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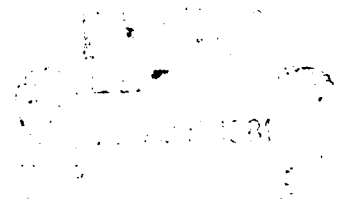
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Guy J. Pauker

January 1980



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INDONESIA IN THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

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Indonesia has the potential of becoming a major regional power in the southwestern Pacific. It has a population of about 140 million now, which may increase to 300 million in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Despite great linguistic and ethnic diversity, Indonesia is and will remain one nation, due to the wise decision of its first generation of nationalist leaders in 1928 to adopt one, universally accepted, national language and to work hard toward overcoming regionalism, guided by the national motto "Unity in Diversity."

Its geopolitical situation gives Indonesia additional advantages. Its 13,000 islands form a bridge between the Asian land mass and the Australian continent. They are also a barrier between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, especially now that the international community seems ready to accept the "archipelago principle" as a valid concept of maritime law.

Endowed with oil, natural gas, copper, nickel, tin, bauxite, vast forests, and soil and climatic conditions favorable to the cultivation of rubber, coconut trees, oil palms, coffee, tea and other tropical products, Indonesia is earning in 1979 about U.S.\$12 billion and will increase its exports further in the coming decade, according to World Bank and other expert estimates. It therefore controls substantial resources for planned economic modernization and, if so desired, for the purchase of modern weapons.

Furthermore, similar to Vietnam but unlike most other nations which achieved independence in the decades since World War II, Indonesia had to fight for its freedom. Three hundred and fifty years of Dutch colonialism came to an end when the Japanese forces occupied the archipelago in March 1942. But after Japan's capitulation in September 1945, the Netherlands, aided by Great Britain, refused to accept the Indonesian Declaration of Independence of August 17, 1945 and proceeded to reconquer their former colony.

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During the following four years the Indonesian nationalists waged destructive guerilla warfare in their own country to deny the Dutch forces of occupation control of the territory. It was only in December 1949 that the growing pressure of military and diplomatic action forced the Netherlands to recognize Indonesian sovereignty.

Today, the unitary Republic of Indonesia is ruled by the nationalist military and civilian leaders of the "Generation of 1945," whose struggle for independence in the years of their youth has given them an understandable sense of self-confidence and national pride. In discussing the future role of Indonesia in a Pacific Community, it is therefore appropriate to ask whether Indonesia's sense of "manifest destiny" is likely to be compatible with the growth of a community of nations, of which some are small in population and poorly endowed with natural resources. Will Indonesia seek to dominate?

The question is particularly legitimate in the light of the first three decades of Indonesia's history as an independent nation. During that period, Indonesia built up diplomatic and then military pressure, from 1951 to 1962, for the liberation of Dutch-controlled Western New Guinea, which became eventually the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya. It then engaged in a campaign of diplomatic and military harassment of Malaya and Singapore, which lasted from 1963 to 1966. The purpose of that "confrontation" was to prevent the formation of the Federation of Malaysia through the incorporation of British-controlled Sarawak and Sabah, on the island of Borneo, part of which is Indonesian. Then, between 1975 and 1977, first through political manipulations and then by overt military action, Indonesia prevented the emergence of an independent state in the Portuguese part of the island of Timor, after Lisbon had decided to divest itself of its colonies. The former Portuguese colony became the Indonesian province of Timor Timur, despite continued protests in the General Assembly of the United Nations and at the Havana Conference of Non-Aligned Countries.

Do these actions, by a nation which had used military force successfully for its own liberation, indicate an expansionist trend similar to the one which has prompted the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December

1978, its military occupation of Laos since the withdrawal of the United States in 1975, and the menacing concentration of Vietnamese divisions on Thailand's borders?

Students of Indonesian history know that the committee which prepared for independence in the summer of 1945--when it became obvious that the period of Japanese occupation was coming to an end--discussed the idea of a "Greater Indonesia." They also remember the assertive foreign policy of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, who guided his nation's destiny from the proclamation of independence in August 1945 until the military took over in the aftermath of a major political upheaval in March 1966.

First, as host of the April 1955 Bandung Conference, in which 29 Asian and African countries participated; then as one of the founders of the "non-aligned" grouping of nations in September 1961 in Belgrade, and finally as the vocal exponent of the concept that "new emerging forces" were rising in opposition to the "old established forces"--a penetrating anticipation in the 1960s of what in the 1970s became the North-South issue -- Soekarno eventually claimed for Indonesia the leading role of "lighthouse" of the Third World.

The militant and dynamic foreign policy of the Soekarno regime in its last years was buttressed by the acquisition, in the early 1960s, of considerable air and naval power provided, on credit, by the Soviet Union. Indonesia became temporarily a major military factor in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, much to the concern of its neighbors, including Australia. It was seen by many, not without justification, as "the troublemaker of Southeast Asia," a nation with an expansionist "manifest destiny."

