

AUSTRALIA & INDONESIA: BEYOND STABILITY, TOWARDS ORDER

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Although Indonesia is Australia's largest and most important neighbour, the relationship between the two profoundly different societies has been punctuated by bouts of high tension, suspicion and mutual mistrust. In the late 1940s the Chifley Government was openly supportive of the emerging nationalist elite in Jakarta, to the point that Indonesia's foreign minister Subandrio later described Australia as the "mid-wife" at the birth of the Indonesian republic. However, despite Australia's diplomatic support for the de-colonisation of the Dutch East Indies after the Second World War, Canberra and Jakarta have experienced a troubled diplomatic relationship virtually since Indonesia's independence.¹

Attempts to resolve enduring problems and recast the bilateral relationship in a more positive light have been a recurring theme in Australian diplomatic and academic circles since the 1950s. And yet despite considerable effort on both sides, remarkably little progress has been made in constructing a long term engagement which satisfies the expectations and aspirations of both peoples.

This paper seeks to identify the structural faults in the architecture of the relationship and explore both the opportunities and limits of future co-operation. It will be argued that before a more mutually satisfactory and successful relationship can be built, new foundations of understanding will need to be laid. This presupposes a recognition of earlier faults which have periodically led to diplomatic cracks in the relationship and prevented enduring levels of civility from developing. From an Australian perspective, this paper assesses the prospects of co-existence between two independent political communities, one an advanced industrial liberal democracy, the other a developing non-liberal society.

¹ For a recent study, see David Lee, 'Indonesia's Independence' in David Goldsworthy (ed), **Facing North; A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 1: 1901 to the 1970s** (DFAT, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2001).

Poor Investment

For much of the period since the 1950s, Canberra has misunderstood the legacy of European colonialism in Indonesia, underestimating the extent to which Indonesian nationalism was part of a broader 'revolt against the West' and a reaction to its *mission civilisatrice*. Indonesia's political aspirations, expressed in the traditional Western discourse of self-determination, sovereignty and independence, led many Australian policy-makers to believe that the newly independent state would also imitate the Western route to political modernisation.² They were soon disappointed.

Ignorance, divergent strategic interests, suspicion of communist sympathies and a legacy of racism combined to push Australia psychologically away from its large northern neighbour. In Indonesia, hostility towards the West, of which Australia was seen as a representative outpost, together with assertions of 'nationalist' unity, frequently situated Indonesia against Australia.

By the early 1960s President Sukarno was seen in Canberra as a dangerous ultra-nationalist, not only economically incompetent and anti-Western but also a likely conduit for eventual communist rule, given the broad-based popularity of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and his increasing support for it. Sukarno's demise and the annihilation of the PKI under Major-General Suharto in 1965-6, widely but misleadingly portrayed as a popular spontaneous eruption, was therefore warmly welcomed in the West.³ The pathological anti-communism of Suharto and the Indonesian Army, and his decision to open up the economy to Western capital, was as much appreciated by Australia, as was his iron grip of a contrived and inherently fragmentary state. For the next three decades Suharto was cast in the West as the only person who could prevent a return to the chaos of the late Sukarno period, when non-alignment and anti-imperialism undermined the West's Cold War posture. His repression and corruption were easily forgiven, and Australian expressions of concern

² See Hedley Bull, **Justice in International Relations**, The Hagey Lectures (University of Waterloo, Ontario 1984).

³ See for example, Scott Burchill, 'Absolving the Dictator', **AQ: Journal of Contemporary Analysis**, Vol 73, Issue 3, May-June 2001.

about these qualities were dismissed as over-stated, inaccurate, or culturally insensitive.

The move to a militarily dominated authoritarian government which had come to power in a massacre of horrific proportions was a problematic start, but Jakarta's bloody and clumsy invasion of East Timor in 1975 and the lies that it and Canberra subsequently told about the situation there, along with repression and censorship throughout the archipelago, showed that under Suharto, Indonesia and Australia were developing along fundamentally different political paths, despite official Australian support for the divergent path that Indonesia was pursuing.

Misreadings

From the perspective of Australia's policy makers, Indonesia has been viewed as densely populated, strategically vital, regionally influential and inherently fragile. This last point has been reflected in constant calls by many Australian 'Indonesianists' to support the unity of the Indonesian state. What they failed to recognise, however, was that regardless of whether Australia wanted Indonesia to be united, fragmented, federated or non-existent, Canberra's concerns remained irrelevant to Indonesia's actual political development. What it actually demonstrated was their own anxiety about Indonesia.⁴ Their own anxiety was based in part on potential instability in the region, in part on the capacity for this to impact on strategic and economic interests, in part on a failure to be able to conceptualise the archipelago as other than united (and 'stable'), and in part to protect their own carefully developed professional reputations. In this, the consistency of perspective that has derived from Canberra's policy elite on Indonesia has reflected much less the plurality of perspectives that genuinely exist, and which are based on solid evidence and strong analysis, than it is on the self-selecting procedure of the foreign policy elite, which by definition only recruits from those people where there is pre-existing agreement with established policy positions.

