Torn between America and China

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ELITE PERCEPTIONS AND INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

DANIEL NOVOTNY

ISEAS
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
Singapore

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To the five Angels of my life —
Ludmila, Marie, Dewi, Daniela, and Devita

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FOREWORD

Many countries will be "torn between" in the 21st century — called on to modulate their relations between the United States and China. Daniel Novotny's book stands as a work of foresight and imagination, attempting to understand the pressures that policy-makers face as the world moves into a new age of two great powers after the collapse of the Soviet system and a generation of unchallengeable U.S. dominance.

Novotny's book has a number of qualities to recommend it. First, there is the focus on how an Asian country and the world's largest Muslim country (yet with a powerful Chinese minority) finds its way between the United States, its friend since the 1960s, and a growingly powerful China, keen to assert its ascendancy in its region. Readers curious about China, Islam, and Southeast Asia need this book.

Second, Novotny raises teasing questions about how "foreign policy" is made. To what extent are the policies of modern states dictated by their material facts of life — their geographic boundaries, the richness of their economies, the ethnicities of their people? Or, do foreign policies get made by small elites who constantly balance their own interests, prejudices, and long-term judgements against the pressures of domestic politics?

Novotny makes an important contribution by trying to get at "the mind" of a bureaucracy and a state's elite as they formulate policy towards the world outside their political boundaries. His diligent interviewing highlights the qualities that scholarship can bring to the study of contemporary affairs: a journalist might do an interview here and there; Novotny, the scholar, had a hit-list of more than forty interviewees whose views he sought systematically and relentlessly.

This relentless interviewing highlights another aspect of the book. Novotny brings to his research the multiple lenses of a widely travelled European, highlighted by his own remarkable linguistic talent. He is a Czech

who is fluent in three European languages and Indonesian. (He used to speak passable Spanish and Russian but says he has forgotten them through lack of use.) He has lived and worked throughout Europe, travelled widely in northern Africa and Southeast Asia, lived in Indonesia with his Balinese wife and their children and had much of his academic experience in Australia. As a professional photographer in another life, he brings to his scholarship the idea that different lenses and different angles produce different pictures.

At the level of information-gathering and story-telling, the book also has much to offer. Indonesia is a country too often ignored. Japan made the economic big time two generations ago; China is the hot story of the twenty-first century; and India's recent rapid growth has business pages breathless. But Indonesia, the fourth largest country in the world, with a population of 230 million (100 million more than Japan's), and the largest Muslim country, falls off the mental maps of many observers of world affairs. Indeed, awareness of the transformations of Indonesia since the fall of Suharto in 1997 is remarkably limited. Indonesia is a different country, a democracy, struggling to create reliable institutions. It has embarked on an unpredictable voyage of social and political change, which for the past ten years has been largely constructive and peaceful.

In redressing the world's picture of Indonesia, Novotny's book plays an important part. We learn about Indonesia's elites — some of whom have been Novotny's informants — and their views of their country's position and global potential. Though the book focuses on China and the United States, Indonesia's relations with its ASEAN partners can never be ignored, because as the largest country in ASEAN, Indonesia has the potential to exert greater influence in world affairs. One of the tests for its policy-makers is to make this advantage work effectively, both to enhance Indonesia's national interests and those of Southeast Asia and ASEAN generally. The book also has to deal with Indonesia's two other day-to-day relationships: with Japan and Australia. Australia maintains its largest diplomatic mission in Jakarta, and the two countries interact daily along their long maritime frontiers. Japan has been a major investor, though the passion has waned in the past ten years. And both Australia and Japan will seek to influence Indonesian responses to the new China.

As well as diligent fact-finding and reporting, Novotny aims to place Indonesian experience in the theory-building that goes on in Big-I, Big-R International Relations. He notes that the peculiarities and complexities of the Indonesian experiment have tended to be overlooked, save for Weinstein's *Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence* (1976), Michael Leifer's *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (1983) and Rizal Sukma's *Indonesia and*

China (1999). He takes up Weinstein's ideas of the threat perceptions of Indonesian elites in what they regarded in the 1960s and 1970s as a hostile world. Novotny finds that the world continues to look threatening from an Indonesian perspective but that elites are more divided than they once were about where the most serious threats come from. There is agreement, however, that internal disarray, encouraged by outside ill-wishers, rather than outright attack on the country's borders, poses the greatest threat.

