

Endorsing Jokowi

There is no such thing as being neutral when the stakes are so high. While endeavoring as best we can to remain objective in our news reporting, our journalism has always stood on the belief of the right moral ground when grave choices must be made.

We were not silent during *reformasi*. Neither have we been shy when power is abused or civil rights trespassed.

Good men and women cannot stay idle and do nothing. Speak out when persecution occurs, stand firm in rejecting the tide of sinister forces.

At certain junctures in a nation's life, its people are called upon to make stark choices. No longer is it a mere ballot cast for one candidate over another, but rather a moral choice on the fate of the nation.

Russia faced such a choice in 1996, during a runoff between independent incumbent Boris Yeltsin against Gennady Zyuganov representing the old-guard Communist Party. It was a moral choice for hope versus remnants of the past. They chose hope.

In five days this nation too will make a moral choice. In an election like no other — divisive in its campaigning, precarious in its consequences — Indonesians will be required to determine the future of our body politic with a single piercing of a ballot paper.

The *Jakarta Post* in its 31-year history has never endorsed a single candidate or party during an election. Even though our standpoint is often clear, the *Post* has always stood above the political fray.

But in an election like no other, we are morally bound to not stand by and do nothing. We do not expect our endorsement to sway votes. But we cannot idly sit on the fence when the alternative is too ominous to consider.

Each candidate in the presidential election has qualities in his declared platform. They have been dissected at length the past three weeks. And voters will sway one way or another based on it. Yet there is also a sizable part of society who are undecided in their preference.

In such a case, perhaps one can consider who not to vote for as their reasoning for that moral choice.

Our deliberations are dictated on the values by which the *Post* has always stood firmly for: pluralism, human rights, civil society and *reformasi*.

We are encouraged that one candidate has displayed a factual record of rejecting faith-based politics. At the same time we are horrified that the other affiliates himself with hard-line Islamic groups who would tear the secular nature of the country apart. Religious thugs who forward an intolerant agenda, running a campaign highlighting polarizing issues for short-term gain.

We are further perplexed at the nation's fleeting memory of past human rights crimes. A man who has admitted to abducting rights activists — be it carrying out orders or of his own volition — has no place at the helm of the world's third-largest democracy.

Our democracy will not consolidate if people's mind-set remains wedged in a security approach in which militarism is an ideal. A sense that one candidate tends to regard civilian supremacy as subordinate to military efficacy.

This nation should be proud of its military, but only if those in uniform acknowledge themselves as servants of the democratic, civilian governance.

As one candidate offers a break from the past, the other romanticizes the Soeharto era.

One is determined to reject the collusion of power and business, while the other is embedded in a New Order-style of transactional politics that betrays the spirit of *reformasi*.

Rarely in an election has the choice been so definitive. Never before has a candidate ticked all the boxes on our negative checklist. And for that we cannot do nothing.

Therefore the *Post* feels obliged to openly declare its endorsement of the candidacy of Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and Jusuf Kalla as president and vice president in the July 9 election. It is an endorsement we do not take lightly.

But it is an endorsement we believe to be morally right.

Prabowo and the 'big mo'

Over the last couple of weeks the unthinkable has happened: candidate Prabowo Subianto has managed to pull within a few percentage points of so-called people's favorite, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, in the race to be the next president of Indonesia. Some are saying that Prabowo has the "big mo" — the momentum behind the campaign that could very well sweep him into the presidency. And there is plenty of evidence to support this claim.

From the beginning, Jokowi's failure to get over the line in the legislative elections shook the very foundation of his campaign narrative as a man of the people.

More recently, the usually friendly media have begun to dig around his past and policy platform a little more deeply. These challenges have been compounded by the bump Prabowo has experienced since he chose former economic minister, Hatta Rajasa, as his running mate.

A further problem for Jokowi is that his easygoing manner stands in stark contrast to the combative nature of Prabowo. The majority of people agree that Jokowi gave the more impressive and assured



Mark Johnson
JAKARTA

performances during the televised presidential debates. Unfortunately, the bar was set so high that it didn't make much of a difference to his campaign.

His opponent, on the other hand, gave a tub-thumping, often nationalistic set of performances — a style that spoke directly to the demographics that will most likely decide this election.

What's more, the Jokowi ticket's strength is also its biggest weakness. The Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla duo represents the cleanest break from the political dynasties that have governed Indonesia, democratically or not, for the past 50 years.

Many people who publicly claim they want change will ultimately opt for the comfort of a familiar face when in the privacy of the voting booth.

However, a word of warning should be heeded. Momentum in

elections is often confused with the normal narrowing of polls that happens in the weeks before an election. In reality, momentum is solidified in the 6 to 3 months prior an election.

It is created through the hard work of solidifying a core vote and slowly but surely picking up votes from the undecideds. Momentum is seldom about the last minutes of a campaign.

