

# 50 Years of U.S. - Indonesia Diplomatic Relations

By Paul F. Gardner

I feel greatly honored to share this table with such important personages--but also a bit intimidated. Indeed, I feel as though they are the professors and I am the student. I get the best of the bargain, however, as I will undoubtedly receive more knowledge than I impart.

Indonesia's great humanist, Soedjatmoko, one of the wisest men I have ever met, made two observations that impressed me deeply. The first -- fear is an important and dangerous companion -- is reflected in the title of the book we are discussing today. The second was "I like Americans better when they are less sure of themselves." I would like to share with you today some thoughts on the influence of these words on the book.

But first, I will like to give you some background on the intended purpose of the book. It is not meant to be a history text book for scholars, although a few tell me they have read it and enjoyed it. No serious scholar would attempt to cover 50 years of two large societies in 300 pages. Indeed, at least one good book has already been published on events covered in each chapter of this book.

Instead, it was principally designed for American readers who are unfamiliar with Indonesia, and it attempts to show how the two peoples reacted with each other over time and where the problems between our two societies originated. For this reason, I recommended and the book's sponsors agreed that we would tell the story as much as possible in the words of Indonesians and Americans who actually participated in or witnessed key events.

Historical documents are essential for efforts such as this because they provide in black and white and stationary form original accounts of events which can be distorted by human memories. I am aware of the shortcomings of human memory by my own participation in an oral history project. This prompted me to read some scientific articles on the subject from which I learned that, just as you can overwrite the text of a computer document, later events can, unperceived by us, change our recollections of the past.

Fortunately, two important groups of American documents were declassified and released not long before I began work on the book. They covered the PRRI-Permesta rebellion in 1958 and the years 1964-66 encompassing the end of the Sukarno era and the beginning of the New Order.

Documents of this type, on the other hand, are not enough. Because they are black and white, flat and stationary and written by people who had no reason at the time to place them in their historical context, they don't really capture the full color, local environment, depth, complexity, and emotional content of situations and events. And we do not get a full picture of the personalities involved.

Personalities were a very important element in our relationship. Some believe, for example that John Foster Dulles, who was a strait laced Presbyterian, disliked Sukarno because of his womanizing. President Kennedy, on the other hand, had no problem with this at all, and was the only American president to establish a truly good relationship with Sukarno. Not only such dominant personalities as Sukarno and John Foster Dulles, but those of many lesser players, such as a desk officer in the Department of State, affected the relationship.

Finally, most of these documents were written by Americans and therefore slight the Indonesian point of view. A big gap is the scarcity of official Indonesian documents regarding such things as decisions in cabinet meetings particularly during the Sukarno era. I wonder if perhaps no minutes were maintained. Pak Roeslan can perhaps clarify this. If Indonesian documents can be found and released, they would add another dimension to the history.

Compensating for these deficiencies are the memoirs and other books of key Indonesian leaders (Pak Roeslan's included) and the interviews I and others were generously granted by many Indonesian participants or eye-witnesses of events. Pak Roeslan was among them, although I did not get the privilege of interviewing him. They not only give the book depth but also entertainment value.

Virtually all of the Indonesians and Americans who contributed to this book are great story tellers. I am particularly grateful that I was able to record the thoughts of three keen observers, good friends and beautiful people, who passed away this past year, Pak Ali Budiardjo and Anak Agung in Indonesia and Charleton Ogburn in the U.S. They not only gave me their stories but generously critiqued some of my chapters.

### **Sources of Fear and Undue Confidence**

Throughout most of the Sukarno era, the United States feared that the communist bloc would gain control over Southeast Asia. Indonesia was generally regarded as the most important country in the area because of its natural and human resources and its strategic location on key sea routes. But during the

earliest postwar years, America's attention was centered principally on Europe and the efforts to establish a NATO bulwark to halt the advance of the Soviet Union. The Netherlands occupied a pivotal position in building this alliance. The United States was torn therefore between its ideological commitment to decolonization and the urgency of establishing NATO.

Indonesia feared that the Netherlands would use its allied status with the United States to reestablish its pre-World War II regime in Indonesia. This was perhaps a legitimate fear until the Dutch overplayed their hand. Many Indonesians believe it was the Republic's demonstration of its anti-communist credentials by crushing the uprising at Madiun that caused the United States to take a more aggressive role in supporting Indonesia's cause. American records of this period seem to me to point to an additional' and perhaps more influential factor. The two Dutch police actions were seen by the U.S. government and, more important, by the American press, the labor movement, religious organizations and a host of other potent political forces as a clear demonstration of bad faith on the part of the Netherlands. Even die-hard Dutch supporters in the government were forced to yield to public sympathies for the Indonesian cause.

