

***Hatta and Indonesia's Independent and Active Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect.* Edited by Evan A. Laksmana and Lina Alexandra. Jakarta, Indonesia: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2022. Softcover: 181pp.**

Ever since Vice President Mohammad Hatta gave his “rowing between two reefs” (*mendayung di antara dua karang*) speech in 1948, Indonesia’s foreign policy has striven to navigate great power politics. This edited volume promises to “offer something new” (p. 13) to the study of the doctrine of the country’s “independent and active” foreign policy, focusing not on the politics of foreign policy making but on the policies themselves.

Of the six questions this book aims to answer, one stands out: to what extent did foreign policymakers seriously consider the doctrine in their decision-making process? Echoing the promise of “something new”, it suggests that this volume will not repeat the tired and over-embellished analysis of normative foreign policy “initiatives” that have had a minimum impact, regionally and globally, but will instead offer a much-needed glimpse into whether Hatta’s visionary principle really has guided the country’s foreign policy making beyond an instinctive pragmatism that is not uncommon in the region.

Structurally, however, this volume still follows the traditional foreign policy classification based on presidential periods. Consequently, although it claims not to “begin and end with ... domestic politics alone” (p. 18), most of the contributions suggest otherwise by illustrating how national interests and domestic politics—which are at the core of Hatta’s principle—explain the country’s foreign policies.

That national interest and domestic politics are at the core of Hatta’s doctrine is clearly demonstrated in Chapter One, in which Ahmad Rizky M. Umar dissects Hatta’s 1948 speech to highlight three elements: that foreign policy is linked with domestic politics; that a realistic and rational foreign policy approach is important when navigating great power politics; and that foreign policy should be based on a comprehensive understanding of national interest, not ideological alignment. Domestic politics and national interests are again the focus of Chapter Two, which explores Indonesia’s foreign policy during the eras of Constitutional (1950–57) and Guided Democracy

(1959–66). Yohanes Sulaiman writes that “what Hatta advocated was a principle of pragmatism ... even aligning itself to any power if necessary to pursue its foreign policy” (p. 38). Such pragmatism, however, did not always lead to successful policies. Although the takeover of West Irian from the Netherlands demonstrated Indonesia’s aptitude for playing great powers against each other during the height of the Cold War, the experience of *Konfrontasi* shows how neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had much sympathy for Indonesia’s position vis-à-vis Malaysia.

The third chapter, by Dita Liliansa, argues that Hatta’s principle on the importance of Indonesia’s national interests underpins its archipelagic outlook and aspiration to assume the leading role in maritime negotiations. Yet, different presidents have interpreted this principle differently. While the more ideological Sukarno resorted to confrontational means, she writes, the more pragmatic Suharto focused on cooperation, national resilience and economic development. In his well-written chapter on the East Timor referendum in 1999, Muhamad Arif writes that “independent” does not mean neutrality or nonalignment, but rather a decision-making process that is free from external interference. This is the only chapter that provides an insight into Indonesia’s foreign policy making during a time of crisis. It shows how President B.J. Habibie, by relying on “his circle of close advisers”, made decisions with minimum input from his foreign minister, Ali Alatas, who was the principal formulator of Indonesia’s foreign policy on East Timor at the time.

Chapters Five and Six echo the same approach of presidential idiosyncrasies. In the former, Moch Faisal Karim writes how President Abdurrahman Wahid sought to reorientate foreign policy towards China and India. It was, however, constrained by “territorial disintegration, the monetary crisis and rampant corruption” (pp. 87–88). Considered the “foreign policy president” by some commentators, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s legacy includes, among other standouts, the creation of the Bali Democracy Forum in 2008, which encouraged Asia-Pacific countries to embrace democracy. In Chapter Six, however, Angguntari Ceria Sari raises concerns that this forum has now become a platform to legitimize authoritarianism while remaining a “talk shop” with little consequence for the promotion of democracy worldwide.

Chapter Seven is the only one that explores bilateral relations, namely between Indonesia and China. Ardhitia Eduard Yerima and

Klaus Heinrich Raditio argue that Indonesia's decision to offer the tender for the Jakarta-Surabaya High Speed Rail project to China went against the principle of an "independent" foreign policy. However, Indonesia's support for the arbitral tribunal, constituted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which ruled in 2016 against China's "nine-dash line" claims in the South China Sea, the authors believe, shows Indonesia's commitment to the said principle. Randy W. Nandyatama's chapter on ASEAN Centrality criticizes Indonesia's fixation on the regional bloc, which he considers contrary to Hatta's ideals. Indonesia, he argues, should not rely solely on ASEAN to promote its foreign policy ideals, and neither should it focus on security and economic issues while neglecting human rights and the environment. Chapter Nine deals with cyber defence and its absence in Indonesia's foreign policy considerations. Fitriani writes that Indonesia "still lacks the ability to defend itself or build a global cyber movement" (p. 135) and suggests the government to be ready to collaborate with others and define a long-term agenda on cyber governance.

The contributions show how presidential idiosyncrasies, domestic politics and pragmatism continue to shape Indonesia's foreign policy. But this observation is not new. In the 1990s, scholars such as Jack Snyder, Helen V. Milner and Susan Peterson, to name but a few, established the importance of domestic politics in issues ranging from great power expansionism and trade policy to crisis bargaining. Chapters One and Two of this volume also show that Hatta considered domestic politics to be crucial for foreign policy. It is thus inevitable that the volume does "begin and end with ... domestic politics" (p. 18) despite its promise not to.

The volume, however, seems to have neglected a crucial element of domestic and foreign policy in Indonesia: religion. Given that it is home to the world's largest Muslim population, it was not surprising that President Yudhoyono, in his first foreign policy speech in 2005, said that Indonesia is where "democracy, Islam, and modernity go hand in hand". Moreover, despite its reliance on presidential idiosyncrasies, the volume does not adequately explore Hatta's own idiosyncrasies: why did he choose the pragmatic "independent" and "active" principles, and not, for example, the more ideological concepts of cooperation, collaboration or democracy?

Nonetheless, *Hatta and Indonesia's Independent and Active Foreign Policy* delivers on the promise of "something new" as

some of the chapters—such as Chapter Four on the East Timor referendum—offer an important glimpse into Indonesia's foreign policy decision making. Overall, the volume contains interesting, short contributions, written with minimum jargon. Therefore, it is suitable for those interested in Indonesia's foreign policy but who lack the time to read lengthy academic tomes, as well as for International Relations students as an additional resource when studying Indonesia's foreign policy since its independence.

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