We need look no further than the US elections in 2012 for a parallel of what is taking place in Indonesia. For the majority of the election season, Obama led in the polls against Republican candidate Mitt Romney. However, in the month before the election, polls were seen to be narrowing.

Story after story trumpeting Romney's momentum were published. But on election day, Obama swept the electoral college vote and won the popular vote by four percentage points. The narrowing of the polls turned out to be — yet again — just part of the natural order of an election cycle.

An important point to remember is that many analysts have to come up with a fresh take on an election

every day — hence the obsession with often hugely non-representative polling. The narrowing of polls gives them a narrative up until the last vote has been cast. The problem is that most elections are won long before polling day, but that does not make for a very interesting story.

Prabowo could well win. His campaign machine is slicker and better funded and he has a style that plays well to people with limited education. His campaign speaks in the language of nationalist economics — a smart strategy given that most elections are won on promises of more money in your pocket and the possibility of a better job.

Yet mistaking the fact that the candidates are polling closely as a true indication of the likely outcome in July ignores the simple facts of elections: Polls will always get tighter, it is what's behind the numbers that count.

The writer is an Asia-Pacific focused public affairs consultant and former election strategist (United Kingdom)

Goals make it the best World Cup ever?

Jim O'Neill
BLOOMBERG VIEW

So here we are, two and a half weeks into Brazil's World Cup. Thirty-two teams have been reduced to eight and now we can get serious thinking about potential winners.

Or can we? After all, one of the eight remaining teams is Costa Rica. Who would have dreamed that was possible three weeks ago? Who would have bet that Italy, Spain and Portugal would all fail to make the quarter-finals?

What a tournament — so far. There is raging debate among football experts as to how good this World Cup has been.

On one side of the debate are those who say it has been one of the best tournaments ever, pointing to the record number of goals in the group stages (and the close scores of so many matches).

Others say that argument is rubbish and that the flood of goals is simply a sign of bad defenses.

Even if there is an aspect of truth in the second argument, I am in the other corner. I have been engrossed with the World Cup since 1966 and have been glued to a TV screen every four years since. I have also attended at least one game at every competition since 1994. I think this year's tournament has been fantastic — and I am excited to join the fun in Brazil.

What can be said about the remaining eight teams? Personally, I'm boasting a 75 percent success rate with my picks — six of the eight teams I predicted in my open-

ing World Cup article are still in the tournament. Costa Rica and Colombia are the two I missed. I was far too conventional expecting Italy and Spain to survive.

I wish I had the same success rate in my days as a full-time financial forecaster and market analyst. I might have even started my own fund.

Maybe this means the outcomes of football matches are more predictable than foreign exchanges, bonds rates and currency markets. They probably are, although that's not to say the sport is predictable.

Is it fair to conclude that because Costa Rica made it to the quarter-finals, and Italy and Spain didn't, that Brazil's climate and other conditions have aided the Latin American teams? Maybe.

In any case, no team from outside South America has ever won the World Cup when it was held on the continent. This must make the four remaining American teams slightly chirpier than the four Europeans.

In their remarkable comeback against Mexico, though, the Dutch showed that they cope with the blazing heat. So they must be feeling good about their chances.

And what is going on with the US? Are Americans truly becoming global and open-minded, with so many visiting Brazil and record numbers watching the games on TV? Perhaps the US finally may stop calling the sport "soccer" and get with the program.

For some of us, the US becoming as dominant at football as it is at so many other things would be very hard to deal with.

In some ways, and especially from a commercial perspective, American interest may be the greatest takeaway from this World Cup. Will there be a rush of non-American moguls trying to start their own Major League Soccer teams or buying existing ones?

Will competition among American television networks increase the bidding for broadcast rights to football games, helping to maintain the top European clubs' rise in value?

Turning back to the remainder of this year's competition: The Brazilians, still the favorites, will need to up their game after being fortunate to survive their match with the plucky Chileans. While I selected Brazil as a semifinalist, I am not sure about their chances for hoisting the cup a sixth time.

Especially if, as in their match with Chile, they have to deal with a team of 11 well-drilled players — not to mention the real discovery of the tournament, Colombia's James Rodriguez, who awaits the Brazilian team in the quarter-finals. If Brazil beats Colombia, their likely opponent will be the Netherlands, a country that has made three finals (two with great style and flair: in 1974 and 1978) but has yet to win the trophy. Will their fourth time be lucky?

And how can I be so dismissive of the Costa Ricans? They beat Italy, so they can probably beat anyone.

France playing Germany is a quarterfinal I anticipated. This match could be a proxy battle for the future heart and soul of Europe. Perhaps, in the event of a draw

after extra time and penalty kicks, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande could lead the sudden-death shootout, with the winner free to design the future of Euro-area fiscal policy.