⁴ For a recent statement of this position, see Jamie Mackie, 'Correspondence', **Quarterly Essay**, No.3, 2001, pp.90-1.

This anxious reading of Indonesia's modern history by a narrowly focused and often self-serving foreign policy elite has meant that it has never been 'normalised' in Canberra's international relations, instead occupying a special or exceptional status in Australia's diplomatic and academic cultures. In one way or another, Indonesia has been regarded as a perpetual concern for Australia – a problem to contain, and for which special allowances had to be made, eventually reflected in deferential (and sometimes obsequious) behaviour.

One early consequence of this anxiety led the Menzies Government in the mid 1950s to make provision for Indonesian studies at universities in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, and the cultivation of what was thought to be a significant body of expertise in the area.

Yet despite having a large number of Indonesian scholars in Australia who have had considerable influence on the formation of government thinking in Canberra, there have been numerous mistakes and surprisingly few benefits to show from this intellectual investment.

In particular, advice from Australia's foreign policy analysts which has been tempered by a desire not to cause offence in Indonesia, or putatively protecting Australia relations with Indonesia, has included (but is not limited to):

1. the deaths of Australian resident journalists in East Timor.
 2. a refusal to publicly acknowledge state terror in Indonesia under the New Order.
 3. a refusal to acknowledge the growth and brutal activities of the so-called 'militias' in East Timor from late 1998 until September 1999
 4. the refusal to acknowledge (despite clear intelligence) the intended program of destruction planned by the TNI and militias in East Timor in 1999
 5. the refusal to acknowledge the clear, demonstrable and now well documented links between the TNI and the militias in East Timor
 6. the refusal to acknowledge the development of and quasi-official support for Islamic militias (e.g. Laskar Jihad)
- the refusal to acknowledge the development of a radical Islam with distinct anti-Western tendencies and arefusal to acknowledge threats against Western/Australian targets by such groups with such an orientation

In each of these instances, foreign policy advice on Indonesia has demonstrably failed, or the considerations upon which advice has been taken has put the perceived 'sensitivities' of a corrupt and self-serving Indonesian elite before the interests of an honest public understanding of political development in Indonesia The lives of thousands of people who were in significant part relying on Australian honesty, and the lives of Australian citizens and residents, has also been jeopardised.

In part, such failures reflect a simple if sorely misconceived understanding by Australia's foreign policy advisors that they are the guardians of a rare wisdom that cannot be understood by less well informed citizens. This approach to a self-defined meritocracy is both anti-democratic and has the demonstrable capacity to produce policy outcomes that are distinctly contrary to the widely held beliefs and wishes of the people they are supposed to be working for - the Australian public.

In part, this approach to Indonesia can also be explained by the concentration of many, though not all, these 'experts' on culture as the key explanatory tool in understanding Indonesia. This culturalist, or cultural relativist, approach went far beyond anthropology, pervading the disciplines of politics, history and even the 'science' of economics. Yet this is an approach which has rarely been used to analyse

other, especially Western, societies. Whereas the West is understood through its history and politics, the East is said to be best understood through its culture.⁵

As they see it, the challenge for 'Indonesianists' has been to uncover the deep significance of Indonesian (read Javanese) culture in understanding Indonesian politics and society which should, in turn, direct how Australia should engage Indonesia and Asia more broadly. It's an essentialist and Orientalist outlook.⁶

Past Mistakes

There are, however, serious problems with Orientalist understandings of non-Western societies. They help to reinforce and reproduce notional differences between the Orient (Indonesia) and the Occident (Australia) – differences that may well be illusory, reconstructed and reified for various political and economic purposes, or simply artificially constructed by the West for its own cultural purposes.⁷ 'Our' civilisation is always known, accepted and normal. 'Theirs' is different, strange and exotic. Religions, races and ethnicities are collapsed into broad reductive categories (the notion of an 'Indonesian' culture of 'values' being a prime case in point), sweeping generalisations without divergent currents, and rigidly separated national cultures which are assumed to be fixed rather than dynamic.

