

P-ISSN: 2986-3686

E-ISSN: 2798-4427

# JGSS

## Journal of Global Strategic Studies

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Vol. 3 No. 2 December 2023

Decolonization and the Cold War: The Superpowers and  
the Anti-Colonial Insurgencies in Indonesia and Vietnam

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*Briliantina Putri*

Master's Programs in International Relations  
Faculty of Social and Political Science  
Jenderal Achmad Yani University

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## **Decolonization and the Cold War: The Superpowers and the Anti-Colonial Insurgencies in Indonesia and Vietnam**

Robert J. McMahon

Emeritus Professor, tOhio State University

*Throughout the Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently faced the dilemma of whether to recognize or to confer legitimacy upon armed insurgencies vying to overturn established civil authority. The superpower conflict, at once ideological and geopolitical, came to encompass the entire globe by the 1950s, with the Third World emerging as the chief zone of competition between the two superpowers--as well as the main source and site of non-state armed groups. The potential transformations of these armed groups into governments threatened to alter the prevailing balance of regional and global power. Policymakers in Washington and Moscow, consequently, needed to calculate carefully how the granting of de jure or de facto recognition to a particular armed insurgency, or the accordance of some form of legitimacy to it, might affect broader Cold War goals. Why did the United States and the Soviet Union, this essay asks, choose to recognize some insurgencies, deny recognition to others, and actively oppose still others? How, for their part, did these various armed, non-state actors seek to gain support, recognition, and legitimacy from one, or both, of the superpowers? What factors best explain their relative successes or failures in those endeavors? the present article explores those larger questions by focusing specifically on armed decolonization movements, arguably the most common and most consequential of the non-state, armed groups that emerged throughout the post-1945 period. In each of the cases examined here, the superpowers sought to shape the outcome of the decolonization struggle, offering, or withholding military support and diplomatic recognition as a weapon of influence. In each case, the aspiring national liberation movement deployed a combination of armed strength and diplomatic advocacy in a bid for legitimacy and recognition, seeing the support of one or both superpowers as instrumental to the overarching goal of full-fledged sovereignty and acceptance within the prevailing international state-based system.*

During their four-and-a-half-decade-long contest “for the soul of mankind,” as President George H. W. Bush so aptly described it, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently faced the dilemma of whether to recognize or to confer legitimacy upon armed insurgencies vying to overturn established civil authority (Bush, 2004, p. 1). That titanic struggle, at once ideological and geopolitical, came to encompass the entire globe by the 1950s, with the Third World emerging as the chief zone of competition between the two superpowers--as well as the main source and site of non-state armed groups. The potential transformations of these armed groups into governments threatened to alter the prevailing balance of regional and global power. Policymakers in Washington and Moscow, consequently, needed to calculate carefully how the granting of *de jure* or *de facto* recognition to a particular armed insurgency, or the accordance of some form of legitimacy to it, might affect broader Cold War goals.

Cold War era armed insurgencies took different forms. Many were anti-colonial rebellions that sought independence from long-time colonial powers. Others, as in Greece, Cuba, Nicaragua, Somalia, and Ethiopia, are best labeled as civil wars or insurrections against unpopular ruling governments. Still others, as in Hungary and Afghanistan, were revolts against externally imposed regimes. All raised the twinned issues of recognition and legitimacy.

Why did the United States and the Soviet Union, this essay asks, choose to recognize some insurgencies, deny recognition to others, and actively oppose still others? How, for their part, did these various armed, non-state actors seek to gain support, recognition, and legitimacy from one, or both, of the superpowers? What factors best explain their relative successes or failures in those endeavors?

The present essay explores those larger questions by focusing specifically on armed decolonization movements, arguably the most common and most consequential of the non-state, armed groups that emerged throughout the post-1945 period. The dismantling of the colonial empires transpired over three decades, principally between 1945 and 1975, ranging from the Asian and African continents to the Middle East and the Caribbean. Many of those independence struggles played out peacefully, to be sure, as imperial powers and indigenous nationalists bargained over the precise terms and timing of self-rule. Such was the case in the Philippines, India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Jamaica, and many former British and French dependencies in Africa. Other struggles devolved into open warfare between colonial military forces and indigenous armed groups. Those will be the focus here.

Although wholly distinct from the Cold War in its origins and consequences, decolonization coincided temporally with the superpower rivalry and was profoundly shaped by it. I will explore the intersection between decolonization and the Cold War by focusing on two of the most significant anti-colonial rebellions, those in Indonesia and Vietnam. In each of those long-colonized territories, Washington and Moscow sought to shape the ultimate outcome of the independence struggle, wielding as diplomatic weapons the prospect of diplomatic recognition or economic-military support—or the withholding of the same. In each case, the aspiring national liberation movement deployed a combination of armed strength and diplomatic advocacy in a bid for legitimacy and recognition, seeing the support of one, or both, of the superpowers as instrumental to the overarching goal of full-fledged sovereignty and acceptance within the prevailing international state-based system. Indeed, the central argument of this essay holds that it was that shrewd admixture of effective fighting strength and adroit diplomatic outreach that eventually led to the success of the independence movements in both Indonesia and Vietnam.

### **Anti-Colonial Rebellions Erupt in Southeast Asia**

Southeast Asia emerged as the first front in the anti-colonial wars of insurgency. In the days and weeks that followed World War II's fiery denouement, anti-colonial nationalists in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina boldly acted to shake off the shackles of colonialism by unilaterally declaring independence. On August 17, 1945, Sukarno and Mohammed Hatta, nationalist leaders who had long opposed Dutch colonial rule, proclaimed an independent Republic of Indonesia. Just over two weeks later, legendary Vietnamese patriot Ho Chi Minh announced the birth of an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In each country, longstanding and well-organized independence movements acted swiftly to capitalize on the power vacuums opened by the sudden surrender of Japan's occupying forces. Prominent, charismatic leaders and their ardent followers in both colonies sought to turn brash proclamations of independence into reality, utilizing a mix of diplomatic outreach and military pressure (McMahon, 1999, pp. 19-25).

Sukarno almost immediately appealed to U.S. President Harry S. Truman for support, requesting American mediation in the anticipated fight with a Dutch Government eager to restore imperial rule. He hoped that the persistent American anti-colonial pronouncements of the wartime years might translate into sympathy for Indonesia's aspirations. Ho, for his part, sent a series of personal letters to the new U.S.

chief executive in which he pled for U.S. support and recognition. Neither man received the response he craved. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes informed Sukarno that a request for mediation could only come from the “territorial sovereign”; and no member of the U.S. Government even responded to Ho’s plaintive missives. Instead, the United States adopted a policy of formal neutrality toward the brewing colonial disputes in Indonesia and Indochina and called for negotiations between the contending parties. On December 19, 1945, the U.S. State Department issued a formal statement that acknowledged the territorial sovereignty of the Netherlands over the East Indies islands while denying the Indonesian Republic’s quest for status as an equal party to the dispute (Byrnes, 1945, pp. 1021-1022).

Throughout the next year-and-a-half, as armed clashes between colonizer and colonized intensified, death tolls mounted, and negotiations stalled, the Truman administration urged the respective contending parties to pursue peaceful resolutions of these colonial disputes. At the same time, the United States declared its strict neutrality toward each of them. By so doing, Washington was conferring a degree of legitimacy on the two independence movements. One does not call for negotiations with terrorists or bandits, after all. Clearly, Washington never placed Indonesian and Vietnamese fighters and diplomats in those categories, nor did it ever explicitly consider them to be *illegitimate* aspirants to power. Indeed, U.S. officials themselves, including former President Franklin D. Roosevelt, had long called for an end to colonialism and the eventual evolution toward indigenous self-rule across the colonial world. Acutely conscious of the burgeoning support for the fledgling Indonesian and Vietnamese republics among the peoples and governments of the emerging Afro-Asian states, the Truman administration instead sought to find a middle ground: maintaining solidarity with key Western allies while straining to avoid alienating Third World anti-colonialist sensitivities or blatantly contradicting its own professed principles. State Department Asian expert and ambassador to the Netherlands Stanley K. Hornbeck reflected that, in attempting to address the decolonization conundrum: “We in effect attempted to support neither side, and yet favored one and hoped not unduly to offend the other” (Hornbeck, 1948, pp. 132-133).

### **Indonesia’s Struggle for Independence**

Indonesia’s leaders actively, and shrewdly, courted support from the United States and from the wider international community—their principal audiences. Diplomatic outreach thus formed a core part of their strategy for achieving recognition and

legitimacy—and, ultimately, full independence. From the outset of the independence struggle, republican leaders vacillated between two alternative policies: diplomasi or perjuangan (struggle). Such spokesmen as Sukarno, Hatta, and Sutan Sjahrir believed that the military, organizational, and ideological weaknesses of the infant republic necessitated a predominantly diplomatic approach. Broadly conceived, their view was that the republic must seek to conclude a negotiated settlement with the Dutch which would be guaranteed by the great powers; everything else would have to be subordinated to that central goal. Once a settlement had been attained, they could then turn to the critical task of transforming and democratizing Indonesian society. The logic of diplomacy thus demanded that any radical or revolutionary tendencies within the nationalist movement be suspended or suppressed to appease international opinion. The republic, according to this calculation, had to demonstrate that it was a responsible, capable, and stable government. By promising to protect foreign properties and displaying a willingness to welcome foreign investments—as it did in its widely circulated political manifesto of November 1, 1945—the Republic of Indonesia vied to project an image of moderation and responsibility to the world. It was, in effect, staking a claim to international legitimacy as a respectable and trustworthy state-in-waiting (The Political Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia, 1948, pp. 172-175).

The risk inherent in a policy of diplomasi was that the attainment of international recognition, if the policy succeeded, might occur at the expense of internal social reform. Perjuangan, the alternative strategy, based its hopes instead on the vigor and revolutionary potential of the national freedom movement. Its chief advocate, popular communist leader Tan Malaka, a decades-long veteran of the anti-colonial struggle, believed that true independence could never be bestowed as a gift from the Western powers. Only through armed struggle could independence be won, a fundamental transformation of Indonesian society effected, and a cohesive, organized sense of purpose created out of the formless national movement (McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 1981, pp. 104-106).

At key junctures, those competing tendencies within the nationalist movement complemented each other. Yet the preference of senior republican representatives for diplomatic outreach to the West as the most efficacious strategy became clear before the end of 1945 and permeated all aspects of governmental policy over the next four years. On December 19, 1945, the State Department released its first official statement on the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, expressing disappointment with the breakdown of negotiations between the two parties and calling for “a peaceful settlement recognizing

alike the natural aspirations of the Indonesian peoples and the legitimate rights and interests of the Netherlands” (Byrnes, 1945, pp. 1021-1022). Although falling well short of the Indonesian leadership’s hope that the United States would acknowledge the republic’s status as an equal party to the dispute, Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir heaped praise on President Truman in a personal Christmas telegram. “The last message of good will and encouragement issued by your State Department,” Sjahrir wrote, “has given us great comfort in the struggle we are waging to establish freedom, justice and democracy in Indonesia”. He added: “We look to you, as the head of a country that has always been in the forefront of the fight for liberty, justice, and self-determination, to use the benefit of your influence to stop the present bloodshed in Indonesia” (Sjahrir, 1945, p. 1186).

Over time, Cold War priorities compelled the United States to accord ever more legitimacy to the Indonesian Republic. A Dutch “police action” of July 1947, aimed at eliminating the republic as a viable entity, failed to suppress Indonesian guerrilla resistance while bringing forth widespread international condemnation of Dutch aggression. Days after the commencement of the offensive, Prime Minister Amir Sjarifuddin broadcast a statement from the republican capital of Jogjakarta, calling for a halt to the bloodshed and appealing to the republic’s friends in India, China, Europe, and the United States to intervene “quickly and effectively”. The aim of the Dutch military action, he stated flatly, was the complete liquidation of the republic and the restoration of the old colonial rule “under the cover of nice words and phrases” (New York Times, 1947).

Washington carefully monitored the international and domestic response to the renewed fighting. A State Department memorandum for Secretary of State George Marshall reported that the Dutch attack “started a wave of sympathy for the Indonesians which has swept around the world” (Secretary of State’s Weekly Summary, 1948). Popular correspondent Theodore H. White thundered in the New Republic: “Men were once more being killed for the sin of seeking freedom” (White, 1947). Added the New York Times, in its first anti-Dutch editorial: “This action cannot be interpreted otherwise, therefore, then as an effort by the Dutch Government to impose by arms what it believed it was not going to gain by negotiation and which it did not choose to submit to arbitration” (New York Times, 1947).

President Sukarno appointed ex-prime minister Sjahrir as an ambassador-at-large to plead the Indonesian case before the UN Security Council. His first stop enroute to New York was New Delhi, where Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s interim prime minister, expressed his outrage at the Dutch assault and promised unqualified Indian support for

the republic. After meeting with Sjahrir on July 24, Nehru gave a forceful indication of the growing self-consciousness and solidarity among the former colonial territories of Asia. "What has become of the U.N. Charter," he asked? "The spirit of the new Asia will not tolerate such things. No European country, whatever it may be, has any business to set its army in Asia against the people of Asia. When it does so, Asia will not tolerate it". The leader of about-to-be-independent India vowed to call formally for Security Council consideration of the Dutch-Indonesian dispute (Grady, 1947, pp. 990-991). U.S. officials, who clung to the hope that they would not be forced to choose between their need to maintain warm relations with their European allies and their determination to forge close ties with the newly emerging nations of the Third World, grew alarmed.

In line with their broader diplomatic strategy, Indonesians kept up the pressure on what they saw as their most important audience in the West. On July 25, Sukarno broadcast an urgent appeal to the United States, beseeching its help to bring about a peaceful settlement. "Just as your American ancestors fought 170 years ago for your liberty and independence," he declared, "so are we Indonesians fighting for ours. Just as you then rebelled against domination by a country far across the seas, so are we". He implored Americans "to stand by the principles of justice and right for which you fought so valiantly only two years ago" (New York Times, 1947, p. 3).

The urbane Sjahrir presented Indonesia's case for independence to the Security Council with an effective blend of eloquence and passion. During subsequent council debates, the Soviet Union championed the Indonesian cause while berating the Netherlands. So, too did Australia and many non-Western states, thereby imposing a nettlesome dilemma on U.S. decision makers. The debates showcased the breadth of Indonesia's support in its bid for international legitimacy and recognition. U.S. diplomats could not afford to ignore that reality without running the risk of alienating the growing number of countries backing Indonesia's aspirations. To head off formal UN intervention, the United States offered to serve as a mediator. When Indonesian officials made known their preference for UN over U.S. mediation, however, Washington shifted course. It acquiesced to a Security Council resolution that called for a cease-fire and the creation of a three-member UN Good Offices Committee (GOC), which came to include the United States, to help implement the cease-fire and foster renewed negotiations (McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 1981, pp. 173-191).

Citizen-diplomat Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina and Truman's appointee as U.S. representative to the GOC, played a pivotal role in negotiating the Renville Agreement of January 1948, signed on board a U.S. naval

vessel docked in the Java Sea. Shortly after arriving in the Dutch East Indies, Graham informed Secretary of State Marshall that he believed the Indonesian Republic to be the “rallying center of the largest, ablest and most dedicated single group of Indonesians in this struggle for independence”. The present leadership, he emphasized, “seems as moderate, reasonable and responsive to Western ideas of any likely to arise in the future” (Graham, 1947).

When Dutch-Indonesian negotiations faltered again in December 1947, and another military action appeared imminent, the State Department drafted a compromise agreement that, while unfavorable in many respects to the republic, averted a military clash and facilitated a tentative negotiated settlement. In a crucial meeting with Indonesian leaders, Graham urged them to sign what became the Renville Agreement because he said it would at least ensure the continued existence of the republican government. “You are what you are,” he famously stated, “and that is what you will remain.” In other words, he was assuring them that signing the agreement would not adversely affect their current status as the *de facto* government in much of Java and Sumatra—the two islands that contained approximately ninety per cent of the total population of the archipelago. That pledge won them over, despite substantial domestic resistance that soon led Prime Minister Sjarifuddin to fall from power (UN Library, 1948; Salim, Hadji A., 1948).