And for the final game at this stage, Argentina against Belgium — the two-time winner against the much-fancied Belgian team — I guess I have to go with the Argentinians, as I did at the outset. Belgium has two players from my Premier League favorite, Manchester United, so I wouldn't be displeased if that prediction proved wrong.

Did you know that no club had players on more different national teams in this World Cup than Manchester United?

Well, you do now. My biggest hope is that they all return fully fit for the upcoming Premiership season and return us to the top.

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The writer, a Bloomberg View columnist, worked for Goldman Sachs Group Inc. from 1995 until 2013, serving most recently as chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, and as the firm's chief economist from 2001 to 2011.

Other opinions

The limits of military power

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has disturbed many in Japan and increased anxiety in Asia by reinterpreting his country's pacifist postwar Constitution so that the military can play a more assertive role than it has since World War II.

While a shift in Japan's military role was never going to be readily accepted by many, Abe's nationalist politics makes this change even harder to swallow in a region that needs to reduce tension.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of what Abe has done. Since 1947, Japan's Constitution, written and imposed by the American Army, has permitted the military, known as the Self-Defense Forces, to engage only in self-defense.

That meant the large and technologically advanced armed forces was barred from "collective self-defense" — aiding friendly countries under attack — and thus was far more constrained than those of other nations.

This is not the first time Japanese leaders have gone this route. Past governments have reinterpreted the Constitution to allow the existence of a standing military and permit noncombat missions abroad. But this step goes further.

The Japanese Parliament must still clear legal barriers to the constitutional reinterpretation by revising more than a dozen laws, which could take months. Abe's governing coalition has a comfortable majority in both houses, and the revisions are expected to pass.

Even so, there is time for citizens to be heard through their elected representatives. It is fair for them to ask Abe to prove that the shift "is not going to change Japan into a country that wages wars".

— THE NEW YORK TIMES, NEW YORK

Restoring peace in Northeast Asia

Wang Junsheng

CHINA DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK/
BEIJING

Just three days before President Xi Jinping's visit to the Republic of Korea (ROK), Kim Jong-un, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leader, attended a tactical rocket firing drill prompting many to speculate that Pyongyang is not happy with the visit.

Indeed, China has criticized the DPRK for conducting three nuclear tests. But it's not true that there has been a fundamental shift in China's DPRK policy.

China still believes that one of the most urgent tasks in the region is to resolve the DPRK nuclear issue, but it still wants the countries engaged in the peace process to view Pyongyang's safety concerns more seriously.

On Monday, the DPRK urged that the two sides on the Korean Peninsula cease hostile military activities from later this week.

This is an important development, and the countries eager to restore permanent peace in the re-

gion should respond suitably to the DPRK's proposal instead of regarding it as just an inane gesture.

The security situation in Northeast Asia is more serious than the other three sub-regions surrounding China — Southeast Asian, South Asian and Central Asian regions. Compared with the other three sub-regions, the Northeast Asian region's security dilemma can be overcome mainly by building a security mechanism and establishing multilateral exchanges.

But since the necessary conditions for building a multilateral security mechanism in Northeast Asia are lacking, more efforts should be made to establish trilateral economic cooperation among China, the ROK and Japan.

Besides, the Six-Party Talks should be resumed as soon as possible. The DPRK's diplomatic relations have not normalized with either the ROK or Japan, and Sino-Japan ties have deteriorated because of the dispute in the East China Sea. So it has become more urgent to establish multilateral exchanges, and improve cultural and people-to-people relations.

Moreover, all the related parties should continue making efforts to safeguard common interests, accommodate each other's demands and jointly manage regional crises.

A nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, peace and stability in Northeast Asia, economic development and cooperation in nontraditional security fields are important common interests of the countries in the region. In order to ensure that the DPRK abandons its nuclear program, all relevant parties should make efforts to help the DPRK on the economic and energy fronts.

But their cooperation should be based on mutual respect and conform to international laws, domestic public opinion and common interests. And China, the ROK and Japan should make efforts to establish win-win relationships with the DPRK by granting concessions.

The US and China, on their part, should meet halfway to help ease the tensions in the region.

This is especially important because many of the region's problems can be traced to the US' actions to maintain its dominant position in the Asia-Pacific.

So, China should take measures to establish a "new type of major-power relationship" with the US by improving bilateral military relations and other means in order to compel Washington to work with it to improve the security situation the region.

Crisis management in the region mainly depends on preventing the DPRK from conducting any more nuclear tests and stopping the other countries involved from provoking it to do so.

The ultimate aim, however, should be to restore permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. It is thus important to free the DPRK from international isolation and help it to develop its economy.

But this can become reality only if the US cooperates with China. Therefore, the onus of restoring permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula rests with the US.

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