Although historical predictions are always hazardous, I believe that these apprehensions are no longer justified. In the first period of national consolidation, under the romantic-nationalist civilian President Soekarno, Indonesia had turned outward, asserting its national identity. The country was not ready, while coping with numerous ideological, regional, and political insurgencies, to concentrate its national energies on the slow and tedious long-term tasks of economic development.

Under the leadership of President Soeharto, a pragmatic army general who took charge of the Indonesian government in March 1966, the nation has turned inward. Economic development rather than international glamor is the major aim of the present Indonesian regime. Aided by an exceptionally able team of civilian technocrats and fully supported by the armed forces, President Soeharto has been able to secure for Indonesia an extended period of political stability and economic growth. He has also skillfully shaped a foreign policy aimed at overcoming the bad memories of the early 1960s. As soon as he took charge, the "confrontation" with Malaysia was brought to an end. Then, in August 1967, Indonesia joined Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand in the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which is increasingly becoming an important factor for stability in the Pacific region and is recognized as such by all the major powers, including the United States, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union.

The "confrontation" with Malaysia was a major historical mistake from which Indonesia's present leaders have learned that, precisely because of its size and potential power, their country should be particularly careful not to intimidate its smaller and weaker Southeast Asian neighbors. Special efforts have been made by President Soeharto to overcome Singapore's fear of its giant neighbor. More recently Indonesia has established cooperative relations with the new state of Papua-New Guinea, which shares a long land border with the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya.

Those who wonder whether the lengthy and costly efforts to liberate Dutch Western New Guinea portend Indonesian expansionist moves toward mineral-rich Papua-New Guinea should be reminded of an historical factor of dominant importance in the age of nationalism: the legitimizing value ascribed to former colonial boundaries.

Indonesia's "Generation of 1945" grew up in the colony of the Netherlands East Indies, learning their geography from maps which included Western New Guinea as an integral part of the colony which they aspired to liberate and establish as an independent sovereign state. But in the "Round Table Agreements" of 1949, which recognized Indonesian sovereignty, the Dutch Government refused to settle the future of Western New Guinea, promising instead to open negotiations for that purpose the following year. Then, Dutch

imperialist pride gained the upper hand and the government in The Hague refused negotiations, unwilling to face total withdrawal from the Western Pacific, after a major presence in that region since the sixteenth century.

Dutch stubbornness cost both the Netherlands and Indonesia dearly. Dutch enterprises in Indonesia lost investments of over U.S.\$2 billion, which were nationalized in the 1950s as reprisals for the refusal to settle the issue of Western New Guinea. Indonesia lost faith in the United Nations, which failed to help in the fulfillment of its territorial aspiration, and withdrew from that organization in January 1965. It also abandoned its non-aligned policy, accepting Soviet military assistance for the liberation of Western New Guinea, and incurred heavy debts for that purpose. Last but not least, Indonesia's national energies were diverted for a decade from constructive economic development to the liberation of Western New Guinea. This became a national obsession until the issue was finally settled in the summer of 1962 through the mediation of the United States which had previously been a neutral bystander, unwilling to exert pressure on its Dutch NATO ally.

The liberation of Western New Guinea had been from the beginning of Indonesia's independent existence a loudly-proclaimed national goal. No claims were ever voiced to the territories which have since become the independent state of Papua-New Guinea. No opposition came from Jakarta to the creation of that country through peaceful decolonization by Australia. The guiding principle of Indonesian territorial claims has obviously been colonial history, not ethnic affinity.

The integration in 1977 of former Portuguese Timor would seem to be in direct contradiction of this statement. But a unique set of circumstances explains that event. From the time of Indonesia's proclamation of independence in August 1945, until the announcement by the new Spínola regime in Lisbon in April 1975 that Portugal will liberate its colonies, Indonesia had never voiced a claim to the eastern half of the island of Timor of which the western part had been Dutch and became an integral part of Indonesia. This, despite the ethnic and religious identity of the population, on both sides of the border. It was only when sudden Portuguese decolonization

provided an opportunity for a Timorese leftist political group to create a sovereign mini-state that Indonesia decided to intervene.

Occurring less than a decade after the nearly-successful Communist coup in Jakarta of September 30, 1965, the threat of the establishment of a Timorese "Cuba" in the midst of the Indonesian archipelago was considered strategically intolerable, especially at a time when factional struggle in another former Portuguese colony, Angola, had demonstrated how the Soviet Union used that situation to its geopolitical advantage by providing military assistance to the group it wanted to see in control of Angola, the late Agostinho Neto's MPLA.