Officially, the U.S. position toward the Dutch-Indonesian struggle remained one of nominal neutrality, and American participation on the GOC helped to bolster Washington’s image as an impartial and even-handed mediator. In reality, though, American actions consistently tilted toward the Dutch. U.S. policies and statements at the UN and mediation efforts on the GOC invariably worked to the advantage of The Hague, as most informed observers quickly realized. When Marshall Plan aid began to flow to the Netherlands in 1948, moreover, the United States was placed in the anomalous position of serving on a UN commission as a nominally impartial arbitrator at a time when its financial assistance was at least indirectly financing the Netherlands’s aggressive policy.

Its pro-Dutch orientation remained dominant until the early months of 1949, in the immediate aftermath of a second Dutch military offensive. The rehabilitation and reintegration of Western Europe and the corresponding desire to present a solid front against the Soviet Union led the United States to support the Dutch position in virtually all negotiations between them and the Indonesians. American support was not uncritical, of course; Washington strongly advised the Dutch against resorting to military force

before both military offensives and continually urged the Netherlands to reach an equitable settlement with the Indonesian nationalists. It was pressure from Washington, in fact, that led the Netherlands reluctantly to accept the Renville settlement.

But the United States never pushed the Dutch too hard. The success of the containment strategy, the European Recovery Program, and the incipient North Atlantic Treaty Organization necessitated the steadfast support of Western European nations, including, of course, the Netherlands. The intensification of the Cold War during those years underscored this need. American officials, moreover, tended to view Indonesia as an essential cog in the economic vitality of the metropole. It would contribute to the economic health of the Netherlands, which in turn would contribute to the economic health of Western Europe. Indeed, the Marshall Plan operated on the assumption that the European imperial powers would continue to draw strength from their colonies in Southeast Asia (McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 1981, p. 7).

In the wake of the second Dutch “police action,” launched in December 1948, American policy changed drastically. The nearly universal denunciation of The Hague’s aggression by the international community and widespread support for Indonesian independence merged with similar sentiment in the American public and Congress to bring the issue to a head. Events within Indonesia, moreover, exposed Dutch policy as hopelessly flawed. Indonesian guerrilla forces fought the Dutch army to a standstill, while the Dutch-sponsored non-republican states on the outer islands, which they were grooming to be pliable puppets in a thinly disguised divide-and-rule tactic, summarily abandoned the Netherlands and moved to join forces with the republic. With that political shift by the outer islanders, the Republic of Indonesia demonstrated beyond any doubt that it had achieved strong domestic legitimacy across the entire archipelago. In the eyes of the overwhelming majority of Indonesians—on Sulawesi, Borneo, and Bali as well as on the far more populous islands of Java and Sumatra-- it was now accepted as the sole, legitimate representative of Indonesian nationalism and the emerging Indonesian state.

Ironically, it was primarily European rather than Asian considerations that led the Truman administration to apply mounting pressure on the still-recalcitrant Dutch Government to accept Indonesian independence. As a result of Dutch intransigence, Congress placed substantial pressure on the administration to move in that direction by threatening to cut off all funds to the Marshall Plan and to hold up passage of the then-pending Atlantic Pact. Those programs, which lay at the heart of the administration’s Cold War strategy, were far too vital to be jeopardized by a colonial war in Indonesia—

a conflict that to most senior American policy experts was an annoying sideshow (McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 1981, pp. 251-294).

In the end, the Indonesians' strategy of combining military action with diplomatic overtures in their independence struggle proved highly effective. Worried that their Dutch ally now represented a greater threat to peace and order than decidedly moderate nationalists did, and that the Soviet Union and local communists would gain influence if the fighting continued, the United States pressured the Netherlands to take immediate steps that would lead to genuine independence. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, in a climactic meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Dirk U. Stikker, on March 31, 1949, made it clear that anything less might force the United States to withhold economic assistance that the Netherlands desperately needed (FRUS, 1949, pp. 258-261). That policy shift led, just days before the decade's end, to the formal transfer of authority from the Netherlands to a sovereign Indonesian state. The United States became one of the first nations to confer formal recognition on the new Indonesian government, its abrupt shift to a pro-Indonesian policy having profoundly affected the timing and scope of that outcome.

### **Vietnam's Jagged Path to Independence**

Ultimately, U.S. policy toward the Vietnamese national liberation movement charted a strikingly different path. A crucial difference derived from the divergent ideological character of the respective insurgencies. From the first, the Indonesian independence movement was led by moderate, non-communist nationalists. The non-communist bona fides of the Sukarno-led government were proven, in the eyes of U.S. analysts, by its bloody suppression of an internal communist revolt at Madiun, East Java, in September 1948. In Vietnam, on the other hand, the outstanding nationalist figure—Ho Chi Minh—was a decades-long communist, former resident of Moscow, and veteran Comintern agent. Worried that if Ho prevailed over the French it would lead to “an independent Vietnam State which would be run by orders from Moscow,” the State Department acknowledged, in September 1948, that “we are all too well aware of the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution that excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome” (FRUS, 1948, p. 48).

Ho and the Viet Minh insurgency he helmed faced the same basic challenge as their counterparts in Indonesia: How best to achieve legitimacy and recognition? What

blend of armed resistance and diplomatic outreach would prove most salutary to the goal of full sovereignty and independence? After fruitless negotiations with France broke down in the summer of 1946, the Viet Minh had little choice but to pursue the path of armed resistance to an obstinate colonial overlord. In November, a brutal French naval bombardment of Haiphong claimed more than 6,000 Vietnamese lives. Ho Chi Minh and his supporters fled Hanoi, the French moved quickly to establish administrative control in the north, and the Viet Minh mobilized for guerrilla warfare. Conflict soon engulfed much of Vietnam. It would rage unabated for the next six-and-a-half years (Hess, 1987, pp. 197-204).

Yet the Vietnamese did not forsake diplomacy. Diplomatic outreach continued to serve as an indispensable adjunct to the ongoing contest of arms. Rather than immediately turning to the Soviet Union, as ideological affinity might have seemed to dictate, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) initially hedged between the West and the East, still hoping that it might draw some degree of sympathy and support from a United States proud and protective of its anti-colonial heritage. Indeed, in 1948, the ruling Indochina Communist Party instructed cadres to refrain from criticizing the United States in public statements and to adopt a posture of neutrality toward the Cold War struggle between the superpowers. “The foreign policy of our government,” it stipulated, should not turn against the Americans “or to act in any way so as to incur their animosity. When it comes to public matters, it is formally prohibited to write, in any document, newspaper or book, one single word or one single line capable of incurring harmful repercussions on the foreign policy of our government in terms of its relations with the United States of America” (Logevall, 2014, p. 225). Until 1950, Ho always took care to strike a neutral pose, a balancing strategy that deepened Soviet leader Josef Stalin’s suspicion that the Vietnamese leader was more of a nationalist than a communist—not unlike Yugoslavia’s Josip Broz Tito. Yet Ho, for his part, reasoned that reaching out to international audiences and potential constituencies in both the West and the communist world best served the nationalist cause (Logevall, 2014, pp. 224-226; Gaiduk, 1996).

The Truman administration’s gravitation toward open support for the French, by 1949, helped push Ho into the arms of the communist powers. With consummate cynicism, France propped up the weak and pliable ex-Emperor Bao Dai as an indigenous alternative to Viet Minh rule. Despite deep misgivings, American policy makers accepted the ruse as the only available alternative to a communist-dominated Vietnam. That would have constituted an intolerable outcome for an administration that increasingly

saw communism as a monolithic movement and greatly feared the geostrategic and ideological repercussions of Mao Zedong's recent triumph in the Chinese civil war (Hess, *The First American Commitment in Indochina: The Acceptance of the "Bao Dai Solution"*, 1978).

America's shift from formal neutrality to open embrace of the French colonialists drew the DRV ever closer to Stalin's Soviet Union and (after October 1949) Mao's China. In January 1950, the Vietnamese leader made a secret trip to Beijing in search of Chinese diplomatic backing and material aid. He then traveled to Moscow the next month, at the very moment that the landmark Sino-Soviet Treaty was being finalized, and personally beseeched Mao and Stalin for military assistance. Weeks earlier, first Beijing and then Moscow had extended formal recognition to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During the three-way meetings in Moscow between Stalin, Mao, and Ho, the former made clear his preoccupation with European issues and his lingering distrust of the Vietnamese and Chinese suitors who he privately considered to be closet Titos. Stalin reaffirmed Moscow's diplomatic recognition of the DRV, but he ruled out any direct U.S.S.R. aid. Instead, the Soviet dictator urged Mao to provide the Vietnamese insurgents with military equipment and training, a directive that Mao readily accepted (Zhai, 2000, pp. 16-18).

Beijing's support, which commenced soon thereafter, proved indispensable to the Vietnamese anti-colonial fighters. It helped secure military victories against superior French forces, culminating in the climactic triumph at Dien Bien Phu, in March 1954. For its part, the United States abandoned any pretense to neutrality in the wake of the communist powers' recognition of Ho's government. It formally recognized the Bao Dai regime in February 1950 and a few months later began providing massive amounts of military materiel to the French. In American eyes, however skewed their vision might have been, the Viet Minh formed part of a monolithic communist threat headquartered in the Kremlin. Despite the largely ineffectual character of French military and political policies, U.S. officials were agreed that the French counter-insurgency campaign served U.S. Cold War interests.

The Geneva Accords of 1954 brought an end to the First Indochina War. The settlement divided the country, temporarily, at the 17th parallel. The negotiators established two regroupment zones, one in the north for the Viet Minh and one in the south for the French and those Vietnamese who had fought with the colonialists. Nationwide elections, slated to take place within two years, were to create a unified Vietnam. But they never took place. Rather, rival North and South Vietnamese states

developed. The former, which kept as its official name the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), was formally recognized by the Soviet Union, China, and all the Eastern bloc countries; the latter, which called itself the Republic of Vietnam, received strong backing from the United States and formal recognition by Washington and its allies. A new guerrilla insurgency then erupted in the south, in 1957, aimed at overthrowing the U.S.-supported Saigon regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Three years later, the so-called Viet Cong guerrillas, supported and controlled by the DRV, established a politico-diplomatic arm: the National Liberation Front (NLF) (Duiker, 1994, pp. 107-137).

### **Vietnam's National Liberation Front**

The NLF followed the script pioneered by the Republic of Indonesia and being pursued simultaneously by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), in Algeria, seeking international legitimacy and recognition as a government-in-waiting through a flurry of worldwide diplomatic activism to complement the ongoing military campaign. Military and diplomatic successes proved mutually reinforcing, as the Indonesians had earlier discovered. By 1961-1962, the Viet Cong/NLF insurgents controlled approximately half of the territory and half of the population of South Vietnam, helping to validate their claim that the Saigon regime lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the populace--the basic constituency that each were appealing to—and that only the NLF possessed that legitimacy (Prados, 2009, pp. 62-72).

The NLF's Foreign Relations Committee launched a diplomatic offensive, in mid-1962, aimed at winning support and recognition from both communist and non-communist states. Deliberately downplaying its intimate ties with and subservience to Hanoi, the NLF presented itself as a genuinely autonomous South Vietnamese actor, intent upon forming a "neutralist" government independent of both Hanoi and Washington. "We believe in a neutral solution to the Viet Nam crisis," declared NLF Secretary General Nguyen Van Hieu. "Vietnam is capable of determining its own future without outside interference and the National Liberation Front is willing to engage in negotiations right now to produce a peace-loving and democratic government" (Brigham, 1999, p. 17). The campaign met with considerable success; the neutralist message and image appealed to many non-aligned states and to certain liberal and pacifist groups in the West as well. Hieu traveled to Jakarta to meet with Sukarno, for example, and the Indonesian president praised the NLF while predicting that "it will surely win." In a subsequent press conference, on September 20, 1962, Sukarno called for immediate negotiations between the United States and the NLF to end hostilities (Brigham, 1999,

p. 24). Following talks with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian ruler likewise praised the NLF while proposing that South Vietnam “should become a neutral zone” (Brigham, 1999, p. 25).

Throughout the mid- and late-1960s, the NLF strove to maintain the pretense of independence and continued following the path of diplomatic activism, even as the conflict in South Vietnam morphed into a major land war with more than half a million U.S. troops deployed there along with tens of thousands of North Vietnamese regulars. To break the military stalemate on the ground—plainly evident by 1967--Hanoi, Moscow, and Beijing insisted that the NLF had to be accepted as a legitimate entity and negotiating partner in any peace talks between the United States and its South Vietnamese ally. Albeit with great reluctance, the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, increasingly desperate to bring an end to the divisive Vietnam War, accepted that bitter pill as a condition for opening the Paris peace talks in May 1968. Winning a coveted seat at those formal negotiations constituted a supreme diplomatic triumph for the NLF; it offered undeniable political legitimacy to the southern insurgency that U.S. military forces had for years labored fruitlessly to liquidate.

Johnson’s successor, Richard M. Nixon, shifted the real negotiating action from the formal bargaining among the Americans, North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, and NLF to secret, behind-the-scenes talks between his representative, National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger, and senior North Vietnamese Politburo Member Le Duc Tho. Those negotiations deadlocked over Washington’s refusal to allow a role for the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the NLF’s new name) in South Vietnam’s postwar governance. Hanoi remained adamant on that essential point. Only the Nixon administration’s belated and pained reversal of course on the PRG’s political legitimacy, allowing it to participate in a postwar coalition government, led to the compromises embedded in the deeply flawed Paris Peace Agreement of January 1973 (Asselin, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

In each of these decolonization upheavals, national liberation movements vied for legitimacy and recognition by combining armed resistance with diplomatic overtures. Indonesian nationalists, with their adroit comingling of diplomasi and perjuangan set the template. They calculated, from the outset, that support from the United States could be crucial to their bid for independence; and that highlighting the moderate, non-communist character of the fledgling republic they had formed in the days that followed

Japan's surrender could help sway American opinion. At the same time, Sukarno and his inner circle realized that, absent a strong military arm, Dutch forces could capsize the republican experiment, snuffing out organized nationalist resistance to the return of imperial rule. They could then present the international community with a *fait accompli*.

For the United States, Indonesia's diplomatic and military achievements together proved instrumental to its belated support for the freedom struggle. Not only had the republic effectively demonstrated its moderation, openness to Western trade and investment, and broad-based support from constituencies in the Afro-Asian world and among progressive groups within American society, but its fierce guerrilla campaign against attacking Dutch units stymied all Dutch efforts to "pacify" the archipelago. In the end, Washington's decision to pressure the Netherlands to grant Indonesia full sovereignty proved to be surprisingly easy. Competing policy priorities shifted decisively toward the Indonesian cause in early 1949 for two essential reasons: first, the republic had plainly attained legitimacy internally and in much of the wider world; second, Indonesian armed resistance to the Dutch counter-insurgency campaign had proved remarkably effective, rendering a Dutch military victory unobtainable and continued fighting both fruitless and dangerously unstable.

The Soviet and Chinese decisions to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam proved just as easy. As the Cold War heated up in the late-1940s, the search for allies in the rapidly decolonizing Third World grew in importance on both sides of the Cold War divide. The American denial of support to the DRV—before and after the Geneva Convention of 1954—seemed as natural as Moscow and Beijing's denial of the same to, first, the French-supported Bao Dai regime and, after Geneva, the Republic of (South) Vietnam. Recognizing a communist-dominated liberation movement was anathema to the United States, recognizing communist North Vietnam, after 1954, equally so.

Unquestionably, the force of arms proved much more decisive to the outcome of the First and Second Indochina Wars than the art of diplomacy. Yet diplomatic outreach also contributed significantly to that outcome. The ability of the NLF, and later PRG, to take on the trappings of at least a semi-legitimate government-in-waiting enabled state and non-state actors outside the communist bloc to champion its cause. Its mere existence as a nominally autonomous agent, moreover, allowed North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China to insist that the NLF must be represented in any peace talks with the United States and South Vietnam. That battering ram of a diplomatic strategy, alongside

constant military pressure, forced the Nixon administration to accord it legitimacy as a political stakeholder in post-peace settlement South Vietnam.

