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Imperialism and Dependence

Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence by Franklin B. Weinstein. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976, 363 pp., \$17.50.

by Richard W. Franke

"Indonesia [is] endowed . . . with what is probably the most strategically authoritative geographic location on earth . . ." So wrote Lawrence Griswold in *Sea Power*, the official journal of the Navy League of the United States in 1973.¹ A nation so located, and with 130 million people, some of the world's richest deposits of oil, tin, bauxite, rubber, forestry reserves, and many other natural resources, is surely a place of major concern to the imperialist powers at a time when their empires are so rapidly shrinking. Particularly for the U.S. since the victory of the Vietnamese revolution, the vast resources and critical location at the juncture of the Pacific and Indian Oceans have likely made Indonesia, along with Iran and Brazil, a major lynchpin "of a new pro-U.S. constellation of power in the Third World."² There was no slip of the tongue when Richard M. Nixon referred to Indonesia as the "greatest prize in the Southeast Asian area."³ Earlier some commentators had suggested plausibly that the massive American war effort in Vietnam after 1965 was linked intimately with the successful right-wing military takeover in October of that year in Indonesia,⁴ a takeover followed by one of the largest massacres in modern times and the establishment of a military dictatorship which has ruled the country for more than 11 years. During those years, the natural resources and large potential supply of cheap labor have motivated several multinational corporations to invest in Indonesia, and the profits from their operations have flowed to Japan, West Germany, and the U.S.

As with investment, the question of Indonesia's strategic location is dependent on the nation's foreign policy—with whom will it ally and who will it oppose? And in Indonesia the foreign policy, like the policies towards investments, democratic rights, land reform, etc., is decided by military dictators in collaboration with their outside sponsors and friends. But how does a military dictatorship gain popular support? How does the army leadership show the still-embittered peasants and workers of Indonesia that the army was justified in killing hundreds of thousands of their friends and neighbors and in closing down their unions, peasant leagues, student organizations, and women's unions, all of which had flourished in the period before 1965? In the modern world even the strongest strongman does not rule

alone, and appeals for public support must be addressed to some sections of the society in order to ward off the chances of a coup within the military or the launching of a long-term guerrilla resistance that would attract popular support.

The answer which Gen. Suharto and his advisors have turned to is "development," and for development they must have capital. Therefore they have gone in search of foreign aid on a scale unprecedented in Indonesia's history, creating in ten years nearly four times the indebtedness that President Sukarno had built up in twenty-five years, despite the latter's image in much of the Western press as a reckless borrower. The drive for development has led to dependency.

Why must such a large and potentially powerful nation be constantly seeking aid from abroad? Why is it not listened to more seriously in international councils despite its size, natural wealth and strategic location? Why is it apparently so powerless to make its own decisions about foreign policy? These are questions apparently being asked by many members of the Indonesian elite, and many are coming to the conclusion that it is the policy of economic dependency which is undermining the country's potential for national and international power.

An account and analysis of this complex set of contradictory events and ideas is contained in a highly informative and often perceptive study of the post-1965 Indonesian elite and its attitudes towards foreign policy. In his book Franklin Weinstein has combined a mass of detailed data on the views of top Indonesian policy-makers with a discussion of the problems created for a large and strategic country with a recent history of nationalism and a keen sense of having fought hard to win independence only to become again powerless pawns dominated by outside forces. Yet despite its excellent evidence, and despite the author's partial understanding of the "dilemma of dependence," the study falls short of what it could be. Weinstein begins with an excellent data base and some perceptive observations but ends with a set of conclusions that are euphemistic and obfuscating. He adheres to a liberal viewpoint and is unwilling to consider the alternative themes that might develop from a Marxist analysis of the material.