Orientalist approaches, such as those adopted by a number of Australia's Indonesian 'experts', have confused the notion of 'culture' with the social, political and economic interests of the ruling elite in a country.⁸ In the case of Indonesia, this constitutes a conflation of predominantly Javanese culture (reconstructed as a state culture) and the culture of authoritarianism associated with the New Order regime of Suharto (which

⁵ See John Legge, 'Asian Studies: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction', **Australian Perceptions of Asia: Australian Cultural History No 9, 1990** (Kensington 1990).

⁶ See Richard Robison, 'Explaining Indonesia's Response to the Jenkins Article: Implications for Australia-Indonesian relations', **Australian Outlook**, Vol 40, No 3, December 1986 and Richard Robison, 'The politics of 'Asian values'', **The Pacific Review**, Vol 9, No 3, 1996.

⁷ John M. Steadman, **The Myth of Asia** (Macmillan, London 1969); Edward W. Said, **Orientalism** (Vintage, New York 1979) and Bryan S. Turner, **Marx and the End of Orientalism** (Allen & Unwin, London 1978).

⁸ J. Pemberton, **On the Subject of 'Java'** (Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1994).

in turn derives from the 'organicist' (fascist) origins of Indonesian state philosophy). The reification of Javanese culture stresses harmony, deference and obedience, hierarchy, conformity and the avoidance of conflict in Indonesian society. The state philosophy, as reflected in the Constitution, the armed forces (TNI) and the construction of the state, emphasise 'state rights' over individual (or community) rights.⁹ The recent flowering of reform and democratisation in Indonesia, which remains largely under-developed and now possibly stalled, has not fundamentally altered this conceptual approach to the state of relations between Indonesia's elites and its 'little people' (*wong cilik*).

However, all of this fails to adequately account for the diversity of interests and ideologies which exist in Indonesia. Harmony and order do exist, but so too do conflict, dissent and opposition. This was evident under the so-called stability of the New Order era, and has become patently obvious in the post-New Order period. Contradictory elements live side by side in modern Indonesia with varying degrees of comfort; centre and periphery, Islam and secularism, the unitary state and local 'nationalisms', communal groups with distinct and often competing economic, political and cultural interests, reform and entrenched interests, extremes of wealth and poverty.

The mistake of many has been to presuppose an 'idealised' notion of Indonesian culture and base political judgements upon it. For example, it was asserted - without any demonstrable proof - that as a consequence of specific cultural characteristics, Indonesians are uncomfortable with Western concepts of liberal democracy and prefer strong rule to fit their dependent personalities and unitary political needs. On this basis, Suharto's repressive rule was excused and defended, not least by Australia's foreign policy analysts and advisers. However, this argument was flatly contradicted by popular support for the fall of Suharto in May 1998 and the process of political reform which followed. However, until this was too overwhelmingly obvious to

⁹ David Bouchier, **Lineages of Organicist Political Thought in Indonesia** (PhD thesis, Monash University, Melbourne 1996); G. Moejdjanto, **The Concept of Power in Javanese Culture** (Gadjah Mada University Press, Yogyakarta 1996); Y.B. Mangunwijaya, 'Some Notes About the Indonesia Raya Dream of Indonesian Nationalists and its Impact on the Concept of Democracy Among the Ruling Elites in

refute, many of Australia's Indonesian 'experts' insisted that all was basically well with the Indonesian body politic.¹⁰

Culturally relative arguments for 'Asian values' in the West, at root the very essence of Orientalist thought, have been easily 'played back' to the West by authoritarian leaders in East Asia who object to the 'imposition' of Western values and institutions. Given their recent experience of European colonialism, it is unsurprising that East Asian leaders portray the West's human rights 'agenda' as a thinly disguised form of cultural imperialism which attempts to thwart the comparative economic advantages of states in the region. The identification of human rights with the West provides a number of them with effective immunity from both internal and external criticism.

Nevertheless, it is ironic that Asian exceptionalism has its roots in the West's Orientalist discourse, and is strategically manipulated by Asian politicians to exploit notions of a common threat (the alien West) and the enemy within (domestic political opponents are 'un-Asian'). The claim that Asians are uniformly and culturally different has provided leaders in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia with a useful, if artificial, rationale for different standards of human rights, freedom of expression and other ethical benchmarks based on the quality of being human, not on the quality of being a member of a particular (if somewhat arbitrary) political community. However, the suggestion that Asians as an homogenous group have different human values from the rest of the world - and even the proposition that values are culturally specific - is a difficult one to sustain.¹¹

Indonesia', Paper to **Indonesian Democracy in the 1950s and 1990s Conference** (Monash University, Melbourne 17-20 December, 1992).