Two other decolonization cases, those of Algeria and Angola, sketched briefly here for comparative purposes, underscore this broader pattern. Nationalist claim-makers in each territory invariably adopted a strategy that blended armed resistance to the imperial power with urgent appeals to the international community. In each instance, those appeals were based on the righteousness of the pro-independence cause and the demonstrable fact that the claims-maker enjoyed widespread domestic support—and hence possessed legitimacy. Freedom fighters in Algeria, in the 1950s and early 1960s, and Angola, in the 1960s and 1970s, adroitly leveraged a mix of armed opposition and diplomatic advocacy in their common quests for total independence, much as had their counterparts in Indonesia and Vietnam in the wake of World War II.

Outside of Vietnam, Algeria stands as the bloodiest of all the decolonization wars, a brutal conflict that claimed as many as half a million lives. There, an extraordinarily skillful diplomatic effort persevered, even in the face of a savage French counter-insurgency offensive. By the late-1950s and early 1960s, the world had almost completely transitioned into one in which anti-colonialism had assumed normative status in international politics. The new, anti-colonial norms represented a sea change in “global historical time,” making the violent suppression tactics preferred by policy makers in Paris ever more problematic and ever more at odds with global opinion than anything faced by their predecessor’s vis-a-vis the Vietnamese insurgency just a decade earlier. When the Algerian independence-seekers formed the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRN), in 1958, it controlled hardly any territory. Yet within weeks it was recognized by thirteen countries, including China, North Vietnam, North Korea, Indonesia, and virtually all the Arab states. The FLN’s leaders exulted when, in October 1960, Moscow accorded de facto recognition as well, promising to provide all possible Soviet aid. For its part, the United States, wary of being caught on the wrong side of history, was considerably less averse to pressuring its French ally than it had been in the early postwar years. The administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy were keenly aware that Algeria had become, in the words of historian Matthew Connelly, “the preeminent anticolonial movement in a profoundly anti-colonial era.” Consequently, they kept up the pressure on France to bow to the inevitability of an independent Algerian state. Algerian nationalists masterfully navigated the treacherous shoals of U.S.-Soviet rivalry to gain a degree of legitimacy from each of the superpowers. Their diplomatic finesse and pragmatism, more than their military achievements, led

directly to the Evian Accords of March 1962 which gave birth to a fully independent Algeria.

In sharp contradistinction to the decolonization contests in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Algeria, each of which produced a single, hegemonic organization that spoke for the nationalist cause and attained strong domestic legitimacy among its internal constituents, Angolan freedom-fighters of the early and mid-1970s split into three factions. They clashed with each other—and with Soviet-supplied Cuban troops—rather than with a European colonial military force intent on preserving empire. Here, too, diplomacy played a significant role. Support from the so-called African “front line” states, determined to help eradicate the last vestiges of empire on the continent, kept up steady pressure on the reactionary Portuguese Government of Antonio Salazar. At the same time, early backing from a more assertive Soviet Union, intent on capitalizing on Africa’s anti-imperialist surge for its own Cold War interests, fortified the Angolan independence-seekers. A regime changes in Lisbon, in April 1974, settled the core issue of whether Angola would achieve unfettered sovereignty. It would. But a civil war among indigenous contestants, each drawing support from one of the superpowers, determined which one would rule. The shape and contours of the Angolan Government that eventually claimed power and speedily won international recognition—the Moscow-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Anglola (MPLA)—thus owed more to superior fighting skills than to diplomatic maneuvers.

The story of decolonization is in large measure the story of Third World nationalist movements’ search for internal and external legitimacy and recognition. The insurgencies that faced violent imperial resistance, such as those discussed above, endeavored to achieve the bedrock goals of genuine independence and acceptance in the state-based international system by pursuing strategies that mixed armed resistance with diplomatic outreach. The relative importance of fighting and diplomacy differed in each case, of course, but the pragmatic mix of the two in the end proved efficacious to all four of these armed insurgencies. The United States and the Soviet Union constituted key audiences in each instance since the superpowers possessed unparalleled influence within the wider international community. The decolonization wars imposed an unusually nettlesome dilemma on policy makers in Washington, caught as they were between the contradictory goals of supporting European allies and yet not alienating the emerging nations of the global South. Cold War priorities shaped the U.S. response in each case, leading to support—however halting and reluctant—for Indonesia’s bid for independence, open opposition to Vietnam’s, and an embrace of the independence cause

in both Algeria and Angola. The Soviet Union faced no such dilemma. Indeed, it eagerly supported national liberation movements across the Third World and wholeheartedly embraced the anti-colonial cause, especially in the post-Stalin era. Such a stance, Kremlin decision-makers calculated, aligned Moscow with the newly emerging forces while weakening the West and tarring it with the brush of imperial aggrandizement—and racism. For their part, the independence movements of the decolonization era benefited from the East-West conflict, using the prevailing bipolar international system to enhance their prospects for achieving independence as quickly as possible. Structure and agency thus combined in manifold ways, creating unique historical opportunities for long-suppressed nationalist groups. They seized them with skill and foresight.

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## **Navigating Indonesia-United States relations, 1967-1969:**

### **President Soeharto's Australian Whisperer**

Shannon Smith<sup>1</sup>

PhD, Australian National University

*Individuals not holding formal positions are often overlooked in studies of international relations, where the focus is generally on Heads of State, foreign ministers and accredited professionals attached to diplomatic services. Indeed, it is an anomaly for an individual, and certainly a non-national, to act as an envoy for one government, and for that intermediary to be attached great importance by another foreign government. Such an abnormality was Clive Williams, President Soeharto of Indonesia's Australian Whisperer. Williams has never been mentioned in a single diplomatic, political or historical account of United States-Indonesia relations. But as shall be seen, he was an extremely effective and indispensable intermediary for both countries as they moved towards closer relations in the late 1960s. The practice of a non-national assisting a national leader in international affairs is a fascinating concept.*

In 1966, United States Ambassador Marshall Green had a major diplomatic obstacle to overcome in Indonesia – 46-year-old General Soeharto, the man effectively running the country, was proving to be inaccessible. Ambassador Green then discovered Clive Williams, an extremely close confidant of Soeharto and his inner political and social circles. It was revelatory - Williams was not just an English tutor to Soeharto, he was an impossibly close insider. Soeharto's Australian 'whisperer' would become an indispensable intermediary for the United States Embassy as the General rose to the Presidency in the ensuing years.

Born in Geelong, Australia in 1921, Clive Williams was just a few months older than Soeharto. After little over three years as a Jehovah's Witness missionary in eastern

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Shannon Smith was a senior Australian diplomat and policy and communications advisor to the Australian Government for over a decade. He has a PhD in Indonesian politics and public policy from the Australian National University, and is author of *Occidental Preacher, Accidental Teacher: The Enigmatic Clive Williams - Volume One, 1921-1968* (Big Hill Publishing 2024). Parts of this article formed the basis of "United States Diplomacy and President Soeharto's Australian Whisperer, 1966-1969", presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> International Indonesian Forum, Yale University on 25 September 2022.

Indonesia, Williams moved to Semarang, Central Java in 1955 where he established a private English course. The local army commander Colonel Soeharto and his wife Tien were among his earliest students, and they developed a very close personal bond. Williams was a good English teacher and was wise and knowledgeable about the outside world - he had travelled to London and New York! To the inward-looking Javanese couple, Williams was a revelation.

Soeharto's outlook on the world had been confined to his humble, rural Java upbringing and domestic experience as a field soldier and military leader; he had little interest in issues of international importance. This was clearly evident as he rose to national leadership through 1966 and 1967, when the Australian Embassy observed, *"There has been evidence that he requires more schooling in international affairs, particularly insofar as the relations between foreign policy and economics is concerned. In this area he has shown himself to be somewhat naive"* (Australian Embassy, 1966).

As Soeharto's position consolidated in Jakarta, Williams was brought in from Semarang eventually settling adjacent to the family compound in the leafy suburb of Menteng. Soeharto was not an intellectual, but he was shrewd, and knew what he did not know. He certainly wasn't following international affairs; Clive Williams was doing that for him, as the Australian Embassy eventually discovered: *"Williams reads, and summarises, the foreign press for the President, prepares English language tapes for Soeharto's continuing English instruction, delivers to the President oral preces of books which the President does not have time to read, handles some English language correspondence both for Soeharto and for his wife... and more..."* (Australian Embassy, 1968a).

Apart from a lack of actual knowledge about international relations, Soeharto had several personal and political shortcomings that were hampering his conduct of international affairs. Firstly, Soeharto was suspicious of politicians and intellectuals, preferring to have domestic-focused army officers as his advisors. Secondly, he was uncomfortable around diplomats and foreigners, both personally as well as for the purpose of projecting the impression that Indonesia was neutral internationally and he not captive to any side of the ensuing Cold War struggle - *"It is hoped that America will not try to orbit us as an American satellite"*, said Soeharto in 1966 (Time, 1966). Thirdly, Soeharto was fairly inaccessible to all but his closest friends, who tended to operate as go-betweens and intermediaries to the various political and economic stakeholders he needed to manage.

It was in this context that non-Indonesian Clive Williams would be of invaluable service to Soeharto. Williams could provide independent assessments and analysis of international issues, separate to those that Soeharto was receiving from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his personal international operatives like Ali Murtopo. Williams too, unlike Soeharto's army officer advisors, could give neutral, uncomplicated advice and encouragement. And Williams could, as a trusted intermediary vis-a-vis foreign governments, give confidence and validation to Soeharto's first steps into the world of international diplomacy. Notably how this happened was more through circumstance than design.

### **The Revelation**

Soeharto had begun his ascent to power in October 1965 when he was appointed Army Commander following a coup attempt that saw his predecessor and much of the army leadership murdered. Gradually his power, and that of the armed forces, strengthened to the point that by mid-1966 he was able to largely appoint his own Cabinet, in effect becoming a de facto Prime Minister or Premier under President Sukarno.

Overseeing day-to-day government affairs was a new Cabinet Presidium. Officially made up of five members, in practice the Presidium was a triumvirate consisting of Soeharto (Chief Minister of Defense and Security), Adam Malik (Chief Minister of Political Affairs/Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX (Chief Minister of Economics and Finance). This trio was presented popularly as Indonesia's new, refreshed leadership, as described by *Time* magazine:

*Soeharto works in league with two civilians, the Sultan of Jogjakarta and Adam Malik, who with him form a triumvirate that combines the best of power, brains, and traditionalism—with a maximum of dedication and a minimum of personal ambition. Soeharto provides the power of army backing. Malik, a Sumatran with practical diplomatic experience, provides the brains. And Hamengku Buwono IX, the Sultan of Jogjakarta, adds the traditionalism and prestige (Time, 1966).*

The Sultan was the traditional ruler of Jogjakarta, to whom authority was considered cosmological or mystical rather than political. He was influential in Indonesia's revolutionary independence struggle against the Dutch in the late 1940s, was Western-educated, and considered a possible successor to Sukarno. Adam Malik, a former journalist, was a skilful politician who was quick to switch allegiance from Sukarno to Soeharto, often defying the President in meetings (such as over the end to

*konfrontasi* with Malaysia) while Soeharto kept silent. The concept of the triumvirate though was somewhat of a misnomer, as American historian Ruth McVey explained: “*Real power lay entirely with Soeharto, but the Sultan symbolised stability and respectability and Malik both pragmatism and the revolutionary past*” (McVey, 1985).

By early 1967, Soeharto was emerging as the front-runner to replace President Sukarno, but it was by no means a sure thing. It is at this point that Clive Williams enters the broader picture of Indonesian political life. The earliest known mention of Williams in the US diplomatic archives is from January 1967, when Major Tan Jauw Khoen (Johanes Hartanto), spoke on two separate occasions to Embassy officers. Tan was accompanied by Williams and the Embassy clearly knew exactly who he was, referring to him as “*Soeharto’s long-time Australian friend and English teacher*” and as an “*Australian resident in Semarang who has been a close friend of General Soeharto for the past twelve years.*” According to the report,

*Major Tan, who was aware of Williams’ contact with Embassy officers, asked Williams to introduce him to a political officer so that he might give the Embassy a better impression of Soeharto’s way of thinking which he was able to provide from six years experience as Soeharto’s family doctor... Tan, on whom Soeharto has now bestowed the Indonesian name “Hartanto”, now spends his working hours in Soeharto’s home and eats most meals with the General’s family (U.S. Embassy, 1967a).*

At the time, Soeharto was particularly busy with political manoeuvres in the lead up to the Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara* or MPRS) session that would decide both incumbent President Sukarno’s fate, as well as the ambitions of Soeharto. The US Embassy was keenly following events:

*Australian Clive Williams has given us account of his conversation yesterday with General Soeharto on forthcoming MPRS session. Soeharto described transfer of governmental authority as interim step but said he expected MPRS would confirm arrangements set forth in presidential announcement. Soeharto said Sukarno would thus remain President in name only until elections. Soeharto said he planned assume Sukarno’s ceremonial as well as substantive functions but did not want title of Acting President.*

*When asked how [political rival] Nasution had reacted to this plan, Soeharto merely laughed and said Nasution had heavy task in MPR session... Williams believes that Soeharto’s comments may constitute only his first negotiating position and that he may later settle for compromise under which MPRS would go further than mere rubberstamping of transfer of authority (U.S. Embassy, 1967b).*

As it turned out, Sukarno was stripped of his Presidential powers and Soeharto was named Acting President by the MPRS on 12 March 1967. American Pulitzer prize-winning journalist John Hughes described Soeharto's rise:

*If Soeharto showed a necessary directness in the economic sphere, he has blended it with caginess and deftness on the political front that have served him well. Eighteen months it took to remove Sukarno, and during this time the pace of Soeharto's advance was often under attack. On several occasions it looked as though Bung Karno had slipped from Soeharto's gentle grasp and was bouncing back to power. Yet the Soeharto way succeeded, and the country was not plunged into the civil war that might have been. Soeharto skilfully juggled different groups and factions. Despite Sukarno's ploys and struggling, the toppling of the national leader was accomplished with a certain grace and dignity. During it, Soeharto established a reputation for constitutionality that undercut criticism that Indonesia had been seized by a military dictator (Hughes, 2014, p. 317).*

Clive Williams had been absolutely correct in his account of how the Parliamentary session would play out, and it bolstered his standing within the US Embassy as being a straight-shooter and reliable interpreter of Soeharto's thinking. The US Embassy soon envisioned Williams becoming an invaluable intermediary and began to cultivate their relationship with him. But why the need for an intermediary in the first place? Wasn't there a foreign ministry and foreign minister? Weren't there diplomatic protocols to follow? And how could a foreigner like Williams be more trusted by the Acting President than his own top officials?

At the time the US Embassy outlined a number of reasons for employing a non-traditional diplomatic approach to communicating with Acting President Soeharto. In particular Marshall Green was coming to keenly understand Soeharto's preference to do things "through intermediaries and by indirection" (U.S. Embassy, 1967c). For instance, in July 1967 the US Embassy wrote a detailed analysis explaining "*some of the psychological and institutional differences between the two nations, to point out the problems which they may cause and to suggest general approaches we might use in dealing with them.*" Edward Masters wrote:

*Javanese behavior patterns, which stress outward harmony rather than clear communications, prevent "thrashing out" problems with Indonesian leaders and often impose the use of intermediaries...One does not have "heart to heart talks" or "thrash out problems" with a Javanese. Outward harmony in*

*personal relationships receives a much higher priority than clear communications. In the case of Javanese leaders, who must make decisions yet preserve “face” in personal relationships, this means that intermediaries are usually employed to sort out areas of agreement and exclude conflicts before the principals meet (U.S Embassy, 1967d).*

Masters’ analysis was crisp and very observant. It was clear to the US Embassy that if it wanted to achieve agreement with Soeharto on important issues, it needed to first sound him out through an intermediary. But up until this point, Green had been extremely exasperated by the unorthodox methods of diplomacy employed by Soeharto, and he outlined his concerns and frustrations to Washington, so that his superiors knew what he faced. Among the key points were:

- “[S]uharto's lack of accessibility, his use of go-betweens and his dependence upon a group of personal staff officers who are, by and large, a pretty poor lot.”
- “Soeharto usually declines to meet any group or individual (except his old Army friends) until soundings by a third party has established that the meeting will be agreeable and without conflict.”
- “Direct contact with Soeharto is accordingly reserved for selling an agreement or acquiring an understanding that has previously been worked out between intermediaries.”
- “Soeharto is visibly ill at ease with most foreigners. He rarely receives diplomats...” (U.S. Embassy, 1967a).