Elite Views of Foreign Policy

Essentially Weinstein has produced two major essays, one on the views of Indonesia's current elite and another on the actual policy decisions and their political context. Each of these essays deserves some critical attention. By far the longest section of the book, from pages 1 to 287, is devoted to an opinion survey of the policy views of selected members of the Jakarta elite. Some questions might be raised about the size and composition of the sample, but in view of the difficulties encountered in conducting wide-ranging interviews with such a large number of officials, the detail of the data is quite impressive. His statistical tables are simple and easy to comprehend. But Weinstein does not limit his presentation to statistical tables alone; he also gives much space to illustrative quotations. Thus the text is enriched and superior to the dry exposition of correlations so often presented in interview studies of this type.

The data indicate several significant tendencies in the foreign policy attitudes of the Indonesian elites. Despite strongly anti-communist orientations, the elite members are extremely wary of the U.S., particularly of the motives of U.S. aid. They remain hostile to Japanese business interests. They resent being treated "like children" by the capitalist donor nations that require annual reports on Indonesia's economic "progress." They worry about the huge debt being piled up, and about who will pay it back. They believe their own national political life is being destroyed by the military government and its repressive policies. They are angry at the destruction of local businesses and industries by multinational corporate investment. They dislike the introduction of advanced technology into a nation whose economy, in their view, is more in need of "intermediate" forms of production assistance.

In addition to these general tendencies, several differences show up in the answers of the army officers, technocrats, Islamic leaders, Catholic Party leaders, and representatives of the non-purged sections of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI). These differences suggest some of the possible political struggles which underlie the smooth surface of government-manipulated elections and the carefully-cultivated image of national unity and agreement about the need for "development." Weinstein presents all these issues with careful documentation and sensitivity to the general political scene in New Order Indonesia.

But here some difficulties in the analysis begin to appear as well. The various party and military respondents come from different segments of the society, and Weinstein is almost certainly informed about their social backgrounds. Yet, instead of analyzing the social bases, he chooses to distinguish between three generations of leaders: the early nationalists from 1928; the veterans of the struggle against the Dutch which resulted in independence in 1945; those who participated in the downfall of Sukarno and the introduction of the New Order in 1966.

There is a justification for the generational divisions. Those who participated in the anti-colonial movements of the 1920s and 1930s were exposed to certain streams of radical thought in Europe—primarily in Holland—while those who grew up during the revolution of the 1945-1950 period, while learning much from the generation of 1928, also were influenced by the world situation at the time of the independence. The generation of 1966, on the other hand, was

educated either within Indonesia or in the United States and was influenced primarily by the doctrines of American bourgeois scholarship of the 1950s and early 1960s. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that there might be some differences in the approaches of these different generations; and indeed, a few do show up. However, the *generational* differences seem slight when compared to the *class* differences, say, within the 1966 grouping. Moreover, the differences can be easily accounted for in the differing educational and experiential backgrounds of those interviewed, and they would clearly be overwhelmed by the differences between the current interviewed elite and the many Indonesians imprisoned or executed in the wake of the army's violent seizure of power.



Jakarta: a statue—a gift of the U.S.S.R.—of an Indonesian freedom fighter being offered food by a woman. (The photographs of Indonesia were taken by Bob Orr, Long Beach, CA.)

Of course Weinstein is aware of this problem. He notes briefly (p. 37) that no left-wing opinions could be solicited, at least not publicly in Jakarta. But if the study is to be a *complete* study of the political tendencies of the present Indonesian elite, the author could have broadened his sources a great deal. For example, several journals are published by refugee groups in Eastern Europe and China, and these frequently carry commentaries on the foreign policy of the current regime. Weinstein utilizes Jakarta newspapers as a supplementary source for opinion in Jakarta, so there is no objective reason why he could not have added some material

on the views of leaders and representatives of a potentially still larger section of the population: the workers and peasants whose support for much of the Communist Party (PKI) program may only be awaiting the end of the repression and the return of the exiles.