¹⁰ One regrettable and distorting manifestation of this approach has been the close identification of many Australian academics and diplomats with other societies, especially Asian societies. In his autobiography, Bill Hayden noted that shortly after becoming foreign minister in 1983, he "detected a preference among some to be overly agreeable towards certain outside interests and accordingly not independent enough in catering for the national interest. At its worst this could manifest itself in a severe infection of 'localitis', where a diplomat serving too long at an overseas post came to be more identified with the host country's interests than Australia's" (Bill Hayden, **Hayden: An Autobiography** (Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1996), pp.387-8.

¹¹ See, for example, Joanne R. Bauer & Daniel A. Bell (eds), **The East Asian Challenge For Human Rights** (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999); Amartya Sen, **Development As Freedom** (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999),

A serious implication of cultural relativism is the claim that Australia should not judge Jakarta's behaviour by its Western values, which are inappropriate in an East Asian setting. This argument avoids the notion of universal values, discounts the assertion of universal criteria, leads to a position of amoral indifference about the fate of those beyond Australia's borders, and encourages governments to adopt the 'realist' view that the internal political complexion of a state is no business of outsiders. Different values and cultures, however, should not be accepted as a rationalisation for constraints upon procedural freedoms in Indonesia or anywhere else in East Asia.

If there is one lesson Australia can learn from its post-war regional history it is the irrelevance of cultural differences in the development of commercial links. The establishment of Australia's most important trade relationship with Japan in 1957 is a reminder of capitalism's imperviousness to cultural barriers. As economic globalisation proceeds, the expansion of Australia's economic links with the region depends, not on its perceived cultural identity, shared values or even friendships, but on the country's industrial relevance.

The other significant error in Australia's attitude to Indonesia centres on assumptions about territorial boundaries.

The secession and fragmentation of nation-states is not necessarily the same thing, though they are both a normal feature of international life. Just as independence for Tibet would not break up China, neither would the separation of Aceh or West Papua ineluctably 'Balkanise' Indonesia. The secessionist movements in Indonesia's eastern and western most provinces are largely the product of Jakarta's military brutality and economic exploitation. The future shape of the republic will depend on whether these citizens still feel their bond with Indonesian nationalism is worth salvaging, and will not be decided by the preferences of neighbours who reflexively favour 'stability' in Indonesia regardless of what is being stabilised there.

Canberra's stated preference for regional stability and the status quo assumes an immutability of political boundaries which is historically rare. In international relations the politics of contesting and redrawing political boundaries never ends.

Many states change their boundaries over time, according to a variety of circumstances. The perceived stasis of boundaries in South-East Asia fails to take into account accommodations that have occurred since 1945, between Thailand and Cambodia, Thailand and Laos, Cambodian irredentist claims to southern Vietnam, Indonesia's claim to Malaysia (the 'Confrontation'), Malaysia from Singapore, Burmese losses to China and, most recently, the incorporation and 'loss' of East Timor by Indonesia. The borders of the region are largely a consequence of the colonial era and were, at best, a series of short-term compromises. Given the previously malleable nature of regional politics, there is no particular reason why regional boundaries should remain intact for long. Indonesia is currently constructed along the lines of an arbitrarily collection of islands within the context of a colonial administration. The logic of the shape of the state is therefore precisely that of the colony that preceded it. Yet the Netherlands East Indies was understood by incipient 'nationalist' Indonesians as illegitimate. The successor state, therefore, based on the same geographic premise, continues to suffer from much the same problems, continues to employ colonial regulations for the subjugation of dissidents, and employs a military that performs essentially the same function as its colonial forebears, i.e. maintaining the unity of the colony/state.

Despite this rather obvious history, to date, Australian strategic planners have shown little understanding of the processes by which recently drawn political boundaries are quickly made 'sacred' and 'non-negotiable'— how modern traditions and feelings about homelands are invented for expedient political and nationalist purposes.¹² When they contemplate the levels of destruction and human suffering that have resulted from the defence of existing territorial boundaries, it might be prudent for Australia's diplomats and political leaders to adopt a more open-minded approach to territoriality than has been their custom. 'National' self-determination is not necessarily a once-and-for-all event at the time of decolonisation, and the history of

¹² See Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds), **The Invention of Tradition** (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992).