After independence was obtained, Indonesian fears shifted. Among them was concern that the United States wished to undermine their free and active foreign policy, first set down by Vice President Hatta. There was good reason for this concern. The book details Ambassador Cochran's efforts to entice the Sukiman government into a semi-allied relationship, a somewhat underhanded effort that angered not only Indonesians but members of the American Embassy staff.

I will now turn to the source of America's excessive confidence in its policies, because this led to its greatest mistake in Indonesia. By the time the Dulles brothers arrived on the foreign policy scene in 1953, U.S. policy had succeeded in uniting Western Europe against the Soviet threat and restoring its economy. There was a natural tendency to extend what had worked in Europe to other parts of the world. The Cold War strategy of the United States was to erect a system of alliances.

The terms used throughout this period: balance of power, a bipolar or bipolar world, the projection of force, and levers of power are all Newtonian terms. They suggested that there were linear equations for security. That is, if you provided your friends and allies with defense agreements and the proper amount of economic and military aid on one side of the equation, you would get a corresponding increase in security on the other side. This worked very well in Europe and with Japan. American policy-makers were almost all well schooled in European affairs, but poorly informed on the cultural, historical and political factors that would spell failure for their policies in much of Southeast Asia.

The United States' biggest mistake in Indonesia was its role in the PRRI/Permesta rebellion. I and my colleagues personally felt the repercussions of this disastrous and stupid mistake, and I was delighted that the declassification of documents describing it in detail were released in time for my book. I will not go into these details, which are thoroughly described in the book, but will give you my personal experience with the repercussions.

In 1964 when I first arrived in Indonesia, six years after PRRI/Permesta, I suspected from press reports that we had been involved, but proof of it was so highly classified that none of us in the Embassy had access to it. We found, however, that virtually any Indonesian on the street could provide us convincing evidence. And the Indonesian government's distrust of American embassy folk was more than evident. We were not allowed to travel to West Sumatra, for example.

I applied to visit South Sulawesi, where the Kahar Muzakar rebellion had just been defeated, and was somewhat surprised when Indonesian permission was granted. I was treated with great hospitality by General Solichin, a most impressive officer whom I grew to admire. He took me all over South Sulawesi in a Russian helicopter to show me villages where rebel territory was being rehabilitated with civic action programs. I was, however, always accompanied by soldiers, who even followed me into the men's room. And when I woke at midnight and looked out the window, I saw two armed soldiers in a jeep keeping watch over my room. I concluded that I was not trusted and that my visit was approved principally to demonstrate that the rebellion was over and that the United States should not contemplate aiding it. If so, I certainly obliged because my report praised Solichin's handling of the situation.

When I was Charge d'affaires for a short period at the embassy during my second tour in Indonesia, some 22 years after PRRI/Permesta, General Benny Moerdani invited me to an *empat mate* dinner.

He recounted his capture of American weapons paradropped to the rebels as described in his book and repeated in mine and then, looking me straight in the eyes, he asked "And where were you then, Paul?"

I replied that I was in Madagascar. Then, still looking me straight in the eyes, he said "And what were you doing there?"

I didn't want to tell him that I was having a disastrous first tour abroad as an administrative officer who could not get his Ambassador's plumbing to work.

Even today, Indonesian military officers are sometimes prone, I notice, to invoke our role in the PRRI/Permesta rebellion when expressing disapproval of some American's statement or action. I was led to compare the effect of our intervention to antibodies created by an initial infection, which multiply in great number whenever there is any sign of a reinfection. I used to call the PRRI/

## The Sixties

After the Dutch had accepted Indonesia's independence, seen their commercial holdings in Indonesia confiscated and ceded Irian Jaya, Sukarno found another threat in the creation of Malaysia, which he viewed as imperialist encirclement. Subsequent events including, of course, the founding of ASEAN, have demonstrated, I believe, that this fear, if genuine, was unfounded. The "Crush Malaysia" campaign focused first on the British, whose embassy and staff housing in Jakarta were burned down by mobs which in Sukarno's words were demonstrating the people's anger.

The United States was later named "enemy number one." Our USIS libraries were burned, our aid mission and Peace Corps were sent home, and the few of us left in the Embassy felt that we shortly would also be forced to leave. Life in Jakarta had become difficult for Americans, but we did not want to leave our Indonesian friends, particularly among those who had signed the cultural manifesto in favor of free speech. Some of them had lost their jobs, but not their interest in the outside world. They would come to our houses at night to read news from Time magazine and other periodicals banned in Indonesia. Among these young people were some who would later contribute greatly to Indonesia's cultural life as newspaper editors, academics and authors.

