

Bond University

From the Selected Works of Jonathan H. Ping

March 13, 2000

Statecraft, Australia and the future of Indonesia

Jonathan H. Ping



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jonathan_ping/19/

COMMENTARY

STATECRAFT, AUSTRALIA AND THE FUTURE OF INDONESIA

Jonathan H Ping

Doctoral Candidate, Politics Department

Indonesia is reconstructing itself. Democracy has taken hold, a free press is working and the rule of law is gaining popularity. What about self-determination, human rights and the environment? Can Australia play a role in assisting those people and groups in Indonesia that can't help themselves? Can Australia's leaders help? To date, unfortunately, it can be argued that Australia has no statesmen (or stateswomen) only politicians! The character of a 'statesperson' sees them looking at the world in a proactive and thus inventive way which allows them to create circumstances and also to take advantage of opportunities. The reactionary is a politician.

Australia's relationship with Indonesia is a prime example of this country's failure to produce any leaders that are statespeople. Gough Whitlam failed to make clear our nation's views on human rights and self-determination and thus Indonesia's leader Soeharto took that as permission to take East Timor by

force. Malcolm Fraser complained and pestered Indonesia but traded and dined with them as if nothing else mattered. Bob Hawke refused to take East Timor's plight seriously and suggested that it would all be resolved with time. Paul Keating attempted to make friends with a dictator but failed and in that failure undermined years of trust that had been honestly but ignorantly built. John Howard dragged our nation through the mess that the previous politicians had created. In doing so he did more than the former holders of power but refused to look into the future or at the evidence.

It is now known that the Australian Defence Intelligence Organisation had been handing John Howard transcripts of radio communications between the Indonesian military and the Pro-Jakarta East Timor militia which anticipated the sacking of East Timor months before it occurred. Why didn't he make that information public? Why for that matter didn't he talk to General Wiranto? Unfortunately John Howard had to wait for the destruction of Dili and

other towns before his government acted. The call to act was couched in emotive images and irrational arguments rather than common sense. Here, we the Australian people are to blame. A combination of ignorance and lack of interest makes it almost impossible for Australian leaders to be able to justify foreign policy decisions to the public unless the public is primed with images of blood and death. But then isn't it too late?

“Twenty five years ago Australia could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives by being honest and mature in its dealings with Indonesia.”

East Timor is now on its way to becoming an independent state. The man to thank for that is not Australian. The only statesman involved in those troubling events, which destroyed the lives of four generations of East Timorese, is the ex-President of Indonesia Bacha ruddin Jusuf Habibie. With the

courage of a condemned man Habibie for the first time in Indonesian history used the extensive Presidential powers against the interests of the colonial Javanese army and state. Yes, it is a colonial power - Java that is. In the outer Provinces of Indonesia, such as West Kalimantan, Ambon, Ache and Irian Jaya, the Javanese army behaves like the Dutch colonialist of pre-1945. The policies are the same and characteristic: forced transmigration, resource extraction, military rule and violence as the ultimate arbitrator.

The Australian state has a proud record of state midwifery. The birth of Indonesia, Malaysia, and PNG can all be found in Australia's international career. East Timor joins that list. Of course Australia was given instructions by the 'acting physician'—Britain and then the United States of America. What about Irian Jaya and the other Indonesian Provinces that are torn by violent opposition to Javanese colonialism? Should Australia send troops to oppose the Indonesian military as it did at the birth of Malaysia? Australian citizens

walked the international border between Malaysia and Indonesia in Borneo. Could Australia not take advantage of this historical opportunity - the solidification of a democratic Indonesia - to suggest and argue logically for the deconstruction of oppressive politics?

Twenty five years ago Australia could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives by being honest and mature in its dealings with Indonesia. A lost opportunity will cost lives. As the nightmare of East Timor ends the failure of Australian foreign policy, and in particular the lack of statespeople, is creating another millstone around our neck. Can Australia attend diplomatic cocktail parties and ignore the destruction of the largest tract of rain forest outside South America, that is in Irian Jaya or West Papua, as the non-Javanese call it? Can we live with the yet to emerge West Papua independence protesters that will fill our streets and condemn our immorality? Will we be content when the ancient culture and lifestyle of the tribespeople of West Papua is gone?

Continued Page 6

Adelaidean

Volume 9 Issue Number 3

Acting Editor John Drislane
Layout Julie Ryke

Printed by Cadillac Color

Writers John Drislane
David Ellis
Ben Osborne
Contributors Adam Barclay



Deadline for next issue is 16 March

Room G07 Mitchell Building, South Australia, 5005. Tel (08) 8303 5174; Fax (08) 8303 4838; Email: julie.ryke@adelaide.edu.au

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/Adelaidean/home.html>

Material may be reproduced without permission but acknowledgement must be given to the *Adelaidean*.

COMMENTARY

STATECRAFT, AUSTRALIA AND THE FUTURE OF INDONESIA

From Page 2

The peoples of West Kalimantan, Ambon, Irian Jaya, Aceh, and other Indonesian provinces have been transferred from Dutch ownership to Indonesian rule. No self-determination took place. The resources: oil in Aceh and gold in Irian Jaya, rain forest in West Kalimantan and Irian Jaya, along with other provinces, are being converted to luxury cars and apartments in Jakarta. It's a fact that can be justified through the Indonesian national ideology of Pancasila. Very little of the income is sustainable, and even less is returned to the people that were displaced or who had their subsistence lifestyle undermined by the destruction of their environment. As Tim Flannery warns in 'Throwim Way Leg': "Indonesia will then face a civil war that will make East Timor look insignificant by comparison (p. 225)."

What can be done? An irrational politician will either ignore the problem and continue to celebrate the past 'triumph' or 'victory', as they understand it, that is East Timor. This may provide enough electoral support to win them another term. Or beginning a domestically targeted public campaign to embarrass and belittle the Indonesian state in order to prove themselves a champion of human rights and self-determination could also win them popular support. Neither option, however, has much to do with a solution.

Statecraft is the answer. A statesperson being proactive and also understanding of the limits of diplomacy and domestic politics could consider several options. Given the momentum and speed of change within the Indonesian state it wouldn't be too much of a push to suggest a federation which could allow for a greater diffusion of power—the deconstruction of the centralised state. A more radical option is the proposition that would see Indonesia disappear. The pre-Dutch boundaries are still there and continue to produce fault lines in the 51 year old post-colonial Javanese state. Why not put it to the 'Indonesian' people? An Australian statesperson would.

Jonathan H Ping
Doctoral Candidate
Politics Department