Indonesia per se is still brief, at a little over a half a century, with its future far from certain. It is a mistake to equate stability with a corrupt or brutal status quo which is inherently brittle and therefore unstable; after all Indonesia required a revolution to gain its independence.¹³

Indonesia is a state more arbitrarily constructed than most. At its base is an ideological paradox – it inherited its shape and form from a colonial system widely considered illegitimate by Indonesian nationalists. It's potential for fragmentation is openly conceded by the use of its armed forces which are deployed to suppress internal political dissent and contain centrifugal forces rather than external defence. Indeed, without the presence of a minatory function, Indonesia would have changed shape, and possibly disappeared, on a number of occasions. It is this apparent necessity for inclusive compulsion that primarily defines the political character of Indonesia, which in turn stands in sharp contrast to the Australian experience. By composition Indonesia is a state in search of a 'nation', not a nation-state.

In this respect, the political distinctions between Australia and Indonesia are more significant than the cultural differences between them. Australia is a participatory and representative liberal-democracy. Indonesia's political culture is highly constructed, relatively arbitrary, immature, and coercive.

In terms of political organisation and values there is little common political ground between the two countries. The two political systems do not mesh because of absent complementarities and antithetical foundations. One is voluntary, stable, predictable and firmly within the Western liberal tradition (Australia). The other is militarised, politically fluid, evolving and subject to internal destabilisation (Indonesia). They cannot be easily conjoined.

A Way Forward: rational order rather than 'stability'

Constructive engagement, primarily at a commercial level, will continue between Australia and Indonesia providing they do not directly impinge on the political

¹³ This argument was clearly articulated in E.H. Carr, **The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939** (Macmillan, London 1939).

processes of either. Trade, investment, tourism, education and development assistance will continue to secure enduring links between the two countries. However, there should be no expectation of either a political or cultural convergence.

One way forward for Australia is to understand and acknowledge these structural political differences, appreciate the value of heterogeneity, and work in those areas where there is mutual agreement and interest. Differences should be acknowledged and faced in a courteous and straightforward manner, rather than hidden by obsequiousness or submerged beneath artificial politeness (which often reflects the mock-courtesy of reified central Javanese elite political values).

This means explicitly rejecting claims of irreconcilable cultural differences leading to inevitable clashes between Western and non-Western civilisations, as forecast by Samuel Huntington.¹⁴ Instead, according to the 'rationalist school' of Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, it is important to focus on the high degree of order which can exist in a global anarchical environment – that is, one without world government and where there is no higher form of political authority than the nation-state.

Rationalists have argued that a high degree of order and co-operation can exist between states which do not feel they belong to a common civilisation. States with very different cultures and ideologies can come together in a "society of states" because they share the primary goals of sovereign independence and a belief that international society is the only legitimate form of world political organisation. A pragmatic need to co-exist is sufficient to produce what Bull called a "diplomatic culture" - that is, a system of conventions and institutions which preserve order between states with radically different aspirations and domestic complexions.

According to John Vincent, it is more straightforward for this international society to establish as a basis for agreement matters that are "functional" or utilitarian, rather

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', **Foreign Affairs**, Vol 72, No 3, Summer 1993; Samuel P. Huntington, **The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World order** (Simon and Schuster, New York 1996).

than "cultural" or explicitly moral in character.¹⁵ In saying this, the intention is to construct a solid basis for further dialogue, and it recognises a basic degree of commonality of values around notions of rationality and the significance of international agreements. This does not preclude moral considerations around issues such as the universality of human rights (notably civil and political rights), or the necessity for states to enjoin in a type of social contract, which enhances the opportunities for social order and stability.

¹⁶. But it does posit functional arrangements as a sound basis for further discussion.

According to the rationalists, international order is the most propitious context in which states can pursue and achieve common purposes. The foundations of international order, according to Bull, requires every society to protect the three "primary goals" of (a) placing constraints on the use of force, (b) upholding property rights, and (c) ensuring agreements are kept. From this base, transcultural values and ethical standards can be progressively developed between states within the society. Where there is divergence between Australia and Indonesia on these criteria, Australia can and should maintain its focus on these primary goals. The failure by one interlocutor to adhere to international norms does not imply that the other should do likewise, or that the maintenance of primary goals is in any way compromised.

Importantly, an open dialogue that places emphasis on order rather than stability, can bridge many of the differences between states such as Australia and Indonesia. Diplomacy should be the means through which the different, the suspicious, and even the hostile reach some common ground. This need not, and should not, be undertaken through deferential behaviour that derives from what is claimed to be cultural convergence. This is particularly the case when that convergence is driven by a small and narrow self-selecting policy elite, focused on a specific subject (Indonesia), and not reflect broad social and political aspirations. Cultural convergence is neither necessary nor desirable, especially in the current phase of globalisation. Appeasement or estrangement is always a false dichotomy, especially within this particular bilateral

¹⁵ Andrew Linklater, 'Rationalism', in Scott Burchill et al, **Theories of International Relations** (2nd ed Palgrave, Basingstoke 2001), p.107.

relationship.¹⁷ Accommodation and compromise within agreed parameters are more likely to produce advances, bringing greater levels of civility to the relationship.