The failure to consult available sources of left-wing opinion, by itself, might be a rather minor point. After all, this study is one of the elite *in power*. However, given all the concern for the generational differences and the relative importance attached to the differences under the surface of official unanimity, it is more than a curiosity why no comment is offered on the views of the Indonesian Marxist community and its leadership in exile.



A wood and charcoal gatherer, Jogjakarta.

In fact, it would appear that this "omission" is part of a more general tendency of the study to discount Marxist ideas altogether, even when they turn up among the elite in Jakarta. The anti-communism is apparent in Weinstein's language, as for example (p. 56) his remark that "One future general received a complete Marxist indoctrination" or his listing of possible conceptual frameworks as "Marxist, nationalist or realist," (p. 107) as if those three characteristics were mutually exclusive.

Finally, it is extremely difficult to understand the meaning of answers to questions that are impossibly general. What does it mean, for example, that 3 out of 5 PSI (Indonesian Socialist Party) respondents felt that "the cold

war is over" (p. 113) while PNI respondents agreed 9-0 that it is not? The correlation of these differing views when taken together with a historical, political, and sociological background of the respondents might explain this pattern, but Weinstein settles for a correlation with another question of the same order: "Is ideology a declining force in world politics?" Those who agree that the cold war is over also favor the view that ideology is a declining factor and the converse also holds true. Again, what difference does this make unless we know more about the two parties and their social bases? The generational breakdown on both questions provides insufficient data by itself to tell us why these different people hold these views.

Perceptions, Politics, and Foreign Policy

The second part of *Indonesian Foreign Policy* (Chapter 8) moves in a much different direction than the preceding analysis of attitudes might suggest. Here Weinstein presents a history of the Indonesian Republic and its foreign policy in terms of countervailing political forces and the continuing tensions between those who favored aid from the Western capitalist powers and those who favored moving in the direction of internal political mobilization and a strong anti-imperialist policy. Although based on secondary sources this section contains a wealth of information, coherently written and focusing on the actual historical policies rather than the questionnaire data. Here we find out about the PKI's motivations in wanting increased Soviet aid, and of tensions between the Party and its Moscow allies. We learn about the role of the army leadership in faking an invasion of Sabah in 1965, determined not to let their best units get away from Java but unwilling to tell the public they were not going to pursue the "confrontation." We see how, from the time of independence, the army leadership favored pro-U.S. policies, were vehemently anti-Communist, and were aided by their American friends with equipment, funds, and overseas training. We also read how, by 1964, and under growing popular pressure led by the PKI—although Weinstein tends to portray this as merely the work of the PKI leadership—the army and right wing felt politically isolated. The fairly consistent record of collaboration with the Dutch, British and American governments in opposition to the Indonesian people on several issues which were supported by broad sections of the public had led to this isolation and included such events as the question of West Irian in 1962, the outer islands rebellions of 1957 (when a U.S. CIA pilot was shot down⁵) and the confrontation with Malaysia.

The successful army and right-wing massacre of the PKI in 1965-66, however, was followed by an almost complete reversal of policies. Indonesia rather abruptly ended the confrontation with Malaysia, broke off diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, toned-down its support of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, and reopened the nation to capitalist investment by remodeling the legal restrictions instituted under Sukarno and returning many nationalized properties to their former owners. It might be added here that Weinstein's documentation on the pro-U.S. policies overlooks one small but significant indicator of the way in which the "independent and non-aligned" foreign policy was mythical: in 1972 Indonesian military officers were training 60 commandos of the CIA-installed Lon Nol

government of Cambodia at the Batu Djadjar Special Forces School near Bandung in West Java.⁶

Weinstein also provides some useful insights into the developing responses to this about-face in foreign politics. As has been noted above, Indonesian elite members, despite their anti-Communism, remain quite suspicious of the West, particularly of Japan and the U.S. By the 1970s the failing economy—despite the massive aid programs—had led to far-reaching disillusionment, summarized in the remark of one respondent who had been in the anti-Sukarno movement of 1966: “This is the most alienated government in the history of Indonesia. Everyone is very depressed . . . I’m afraid we demonstrated against the wrong fellow.” (quoted on p. 347) Weinstein weaves many of these anti-government currents together and offers some thoughtful speculations on the possible forms of active opposition that might develop, concluding that probably the most likely type of change is the rise of a more militantly anti-U.S. regime, somewhat like that in Egypt. (Needless to say, the book was written before Sadat’s recent split with the USSR and return to the West for assistance.)

