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Indonesia's Foreign Policy under **Suharto**

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Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto

Aspiring to International Leadership

SECOND EDITION

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Preface to the Second Edition

I am delighted that my book *Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto: Aspiring to International Leadership* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1996) is now reissued with a postscript.

When the original edition of the book was published, I received feedback from many Indonesian scholars. I was pleasantly surprised. Not long after that Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES), a leading academic publisher in Jakarta, asked for my permission to translate the book into Bahasa Indonesia. I gladly consented. The Indonesian version (*Politik Luar Negeri: Indonesia di Bawah Soeharto*) was to be published in early May 1998, a few weeks before the downfall of President Suharto. Therefore, I included a short postscript for the Indonesian edition, covering the last two to three years of his rule. I was informed that *Politik Luar Negeri* had become a major reference book for the politics and international relations courses at least at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta and Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. I was so pleased that when I met some lecturers and graduates from these universities, they often discussed the book with me. I felt very honoured and encouraged.

In 2019, I received an unexpected request from an editor of the LP3ES in Jakarta that they wanted to reissue the Indonesian version of the book. He told me that there were still demands on the book. Students and scholars are still looking for the book. They asked me to write a new postscript for the book, but I did not have the time to do so as I was busy with my projects. I proposed to write a new preface, explaining briefly why the book, without revision, is still relevant to the present situation. The LP3ES agreed and the book was eventually republished in October 2019.

The reissuing of *Politik Luar Negeri* made me re-read the original version of *Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto*. The book was published when I was still teaching in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore (NUS). It took me several years to complete writing the book. Two chapters had been published in *Asian Survey* before the book

was published. I benefited from the discussions with friends and colleagues in writing the manuscript.

The book, which was written about twenty-five years ago, examines Indonesia's foreign policy under Suharto. It not only details his foreign policy behaviour vis-à-vis Indonesia's neighbours and the world's major powers, but also put it in the context of foreign policy analysis. It is worth noting that the book remains as the only full-length study on Indonesia's foreign policy under Suharto. As there was a demand on this book in Indonesia, I feel that the book should be of interest to the younger generation of students and scholars outside Indonesia. I have therefore decided to reissue the English version.

In 2004, the publisher Marshall Cavendish had agreed to reprint some of my earlier studies, including *Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto*. Promotional material, including new book covers, had been released and they can still be found on the Internet today. Six of my books have been reprinted, but *Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto*, which was supposed to be republished in 2007, was suddenly cancelled due to a change in management at Marshall Cavendish. Therefore, the book in your hands now is the actual second edition of the book.

Some friends suggested I do some updating. I agreed, but the text should not be revised. As I had completed the work in 1995, it should remain as it is. I would like the reader to know how I looked at Indonesia's foreign policy then, especially during the Suharto era, and the younger generation of readers can pass their judgement on the arguments that I put forward. I do not wish to revise the book to reflect my current thinking. The updating can be done through the inclusion of a postscript.

The postscript, which I have written and is included after the concluding chapter, is entitled "Indonesia's Foreign Policy from the Fall of Suharto to Joko Widodo: Still Aspiring to International Leadership?". In this postscript, I briefly examine the similarities and differences between the Suharto era and post-Suharto era, in terms of the foreign policy decision-making process and the foreign policy elite. I then follow the structure of the original book and deal with Indonesia's policy towards ASEAN and the ASEAN states, neighbouring Australia, medium power Japan and two superpowers, namely, China and the United States. "Indonesia, the Middle East and Islam" constitute the last section of the postscript as there has been an increase in terms of the role of Islam in Indonesia's foreign policy. Towards the end I have added a brief evaluation on the post-Suharto Indonesia's foreign policy.