Michael Doyle correctly points out that modern liberal states eschew violence in the conduct of their relations, but he also reminds us that liberal democracies retain a healthy appetite for conflict with authoritarian states. On the important question of how liberal states should therefore conduct themselves with non-liberal states, prominent liberals such as Doyle and Francis Fukuyama are equally and surprisingly silent.¹⁸

John Rawls, on the other hand, is concerned with the extent to which liberal and non-liberal peoples can be equal participants in a “Society of Peoples”. He argues that principles and norms of international law and practice – the “Law of Peoples” - can be developed and shared by both liberal and non-liberal or decent hierarchical societies, without an expectation that liberal democracy is the terminus for all. The guidelines and principle basis for establishing harmonious relations between liberal and non-liberal peoples under a common Law of Peoples – the extension of a general social contract idea - takes liberal international theory in a more sophisticated direction because it explicitly acknowledges the need for utopian thought to be realistic. This is the plane on which Australia-Indonesia relations can be broadened and deepened, providing certain basic conditions are met.¹⁹

Rawls outlines the “fair terms” for political co-operation between liberal and non-liberal peoples. The challenge for liberal peoples is to recognise non-liberal peoples as equal participating members in good standing of the “Society of Peoples”, with certain rights and obligations, but with no requirement that they become liberal. Little

¹⁶ States that do not employ a type of social contract are invariably failed states, or in the process of failing, or ‘predatory states’ (see Evans, P. *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁷ On the rationalist tradition in International Relations, see Andrew Linklater, ‘Rationalism’, in Scott Burchill et al, **Theories of International Relations** (2nd ed Palgrave, Basingstoke 2001).

¹⁸ Michael W. Doyle, ‘Liberalism and World Politics’, **American Political Science Review**, Vol 80, No 4, 1986; Francis Fukuyama, **The End of History and the Last Man** (Hamish Hamilton, London 1992); Michael W. Doyle, **Ways of War and Peace** (Norton, New York 1997).

¹⁹ John Rawls, **The Law of Peoples** (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1999).

progress can be made if liberal societies set preconditions for co-operation and judge others by how closely their ideas and institutions express a liberal political conception. The West cannot demand that other societies live according to its moral conventions, though it can and should expect legal and constitutional consistency.

In fact the idea of limited power and respect for the rule of law contained within the idea of 'constitutionalism', "which is present within, but not entirely synonymous with, liberal democracy", may be one way forward.²⁰ According to Rawls, the criteria for mutual respect and toleration between liberal (Australia) and decent hierarchical societies (potentially, Indonesia) – which together Rawls calls "well ordered societies" - need not be exclusively Western or liberal. A decent hierarchical society should:

- a) not have aggressive aims and recognise that it must achieve its legitimate goals through diplomacy and trade – it must honour the laws of peace and respect the different political and social orders of other societies;
- b) have a system of law which respects human rights and imposes duties and obligations on all citizens in the territory – the focus should be on procedural freedoms - to life, liberty (conscience, religion, thought and expression), property, and equality before the law; and
- c) have judges and others who administer the legal system who sincerely believe the law is guided by a common good idea of justice.²¹

These principles can form the basis of an understanding between very different societies. They avoid perceptions of one imposing its allegedly superior values upon the other. And they short-circuit the connection between periodic political disputes and invocations of irreconcilable cultural differences.

²⁰ Andrew Linklater, 'Liberal Democracy, Constitutionalism and the New World Order', in Richard Leaver & James Richardson (eds), **The Post-Cold War Order: Diagnosis and Prognoses** (Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards 1993), p.33

²¹ Rawls 1999, pp.64-8.

A common basis of understanding which is not susceptible to short term political crises, or overly dependent on transient or authoritarian political leaders, needs to be established between Australia and Indonesia so that the whole relationship is not put on the line each time a diplomatic breach occurs. Upon this base, many layers of co-operation, mutual interest and common concern can be erected. In the past, the absence of shock absorbers able to withstand normal diplomatic potholes led to a feeling in Canberra's diplomatic circles that good relations with Jakarta had to be maintained at almost all costs. Again, the focus should be on order and what can be achieved within an ordered context, rather than the preservation of stability and the need to please.

In the case of the bilateral relationship under discussion, Rawls' principles do not apply to relations between liberal states and "outlaw states", "societies burdened by unfavourable conditions", or "benevolent absolutisms". If it is optimistic to describe contemporary Indonesia as a "well ordered" and "decent hierarchical society", two points need to be made.

