

## The Role of Interest Groups in Foreign Policy: Assessing the Influence of the 'Pro-Jakarta Lobby' in Australia and Indonesia's Bilateral Relations

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**Abstract :** This paper examines the ways that domestic politics and pressure-generated through lobbying, public diplomacy campaigns and other tools of soft power-contributes to the formation of short-term and long-term national interests, priorities and strategies of states in their international relations. It primarily addresses the conceptual problems regarding the kinds of influence that lobby groups wield in foreign policy and how this influence might be assessed. Scholarly attention has been paid to influential foreign policy lobbies and interest groups, particularly in the areas of US foreign policy. Less attention has been paid to how lobby groups might influence the foreign policy of a middle power such as Australia. This paper examines some of the methodological complexities in developing and conducting a research project that can measure the nature and influence of lobbies on foreign affairs priorities and activities. This paper will use Australian foreign policy in the context of its historical bilateral relationship with Indonesia as a case study for considering the broader issues of domestic influences on foreign policy. Specifically, this paper will use the so-called 'pro-Jakarta lobby' as an example of an interest group. The term 'pro-Jakarta lobby' is used in media commentary and scholarship to describe an amorphous collection of individuals who have sought to influence Australian foreign policy in favour of Indonesia. The term was originally applied to a group of Indonesian experts at the Australian National University in the 1980s but expanded to include journalists, think tanks and key diplomats. The concept of the 'pro-Jakarta lobby' was developed largely through criticisms of Australia's support for Indonesia's sovereignty of East Timor and West Papua. Pro-Independence supporters were integral for creating the 'lobby' in their rhetoric and criticisms about the influence on Australian foreign policy. In these critical narratives, the 'pro-Jakarta lobby' supported a realist approach to relations with Indonesia during the years of President Suharto's regime, which saw appeasement of Indonesia as paramount to values of democracy and human rights. The lobby was viewed as integral in embedding a form of 'foreign policy exceptionalism' towards Indonesia in Australian policy-making circles. However, little critical and scholarly attention has been paid to nature, aims, strategies and activities of the 'pro-Jakarta lobby.' This paper engages with methodological issues of foreign policy analysis: what was the 'pro-Jakarta lobby'? Why was it considered more successful than other activist groups in shaping policy? And how can its influence on Australia's approach to Indonesia be tested in relation to other contingent factors shaping policy? In addressing these questions, this case study will assist in addressing a broader scholarly concern about the capacities of collectives or individuals in shaping and directing the foreign policies of states.

**Keywords :** foreign policy, interests groups, Australia, Indonesia

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