Since I rejoined the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in 2014 as Visiting Senior Fellow, I have been very fortunate to be given the opportunity to do research on Indonesia again. I have also been able to interact with many

young and established scholars who came to the institute, which broadened my horizon and deepened my understanding about Indonesian politics and foreign policy. I continue to write about the subjects that I have been writing all my life. This is also the reason why I am still able to write the postscript for this book.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues at ISEAS, especially Mr Lye Liang Fook, Mr Daljit Singh and Dr Siwage Dharma Negara, for reading the postscript and made valuable comments and suggestions; Mr Tan Chin Tiong, former Director of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, for encouraging me to continue to work on Indonesia's foreign policy, and Mr Ng Kok Kiong, Director, Publishing Division, for agreeing to reissue the book. Nevertheless, none of them is responsible for the contents of the book, I am solely responsible.

Leo Suryadinata
21 February 2021
Singapore

Preface

In writing this book, I have benefited greatly from numerous discussions that I have had with many friends and scholars over the last 20 years. I have also profited from various seminars on Indonesia's foreign affairs given by Indonesian officials, diplomats and academics. Many of these seminars and talks were behind closed doors or off the record, and therefore they cannot be cited. Nonetheless, they have had a strong influence on my study.

Many friends in Indonesia have shared their expertise with me, and in doing so have enriched my understanding of both Indonesia's domestic politics and foreign policy. Their names are too many to be mentioned here but I would like to offer all of them my sincere thanks.

A significant portion of the study was conducted between 1988 and 1989 during my sabbatical leave in three institutions: the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore (ISEAS), Ohio University and Cornell University. Each possesses an excellent library, and I am grateful to the staff of those libraries for assisting me in my research.

A few friends have read the early version of my manuscript, either in part or in full. I would like in particular to thank Chin Kin Wah, N. Ganesan, Michael Leifer, Jamie Mackie and Nancy Viviani for their useful suggestions. I am also grateful to Triena Ong who has given me editorial advice. Nevertheless, for any mistakes and shortcomings which still exist in this book, I am alone responsible.

*Leo Suryadinata
July 1995
Singapore*

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the publisher of *Asian Survey* for kind permission to reproduce parts of “Indonesia-China Relations: A Recent Breakthrough”, *Asian Survey*, July 1990, pp. 682-696; and “Islam and Suharto’s Foreign Policy: Indonesia, the Middle East and Bosnia”, *Asian Survey*, (March 1995), pp. 291-303.

The author also wishes to thank the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, for kind permission to reproduce “Indonesia-Vietnam Relations Under Soeharto”, taken from *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (March 1991), Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 331-340.

INTRODUCTION

Suharto's Foreign Policy

There are a number of book-length studies on Indonesia's foreign policy, of which very few have been published. Most of the books published can be divided into two broad categories: macro and micro studies. The macro studies (such as works by Franklin Weinstein, Anak Agung Gde Agung and Michael Leifer) deal largely with Indonesia's foreign policy in general,¹ while micro studies (by Jon M. Reinhardt, J.A.C. Mackie, David Mazingo, Dewi Fortuna Anwar and others) focus on specific topics and themes.² Of these two types of studies, many cover the Sukarno period or early Suharto era. Particularly lacking are macro studies on Indonesia's foreign policy under Suharto. The existing books which partially or wholly deal with Suharto were either published in the 1970s or early eighties. To my knowledge, there is no up-to-date book that examines comprehensively Indonesia's foreign policy under Suharto.³ Undoubtedly there is an urgent case for such a book.

It is also worth noting that most of these books do not adopt a specific "theory" or model for examining Indonesia's foreign policy and I have followed the same approach, although I am fully aware of the existence of these "theories" and models.⁴ An Indonesian case study such as mine is usually insufficient for generating a useful model. Nevertheless, the information provided in my study may contribute to future model-building on foreign policy behaviour.

Although no model has been used in the study, I have adopted a framework of foreign policy analysis. The framework provides a useful checklist of items required for a study of foreign policy, including the determinants of a country's foreign policy behaviour.⁵

In analysing Indonesia's foreign policy during the Suharto era, however, it appears that the Indonesian military and culture (or political culture) are of crucial importance. The military, together with President Suharto, who was an army general, are initial decision-makers. Their policy tends to be influenced by prevalent political culture in terms of *abangan* (or nominal Muslim-cultural) orientations, and preference for authoritarianism. Nonetheless, it is clear that, in the later period, Suharto became more assertive in foreign policy. He has not always agreed with the military establishment on domestic politics as well as on foreign policy issues as illustrated by his handling of the East Timor issue, especially the recent Dili incident. Due to the crucial role played by Suharto in Indonesia's foreign policy, this study tends to highlight his leadership and whenever possible links him to the New Order foreign policy.