William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, offered some sage and comforting advice to Green: *“It is always a little lonely at the apex of power, and drawing in behind a screen of cronies is a very natural reaction. Then, of course, he has an unfamiliar and tough job, and I can understand his disinclination for polite exchanges with the Diplomatic Corps”* (U.S. Embassy, 1967b). As Bundy would note, these were the *“subtleties of the diplomatic art as practiced in post-Sukarno Indonesia”*. Importantly Bundy gave Green the go-ahead to use intermediaries.

But in addition to the issues of Javanese culture and the Acting President’s style and means of communicating, there was one more reason to use a trusted intermediary, and that was the need to have someone assist in interpreting the subtleties of what Soeharto was actually saying. Edward Masters explained that President Soeharto had four ways of saying ‘yes’:

*He never said 'no' - there were four yes's. One really meant yes... One meant 'maybe', one meant 'I hear what you're saying'. This would be, kind of, as you're talking, he's saying 'yes, yes'. That doesn't mean he agrees with you. And the final yes means 'it's a dumb idea, forget it', but he says 'yes'. So from the context, and the body language, and maybe knowing how the guy thinks, you've got to figure out which 'yes' you're getting. And that... I found sometimes is tricky... Where I had any doubt, I would go to an intermediary, and say, 'What did the President really mean?' (Masters, 1989, p. 14).*

So, US diplomats could either sit and study Soeharto's body language and ponder the context and reactions among people around him to figure out which 'yes', they were getting. Or, as Masters admitted, they could go to an intermediary, and ask, 'What did the President really mean?' It was in this context that the US Embassy became cognizant of the importance of Clive Williams as a reliable conduit to Soeharto.

### **Confidants and Confidence-men**

The US Embassy certainly did have other options for an intermediary. The Acting President was actually surrounded by dozens of official and semi-official advisors, and in Williams' specific case, one non-official advisor. At the centre of Soeharto's team were the SPRI (Personal Staff or *Staf Pribadi*) which had been created in August 1966 to assist Soeharto with managing the processes of government. Headed by Major-General Alamsjah Ratu Perwiranegara, it was made up of army officers, among them Brigadier-General Sudjono Humardani (Economic Affairs), Colonel Ali Murtopo (Foreign Intelligence Affairs) and Lieutenant-General Sudharmono (General Affairs).

Soeharto trusted his SPRI, and it made sense that the General brought in help from those he knew and could trust as he consolidated his power. The SPRI had Soeharto's ear and key members like Murtopo and Sudjono were regularly consulted by Soeharto for advice. But it also had the effect of giving the SPRI unprecedented power, and they became controversial for their almost unrestrained non-bureaucratic approach - some dubbed them the "invisible cabinet".<sup>2</sup> Australian historian John Legge noted, "*In a regime where constitutional procedures were only vaguely defined, the informal influence of a group*

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<sup>2</sup> The SPRI included Major General Alamsjah Ratu Perwiranegara (Coordinator), Brigadier General Sudjono Humardani (Economic Affairs), Colonel Ali Murtopo (Foreign Intelligence Affairs), Brigadier General Yoga Soegama (Domestic Intelligence Affairs), Major General Surjo Wiryohadiputro (Financial Affairs), Brigadier General Sunarso (Political Affairs), Brigadier General Abdul Kadir Prawiraatmadja (Social Welfare Affairs), Brigadier General Slamet Danusudirdjo (Trade Affairs), Lieutenant General Sudharmono (General Affairs), Brigadier General Jusuf Singadikane (General Election Affairs), Brigadier General Nawawi Alif (Mass Media Affairs) and Major General Isman (Mass Movement Affairs).

*of this kind with regular and easy access to the President became more important than the influence of those holding formal government office” (Legge, 1977, p. 168).*

Accompanying the core group of army-dominated SPRI, there were two teams of civilian advisors, a political team including Sarbini Sumawinata, Fuad Hasan and Sulaeman Sumardi and an economics team including Widjojo Nitisastro, Mohammad Sadli and Emil Salim. In addition, Soeharto had a range of other semi-official advisors he consulted. Many were anti-Sukarnoist intellectuals and politicians, like his neighbour Mashuri, and others were old friends and acquaintances from Semarang.

By this time Soeharto was also exerting more control over his potential political rivals. Soon after he became Acting President, his partners in the triumvirate, Malik and the Sultan, lost stature – Malik was no longer in charge of political affairs, just the foreign ministry, and the Sultan became coordinator of the economics ministries. We shall see how Soeharto exerted influence over Adam Malik and foreign policy below. But how the acting President handled Sultan Hamengkubuwono is illustrative of Soeharto’s detached managerial leadership style; essentially, he created a web of official and unofficial connections between he and his Ministers. The Australian Embassy discovered this from one of the Sultan’s staff:

*According to this Indonesian official, the unofficial economic team either create economic plans ab initio, or considers and reports on problems referred to it from official sources. When it has reached a considered position, it takes the results of its deliberations to the Ministry of Finance, where the matter is considered by government experts. The role of the Sultan himself was not described in this account. The resultant, modified position is then taken by Widjojo’s people along to Soeharto’s private staff, where it is scrutinized by the economic members and further modified before submission to Soeharto or the Presidium for decision. An unspecified percentage of decisions is taken at staff level, without reference to Soeharto. The discussion with Soeharto’s staff is not normally joined by officials from the Ministry of Finance, and according to our informant, neither the Sultan, the Minister of Finance, nor Ministry officials see Soeharto except at Presidium meetings” (Australian Embassy, 1967).*

The civilian political team was soon set aside of official importance - some of them would become critics of Soeharto’s emerging regime – while most of the economics team would go on to become Ministers. But these civilian advisors had their own challenges, one being that they themselves often required an intermediary to communicate with Soeharto. Sarbini Sumawinata told the US Embassy that he dealt with Soeharto primarily by memoranda submitted through intermediaries and found this the most effective way of getting his views across:

*“The best intermediary is Brig Gen Sudjono Humar Dani (sic) referred to by Sarbini as the ‘hot line’. However, Sudjono, like his boss, is also somewhat limited in what he can absorb” (U.S. Embassy, 1966a).*

A second challenge for the civilian advisors was that their neutrality and administrative influence was being curtailed by army officers being placed inside every public service department. A US Embassy appraisal of the new senior bureaucrats appointed across the public service found, *“There appears to be a higher incidence than was first apparent of career experts and technicians... It also is striking to note the incidence of Army influence; every department has at least one officer as Secretary General or Director General...”* (U.S. Embassy, 1966b).

By 1967 the civilian advisors were out of the picture (except on macro-economic issues) and the SPRI were the Acting President’s primary advisors and gatekeepers. But the SPRI themselves did not have exemplary credentials. Australian academic Harold Crouch explained that not only did they play a major role in determining appointments in the military hierarchy and the government administration, but they were involved in the opening of business opportunities for Soeharto’s ‘patronage machine’ (Crouch, 1978, p. 308).

Alamsjah, for instance, was heavily involved in corruption, while Sudjono and Murtopo were known by the US Embassy to extract commissions from US trade and investment contracts – the US Embassy referred to them as “Five Percenters” in a briefing to Vice-President Hubert Humphrey (U.S. Embassy, 1967e). In a conversation with the US Embassy, General Nasution recounted a story that Alamsjah and Murtopo had divided a two-million-dollar credit allocation between themselves. Nasution made clear that he did not believe that General Soeharto condoned misuses of authority but that *“Soeharto stubbornly trusts these members of SPRI who have been ‘close to him for a long time’ and, consequently, ‘will not listen’ to ‘outsiders’ who attack them for corruption”* (U.S. Embassy, 1967f).

Foreign Minister Adam Malik was a closet critic of the SPRI – he was sometimes at loggerheads with them over who directed foreign policy, but mostly kept his opinions to himself. Malik lay blame for the Government’s mistakes principally at the door of the SPRI, which he said were practically running the country:

*They let Soeharto know only as much as they want him to know and consequently Soeharto is losing touch with people. Generals around Soeharto ‘have power but not responsibility’ and this is wrong. Soeharto should not assume sole responsibility for the wrongs of the country, as he did*

*recently when students protested over rice price. This would undermine Soeharto's position. There must be corporate responsibility, and if imposition of private staff between Soeharto and his Ministers made this impossible, then Soeharto should make them Ministers, give them responsibility and be done with it (U.S Embassy, 1967g).*

The SPRI were not in any way a united group, and over time divisions became very apparent. Clive Williams had his own views on the various SPRI and revealed one of them in a conversation with Joe Harary of the US Embassy: *"Williams said that the struggle between General Sudjono Humardani and General Alamsjah had intensified in recent weeks. Sudjono used to refer to Alamsjah as 'Napolean' but now he calls him 'Quisling'. It was the opinion of Williams, who does not like Alamsjah, that the latter would soon be removed from his position as State Secretary"* (U.S. Embassy, 1969a).

Williams was clearly aligned to Sudjono Humardani's camp - they had known each other for over a decade, and Williams had been staying in Sudjono's house when he visited Jakarta from Semarang until fairly recently. But Williams wasn't representing Soeharto's thinking on this occasion. Indeed, Sudjono had told a US Embassy source almost two years prior that he would publicly *"refuse to obey Alamsjah's orders' if Soeharto were not standing behind him"* (U.S. Embassy, 1967f).

After his discussion with Williams, Harary noted, *"This is not the first time that information has come to our attention regarding the possible removal of Alamsjah from his position. About a year and a half ago there were strong intimations that Alamsjah would become an ambassador. At that time Alamsjah himself felt that his position was insecure. However, nothing happened. Unless the Embassy receives much more definite information which would confirm Williams' assertion, it is suggested that his statement be taken with a grain of salt as expressing wishful thinking on his part and that of Sudjono rather than Soeharto's intentions"* (U.S. Embassy, 1969b).<sup>3</sup>

The SPRI would be disbanded on 9 June 1968, essentially removing their policy authority, or coordinating functions over Cabinet. The US Embassy noted, *"The staff's abolishment constitutes definite progress toward moving government business into overt, official channels and reducing the "green wall" of military cronies who some have accused of isolating Soeharto in the past"* (Howard Palfrey Jones Papers, 1968). But Soeharto simply replaced the SPRI with ASPRI (Personal Assistants or *Asisten Pribadi*) and Ali Murtopo (political)

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<sup>3</sup> Alamsjah was State Secretary from 9 February 1968 to 8 April 1972 and would later serve, after a spell as Ambassador to the Netherlands, as Minister for Religious Affairs (29 March 1978 - 19 March 1983) and Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare (19 March 1983 - 23 March 1988).

and Sudjono Humardani (economic) were appointed to manage “day-to-day matters”, essentially to protect Soeharto by maneuvering behind the scenes against perceived political threats to the President as well as directing financial resources for his use for patronage. Most of the other SPRI did not lose influence and were appointed to a range of high-level positions.<sup>4</sup>

Which brings us back to the question why the US Embassy had such close dealings with Clive Williams as an intermediary when they had so many other options to choose from. And it doesn't simply follow that they didn't have a great number of viable options. Sudjono, Murtopo and others may have been extracting commissions in their business dealings, but they were effective. As Marshall Green noted, “*five-percenters frequently earn their five percent*” (U.S. Embassy, 1967h).

Partly the answer lies in serious doubts the Americans had that Soeharto was obtaining accurate information about the United States from Sudjono and Murtopo, not necessarily because of any intention to misrepresent but because of ignorance of the outside world. For instance, their associates such as Jan Walandouw and Bob Hasan were roaming the world with ‘hunting licenses’ to seek business deals, foreign loans and aid, and the US Embassy was told, “*These promoters bring back false and exaggerated reports which get to Soeharto with proper screening*” (U.S. Embassy, 1967i).

Sudjono was eventually invited to the United States in July 1967 - in a plan hatched by concerned Indonesian intellectuals/bureaucrats/politicians (led by Umar Kayam) together with the US Embassy - for Sudjono “*to receive a high-level civics lesson in Washington*”. It had mixed results - during a major briefing, “*Sudjono listened in typical Javanese fashion – cigarette in hand, his eyes staring off into the middle distance*” (U.S. Embassy, 1967j). While the Americans felt that Sudjono gained a better understanding about the United States and the merits of a conventional approach to their aid and other support, they were told that Murtopo was still “*resorting to any kind of shenanigans to shake additional money out of the U.S*” (U.S. Embassy, 1967k). Clearly, Sudjono, Murtopo and their associates were never going to be reliable in negotiations; State Department officials described their style as a “*freewheeling attempt at sub-summit diplomacy*” (U.S. Department of State, 1967a)

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<sup>4</sup> Yoga Soegama was appointed as head of the state intelligence body, BAKIN; Alamsjah was appointed to Cabinet as State Secretary; Sudharmono became Cabinet Secretary; Nawawi Alif became Deputy at the Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (KOPKAMTIB); Sunarso became Ambassador to Singapore; and Slamet Danudirdjo became Deputy Chairman of the National Development Planning Board (Bappenas).

However, a secondary objective of Umar Kayam and his colleagues (including incidentally, Probosutedjo, Soeharto's younger half-brother) was "*to convince Sudjono (and through him Soeharto) that the only productive way to deal with the United States was through Ambassador Green and the executive branch agencies, and not through special secret representatives that attempted to bypass these agencies*" (U.S. Department of State, 1967b). They apparently put their own argument directly to Soeharto that uncoordinated, 'out-of-channel' approaches confused the US Government and didn't work.

Second, it appears that Soeharto became cognisant of this and was swayed to change tact, for it was he who nominated Williams to take on an intermediary role. Williams would often turn up on the doorstep of a US diplomat's house at the behest of the Acting President. The US Embassy though also carefully chose Williams for reciprocal assignments. And that is because Clive Williams was very different from other intermediaries. For one, Williams was non-political, incorruptible, and simply not interested in money.

Third, Williams understood Soeharto's nuances and communication style; he could read Soeharto's mood and could tell whether he was angry or prevaricating or anxious, and he could anticipate Soeharto's thinking and reaction to an issue. Fourth, Williams was a native English speaker, as well as fluent Indonesian speaker, ensuring there were no linguistic or cultural misunderstandings.

For the Americans, Williams would be a crucially important intermediary over the next couple of years, interpreting Soeharto's wishes and thoughts on a range of issues. A senior State Department official who worked in the US Embassy in Jakarta at this time, and later served as Ambassador elsewhere, described Clive Williams to me as Soeharto's "Australian whisperer" (Confidential author interview, 14 May 2020).

### **The Australian whisperer**

The years of 1967 and 1968 would be significant for Soeharto, as the General emerged firstly as Acting President and then President in his own right (U.S. Embassy, 1967l). There were essentially three main challenges for Soeharto at this time. On the economic front, Soeharto needed to make badly-needed economic reforms, despite the short-term consequences in terms of price rises, while also dealing with dire food shortages. Politically, Soeharto had to make a set of decisions about the constitutional arrangements through which he would obtain the Presidency and hold on to it.

And in international relations, Soeharto needed to establish a foreign policy that was 'free and independent', especially with regards to its relationship with the United States. It is particularly interesting to view these major challenges and events through the lens of Clive Williams who divulged vital information that would have a significant influence on US foreign policy towards Indonesia.

The revival of the economy was one of Soeharto's principal concerns. The economic policies on which he had embarked were heavily deprivational for the majority of the population. Then in late 1967, a very serious rise in prices due to a shortage of rice threatened to up-end the economic stabilization program. Soeharto desperately needed foreign financial assistance and food aid, but he seemed very unsure about the position of the US and other donors. Primary carriage for these discussions was the preserve of the Sultan and Adam Malik, but Soeharto was concerned enough to conduct his own diplomacy.