Novotny's skills, fascinations, and perspective have enabled him to produce a book that will engage a number of audiences. It helps to refine views of 21st-century Indonesia; it contributes to our understanding of how "foreign policy" is made; and it provides readers with a remarkable perspective, through the eyes of a European whose feet and heart are in Southeast Asia, on how the world's fourth largest country views itself, Asia, and the world.

Robin Jeffrey
Institute of South Asian Studies
Singapore
May 2010

PREFACE

The origins of this book can perhaps be found somewhere inside the extensive maze of narrow corridors or in the State Rooms of the "Office of the President" that is located within the splendid Prague Castle perched on top of the hill in the heart of Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic. As an intern and later an aide in the Political Department during President Václav Havel's tenure, I enjoyed the privilege of watching closely the "human dimension" behind foreign policy-making. I was often taken aback when I saw how much impact the President's, senior diplomats' and policy-makers' personal idiosyncrasies (shaped by past experiences), their personal perceptions, attitudes and preferences would have on the dynamics and actual outcomes of a state's foreign relations. One of the main arguments underlying the discussion in this book is the idea that policy-makers' perceptions are as important as realities, in that they shape their real actions.

This book was written for many thousands of people — students, academics, professional diplomats, as well as a general audience who are interested in and want to learn more about foreign policy-making in general and the important role Indonesian policy-makers' threat perceptions play in shaping the country's foreign policy in particular. I spent more than four years researching this topic — including countless hours of interviews with present and former Indonesian presidents, cabinet ministers and senior diplomats (and days spent at the library) — and, finally, wrote this book out of passion and curiosity. "International relations" and "foreign policy" are fascinating objects of study. However, most texts on foreign policy formation tend to use mostly narrative, descriptive and *atheoretical* approaches and generally seem to downplay the important role of decision-makers' threat perceptions in explaining foreign policy outcomes. Their limitation stems from the failure to use a theoretical framework to organize and assess empirical findings. While this book brings a theoretical perspective based on the balance-of-threat

concept to bear on the study of foreign policy elite perceptions, it puts a special emphasis on the elite's state-based security concerns. The balance-of-threat theory is employed here as a predictor about how Indonesia will behave and whether it will implement policies intended to prevent other countries from endangering Indonesia's national interests and security.

Indonesia is used here as a case study to explore the subject matter. This book constitutes a comprehensive perceptive account of Indonesian foreign policy — it analyses the perceptions of the country's foreign policy elite about other states, with a special attention devoted to Indonesia's triangular relationship with the United States and China, and the manner in which these shape the decision-making process and determine policy outcomes. I sought to find answers particularly to these questions: What are some of the most important factors in forming the Indonesian elite's threat perceptions? Is there a causal relationship between elite perceptions and policy outcomes? Moreover, with a special reference to the United States and China, will a particular threat perception remain the same through a long period of time, or will it change with time? And last but not the least, to what extent have all of the diverse sections of the Indonesian elite agreed on the nature and urgency of the threat posed, respectively, by the United States and China, to their country's national interests?

Like virtually any academic study in the field of social sciences, also this book is not capable of covering all aspects, qualities and eventualities of the subject matter under consideration. This limitation ought to be even more accentuated given the character of this study, which is concerned with the phenomenon of elite perceptions. Among the sheer variety of possible factors affecting foreign policy elite perceptions, in terms of the policy-makers' background, I chose to focus primarily on the factors of religion and education and to a lesser extent on their party or professional affiliation. Because of their non-material, subjective and effectively elusive character, the description and evaluation of human perceptions completely depends on the quality of the person's recollection and the accuracy of his or her narrative. In this context, this book does not aspire to offer a substantial elaboration on the psychological mechanisms at work in threat perceptions. While admittedly the existing literature on threat perceptions tends to be agnostic about the role of emotion, as well as affective and cognitive processes in generating perceptions and images about international environment, I do not consider myself as being academically equipped to carry out a fruitful research in the field of psychology or physiology.

There have been only a few studies of Indonesia, or non-Western countries more generally, that have employed a systematic approach within

a theoretical framework to explain the correlation between elite perceptions and foreign policy outcomes. In broad terms, this book is a kind of "update" of Weinstein's major 1976 study on Indonesian elite's perceptions titled *Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence: From Sukarno to Soeharto*. Within these pages I will set out on a journey through the minds of Indonesian presidents, cabinet ministers, senior diplomats and high-ranking army officers during the present plural democratic system of government in the post-Suharto period to find what they see when they view the outside world. The comparison with the earlier Suharto and Sukarno-dominated regimes, as discussed in Weinstein's book, will reveal some dramatic changes and surprising continuities — notably the enduring perception of Indonesia as having to constantly deal with position fraught with dilemmas within the "tricky" and "perilous" international system.