This study will discuss the main factors which have contributed to Indonesia's foreign policy behaviour, including the capability of the state, the perception of major leaders on foreign policy matters, the dominant political culture and the political institutions which impinge upon foreign policy. The personality of the decision-makers will be highlighted as well, especially those of the top political leaders who have been mainly responsible for Indonesia's foreign policy.

The organization of this book deserves explanation. Although the emphasis of this study is Indonesia's foreign policy during the New Order era, a brief examination of the pre-1966 period is included as it is crucial for an in-depth understanding of Suharto's foreign policy. It is followed by an in-depth discussion of the policy during the Suharto era, beginning with the rise of the military as a foreign policy-maker at the expense of other foreign policy-making institutions, and ending with the later emergence of Suharto, who often distanced himself from the military establishment as a foreign policy-maker. It is not easy to document Suharto's role in Indonesia's foreign policy, but in many cases, one can clearly see his guiding hand. The role of Suharto in Indonesia's foreign policy is one of the central themes in this study.

Nonetheless, this study also attempts to identify the patterns and processes of Indonesia's foreign policy through an examination of Indonesia's relations with various countries. In this book, the discussion of these relations has been arranged in accordance with the relative importance of these countries to Indonesia. The order of their importance may, of course, differ from author to author. Again, if economic interactions and volumes of trade are used as indicators, a rather different ranking might emerge.

In terms of Indonesian perceptions of security in a broad sense, the United States and Japan are the most important nations. Nonetheless, if security is defined in military and political terms, geopolitics is a major factor. This does not mean that only a neighbouring country with a strong military capability will pose a threat to Indonesia. Even a small neighbouring state that is occupied or used by a major power hostile to Indonesia may be perceived as a threat. For this reason, the ASEAN states are most important to Indonesia and hence deserve to be discussed first. Of the seven ASEAN members, countries such as Malaysia and Singapore are seen to be more important than others such as Thailand and the Philippines.

After the ASEAN states, Australia is vital to Indonesian interests, especially in relation to the Irian Jaya and East Timor issues. Indonesia has been concerned with developments in Papua New Guinea and Australia's attitude towards its ex-administrative territory because these two factors may affect the situation in Indonesia's Irian Jaya province. Indonesia is also sensitive about Australia's attitude towards East Timor because of possible effects on the ex-Portuguese colony. Any separatist activity in these provinces would in turn affect other minority regions in the republic.

In the north, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has always been viewed by Indonesian leaders as an "expansionist" power and a major competitor for the role of regional leader to which Indonesia aspires. For this reason, Vietnam has been seen as a buffer against the potentially expansionist tendencies of the PRC. Although some military leaders have emphasized the significance of common historical experiences in Indonesian-Vietnamese relations, it was strategic considerations which caused the Indonesian military to recognize the usefulness of Vietnam.

The two superpowers, namely the United States and the former Soviet Union, as well as the economic superpower Japan, were crucial in ensuring the well-being of Suharto's Indonesia. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Indonesia's foreign policy focus has turned to the United States and Japan. Indonesia has depended on economic aid and investment from the West led by the United States. Understandably, Indonesia has tolerated an American security presence in Southeast Asia, partly owing to the absence of an alternative. In the long run, however, Indonesia would prefer the United States to be nominally involved in Southeast Asia. One interpretation of this is that the resultant vacuum might be filled by Indonesia.