In late January 1968, Marshall Green heard from Clive Williams that Acting President Soeharto was increasingly concerned about growing rice shortages and the effect they were having on food prices. Williams stressed that Soeharto wanted rice and economic assistance, and quickly. The Acting President was to face the MPRS again in just a few weeks, and they would determine whether he would become President in his own right. Green sent the following message to Washington:

- 1. Recent rise in rice and other prices and students' subsequent agitation has apparently hit Soeharto hard. His Australian confidant Clive Williams, who now visiting in Acting President's home, reports that he has never seen Soeharto so depressed or distracted. According to Williams, Soeharto stares into space during meals, oblivious to conversation except that touching on rice shortages.*
- 2. His current worries may be causing Soeharto to see impediments which do not exist. For example, Soeharto complained to Williams that US not responsive to Indonesia's bulgur requests... We reassured Williams on this score, providing him with latest info regarding bulgur arrivals and other aid in store, which he said he would pass on to Soeharto.*
- 3. Williams strongly recommended that I personally reassure Soeharto of our efforts to assist his Govt in overcoming food crisis but believed it better to have some new information in hand. Final approval of \$60 million package will be great help in this respect. However, Soeharto's immediate concern, as Williams pointed out, is next three months and bulgur will only enter picture in April. I am convinced that the most strategic assistance we could render to Soeharto's Govt at this*

*junction would be the provision of additional rice immediately, from whatever source possible... (U.S. Embassy, 1968a).<sup>5</sup>*

This portrayal of Soeharto's mood is very vivid, and extremely rare. One can visualize Soeharto, sitting at the breakfast table with his untouched meal, shoulders drooped and eyes staring into the distance. Most significantly, as their discussion continued, Williams pitched to Green that the food situation in Indonesia was so grave that the US needed to act promptly. Green was listening; he hastily arranged an additional US food aid package, helping avert a food crisis and further economic pain, and bolstering Soeharto's economic credentials!

As important as the economy was, one of Soeharto's main tasks was to make a set of decisions about the political arrangements through which he would obtain the Presidency, and hold on to it. For instance, he needed to identify an existing, or create a new, political party or coalition that could hold a majority in Parliament and support him. Australian academic Herb Feith wrote about Soeharto's political predicament at the time:

*In the months before March 1968 the questions were 'Who will be our partners in power?', 'To whom shall we accord the right to participate in representative and electoral politics, and to whom shall we deny this right?' and 'How far shall we allow ourselves to be tied down by civilians, by constitutional prescriptions concerning elections, the powers of representative bodies, freedom of the press, assembly and demonstration, and so on?' (Feith, 1968).*

In November 1967, Ambassador Green spoke to Foreign Minister Adam Malik about Soeharto's plans to hold elections, and the political parties which might contest them. Malik was very critical of "*creeping militarism and how Soeharto was letting the political situation drift along without reaching firm decisions on organization for elections... Malik regards it as essential that Soeharto act before it is too late to establish new parties and perhaps a mass support group for the government*".

In reporting the conversation to Washington, Green added additional information, "*According to Soeharto's Australian confidant Clive Williams, Director-General for Higher Education Mashuri made a similar pitch for a new party structure to the Acting President and now claims to have obtained Soeharto's agreement*" (U.S. Embassy, 1967m). Mashuri, who was now a close friend of Williams, was a member of a group of anti-Sukarno

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<sup>5</sup> In April and May 1968, Soeharto faced political attacks from various quarters – students, Parliament, religious organisations – over a further series of price rises, including rice and petroleum. Soeharto told Williams that he expected demonstrations but "*did not plan to break them up at the beginning*" (U.S. Embassy, 1968b).

intellectuals who created an “*independent group*” which they hoped would develop into a political party behind Soeharto (U.S. Embassy, 1966c).

And then two months later, Williams provided new advice - that Soeharto had changed his mind. “*Soeharto’s Australian confidant Clive Williams told EmbOff January 18 that Soeharto definitely indicated to him that he will not approve formation of Independent Movement*” (U.S Embassy, 1968c). Distrusting of civilian politicians, Soeharto would turn to Ali Murtopo to create a new electoral machine, known as Golkar (*Golongan Karya* or Functional Groups) out of a federation of professional and social organisations. Under Soeharto, Golkar would portray itself as non-ideological with a focus on ‘economic development’ and ‘social and political stability’. He would also encourage civil servants to vote for it as a sign of loyalty to the regime.

In addition to keeping political parties in check, Soeharto was concerned about the upcoming session of the MPRS of 27 March 1968, which was made up of old politicians, his own appointees and representatives of the armed forces. With the threat from Malik and the civilian politicians now diminished, Soeharto’s main rival for the Presidency was General Abdul Haris Nasution, former Army Chief of Staff and Minister for Defence.

Soeharto had maneuvered Nasution into the chairmanship of the MPRS, where he had supported measures to appoint Soeharto as Acting President in 1967. But it left Nasution with some potential autonomy to flex the semi-independence of the MPRS, and Soeharto was wary. The US Embassy noted: “*Soeharto’s Australian confidant Clive Williams told Emboff that both Nasution and Subchan are still causing trouble and that Ali Murtopo and other members of Soeharto’s Personal Staff are working night and day to sell their MPRS program*” (U.S. Embassy, 1968d).

Despite being appointed as President by the MPRS in March 1968, Soeharto and his close circle remained highly suspicious of Nasution because he had also attempted to introduce a bill which would have severely curtailed Soeharto’s presidential authority. At one point Ed Masters reported, “*According to Acting President’s Australian friend Clive Williams, Soeharto has in recent days criticized Nasution with unprecedented explicitness*” (U.S Embassy, 1968e).

Nasution was emerging as the most strongly identified muslim (the largest of the country’s religions) of the senior generals, and with an interest in the strength of the legislative branch. Williams told Green of his private conversation with Soeharto about this very issue, and Green was quick to clarify the US Government’s connections, or lack

thereof, with Nasution to avoid any perceptions that it was somehow supporting Nasution:

*According Williams... Soeharto is, we believe, genuinely worried that Nasution's ambition will lead him to exploit and deepen divisions within nation. Moslems have now quite clearly lined themselves up in opposition to Soeharto Government on virtually every important issue and they are able to exploit volatile religious emotions of rural masses. Nasution frequently sings along with traditionalist Moslems and is able to give impression that Army not fully united behind Government....*

*We suspect that bad relations between Soeharto and Nasution will continue to be key element in Indonesian politics for some time to come without, however, becoming all out power struggle. It would not be in character for Nasution to precipitate show-down, and Soeharto brushed off suggestions by Williams that Nasution be sent overseas, indicating that Nasution's punishment will be 'left to God'....*

*We do not intend to... [get involved] in this most sensitive political feud. We shall, however, be careful to limit our currently very infrequent contacts with Nasution camp in order to allay Soeharto's suspicions, which William's confirms, that Nasution has some American support. We have been pointing out to lower level, personal contacts such as Williams that Moslems have also falsely accused us of fostering Christian-military alliance (U.S. Embassy, 1968f).<sup>6</sup>*

Since his ascension to the Presidency, Soeharto had been very wary to ensure that Indonesia be seen to be non-aligned, and that especially came to relations with the US. From time to time, Clive Williams was advising the US Embassy about who they should avoid aligning with, like Nasution, but he was also relaying information normally the domain of diplomats or intelligence operatives.

In June 1968, former US Secretary of Defense and now President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, visited Jakarta for talks with the newly official President and his economics team, in particular to find ways to support the Soeharto government's economic stabilization measures. The Australians were told McNamara "*Had been highly impressed by the calibre and purpose of the economists advising the Indonesian Government and by President Soeharto's obvious determination to stand behind these advisors. On the other hand, Mr McNamara had not been led up any garden path by Indonesian blandishments, and had, for instance, regarded what had been told to him by a group of generals that he had met as 'hogwash'*" (Australian Embassy, 1968b).

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<sup>6</sup> Soeharto had Nasution removed from his position as MPRS chairman in 1969 ahead of the 1971 legislative elections and forced his early retirement from the military in 1972.

Ambassador Green would report on the visit, “*General Soeharto’s Australian confidant Clive Williams said President ‘liked McNamara very much’ and expressed appreciation in particular for latter’s support of GOI [Government of Indonesia] economic policies in remarks McNamara made to students and political parties*” (U.S. Embassy, 1968g).<sup>7</sup> McNamara returned home convinced of the urgent need to support the Soeharto government, and soon established the Bank’s first permanent mission in a developing country in Jakarta.

It was one thing to accept US food aid, or the support of the World Bank, but another to allow a US program like the Peace Corps to operate in Indonesia. On 10 August 1969, Clive Williams approached Joseph Harary, Counsellor (Commercial) at the Embassy, to discuss a range of important bilateral issues that were on Soeharto’s mind. Williams’ main focus was the President’s concern about the possible return of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, which had been withdrawn from Indonesia after former President Sukarno had told the US Government “*To hell with your aid*” in January 1965.

According to Williams, Soeharto was not supportive of the return of the Peace Corps and wanted to stress that this position over-rode any views or impressions that Foreign Minister Malik may have imparted. Soeharto was right to be concerned because when the Director of the US Peace Corps was seeking approval for a Peace Corps program in Indonesia, he gained what Marshall Green recorded as “*the distinct impression from his conversation with Malik that the latter approved the idea.*” Green later wrote of Malik, “*The only problem I ever had with this superb diplomat was the way he would nod his head and smile, suggesting agreement with what I was saying. This was not an untypical Asian way of implying understanding of the point you were making, but not necessarily agreement*” (Green, 1990).

In Harary’s detailed memorandum of their discussion about the Peace Corps, Williams also revealed certain internal politicking within the Indonesian Government - the President’s continued anxiety about Nasution, and Soeharto’s distrust of Foreign Minister Adam Malik. Joseph Harary reported to Francis Galbraith, Green’s successor as Ambassador:

*Mr. Clive Williams came to my house last evening a little before 6 p.m. and said that he had an important matter to discuss... He said that he had come to see me at the specific order of President Soeharto and that the President hoped I will pass on to you the information given. This involved the following two points:*

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<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, US Senator and Senate Majority Leader Michael Mansfield visited Jakarta in August 1969, and the US Embassy reported to Soeharto, via Williams, the Senator’s impressions (U.S. Embassy, 1969c).

1. *The President believes that a return to Indonesia of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers is untimely at present, could strengthen his opponent's accusation that he is veering towards the U.S. and the West, and that it would give grist to the mill of the 'anti-American group' in Indonesia. He implied that General Nasution belonged to that group. Soeharto is most anxious to maintain what he considers the very friendly relations between the two countries... He is afraid that further official discussion of the Peace Corps question could have an unfavorable effect on the above.*  
*Williams said that Soeharto had specifically instructed Malik to express the above view to the American side and to reiterate the Indonesian position during his meetings... However, Soeharto is not certain that the Foreign Minister expressed his views with sufficient strength and clarity. That is why he had asked Williams to contact me on this point. Soeharto would like to be informed 'unofficially' (read through Williams) whether in view of the above the USG [US Government] has for the present put aside consideration of the question of the return of the Peace Corps to Indonesia.*
2. *Soeharto told Williams to stress that he is deeply interested in seeing "U.S. bilateral aid" increased without delay... Soeharto feels that this aid would play a vital role in strengthening his own political position and would have a desirable and long-range effect on stability in Indonesia as well as this country's social and economic development...*  
*Comment*
  - a. *As you know, Williams has been used in the past to convey from Soeharto to the Embassy messages which the President did not want to transmit officially. The latest such occurrence, to my knowledge, was Williams' intervention with Mr. Lydman [Jack Lydman, Minister-Counsellor, US Embassy] to express Soeharto's desire that the substance of your two-hour private evening meeting with him be conveyed to President Nixon prior to his arrival here in order to save time and make sure that the discussions between the two Presidents would be more fruitful.*
  - b. *It is unfortunate but generally true that Malik has detractors among some members of Soeharto's entourage, particularly the military. Because of the above the President feels that sometimes Malik's public statements on issues do not necessarily mirror exactly Soeharto's position. Williams implied that this causes Soeharto not to be "absolutely certain" that Malik does not color both his public statements and those made privately to diplomats to suit his own opinions, which might be at some variance with those of the President on the issues discussed (U.S. Embassy, 1969d).*

Ambassador Galbraith was sufficiently convinced by the President's overtures through Williams that he informed Washington accordingly, "*I am more convinced than ever that Peace Corps under whatever name is nonstarter in Indonesia at present time and that low profile policy we have attempted to follow is sound one and should be continued*" (U.S. Embassy, 1969d). Curiously a second version of Harary's Memorandum contained an additional

paragraph, in which the US Government's position is made known to the President at a subsequent meeting the next day between Harary and Williams:

*As per instruction of the Ambassador, I contacted Williams the next day and told him that discussions between Indonesian and US officials had concerned US-Indonesian cooperation in the establishment of an international voluntary, Peace-Corps like, operation in Indonesia. Minister Malik had made clear that he did not feel that the return of Peace Corps Volunteers to Indonesia was timely at present. The Ambassador had asked that Williams inform Soeharto that the question of sending Volunteers to Indonesia is no longer under active consideration by the USG. Williams appeared pleased with the above and stated that he would pass the Ambassador's message to the President immediately (U.S. Embassy, 1969a).*

The information provided by Williams led to an almost immediate policy shift by the US Government, affecting bilateral aid decisions and continuing the non-activation of the Peace Corps in Indonesia. Williams was clearly an extremely important intermediary between Soeharto and the United States Government. The examples above offer irrefutable evidence that Williams was providing information of significant policy importance but also clarification about the President's views on a wide range of topics - his suspicions about his own Foreign Minister Adam Malik, his reaction to economic challenges, and his attitude towards political parties and potential rivals (General Nasution in particular).<sup>8</sup>

From a more Machiavellian political perspective, the episode also illustrates clearly how Soeharto was exerting his influence and control over potential rivals as well as allies. From Williams' discussions with the US Embassy, we have seen how Soeharto circumvented Adam Malik in his role as Foreign Minister, and removed any ability for him to act independently, such as over the return of the US Peace Corps volunteers. Meanwhile, Soeharto was, through Williams, negotiating food aid and financial assistance, both the remit of Sultan Hamengkubuwono and his economic teams.<sup>9</sup>

Soeharto was also making it perfectly clear to the US Embassy that Nasution was a rival with a potentially undesirable religious political base, and that any support for him from the Americans would be frowned upon. As it turned out, Soeharto removed Nasution from his position as MPRS Chairman in 1969 and soon after forced his early retirement from the military.

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<sup>8</sup> On Williams providing Soeharto's views on muslim political parties, see (U.S. Embassy, 1968c)

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Soeharto was sending out teams in all directions. For instance, Sudjono dispatched Lim Bian Khoen (Jusuf Wanandi) and ASPRI Major Harjo (Surjo Wiryo Hadiputro) to Australia to seek food aid. (Australian Embassy, 1968c)

Several points though stand out about United States diplomacy in Indonesia over this period. And these are important to understanding Williams' role as an extremely valuable but strictly non-official representative of the Indonesian Government. Firstly, the United States was conducting secret discussions with the Acting Indonesian President through Williams but was not running secret foreign policy negotiations. This is an important distinction. The two sides simply used intermediaries to size up each other, to reach understanding ahead of formal meetings, and to avoid public debate.

Secondly, the United States' formal diplomatic structures and procedures were maintained throughout. The Embassy in Jakarta transparently explained its methods to Washington which, in turn, gave the green-light to pursue the use of intermediaries like Williams. This was not so in Indonesia, where Soeharto kept secrets away from the formal political and bureaucratic structures, such as the foreign minister, and publicly away from anti-US constituencies. Incredibly, Williams has never been mentioned in any of the diplomatic, political and historical accounts of this period of United States-Indonesia relations. Williams' individual role, until now, has not been known.

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The paradigm of Indonesian President Soeharto and his Australian confidant Clive Williams is a very rare phenomenon in international relations. International affairs are largely conducted by Heads of State, foreign ministers and the accredited professionals attached to their home country's diplomatic services. It is an anomaly for a single individual, and a non-national to boot, to act as an envoy for a government, and for that intermediary to be attached such great importance by another foreign government. So why and how did it work so effectively? It is important to stress that the episode was neither accidental, nor was it by deliberate design; it came about through fortuitous circumstance and was extremely effective for the period of time it was in place.

Soeharto needed someone to trust in his dealings with Indonesia's largest financial donor and, given his anti-communist outlook, most natural superpower international ally. Williams was the only native English-speaking (and fluent Indonesian-speaking) advisor close to Soeharto, and thus the only one, in terms of the Americans, with whom there would be no language barriers, no issues of missed nuance or cultural misunderstanding. When Williams stated what Soeharto was feeling or desired, the US Embassy got the message very clearly. Williams never acted independently, always spoke and acted according to Soeharto's wishes, and never had any other political or financial motivations. It turned out to be a highly effective arrangement.