The Limits of Liberal Scholarship

After so much careful research into the foreign policy attitudes of the elite, and after a well-written account of many of the historical policies, Weinstein comes to his concluding remarks. But here the limitations imposed by the author’s liberal world view become much more debilitating than is apparent in the individual sections reviewed above. Back in the 1950s C. Wright Mills warned of two harmful theoretical systems in American social science. One stream, *abstracted empiricism*, utilized highly refined data and expert statistical and methodological techniques in order to discover correlations and to arrive at conclusions of little relevance to anyone in the real world. At the other extreme, *grand theory* was at work at such a high level of abstraction and generalization that the real world below could never be coherently understood without simply doing a separate study and not making use of the theory at all.⁷

Weinstein’s material on the attitudes of the Indonesian elite, taken by itself, is abstracted empiricism. But in attempting to tie together the attitudes and the events recounted in his Chapter 8, he goes the other way into the trap of grand theory. Having brought all the interviews together, Weinstein arrives at a most general question on which to base his concluding hypothesis: what is the average percentage of answers to questions by any respondent which indicate a view of the world as a hostile place? By averaging all the averages for all the respondents across all the groups and generations, he finds 73% of the answers indicate such a view. (p. 361)

But how does this finding fit with the historical material presented in Chapter 8? Before 1965 there was a general move towards independence from Western aid; after 1965 the regime turned sharply the other way. Weinstein picks as his second variable the presence or absence of “political competition.” Before military takeover, many parties competed while afterwards there was only the army. Here then is Weinstein’s hypothesis, as derived from, and offered as an explanation of the data in his study:

When the foreign policy elite of an underdeveloped country perceives the world as hostile, intense political competition

will lead the country toward a foreign policy that puts independence first, while a less competitive situation will permit a policy that accords priority to the search for aid.
(p. 356)

In examining this highly abstract hypothesis, we might first wonder if the author has subjected it, even informally, to a cross-cultural test. Has the People’s Republic of China undertaken development without foreign aid primarily because of the political competition there? Aren’t there several one-party states in Africa which have alternately supported and opposed foreign aid while the essential one-party structure remained the same? Hasn’t India sought western support both when there was and when there was not “political competition”?

More significantly for the development of a theory, what if the hypothesis *did* test out internationally, as the author proposes? A hypothesis is of little help, even when validated, unless it is accompanied by *an explanation that provides logical, plausible reasons why the hypothesis is correct*. And what could there be in something as vague as “political competition” that could possibly explain the presence or absence of a desire on the part of an elite for Western aid? Between the elegant and hard-won data on attitudes and the historical facts on policies, Weinstein erects not a bridge for understanding but an abstraction which, even if true, is not worth knowing.

A Marxist Alternative

This reviewer certainly does not claim to enjoy Weinstein’s expertise regarding the current Indonesian elite, but with the concepts of Marxist analysis it is possible to put forward an alternative theoretical structure that can avoid the dual pitfalls of abstracted empiricism and grand theory while simultaneously producing both a hypothesis and an explanation which can be briefly tested against some of Weinstein’s data.

We can start from the general proposition that people’s attitudes are a reflection of their class position. Combining this with the notion that the advanced capitalist powers in their “defense” against socialism, need to dominate the economic and political systems of nations which have raw materials, cheap labor, or military-strategic importance, we can predict that the international capitalist class will ally itself with a local elite which generally has the most common interests with it.