Few societies have to confront, simultaneously, a crisis of legitimacy in the system (political order) and the regime (leadership). The election of Megawati Sukarnoputri to the presidency via a democratic vote of the floor of the parliament in 2001 may have only temporarily settled the issue of regime crisis in Indonesia, while questions remain about the constitutionality of processes of regime change.

Deeper questions also hang over the legitimacy of the system. Do the methods by which the state maintains itself in fact define the state? Can a brutal state which places a premium on the coercive unity of the state ever develop along democratic lines? Can the political elite in Jakarta expect that the people will voluntarily comply with their demands or will coercion be required to sustain their legitimacy, as in the past? These questions go to the heart of Indonesian polity, and are a major point of divergence between Australia and Indonesia.

In maintaining the state, contemporary leaders of Indonesia will find it increasingly difficult to rely on earlier modes of legitimation. Monarchy and a divine right to rule (traditional legitimacy) are not available, and attempts to re-invent them by Sukarno

and Suharto both ended in chaos. Cults of personality (charismatic legitimacy) are rarely dynastic, and are unlikely to work in the longer term without becoming 'routinised'. The material aspirations of the masses are not being met as fully now as they were a decade ago (eudaemonic legitimacy). And locating themselves in the nationalist, anti-colonial tradition (official nationalist legitimacy) won't provide leaders with the same resonance as in the past. The prospects of a novel vanguard (new tradition legitimacy) or relying on the achievement of long-sought aims such as independence (goal-rational legitimacy) are poor and not likely to induce mass support.

Increasingly, Indonesia's modern rulers will need to rely on their legal-rational legitimacy – the rule of law, democratic political processes and values, freely contested elections and popular consent – if they are set aside the seemingly permanent threat of system failure and legitimation crisis. The extent to which they achieve this difficult task, as well as other major challenges such as the depoliticisation and civilian control of the armed forces and the independence of the judiciary, will largely determine whether Indonesia can be fairly described as a "well ordered society".²²

Secondly, even if the republic falls short of these criteria now, Australia may need to work on the assumption that it does qualify as such – and encourage it to move in this direction – because the alternative is to effectively abandon any prospect for developing a long-term relationship of mutual benefit and satisfaction. Political cultures are rarely static for long, so changes in the direction of a "well ordered society" are likely to maximise Indonesia's internal and external opportunities.

Tolerating difference

It cannot be assumed that the Western path to modernity will ultimately command universal consent. Australia needs to accept that Indonesia could follow a different route – one that is seen domestically as more legitimate and appropriate - and should not wait for Jakarta to conform with the expectations of neighbours. The value and

²² The various modes of legitimacy are summarised in Leslie Holmes, **The End of Communist Power** (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1993), pp.8-19.

advantages of liberal democracy should nevertheless be actively promoted by Australia as an incentive to those within the Indonesian polity striving for higher levels of political development, but it should be done in a way that doesn't hector or lecture from a position of ethical superiority.

Similarly, both countries should seek to participate in each other's civil society and develop links which can only prosper in the public space which grows out of non-governmental and non-military domains. The success and warmth of the bilateral relationship is too often narrowly measured against the temperature of official ties, which in turn comes to be defined as 'the whole relationship'. Government to government relations are only one aspect of a much broader and deeper set of associations.

While it continues to be necessary for Australia to engage in regional trade and investment, foreign policy should not be predicated on regional acceptance or an emphasis on Australia's regional identity. In foreign minister Downer's words, Australia need not be a demandeur. This approach presupposes the need for cultural adjustment if Australia is to find a sense of belonging, when in fact this is both domestically unpopular and ignores the appeal of Australia's distinctiveness in East Asia and beyond.²³ Meaningful engagement will result from actions and neighbourly relevance to regional concerns and challenges, rather than contrived identity politics. Engagement must be tangible, sought on equal terms, and not conducted in a fawning or craven way. Exclusion from regional fora such as the ASEAN + 3 group, for example, must be understood as a short term political tactic rather than a long term cultural objection.

Australia's reaction to the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001 indicates that Canberra's regional mindset is still in its formative stages. The Howard Government's failure to consult with other governments in the region prior to making a military commitment to the US-led coalition was strikingly reminiscent of the Hawke

²³ Surprisingly, calls for Australia to join the Asian "club", including suggestions that the country should comply with membership rules, together with an exaggerated fear of being excluded, continue. See Stephen Fitzgerald, **Is Australia an Asian Country?** (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards 1997) and Jamie Mackie, 'Correspondence', **Quarterly Essay**, No.3, 2001, pp.89 & 93.