Firmly restrained from direct intervention by President Soeharto, the Indonesian military authorities attempted at first to protect Indonesian national interests by political means. But then civil war broke out between contending political factions, creating in East Timor a situation similar to that which had prevailed in Angola prior to the Soviet-Cuban intervention. At that moment, Indonesia decided to intervene militarily in support of the local group advocating integration of East Timor as a regular province of Indonesia.

By then, radical elements in the Portuguese military had provided the leftist Fretilin faction in East Timor substantial amounts of modern small weapons from its NATO stocks. Instead of conducting an unopposed military occupation two years earlier, the Indonesian military found themselves engaged in protracted combat operations, during which they both suffered and caused heavy casualties in East Timor.

A glance at the map of the Indonesian archipelago shows that the case of East Timor had unique features. Its location threatened vital external and domestic Indonesian security interests. Nevertheless, the Soeharto regime delayed decisive action until the twelfth hour to avoid reviving the fears generated a decade earlier by President Soekarno's "confrontation" against Malaysia. The integration of East Timor is not an indicator of future Indonesian intentions toward the small island nations of the South Pacific.

A significant proof of Indonesia's benign intentions toward its neighbors is its current military policy. Residual apprehensions in Southeast

Asia and, curiously, also in Australia toward the world's fifth most populous nation seem to ignore the fact that Indonesia is one of the few nations which has pursued in the last decade a drastic policy of disarmament.

The Indonesian military leaders who took power in March 1966 decided that national security required economic and social development rather than military preparedness. Consequently, scarce foreign exchange was not allocated for the maintenance of the sophisticated, modern Soviet equipment acquired only a few years earlier. Within a very short time that equipment ceased being operational and was eventually discarded. Indonesia had become practically defenseless when, after its April 1975 victory, Communist Vietnam emerged as a major regional military power in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia's armed forces have been reduced to a total of about 350,000 for all services--a modest order of battle for an archipelagic nation of 140 million, with very extensive, vulnerable, coastlines and serious logistic constraints on troop movements between islands. The military budget provides primarily for routine expenditures. Despite the country's rapidly growing foreign exchange earnings, the military rulers of Indonesia still show great restraint in purchasing modern equipment for the services.

The quality and quantity of weapons currently purchased for the army, navy, and air force provide convincing proof that Indonesia's military posture is defensive. Its armed forces do not have and are not acquiring an offensive capability. The current military policy contrasts strikingly with that of the early 1960s, when Indonesia obtained from the Soviet Union an air and naval capability which threatened its Southeast Asian neighbors and even Australia with TU-16 bombers and W-class submarines. It had even some capability to interdict passage through its archipelago to the navies of the superpowers. There are no indications that such military ambitions are being resuscitated.

Strongly committed to a non-aligned, middle-of-the-road foreign policy and to the strengthening of regional stability through ASEAN cooperation, Indonesia could undoubtedly play a constructive role in a Pacific Community. But is it likely to be interested in that concept in the near future? In the absence of official pronouncements from Jakarta, one can only speculate.

Probably, Indonesia will not want to see the consolidation of ASEAN jeopardized by a major shift of attention to a larger grouping of countries. From 1967 to 1975 ASEAN was primarily a "foreign ministers' club." The fall of Saigon in April 1975 gave enhanced significance and a sense of urgency to that association of five countries which had all experienced Communist insurgencies and subversion. Nevertheless, they refrained from turning ASEAN into a security organization with ideological overtones and decided instead to emphasize economic and cultural cooperation.

But the economies of the ASEAN countries are competitive rather than complementary. Their cultures, despite an ancient common substratum, have been shaped in recent centuries by a considerable variety of colonial influences. Although in the last four years intense cooperative efforts have taken place, at all levels, between the governments of the five countries, ASEAN is still more a state of mind than an institutional framework for common action on a wide front.

Indonesia will probably consider a Pacific Community's impact on the evolution of ASEAN before making a commitment to the larger grouping. Furthermore, Indonesia's economic policy aims at protecting to some extent domestic industrial development. This has already created dilemmas in determining the pattern of economic cooperation within ASEAN. Commitment to a broader Pacific Community, which would include advanced industrial nations such as the United States and Japan and new industrial nations such as South Korea and Taiwan, might not be welcome in Jakarta at this stage in Indonesia's economic development.

But the ASEAN experience might prompt Indonesia to wish to contribute to the gradual development of the state of mind without which a Pacific Community cannot become a reality. Indonesia is proud of its rich cultural heritage and sure of its national identity. It will appreciate opportunities to become better known in the South Pacific and in Latin America through scientific and cultural exchanges, a more abundant flow of information, sports, tourism, and other ways through which it can establish new ties and broaden its circle of friends.

Through such cultural activities, which do not create constraints on the nation's economic development and are compatible with a non-aligned foreign policy, Indonesia is likely to become an active and constructive participant in the creation of a framework for a future Pacific Community.