Indonesia once saw the former Soviet Union as a regional competitor but this is no longer so. Besides, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the new union which replaces the USSR, is not only weak, but also unimportant economically to Indonesia. On the other hand, Japan is economically essential to Indonesia. This economic giant is not only Indonesia's largest direct investor but also the country's largest trading partner. Almost 60 per cent of Indonesia's crude oil is sold to Japan and the country has also received a significant amount of foreign aid from the "Land of the Rising Sun". Because of Japan's significant role in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is still concerned with its militarization.

The Middle East is another region that is becoming more important to Indonesia because of the resurgence of Islam in the world and also within Indonesia itself. In the past, Indonesia's policy towards the Middle Eastern countries had been responsive rather than proactive. Although this link to the Islamic world has not been significant, increasingly it can no longer be ignored. Nonetheless, recent Indonesia-Middle East relations and Jakarta's policy towards Bosnia have revealed the non-Islamic basis of Indonesia's foreign policy.

As a large and richly-endowed country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia understandably has aspired to become a regional leader and beyond, and desires to be recognized as such. These aspirations have been significant factors in directing Indonesia's foreign policy, as reflected in its involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement, its desire to lead the movement and its prominent role in the APEC Summit. Indonesia's leadership role has often been challenged, however, not only within the region but also outside it. Some of these challenges will be discussed in this study.

Apart from the discussions on Indonesia's relations with the various countries and their concerns, the patterns and processes of Indonesia's foreign policy will also be established. These patterns and processes will serve as a foundation from which future scenarios can be extrapolated.

NOTES

- 1 Works which fall into this category include Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *Twenty Years of Indonesian Foreign Policy 1945–1965* (The Hague: Morton, 1973; reprinted and reissued in 1990 by Duta Wacana University Press in Yogyakarta); Franklin Weinstein, *Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence; From Sukarno to Soeharto* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976) and Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).
- 2 Works which fall into this category are larger in number but due to space constraint only four titles are listed: Jon M. Reinhardt, *Foreign Policy and National Integration: The Case of Indonesia*, Monograph Series No. 17 (New Haven: Connecticut, 1971); J.A.C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaya Dispute 1963-1966* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974); David Mozingo, *China's Policy towards Indonesia 1949-1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Dewi Fortuna Anwar, *Indonesia in ASEAN: Foreign Policy and Regionalism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994).
- 3 Even the Ph.D. dissertation of Gordon R. Hein on "Soeharto's Foreign Policy: Second-Generation Nationalism in Indonesia" was submitted to the University of California at Berkeley in 1986.
- 4 There are five approaches developed by Western (American) scholars regarding foreign policy analysis: the strategic or rational model; the decision-making model; the bureaucratic politics model; the adaptive model; and the incremental decision-making model. For a brief and useful analysis of the various models for explaining foreign policy, see Lloyd Jensen, *Explaining Foreign Policy* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1982, pp. 1-11.
- 5 For a general framework of foreign policy analysis, See David O. Wilkinson and Lawrence Scheinman, *Comparative Foreign Relations: Framework and Methods* (Belmont, California: Dickinson Publishing Co., 1969). It should be noted that this book is not the first theoretical work on comparative foreign relations. Others dealing with similar topics include Hans J. Morgenthau's classic, *Politics Among Nations* (1954), and Roy C. Macridis (ed.), *Foreign Policy in World Politics* (1958, 1st edn.; 1989, 7th edn.). K.J. Hosli's book entitled *International Politics* (1967) also discusses important aspects of comparative foreign relations. Nonetheless, I am impressed by Wilkinson and Scheinman's systematic attempt to deal with comparative foreign policy. Some books have used the above framework to describe a country's foreign relations, for example, Robert C. North's work on China and Sudershan Chawla's book on India. Due to the difficulty in getting adequate information on Indonesia, especially on the process of foreign policy-making, I have not used Wilkinson and Scheinman's framework rigidly. Rather, I refer to elements of foreign relations discussed in the book where they are relevant. Apart from Wilkinson and Scheinman's work, James N. Rosenau's *Scientific Study of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1971) is also useful. I am particularly impressed by his "idiosyncratic" factor (that is, personality factor) in foreign policy, which is crucial for a fundamental understanding of Suharto's foreign policy.