Furthermore, the US Embassy's contact with Clive Williams was a tightly-held secret. Within the United States Department of State, only a few very senior American diplomats - the Ambassador, DHOM and Counsellors (Economic and Political) - and their Washington-based superiors had contact with, or knowledge of, Williams. On the Indonesian side, Williams was little-known outside his Semarang friends and acquaintances, and Soeharto's family; the public 'English teacher' moniker cleverly downplaying his role and proximity to Soeharto.

In addition, the entire arrangement turned out to be transitory in nature. Soeharto was extremely mistrustful of everyone throughout his rule, but no more so than in the early days when he was Acting President. In that respect, the faith and trust that Soeharto placed in Clive Williams was simply enormous; a true measure of their deep friendship and bond. It was only when he became President in 1968 that Soeharto largely disbanded his personal assistants and advisors and began trusting his own formal diplomatic and bureaucratic structures. At that juncture, the role of Williams as a diplomatic intermediary with the United States soon declined.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of a non-national assisting a national leader in international affairs is a fascinating concept. For President Soeharto of Indonesia though, it seemed natural that he would engage his closest confidant Clive Williams in his most sensitive dealings, regardless of his place of birth or nationality. Williams, in fact, would be assigned new roles by Soeharto – including playing a backchannel role vis a vis the Australian Government - and was still living adjacent to the Presidential family compound three decades later (he passed away in 2001).

In the only known video-recorded public mention of Williams, Soeharto told a group of visitors to his cattle ranch in September 1995, with a twinkle in his eye, a warm smile and in an affectionate voice, "There is one special advisor who has been living here a long time, about 45 years, an Australian by the name of Clive Williams, and he provides advice as well as guidance to the farm staff. But there are no foreigners involved here whatsoever."<sup>10</sup> It is telling that Soeharto never considered Clive Williams anything but part of the intimate fabric of his world, and certainly not 'foreign' in any way.

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<sup>10</sup> Soeharto was responding to a question whether the people involved in his cattle farm were Indonesian, or whether foreigners or overseas-trained people were used. See Soeharto's response to the first question in Temu Wicara Presiden Soeharto dg BKMT di Tapos, 19 September 1995, *Youtube*.

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## **The Coming Hypersonic Era: Modern Weapons and Counterforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Peter J. McLaughlin

Graduate Student, Ohio State University

*Much of the literature on emerging hypersonic weapons discusses their ability to deliver strategic nuclear strikes, conduct nuclear counterforce, or perform traditional tactical strikes in isolation. However, with their inherent versatility, a single hypersonic weapon can perform all of these roles without reconfiguration. I explain how the versatility of these new multipurpose weapons generates ambiguity and undermines the tenets of nuclear deterrence theory. National leaders who observe HPGM deployments on their nations' borders will increasingly view HPGM weapons as tools of destabilizing counterforce, even if the deployers have defensive intentions. With HPGMs capable of traveling intercontinental distances on the horizon, policies of restraint will become necessary to clearly indicate intentions without increasing global fear of counterforce strikes.*

### **Introduction**

Seventy-seven years ago, the United States detonated the world's first atomic bomb-a device that could annihilate a city with a single charge. A new era arrived in which mankind no longer needed to wage a war that lasted years to finally lay siege to a major population center. At the time of the first nuclear detonation, the US Air Force still bore the name "United States Army Air Forces," the term "Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)" did not exist, and Germany's new V-2 vengeance program weapon could only cross the English Channel. Technological advancements, from the introduction of ICBMs to U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, necessitated the creation of nuclear arms theory, which grew apart from conventional security theory. The sheer destructive power of nuclear weapons combined with their space-capable supersonic delivery systems required strategists to treat these weapons as delicate objects, with launch buttons always at the ready.

Nuclear war has not occurred since World War II thanks in large part to a robust strategic framework of deterrence. The strategy of nuclear deterrence uses credible,

coercive threats of pain to prevent the use of nuclear weapons by assuring the initiator that the costs will clearly outweigh any potential gains.<sup>11</sup> Counterforce, the doctrine of disarming strikes against an adversary's nuclear capabilities, did not see much development because of the infeasibility of any such strike. No nation could locate, target, and destroy the thousands of warheads that mature nuclear nations such as the Soviet Union possessed, or even the dozens or hundreds of warheads that budding nuclear nations held.

Today that balance has deteriorated with hypersonic precision guided munitions (HPGMs)<sup>12</sup> presenting a new destabilizing force in the realm of nuclear deterrence. The strategy of counterforce creates a first strike incentive proportional to the chance of the strategy succeeding. Any advances towards a more effective counterforce strategy will, using the logic of Jervis and Schelling, destabilize the world as national leaders become more suspicious of one another. For a counterforce strategy to succeed, the counterforce attacker must find a target state's nuclear weapons and destroy the weapons before the defender can launch them. Ideally, the attacker uses a small non-nuclear strike force to discourage nuclear retaliation. Thus, reconnaissance systems with greater reach and faster high-accuracy weapon platforms will make counterforce strategies more effective. Reconnaissance systems have matured rapidly over the last four decades, but weapon speeds have begun increasingly rapidly with advances in hypersonic propulsion systems. With the reconnaissance systems having already matured, HPGMs provide the final piece to creating an effective counterforce strategy separate from nuclear armageddon. HPGMs have great flexibility in the targets they can hit and they can receive new target assignments after entering the field. Leaders who observe HPGM deployments on their borders will then have to treat HPGMs as counterforce weapons regardless of the HPGM operators' intentions.

In discussing these new weapons, I begin with an assessment of the efficacy of modern counterforce and the subsequent need to treat retargetable HPGMs as potential counterforce weapons. After concluding that counterforce has become a viable strategy, I explore how HPGMs' speed and accuracy enable them to better fulfill counterforce roles than current PGMs' characteristics. Then I provide an analysis of the impact of modern weapons' retargeting abilities on nuclear deterrence theory. Finally, I provide an

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<sup>11</sup>See (Schelling, 1960; Jervis, *Deterrence Theory Revisited*, 1979; 1989; Narang, 2013; Huth & Russett, 1984; Achen & Snidal, 1989; George & Smoke, 1989; Lebow & Stein, 1989; Maxwell, 1968; Weinstein, 1969; Glaser, 1989)

<sup>12</sup>The category of HPGMs includes munitions, typically missiles, which can reach or exceed Mach 5 (five times the speed of sound - hypersonic) at any point in flight and which have systems or subsystems capable of making mid-flight trajectory corrections (precision).

overview of the consequences for great powers, minor nuclear powers, and arms control theorists. I then finish with a proposal to adopt a grand strategy of restraint to mitigate the most destabilizing effects of target ambiguity.

### **The Escalation Route of Counterforce**

The decision for statesmen to launch counterforce strikes has become a more serious possibility than during the Cold War. Nuclear theory for the last half decade has assumed a stable relation between nuclear armed states, with states that lack nuclear weapons rarely factoring into the equation. The game theorist Thomas Schelling outlined nuclear theory as one in which nuclear armed states made credible threats to annihilate one another's population and thus completely bypass the long conventional war that preceded an army's advance to a major population center (Schelling, 1966). Schelling recognized that the immediate effects of a nuclear strike made such a strike dangerous even more than the following casualty count (Schelling, 1966, p. 20). For a nation considering the launch of nuclear weapons, the threat must exist that the target nation will launch a counter strike and destroy the contemplating nation in order to maintain a strategic balance. The problem of commitment to use nuclear weapons requires a solution of determining when to use such weapons. Typically, nuclear theorists assume that a state will use nuclear weapons in order to either preserve the immediate boundaries of a state or in retaliation for a nuclear strike. However, one wargame study has shown that in a conflict between nuclear armed states, "players were willing to suffer major conventional defeats before considering nuclear use" (Pauly, 2018, p. 178). Deterrence in the study played a major role in determining whether participants in wargames escalated to nuclear attacks, due to the expected reciprocal response (Pauly, 2018, p. 179). Strategic stability can then exist as long as a state with nuclear weapons assumes that the use of said weapons will incur a nuclear counter attack.

The question remains of whether leaders will actually use such weapons during a time of war. Reid B.C. Pauly of Brown University conducted the aforementioned study which showed that leaders will favor restraint when determining whether to use nuclear weapons. The study used a sample of 26 wargames to determine the thresholds for nuclear use among key decision makers in states (Pauly, 2018, p. 160). Using the variables of deterrence, practicality, ethics, precedent, and reputation, the wargames took place with 24 out of 26 players choosing not to employ nuclear weapons. Above all, players who did not initiate nuclear attacks withheld their weapons out of fear of retaliation from hostile nuclear players. The only two instances of nuclear use occurred

when fighting against non-nuclear armed adversaries. A weak point of the study came from Paul's use of China, Russia, and the United States as players without including any of the smaller nuclear-armed states.

For counterforce theory, the decision not to use nuclear weapons even when facing heavy losses presents a clear problem if using Schelling's logic. From Schelling's standpoint, the threat of nuclear use, no matter how irrational suicidal maneuvers may appear, keeps attackers at bay. When considering counterforce strikes, a strike against a defending country's nuclear forces may not escalate to the level of reciprocal nuclear exchange. Using the study's conclusions, if a defender suffers an attack that destroys the majority of the defender's nuclear strategic forces but not major population centers, then the counterforce attacker may determine that the defender will not conduct a nuclear retaliatory strike. Since major population centers serve as the targets of deterrent strikes, a counterforce strike does not guarantee that a defender seeking a reciprocal strike will counterattack the initial aggressor's population centers. However, the defender retaliating against the attacker's population centers, if even possible after a counterforce strike, incurs the equally high risk of the attacking nation directly targeting the population centers in a third strike against the crippled defender. As a result, deterrence logic can form an even more perverse paradox than normal where the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons enables escalation all the way to a counterforce strike without nuclear attacks against cities occurring.

A second study of counterforce escalation explores the route that Chinese strategic planners may take in response to a strike against Chinese nuclear forces. Caitlin Tamalidge's study makes an important point by recognizing that conventional military preparations infringe on the realm of counterforce (Tamalidge, 2017, p. 51). Any planning to neutralize bombers, submarines, and missile batteries can easily translate to plans to destroy nuclear bombers, nuclear submarines, and nuclear missile silos. A counterforce strike could accompany a conventional war as a way of neutralizing an adversaries' nuclear strike option. In the study's scenario of a war between the US and China over Taiwan, strikes against the Chinese mainland could occur in order to disable air bases and naval installations (Tamalidge, 2017, pp. 66-68). While in such a situation the US may not directly target nuclear weapons, the idea of waging a conventional war in the skies above the Chinese mainland while accepting the risk that a barrage of nuclear-armed missiles may launch against the US comes across as hard to believe. Assuming the outbreak of a conventional war between nuclear-armed states, then the opportunity to cripple an adversary's guaranteed ability to strike becomes more appealing.

### **Counterforce Feasibility in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

No counterforce strike has ever occurred. Many mature nuclear-armed nations have attempted to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons in prospective nuclear states from South Africa to Iran, but not to destroy the arsenals of nations that already have weapons. In the case of North Korea, the US has used sanctions against the regime but has not threatened a strike designed to destroy the weapons with force. Part of the rationale of restraint has resulted from the simple fact that conducting a single strike with the accuracy and force to destroy a country's nuclear weapons could not occur before. Weapons did not have the accuracy or the speed to destroy hardened (armored) targets. Furthermore, nations could not reliably determine the exact location of the hundreds or thousands of warheads that a nuclear state possessed. Major technological advancements over the last three decades however have made counterforce strikes possible.

Keir Lieber and Daryl Press examined the implications of massively improved munitions accuracy on counterforce theory. Lieber and Press point to the introduction of advanced computers which have substantially improved the capabilities of weapons as the main driving factor in counterforce change (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 10). Lieber and Press make an important point that nuclear arsenals have not proven as inherently survivable as some may assume (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 15). The fact that states with nuclear weapons have continued to compete intensely in the conventional military realm does not only have to do with projecting power but maintaining national and nuclear defenses. If nuclear weapons proved inherently survivable, then no security competition should occur among nuclear armed states (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 15). But credibility thresholds and survivability remain questionable, and as degrading assessments of either appear, opportunities to exploit weakness emerge. According to Lieber and Press, three factors form the basis of nuclear weapons protection: hardening, concealment, and redundancy (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 16). Counterforce attacks must thus successfully neutralize a large number of diverse and stealthy weapons. Targeting nuclear weapons typically requires that the targeting entity possess weapons which can penetrate the armor of hardened silos and which can locate mobile missile launch platforms. Accuracy plays the determining role in the ability to destroy underground armored nuclear missile silos. The accuracy of Sea Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) has increased from a 9% hardened target kill chance to 80% since 1985, and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles have increased from ~57% to 80% (20% failure factor for both). However, these two statistics complement massive increases in reliability for missiles to include rapid

retargeting capabilities that can adapt to failures mid-launch (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 20;23;24). Even worse for nuclear stability, the authors calculate that a weapon needs only a 10-15 meter accuracy window in order to successfully deliver a nuclear strike that does not kill beyond the target facility (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 30).

New advances in targeting have further assisted the decline in nuclear survivability. Reconnaissance assets have become much more effective in locating nuclear forces than in the preceding century. For the triad, nuclear submarines, mobile launchers, silos, and bombers no longer have the ability to hide during peacetime. Modified Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellites enable operating countries to make regular passes over hostile territory and determine the locations of both fixed launch points and mobile points intermittently (Lieber & Press, 2017, pp. 38-42). Lieber and Press then mention that when combined with airborne surveillance systems, these satellite surveillance systems can give real-time information about the location of nuclear forces. All of these developments point to a decrease in the ambiguity about location and warhead effectiveness. Nonetheless, actually getting missiles close enough to deliver their warheads without triggering a nuclear strike poses an entirely different problem.

### **A New Breed of Weapons**

Newly operational HPGMs have two distinguishing elements: accuracy and speed within accuracy. Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) have existed for decades, but have lacked the speed and range to pose serious counterforce threats. Lieber and Press used a gravity B61 bomb when forming the simulation of a low-casualty counterforce strike (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 31). Using large bombers to maneuver bombs into hostile airspace directly over targets hardly guarantees that the bombs will ever reach their targets. Additionally, the large time window between launching bombers and current transonic missiles ensures that the leader of a target country has ample time to respond. Traditional ICBMs however have the speed and range, but they lack the accuracy to destroy a hardened target without using a high-yield warhead. Using a high yield warhead will destroy the entire country along with the country's nuclear weapons (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 31). HPGMs combine the most potent attributes of both ICBMs and sub/trans-sonic PGMs to create a new era of destabilization.

HPGMs fall into three categories: hypersonic cruise missiles (HCMs), hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs), and hypersonic ballistic missiles (HBMs). Of these categories, hypersonic cruise missiles present the most destabilizing force due to their superior

accuracy, speed, and range relative to their size (Dorn, 2005, p. 13). Hypersonic cruise missiles, with their widely publicized nature, have become the topic of hot debate. On the one hand, the name implies an incredible speed, but the Mach 5 (five times the speed of sound) speed of a hypersonic missile does not compare with the Mach 20 speed of an ICBM (Reny, 2020, p. 52). If hypersonic cruise missiles replace cruise missiles, then the hypersonic variants should still have the accuracy of cruise missiles. Current cruise missiles such as the US-designed Tomahawk can hit targets within the 10-15 meter range that Lieber and Press specified for their tests but not before leaders have the opportunity to react (CSIS Missile Defense Project, 2021). Though the accuracy of many new hypersonic cruise missiles remains classified, one report of the new Chinese DF-17 missile suggests that these new cruise missiles have even greater accuracy than current cruise missiles (CSIS Missile Defense Project, 2021; Sayler, 2022). The accuracy of hypersonic cruise missiles matters much more than the missile defense evasion aspects or the purported stealth capabilities of such weapons. For delivering nuclear strikes, ICBMs already adequately fill the anti-missile defense role and can wipe out a country easily enough without necessarily destroying second-strike capabilities.

### **Ambiguous Targeting**

HPGMs pose a particular threat to stability because of their wide selection of targets and ability to retarget after deployment. While these weapons often serve defensive purposes in the minds of planners and designers, the leaders of countries hostile to the deployers assume the worst-case scenarios. Within the realm targeting three distinct scenarios arise: tactical, strategic counterforce, and strategic nuclear deterrent. Most HPGMs deploy with tactical and strategic nuclear deterrent intentions but can receive new target assignments after deployment and support a different strategy than at deployment (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2017, p. 3). Since HPGMs can receive new target data and have fewer limitations on reach than previous generations of PGMs, the physical limitations which narrowly defined capability cease to create easily distinguishable categories.