Government's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. It appears that in moments of global crisis, Canberra's policy process defaults to the traditional trans-Pacific alliance rather than part of a common South East Asian approach, despite almost two decades of official 'regional engagement'.

Australia has two great advantages in forming regional relationships – the *secular* and *multicultural* nature of Australian society. In theory it is better prepared for engagement with such a heterogeneous region as East Asia than virtually any other state. And yet Canberra has consistently failed to develop and capitalise on these and other features of contemporary Australian society which break with anachronistic stereotypes still found throughout the region. Just as it should avoid misleading representations of the Orient in European culture, Australia should also seek to disassemble perceptions in Asia of the West as a monolithic and homogenous entity.

Foreign policy should not be reduced to the pursuit of 'good bilateral relations' because this simply turns diplomacy into reactive problem-solving. A productive working relationship between Australia and Indonesia should be seen as a means to other ends – enhanced people contacts, educational exchanges, modernisation and democratisation, economic reform, security dialogue, institutional ties, etc, and should not be elevated to a policy objective per se.

A more sophisticated understanding of each other's political agenda is also needed. The breakdown of co-operation on the issue of asylum seekers and people smuggling from Indonesia to Australia is less an example of Canberra's diplomatic insensitivity and more a failure to understand that its priorities (especially as elections approach) are not axiomatically shared in Jakarta, which faces much greater difficulties on a number of other fronts. Canberra needs to take Jakarta into its confidence and consult about potential bilateral problems before presenting them to a domestic audience and, consequently, a bemused interlocutor. The relationship needs to be able to withstand short term shocks which should not be allowed to forestall a more permanent solution to the problem, to say nothing of cooperation on other issues which require a good working arrangement at heads of government level.

Foreign policy-making in Australia would benefit from greater levels of community participation and transparency: the failure to do so leads to a policy debacle of the kind witnessed in relation to East Timor between 1974 and 1999. Only popular consent confers legitimacy on public policy. The quiet councils of academia and bureaucracy should not be the sole locations for foreign policy discussion. Secret diplomacy of the kind which produced the 1995 security agreement between Australia and Indonesia should be abandoned altogether. Diplomatic initiatives, which always require public support, should be developed as much as possible within normal policy-making channels. Only when these criteria have been met can relations between Australia and Indonesia be fully normalised.

Recommendations:

1. Broaden Australia's foreign policy community to include a plurality of perspectives and approaches.
2. Policy analysis should reflect evidence from the field.
3. Policy analysis should not reflect deference towards perceived 'cultural differences'. Policy that purports to protect Australia's relationship with Indonesia by compromising policy advice betrays both itself and the people it is intended to serve, the Australian public.
4. Australia's relations with Indonesia should be conducted in a cordial, and where possible friendly, manner.
5. However, the parameters of diplomatic behaviour should be defined by normative universal criteria, rather than a cultural relativism that makes allowances for elite-based interests.
6. Relations between Australia and Indonesia should be based on a recognition of the enduring importance of institutions rather than transient individuals. While this is generally the case, there is a history of building personal relationships at the expense of institutional relationships, with consequences dependent on the character or fortunes of the individuals concerned (e.g. Suharto).
7. In pursuit of normative universal values, and in recognition of the distinction between stability and order, Australia should:
 - i. offer greater support for legislative, regulatory, and judicial reform.
 - ii. offer greater support for police investigative techniques.

- iii. provide incentives for good governance, broadly defined.
- iv. Provide incentives for recognition of the necessity of a separation of powers between the executive (and the military) and the judiciary, and for placing the military under civilian political control.
- v. NOT renew defence training or support links with the TNI, recognising that the alleged benefits of such links, such as increased respect for human rights by the TNI, have demonstrably failed (acknowledged as such by former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans).
- vi. Distinguish training support for police recognising that:
 - a. the police are still under effective command and control of the TNI in conflict areas.
 - b. Brimob (Police Mobile Brigade) is essentially a paramilitary organization trained along the same lines as the army, equipped with army weapons, and serving a military as opposed to a policing purpose.
 - c. Police BKO (bawah kendali operasi - under operational command) units are largely staffed by seconded highly trained army personnel, from Kopassus and Kostrad, and are therefore military rather than police units.
- vii. Continue and expand sustainable development programs.
- viii. Continue and develop the provision of potable water.
- ix. Continue and develop primary and secondary education facilities.
- x. Continue and develop support for Indonesia's electoral process.
- xi. Continue and develop support for increased trade between Australia and Indonesia.
- xii. Continue and develop support for social, academic, technical, scientific and cultural visits and exchange programs.