LIST OF FIGURES

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While this book is the most evident product of the five-year-long journey made up of research, collecting data, interviewing policy-makers, library visits and writing-up, by no means less important is its not-so-obvious human dimension — the support, inspiration and motivation given to me by many people. The journey has certainly been much easier because I could travel together with the following people:

The first person to whom I would like to express my gratitude is my first main supervisor A/Prof David Reeve. He has stood on my side from the very beginning till the end of my Ph.D. candidature, both during good and difficult times. David Reeve has been my "guru", colleague and closest advisor, an indispensable source of ideas and inspiration, as well as motivation when I felt let down by the lack of progress. Being a brilliant scholar, I have enjoyed the privilege of "tapping" into the bottomless pool of David Reeve's knowledge about Indonesia. Besides of being an excellent supervisor, I dare to say that David has been as close as a relative and a friend. I deeply value his never-ending empathy and understanding of my complicated family situation when I had to "fairly" divide the time between the research and my newly born baby girl.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr Liz Thurbon who guided me through the abstract world of international relations theory, introducing me to new ways of how to effectively use the theories to explore and better understand the complexities of Indonesian foreign policy. Moreover, I also owe lots of gratitude to Prof John Ingleson who kept an eye on the progress of my work and always was available when I needed his valuable comments. John especially helped me in finding the right words to explain some complicated phenomena with regards to Indonesian elite perceptions and in streamlining the text in this book.

Another credit goes to the University of New South Wales (UNSW) for offering me the UPRS/UPRS scholarship without which I would not have

been able to commence this research. But the UNSW did not give me only the valuable experience of studying (and tutoring/lecturing) at one of the best universities in the Asia-Pacific — it was at the UNSW campus where I met my future wife, herself a UNSW graduate. After all, a university campus is not only a place where research and experiments are carried out but also a place where new friendships and partnerships come into being. My colleagues from the School of Modern Languages all gave me the feeling of being at home at work.

Thanks are also due to other colleagues and academics with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss my research and who have thus in one way or the other helped to shape my ideas: A/Prof Jean Gelman Taylor, Dr Charles Coppel, Dr Angus McIntyre, Dr Richard Chauvel, Dr Thomas Reuter and others. I am particularly grateful to Prof Peter Reeves and Prof Robin Jeffrey and their wives Noelene and Lesley for their useful advice, warm friendship and unforgettable hospitality during my research-related stays in Singapore and Melbourne. For the same reason, I would like to send lots of thanks to Singapore to my friend Dr Jan Mrázek and his family.

This book would never have become a reality if it were not for the enormous support and cooperation from all the members of Indonesian foreign policy elite whom I had the opportunity to interview. Whether it was a career diplomat, an academic or a government minister or a former president, all of them put their work aside and reserved some time to discuss with a young scholar their perceptions, views and opinions. Since the university policy does not permit to reveal the respondents' identities, unfortunately, I can only express my gratitude to the interviewed leaders collectively while keeping their names in anonymity.

The Habibie Centre in Jakarta also substantially contributed to the development of this work by providing me with a base and useful contacts during the fieldwork. I would also like to thank to the ISEAS Library and the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) in Singapore where I conducted my research twice as a Visiting Research Fellow. Among all colleagues and friends at the IDSS, I would like to thank namely to Dr Ralf Emmers, A/Prof Leonard Sebastian, Dr Adam Dolnik and Nita Prawindarti for extensive discussions and their valuable comments. On the European front, I also thank my former lecturers from Prague-based Charles University, namely Dr Blanka Knotkova, A/Prof Alena Miskova and Prof Lenka Rovná for giving me the initial stimulation to pursue further studies in Australia. Encouragement and tacit support came from several friends and colleagues from the Prague-based Association for International Affairs (AMO).

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I am very grateful to my wife Dewi for her love and patience during the entire Ph.D. period. She patiently endured my late-night arrivals at home from the campus and the long months of separation. I also appreciate her great help with the technical aspect of this book. The account of the human dimension underlying this thesis would not be complete without mentioning perhaps the best experience that we lived through in this period — the birth of our first daughter Daniela Putu. It was she who supplied us with an additional joyful element to our life mission and provided me with yet another reason to strive to complete the research. And it was also the birth of my second daughter Devita Madey that has given me the ultimate impetus to complete the final draft of the manuscript for this book.

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