### Gestapu and the New Order

On the way to the Embassy on the morning of October 1, 1965, I noticed that Jalan Imam Bonjol was blocked off and my chauffeur had to detour. This was not unusual, however, since this occasionally occurred when there were meetings at military or civilian leaders' houses there. When arriving at the Embassy, I saw there were soldiers lined up on Medan Merdeka facing the Embassy and asked my chauffeur why. He said they were probably practicing for Armed Forces Day.

We had a relatively new Ambassador at that time, Marshall Green. Green was a very hard worker who arrived at the Embassy before working hours and was unhappy to find himself alone. So I tried to arrive early and was pleased to find that I had beaten him to work. His car drove up as I was walking up the Embassy steps and he asked me, "Paul, what are those soldiers doing over there?"

I replied "they are practicing for Armed Forces Day, sir." He said, "That must be it." I was elated. The Ambassador had remembered my name, had asked me for an assessment of the situation, and I had given a prompt and reas-

surging answer.

One of my morning tasks was to monitor Indonesian news broadcasts. Within 30 minutes I discovered that a group called the September 30 Movement was in control of Jakarta and prayed that the Ambassador would quickly forget who I was.

There are many people, Indonesians and Americans, who believe that the United States had something to do with the events in October 1965. Just a week or so ago, an American journalist told me that the CIA must have been involved in the developments leading to the New Order since things came out in the free world's favor. My response was that, as an old Southeast Asia hand, I took this as proof that we were *not* involved.

In both Cambodia and Laos, where I served, we gave covert and overt military and economic assistance totaling hundreds of millions of dollars. Things came out much worse than we had hoped in Laos and exceeded our worst nightmares in Cambodia. In Indonesia, our earlier misdeeds had robbed us of any ability to influence events and we did not try. All the cables written at that time, only a few of which are quoted in the book, clearly reveal the Embassy's confusion over what was going on, as well as Green's determination once Suharto gained control to resist rushing in with aid or advice (incidentally, Green also opposed the much later decision of the Nixon administration to become involved in Cambodia).

Permit me to overgeneralize to make a point. Americans have a strong tendency to be pro-active, to use a popular term these days. We foresee a problem and we immediately start to head it off or fix it. This trait has served us well on our own continent and in Europe but, in my opinion, served us badly in Asia. Our interference has in fact often changed the very nature of Asian problems, making them more virulent. I would guess that Marshall Green, who passed away this year, would agree. As cables quoted in the book show, he spent a great deal of effort during the first months of the New Order trying to deter government officials, including our Vice President, from rushing in with solutions to Indonesia's problems. Among the many things we have been learning from Asian societies are patience and perseverance.

### **The Effect of the Economic Crisis on Indonesian-American Relations**

Recently there has been reason to question whether the recent Asian financial crisis and Indonesia's experience in particular has had an impact on the bilateral relationship. Some Asian figures, including former President Suharto, profess to believe that the crisis was a purposeful American action designed to

bring the highly vaunted Asian economies to their knees. Others, who do not go this far, have nevertheless suggested that Americans are pleased by this development.

Both of these views are, in my opinion, completely false. Although some American newspapers that formerly marveled over Asia's economic prowess have found new fodder in perceived economic weaknesses, I believe that the prevailing emotion among government, business, and banking circles was fear that the contagion might spread first to Latin America and then to North America. The fact is that all members of the free market economy are in the same big boat. An IMF "bail out" of foundering economies is often necessary to keep us all afloat, although the IMF is, of course, justified in insisting that countries fix the leaks in their part of the vessel.

Much of the blame for the current crisis has been placed on the fact that East Asian banks were not independent institutions but were subservient to the management of the conglomerates, chaebols and keiretsu to which they belonged. Cronyism within these organizations has in particular been targeted.

While personal trust does seem to play a larger role in East Asian commerce than in the U.S., cronyism is hardly restricted to Asia. It is important to remember that America's large bank crisis a decade ago sprang \*on the same source. Congressmen and the management of the Savings and Loan industry were very much in collusion with each other, the banks providing huge campaign contributions in exchange for legislation that allowed them to do things they should not have done.

As in the case of East Asian countries, a huge real estate bubble developed and burst. This crisis cost the American taxpayers a whopping \$200 billion. It also caused a deep recession that robbed President George Bush of a second term and the scandal destroyed the political aspirations of a number of senators and governors. The fact is that we are not only in the same boat but we are making and hopefully learning from the same mistakes. This is a message that I fear is not getting over to the people of East Asia.