Using Jervis's logic of the security dilemma, the retargeting ability of HPGMs presents a seriously destabilizing force in nuclear affairs. Infact, Jervis directly addresses the problem of missile acquisition for nuclear forces in his seminal piece "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma". Jervis writes that under the security dilemma, in which increases to one state's security come at the cost of another state's security, the dual purpose of ICBMs as anti-city and anti-nuclear weapon missiles hides the strategic

purpose of the weapons. ICBMs however require high yield warheads to compensate for their poor accuracy which leave ICBMs incapable of destroying nuclear weapons without destroying everything around them (Lieber & Press, 2017, p. 32). Jervis on the same page makes a small statement about how strategic planners at the time (1978) viewed then-transonic cruise missiles as potential counterforce weapons (Jervis, 1978, p. 206). If HPGMs directly replace tactical cruise missiles and strategic ballistic missiles, then hypersonic weapons have indistinguishable purposes while increasing the advantages that a first-strike posture affords. The result advances the world towards a “doubly dangerous” (Jervis, 1978, p. 211) strategic environment in which first-strikes can succeed and offensive and defensive missile deployments appear identical.

Regardless of whether a weapon deploys with benign intentions, modern weapons can hit targets of almost any size and type. National leaders then treat these weapons as supporting the worst potential scenario. As Jervis discussed, if a statesman perceives a scenario which threatens catastrophic national losses, then the statesman will react more brashly than normal (Jervis, 1988, p. 697). Thus, regardless of the intent of the weapon initially, the ease of an operator to repurpose an HPGM for a counterforce scenario makes all HPGMs potential counterforce weapons.

### **An Increasingly Ambiguous Nuclear World**

Nuclear theory has thus far focused on discussions of deterrence, MAD, and the preservation of those concepts. Technically, discussions have revolved around the weapons that carry nuclear warheads and their countermeasures. These countermeasures include anti-ballistic missile systems, such as those in the anti-ballistic missile treaty, thus far only cover weapons that allow countries' militaries to respond to a nuclear missile launch (Kimball, 2020). However, since the chance of a nuclear missile launch remains low, the debate about nuclear weapons and their role has largely fallen to the wayside (U.S. Senate, 2023). Nuclear weapons at present lurk in the shadows with no clear indication as to what may trigger their use or when, if ever, they will see use due to their historic non-use.

But these weapons exist. Their existence alone constrains the actions of politicians. Historically the hegemonic competition between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics remained cold with the mutual understanding that the loser of a conventional war could initiate a nuclear war. Thus, the Cold War drew to a close with Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan famously declaring in 1985 that a

“nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, nd). The sentiment that a major war could bear no fruit pervaded a world in which nuclear deterrence and Mutually Assured Destruction (Fairbanks Jr, 2004) underpinned discussions. But these sentiments have begun to falter as missiles’ targets become more ambiguous.

As the world becomes more ambiguous, nations will pursue older and superficially irrational methods of maintaining security. Great powers will increasingly depend on geographic buffers while small nuclear powers will pursue asymmetric conventional counterforce capabilities. Furthermore, The Cold War-era strategy of Arms Control will fail to resolve these conflicts. However, a policy of restraint can abate the threat that HPGMs pose.

### **Great Power Responses**

Despite the implications of more widespread HPGMs, effective mass production HPGMs have yet to enter service. Neither the United States, Russia, China, nor India have created a weapon which could meet the requirements of sustained hypersonic flight and versatility that a cruise-missile style HPGM offers. Yet the destabilizing world has made great powers seek buffers.

When assessing the pursuit of buffers, great powers can fall into two categories: naval powers and land powers. For naval powers, the effects of HPGM proliferation become less pronounced. Yet for land powers, ambiguity leads to attempts to create buffer zones through conquest. Subsequent application of HPGM proliferation to modern territorial disputes can therefore make superficially irrational conquests rational.

The definition of a great power remains open to debate, but generally a state with a military, economy, and general level of influence greater than the rest of the states within the international system can offer a working definition. Russia, China, and the United States today constitute the three great powers within the international system according to the congressional report service (Congressional Research Services, 2023, p. 1). Debates persist about whether the United States still has the status of hegemon or unipole, or whether Russia should continue to count as a great power. Indeed, the U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has labeled China as the “pacing challenge” of the United States in reflecting the diminished status of Russia as a rival great power (Garamone, 2021). Despite the decline of Russia from the days of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation persists as a major international competitor as the invasion of Ukraine shows.

Within the context of land powers, buffer states have traditionally restricted the movement of armies. The logic goes that if a large geographical buffer separates two warring states, then the additional time and complexity of moving an army decreases the effectiveness of military maneuvers (Atzili & Kim, 2023, p. 650). Yet with advances in military technology, an argument has arisen that buffer states have become much less effective than in the past.

Buffers have not become less effective though. Critics of buffer zones argue that since missiles and aircraft traverse the air at great speeds, the ground beneath them matters less than in the times of grand armies (Atzili & Kim, 2023, p. 653). But the physical territory has never had greater relevance than today. First, aircraft and missiles must require runways and launchers. Those ground-based assets then need territory to stage on. Throughout the debates of airpower and missiles ground has received surprisingly little attention despite the fact that nothing remains permanently airborne.

For airborne weapons, the distance they travel directly affects the time they need to reach their targets. A missile battery on the border between two warring countries can launch a missile that takes less time to reach a target than a missile from a battery far from the border. In a simple distance - rate - time calculation, a leader who wishes to buy more time and who cannot control the speed of a missile will increase the distance from the missile to the missile's probable targets.

Regarding specific great land powers, Russia currently stands alone. India has risen in economic strength but the Indian military has yet to become a major international force (Allison, 2023, p. 3). Thus India will still count as a minor power, even if a relatively strong one. Russia's status as a land power derives from Russia's military orientation towards the continental powers of Europe and Central Asia. Russia prioritizes the army, then the navy, and then the air force in spending (Crane, Olikier, & Nichiporuk, 2019). Russia's relative strength enables Russia to pursue the creation of a buffer whereas weaker states cannot easily create buffers.

Advances in missile technology have at least partially motivated Russian leaders to pursue a substantial geographical buffer. The apprehension over missile advances becomes evident in the withdrawal of both the U.S. and Russia from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 2019. Russian President Vladimir Putin cited the development of a ground-launched variant of the tomahawk cruise missile as grounds for his withdrawal of Russia from the treaty (Bodner, 2019). A couple years later, in the critical diplomatic phase before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Putin referenced

hypersonic cruise missiles in Ukraine as unacceptable (Soldatkin & Osborn, 2021). In all of his arguments, Putin cites reduction in time to target as the main threat that closer missile batteries to Russia pose.

While the United States never officially announced the movement of batteries into Ukraine, the ambiguity between strategic and tactical weapons had grown substantially. The United States military deemed the modified Mk-41 Vertical Launch Systems in Poland incompatible with Tomahawk cruise missiles (Korda & Kristensen, 2019, p. 302). In considering that distinction adequate and the Russian response an overreaction, the United States clearly failed to recognize the impact of growing target ambiguity. Much as in the prisoner's dilemma, Russian leaders cannot take a chance on ambiguous weapons. If these launchers could launch tomahawk cruise missiles and successor hypersonic cruise missiles, then they could do as much damage to frontline supply depots as to Russian nuclear forces. Thus, the Russian leadership will seek to increase the physical distance between potential missile launch sites and Russian nuclear missiles.

For naval powers the necessity of buffers remains but becomes less acute. By their nature, naval powers already possess oceans as buffers. Nonetheless, the two major naval powers, China and the United States, have sizable land buffers which follow the logic of the land power buffers when encountering target ambiguity. The ambiguity for these countries will however become worse as the conventional prompt global strike program matures.

The Chinese military will react more aggressively to missile batteries on islands in the South Pacific as target ambiguity continues to grow. Thus far, China has maintained a relatively passive posture regarding nuclear forces. The Chinese military has long sought to use nuclear weapons as a form of deterrence against nuclear blackmail, going back to the experience of the Korean war (Denmark & Talmadge, 2019, p. 3). The recent construction of additional nuclear missile silos and strengthening of the Chinese nuclear triad has subsequently sparked fears of increasing Chinese aggression (Copp & Baldor, 2022). Yet the Chinese government maintains the country's nuclear no first-use pledge. The nuclear buildup then clearly represents a response to the deterioration of strategic stability.

### **Minor Nuclear Powers**

The United States and Russia both developed nuclear arsenals at the beginning of the Cold War with one another in their sights. These two nations have subsequently remained the center of the nuclear debate, especially since the United States and Russia have 90% of the world's nuclear stockpile with ~6000 warheads each (Davenport, 2022). Such large stockpiles have given the United States and Russia highly resilient nuclear forces, since any decapitating counterforce strike must destroy the vast majority of these weapons to prevent retaliation. Further, the United States and Russia enjoy superb geographic boundaries with the US possessing two ocean barriers and Russia the vastness of the Siberian tundra. For the rest of the nuclear community, the safety of massive stockpiles does not exist. States with small nuclear stockpiles have a higher chance of becoming counterforce targets simply because a completely effective strike has a higher chance of occurring against smaller nuclear stockpiles.

Real-time information does not matter as much for China, the US, or Russia as all three can develop reliable defenses against one another's surveillance assets (Lieber & Press, 2017, pp. 46-47). For smaller countries, the effects become much more profound. India, Israel, Iran, and Pakistan for example do not have anywhere near the surveillance capabilities that the US, China, and Russia have. However, all four have alliances of some kind with these three superpowers. More importantly, while most physical forces take a long time to stage for any kind of operation, satellites can survey points all across the globe, and airborne systems can travel long distances in short periods of time.

Even with advancements in technology, the chance of a nation conducting a counterforce strike remains low. Within that small chance of counterforce strikes occurring, India and Israel have greater incentives to conduct strikes and higher chances of succeeding than their fellow nuclear-armed nations. Israel sits close to Iran, which has come close to acquiring nuclear weapons in recent years and which Israel has vowed to thwart. India sits next to Pakistan, both countries have nuclear weapons, and both country's militaries have fought several conventional wars after developing nuclear weapons. Israel has a close military relation with the United States, Iran with Russia, Pakistan with China, and India possessing a somewhat neutral stance though having good relations with Russia and the US.

India and Pakistan both have around 160 nuclear warheads each making their arsenals much smaller than those of Russia and the US (Davenport, 2022). India has already begun considering counterforce options especially given the incredibly fraught relation that India and Pakistan have. Pakistan has made threats of first-use nuclear

strikes against Indian forces which have motivated Indian military planners to develop contingency plans (Clary & Narang, 2018). India possesses a superior conventional military force to Pakistan's and has a much larger population and economy, all of which substantially improve India's odds of winning a conventional war against Pakistan. If using US surveillance assets, India could conceivably use precision missile attacks to destroy Pakistan's nuclear weapons and crush Pakistan's smaller military, ending decades of conflict.

Israeli leaders have adopted a stance of never allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons which indicates a potential interest in counterforce strikes. Israel and Iran have had an incredibly tenuous and widely-publicized relationship going back to Israel's founding in the 1940s. Iranian leaders have threatened to destroy Israel and Israel to crush Iran's nuclear program (Nader, 2013, p. 21). The Israeli leadership clearly sees Iranian nuclear weapons as a threat and shares these views with the United States as the U.S. sanctions policy towards Iran indicates (Robinson, 2022). Using advanced surveillance assets, the U.S. could monitor the locations of Iranian nuclear weapons with great effectiveness since capable surveillance assets already exist in contrast to the mid-Cold War Pakistan and India case. Destroying Iranian nuclear weapons before they appear in large numbers presents an attractive option given the harsh Israeli rhetoric about Iranian nuclear acquisitions.

A new era of counterforce has arrived. Counterforce strikes in past decades could occur, but not without using a massive nuclear strike that bore little difference from a devastating nuclear attack against population centers. Major advances in surveillance and accuracy have enabled military planners to seriously consider decapitating strikes against adversaries' nuclear arsenals. While for nations with thousands of nuclear weapons such as the United States and Russia the effects of such a transformation bear little consequence, the effects become more important for smaller regional rivals such as Pakistan and India. The question of whether a nation will launch a nuclear attack in response to a debilitating strike, if the target nation even has the capability afterward, gives maneuvering room to planners of a counterforce strike. In the future, states such as Israel may use counterforce strikes against emerging nuclear powers such as Iran in order to prevent rivals from acquiring robust nuclear arsenals. Nations that already have nuclear weapons but do not have stockpiles on par with the US and Russia, such as India, will consider increasing the sizes of their arsenals to improve their survivability in the event of a counterforce strike.

### **Mitigating Target Ambiguity**

In order to mitigate target ambiguity, countries must pursue policies of restraint. Arms control will not work for the simple reason that countries tend to follow arms control regulations with such powerful weapons only when convenient. The complete collapse of the Cold-War and immediate post-war treaties offer the best evidence for why arms control won't work. Furthermore, as previously discussed, complete withdrawal or overextension of military forces will do little to mitigate ambiguity.

Nuclear arms control has seen a massive backslide over the last couple of decades. In February of 2023, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced the suspension of the New START treaty, the last nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia (Bugos, 2023). The suspension of the treaty follows the collapse of the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile treaty. The collapse of the IRBM treaty occurred only a year after Russia announced the successful test of a nuclear-powered cruise missile (Gady, 2018). Two weeks after the collapse, the United States tested a ground-launched Tomahawk cruise missile (Korda & Kristensen, 2019, p. 302). With these two developments, both countries clearly began deploying new technology which had both tactical and strategic uses.

The growing ambiguity in target selections makes limiting strategic weapons more difficult because military leaders will observe a limitation of tactical capabilities. With China, Russia, and the United States entering a more unstable world, tactical weapons will become more attractive. Hence the creation of the CPGS program in the first place. Any arms control treaties that arise will almost certainly govern unambiguous strategic weapons or weapons which have yet to become feasible.

Maintaining a posture of restraint however will substantially mitigate the worst effects of target ambiguity. Using the United States as an example, keeping forces in Japan and Germany/Poland but giving Russia a buffer and China an island buffer will keep tensions low. The need for HPGMs will decrease and no imminent risk of a short-range hypersonic missile attack will exist. For smaller countries, keeping U.S. forces back will reduce the risk that a smaller country will launch a counterforce strike that a broader coalition can exploit.

The American political theory of retrenchment best illustrates how adopting a secluded international strategic position can incentivize the development of wildly destabilizing weapons and make such a posture, ironically, threatening. The theory of retrenchment promises a more stable world through the removal of forward American

forces abroad. The arguments in favor of retrenchment often point to America's geographical position for evidence of inherent American security. The wide oceans on either side of America create effective buffers against any adversary's attempt to invade. Furthermore, the weak neighbors to the North and South of the United States pose little threat of invasion. Beyond the risk of invasion, America's nuclear arsenal guarantees protection from any massive strategic attack (Posen, 2013). These conditions then create the basis for putting more pressure on allies to contribute to their own defenses and thus alleviate some of the economic burden of defense that the United States bears.

These arguments closely follow the older isolationist discourse that pervaded America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Critics usually cite the effects of reduced deterrent capabilities, less assurance for allies, and a reduced reaction time for international crises (Lieberman & Kyl, 2013). Yet the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has indicated a shift towards constraining American involvement abroad. If calls for withdrawal increase, then demand for budget cuts will follow.

Yet the issue of how to actually implement retrenchment has led to a division between isolationism and what Professors Mearsheimer and Walt call "Offshore Balancing". Under Offshore Balancing, the United States moves military forces only to regions where a regional hegemon has begun to grow. Mearsheimer and Walt believe that the time a regional hegemon needs to grow translates to ample warning of said hegemon's rise (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). While cost reduction serves as the ultimate goal, transporting troops and equipment to a continent in response to a threat requires additional funds. If the United States could avoid having to move massive amounts of equipment and material entirely, then military costs could fall substantially.