However, owing to the expansionist character of capitalism, the imperialist alliance between these two classes nearly always becomes contradictory and unstable. Since both groups preside over state power, the engendered disputes will appear most frequently as foreign policy issues between the respective governments.

Much of Weinstein’s study is concerned with the several foreign policy differences which have arisen between Indonesia on the one hand and Japan, the U.S., and European imperialists on the other over rubber prices, oil prices, loans, fishing rights, and the like. Indonesia has lost most of these disputes. *It is directly from these contradictory political and economic interests that Indonesia’s foreign policy elite derives its contradictory attitudes towards the capitalist nations.*

As rulers of their own nation, the Indonesian elites fear China and the Soviet Union because they view these two societies as potential allies of their local opponents: the

workers and peasants of Indonesia who have risen up already three times in this century and have had to be disciplined with enormous terror and brutality. But, simultaneously, these same Indonesian rulers are dominated, personally degraded, and constantly aware of the inferior position held by their giant and strategic nation, a domination, degradation, and inferior status which they cannot help but see as coming from the structure of their relationship with the very "allies" who are saving them from socialism. Their historical experiences with the abuses inflicted on them by Dutch colonialism reinforce their fears of the imperialist allies whose behavior politically, economically, and in interpersonal relations reminds them so much of the pre-independence days. The "high hostility index" described by Weinstein results from these contradictions, but the use of "hostile world" as an analytical category obscures the very contradiction which dominates the real situation—and most of the text of the book.

But what of the concept of "political competition"? Here again, we can proceed with Marxist analysis to a more thorough understanding. Without repeating the long series of propositions above, we can suggest briefly the following alternative. The wealthy elite will tend to favor aid; but the impoverished masses, once organized and led by a conscious revolutionary leadership will tend to oppose such aid because it would maintain the imperialist bonds which they must break

in order to develop their nation's productive forces and to create a more egalitarian society. Particularly when it has weathered a serious challenge to its power (e.g. 1963-65), the elite will find it especially necessary to align with imperialist military and economic forces. Much of Weinstein's data and the analysis presented in his Chapter 8 will fit directly into this framework. Like his "hostile world" paradigm, Weinstein's concept of "political competition" obscures both the class referents of the various attitudes towards aid as well as the fact that it is the *content* of the politics and the strength of the groups supporting these politics that influence the national course of development and policy.

Conclusion

The struggle for progress in the times in which we live is in part a struggle for rational, scientific analysis of the world and of the social and political processes taking place. An important role for the intellectual is to aid in the production of these scientific analyses. It is hoped that this review may serve in some measure as an invitation to Franklin Weinstein to go beyond narrow empiricism, to come down from grand theory, and join in this work. I am certain that many of our colleagues in Indonesia are already doing the same. Someday the "most strategically authoritative geographic location on earth" will be in the hands of its own people — the workers and peasants of Indonesia. ☆

Notes

1. Michael Klare, 1975, "Indonesia and the Nixon Doctrine" in Malcolm Caldwell (ed.), *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*. (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975), pp. 265-74. Quote from p. 265. (This book is available in the United States for \$5.00 from: *Tapol—USA*, the U.S. Campaign for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners, P.O. Box 609, Montclair, N.J. 07042.)
2. Ibid.
3. *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967.
4. See for example: Deirdre Griswold, *Indonesia: The Bloodbath That Was*. (World View Publishers [46 W. 21st St., New York, N.Y. 10010], 1975); and Peter Dale Scott, "Exporting Military-Economic Development—America and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-67" in Caldwell, op. cit., pp. 209-64.
5. See also the full account of CIA activities in this rebellion as recounted by Griswold, op. cit., and David Wise and Thomas R. Ross, *The Invisible Government* (New York: Random House, 1964).
6. *New York Times*, March 29, 1972.
7. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). See especially chapters 2-3.

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