With these elements in mind, the appeal of the Conventional Global Prompt Strike (CGPS) program grows ever greater. The basic premise of the program, to create a set of HPGMs which can deliver conventional warheads from the U.S. mainland to any target in the world in under an hour, promises to fix the problems of retrenchment (Congressional Research Services, 2021, p. 1). For the critics of retrenchment, the program offers a solution to reduced global deterrence. The ability to threaten a massive conventional missile strike that launches from the U.S. mainland differs little from the same threat but from forward bases, on paper at least. Former U.S. President Barack Obama expressed the exact same beliefs when he described how the program could provide regional deterrence (Congressional Research Services, 2021, p. 1). In fact, current congressional support for the program has derived from the U.S. reducing the footprint of overseas conventional forces (Congressional Research Services, 2021, p. 3).

Building up HPGMs takes place at the U.S. mainland and during times of peace as opposed to close to an adversary and during times of high tension. Additionally, conventional precision weapons have the unique ability to hit any target as opposed to a nuclear ICBM's fixed target coordinates. On top of the variable targeting of the missiles, a large number of missiles launching from the U.S. mainland can mirror a nuclear missile strike and trigger an accidental retaliation.

However, assuming a high threshold for triggering a nuclear retaliation, conventional responses become more probable. For a foreign leader gauging the buildup of the U.S GSW arsenal, the target of a strike from the arsenal will remain ambiguous. The ambiguity may then increase the probability of war, or at a minimum strikes against, a retrenched United States.

Countries' leaders who move in a similar direction as retrenchment or which seek to leave an entrenched position will face similar temptations to develop GSWs. In the coming world, isolated powers will become less removed and will pose as great a threat as expansive militaries once did.

The latest round of arms races has begun destabilizing the world. In contrast to past decades however, the ambiguity of the target selection for these new sets of weapons drives the instability. Including the ambiguity of modern HPGMs in strategic planning can explain why states today take actions that their leaders consider defensive and opposing leaders offensive. Addressing the new era of ambiguity will require restraint on the part of policy-makers around the world and avoidance of extreme force restructuring.

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## **Saving the Mighty Mekong: The Case for Additional US Engagement with the Mekong Sub-region**

Alexis Turek

American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.

*The Mekong River has provided food, agriculture, and employment for millions of people in Southeast Asia for thousands of years. This storied history may well be coming to an end following decades of harmful Chinese damming practices, a regional overreliance on hydropower, and climate change. Severe drought, water shortages, and major biodiversity loss have led to a marked decrease in agriculture and fishing yields, which could lead to an economic downturn and/or food shortages if the current situation continues. It is in the best interest of the US to aid in mitigating these risks. Such efforts would support US goals regarding environmental protection and sustainable energy, and also provide an opportunity for US-Southeast Asian cooperation that the region will be more receptive to; as it will not require states to “choose” between China and the US.*

### **Introduction**

The Mekong River is one of the world’s great rivers, which has long provided food and income for millions of people within Southeast Asia. The Mekong is 5,000 miles long, beginning in China’s Tibetan Plateau and ending in the Mekong Delta. Flowing through six countries: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam; the Mekong’s incredible biodiversity provides essential natural resources for the nearly 65 million people that depend on it in the Lower Mekong River Basin (Mekong River Commission (MRC), 2023). While the Mekong has provided for the people that live near it for thousands of years, climate change and harmful damming practices have resulted in severe drought, water shortages, and major biodiversity loss (Eyler & Carr, 2021). Beyond the threat posed to regional ecology, losing access to the vital resources of the Mekong could have significant effects on the security and development of impacted states. Mitigating the impacts of dams along the Mekong will require significant focus and investment from regional actors and intergovernmental organizations. It is crucial that the United States assist in these efforts, not only to fulfill our promises to fighting

climate change, but also to ensure that we can protect our own interests in Southeast Asia. The Biden administration has stated their desire to improve relations with Southeast Asian states through increased trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement (The White House, 2022). Investing in the Mekong allows the US to improve its relations with Southeast Asian states through engagement that ASEAN will be more receptive to (Stromseth, 2019; Polling & Natalegawa, 2023). Focusing US engagement with Southeast Asia in an area other than defense allows the US to communicate that they are interested in working with Southeast Asia in ways other than competition with China and are willing to work with ASEAN on issues that will significantly impact Southeast Asian populations.

### **An Overview of the Problem**

The massive increase in occurrences of drought is one of the biggest issues facing the Mekong sub-region due to its impacts on agriculture, fishing, and local economies. Over the last four years the Mekong has experienced a severe drought that has resulted in the lowest water levels in more than 100 years (Hunt, 2022). When the annual monsoon rains failed to arrive, dry conditions and extreme weather occurred. This severe drought has had a predictable, but still devastating, effect on the populations that rely on the flooding for food, fresh water, crops, and income. Fish catches in the region are down 80%, as the rising water levels serve as a biological cue for fish to spawn and complete patterns of migration (Lovgren, 2019; Eyler, 2019; Keo & Lipes, 2020). This significantly reduced fish catch is worsened by the lack of water to grow crops, like rice and other staple foods. This has the potential to lead to a food shortage crisis, especially as these disruptions to water flow and droughts become more common.

When attempting to determine the root cause of these worsening periods of drought, two main culprits arise. The first of these is climate change. The cumulative effects of climate change can be felt around the world, but this is a particularly salient issue for those within Southeast Asia (Kummu & Sarkkula, 2008). Within the Mekong region climate change has been responsible for more intense and shorter wet seasons, frequent extreme weather events, and longer periods of drought. While climate change is certainly an issue of great concern for policy makers, many scholars argue that the far bigger issue for countries along the Mekong is the improper damming practices undertaken by China and other upstream states.

China began building dams along the Mekong in 1990, causing concern from those downstream that they could potentially use these dams to restrict water going into Southeast Asia. There are currently a total of 11 mega-dams along the Mekong in China, and numerous other smaller dams along tributaries (Eyler, Weatherby, & Kwan, 2020). These dams have the capacity to hold as much water as the Chesapeake Bay, meaning that China can store massive amounts of water coming from the Mekong (or Lancang, as it's called in Chinese) that cannot be used downstream. While China has long attempted to deny any such restrictions of water, satellite imagery and physical gauge evidence provided by the Mekong River Commission shows clear evidence that goes against the prevailing Chinese narrative (Basist & Williams, 2020).

The Mekong River Delta has experienced record setting levels of drought since 2019, resulting in the worst river conditions for more than 60 years in some communities (Hunt, 2022). The Mekong River Commission conducted a study into the dams along the Upper Mekong, confirming long-held suspicions about Chinese water management policy (Eyler, Weatherby, & Kwan, 2020). This study provided significant amounts of data concerning the amount of water restriction, when restrictions took place, and for how long China restricted water from being accessed by its downstream neighbors (Eyler, Weatherby, & Kwan, 2020). The report's most significant finding is that in 2019 the upper region of the Mekong within China received high to average levels of precipitation, yet the hydroelectric dams continued to restrict record-high levels of water even as Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam experienced an unprecedented wet season drought. This restricted water was then used to produce hydropower for Chinese consumers (Basist & Williams, 2020). When looking at the data provided by the Eyes on Earth Study, it becomes clear that if Chinese hydropower dams had not restricted such high levels of water, the downstream countries would have experienced average water levels within the Lower Mekong (Eyler, Weatherby, & Kwan, 2020). While scholars had been speculating as much for years, the definitive proof provided by the Mekong River Commission shed much needed light on just how significant harmful damming practices are in an area already struggling from the ecological impacts of climate change. Despite this discovery, China's seeming apathy and inability to change its damming practices in the years since has only resulted in the problem increasing in severity (Bhandari., 2023).

In 2020, amidst an extreme drought within the Lower Mekong River Delta, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that the main reason for the drought was a lack of rain, a problem that China suffered from as well (Funaioland & Hart, 2020). With this statement from China, the governments of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam

enacted policies to manage problems arising from the drought. With fish catches down nearly 80% and many within the area without access to fresh water at the height of the drought, the governments of Southeast Asia were forced to dedicate resources to fight growing food insecurity and competition over limited amounts of water. This high level of dishonesty and misinformation is not unusual for the Chinese government, as they have been famously secretive over the location and practices of these hydropower dams since their inception (Fawthrop, 2020). While China has justified their actions as merely exercising their right to exploit their own natural resources, by reserving so much water they are preventing the countries downstream from using their own natural resources. Knowing that the downstream countries are less developed and possess less international influence, there is little that can be done without stronger actors working together.

While this is already a complicated issue, the issue over use of the Mekong becomes even more complex when you consider how important hydropower is to the region. As states around the world begin to realize the cumulative impact that climate change is having on our environment, finding renewable sources of energy is becoming increasingly important. Countries like China, who produce large amounts of carbon emissions, have been steadily working to develop scientific and policy solutions to climate change. Given that China has a number of large rivers, using hydropower dams is an effective way to produce massive amounts of power, while also reducing emissions and moving China closer to their goal of becoming carbon neutral (Xie, 2021). As China becomes more urbanized and expands domestic manufacturing, the country will need increased amounts of power. Purchasing this power from their own hydroelectric dams makes economic sense and has the additional benefit of being a more carbon neutral form of energy production than burning coal (Columbia University, 2021). Given the number of people and the increasingly large demand for power within China, hydropower is a far more effective solution than solar or wind, making the creation of these dams a rational decision for Chinese policy makers (Chik, 2023). While this decision may be in the best interests of the Chinese government, it has severely negative impacts on the other states along the Mekong.

This paper will now examine the situation within each of the nations along the Mekong, in order to determine areas of vulnerability and identify potential areas of mitigation for the US and other interested parties.

### **Myanmar**

The case of Myanmar is significantly outlier from the rest of the Mekong region. The ongoing Civil War has thrown the entire nation into chaos, with ethnic armies and

National Unity Government (NUG) backed militias fighting the military junta's forces. The fighting within Myanmar has had significant impacts on ASEAN as a whole, which has struggled to reach consensus on a potential solution for the conflict. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) has cited the instability created by the ongoing Civil War as a major contributor to stalled discussions regarding environmental rules and regulations (Yee, 2023). Along Myanmar's borders with Laos, Thailand, and China, concerns over instability and the spread of conflict are high (Purba, 2023). These concerns began long before the Civil War broke out, due to high levels of transnational crime and illicit business within Myanmar's Northern Shan state (International Crisis Group, 2023). These illicit activities help fund the military junta, making it incredibly unlikely that they will end anytime soon. While any assistance provided by ASEAN, the US, and the international community would take a very different form for Myanmar than any other state along the Mekong, halting the conflict and bringing peace to Myanmar will improve the stability of Southeast Asia as a whole.

### **Laos**

Laos is one of the poorest states in Southeast Asia, facing slow economic growth and a growing debt crisis. In an attempt to fix its domestic economic problems, the Lao government has embarked upon an endeavor to become the "battery of Southeast Asia" (Sasipornkarn, 2021). The Lao government has made plans for the construction of nine hydroelectric dams along the Mekong, believing that energy exports can provide an opportunity for economic growth and job creation for the struggling Lao populace. The construction of these dams has been very controversial, both due to their impact on local Laotian communities, and due to the broader environmental impacts caused by further restricting the flow of the Mekong. Of the nine planned dams, two have finished construction, four are currently under construction, and the three others are currently having their plans reviewed by the Mekong River Commission (MRC) (Strangio, 2021). The MRC is a consortium made up of the Mekong states, which provides consultations and evaluates construction proposals along the Mekong. The MRC rejected the most recent report from Laos regarding the benefits and harms of its newest project. The reason for this rejection was that Laos had provided insufficient evidence that the economic benefits of this dam will outweigh the environmental harms (Strangio, 2021). Laotian dams already produce more energy than the state can use, and while energy sales have increased following regional recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction of

seven additional dams will produce far more energy than can be reasonably expected to be used or sold.

While Laos has received investment from other ASEAN states, its greatest investor by far is China. Laotian debt to China has increased dramatically since 2013, with the Lao government borrowing billions from Beijing to fund infrastructure projects as part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Lao hydroelectric dams are being constructed using the money borrowed from China, under the misguided belief that exporting hydropower can successfully carry Laos out of the unfolding economic crisis it is currently facing (Chandran, 2023). While China granted Laos short-term relief in the form of deferred repayments from 2020-2022, Lao still owes a debt equivalent to nearly 122% of its GDP to Beijing (Chandran, 2023). It is critical for the Lao government to identify alternative sectors to invest in, in order to create profitable industries that will spur economic growth and allow the government to repay its debts.

Laos has made their desire for alternative sources of investment clear, though they have historically been wary of looking towards the US due to US human rights and democracy promotion and Vietnam War legacy issues (Dolven & Lum, 2022). Investments from the US and its allies can aid Laos in developing new industries, particularly those without an outsized environmental impact. If Laos is committed to remaining an energy exporter, identifying alternative sources of energy production is critical for those who rely on the Mekong for agriculture and fishing.

### **Thailand**

Thailand plays a key role in determining the future of the Mekong River. Over the last several years, many working within the Thai government and in environmental NGOs have pushed to stop the construction of new dams along the Mekong, and push for more transparency from the Chinese government (Thongnoi, 2021). Thailand has also been pushing for the development of alternative energy sources to reduce regional dependency on hydropower. The Royal Thai government plans to gradually increase their energy production levels under the National Energy Plan (NEP) 2022, a combination of five separate plans that could potentially lead to \$4.2 billion in investment to the country (International Trade Administration, 2022). Thailand has the potential to radically refocus its energy production towards renewable sources due to its high levels of solar irradiation and abundance of bioenergy, projecting that by 2037 solar energy will account for 50% of overall energy production in Thailand (Fallin, Lee, & Poling, 2023). As the

largest consumer of hydropower in Southeast Asia, if Thailand chooses to pursue alternative sources of energy production, it will impact the entire region.

Following the election of Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin in August 2023, researchers within and outside Thailand are worried that Srettha will put an end to conservation efforts out of a desire to increase international investment and overall economic growth in Thailand (Phakdeewanich, 2023; Deetes, 2023). This concern is supported by the September 2023 signing of a deal between the Energy Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), China Datang Overseas Investment Co, and Gulf Energy Development PCL confirming the construction of the Pak Beng hydropower dam (Deetes, 2023). The current administration's focus on economic growth over environmental impacts is worrying, but can be mitigated if investment in alternative renewable energy sources can be made more attractive.

Although Thailand is a US ally, it has grown increasingly close to China. The US should work to ensure that it can improve its relationship with the Thai government in a way that does not suggest that Thailand need "choose" between working with the US over China. By providing assistance in key Thai industries, the US can ensure that Thailand's own economic interests can be pursued without threatening regional security.

### **Cambodia**

The Mekong's yearly flooding begins in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake (Fawthrop, 2020). In a typical flood season the Tonle Sap expands from approximately 2,500 km<sup>2</sup> to approximately 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> and the water depth goes from less than 1 m to 6-9.5 m (Lamberts, 2013). While most of the year the Tonle Sap is a tributary of the Mekong, early on in the wet season the flow of the Tonle Sap is reversed due to high water levels and flow in the Mekong. The water that then comes into the Tonle Sap from the Mekong accumulates in the lake and floodplain, causing massive flooding (Lamberts, 2013). This river flow reversal then transfers silt and sediment from upstream into the Mekong Basin, which can then be used to grow crops and maintain the high levels of regional biodiversity (Fawthrop, 2020; Lin & Qi, 2017). Just as importantly, this massive expansion of the Tonle Sap turns the area into the world's largest in-land fishery, which provides an essential source of food and income for the people that live there. There are an estimated 2.5 million fishermen in the Tonle Sap, who rely on the lake as the "region's rice bowl" (Eyler, nd). Beyond those communities in close geographic proximity to the Tonle Sap, there are also large numbers of seasonal migrants who come to the area to assist in fishing

and other seasonal industries that are created by the flooding (Lamberts, 2013; Eyler, 2019).

Damming and significant periods of drought have resulted in a change in flood patterns along the Mekong. Dams along the Mekong have resulted in silt levels dropping throughout the region, making it significantly more difficult to grow crops. These agricultural difficulties are compounded due to decreases in fish catches. Food insecurity is a growing issue throughout the Mekong sub-region, but particularly in Cambodia, where communities are heavily reliant upon fishing. Cambodia's leadership initially working to mitigate the negative impacts on communities around the Tonle Sap, deciding in 2020 to halt construction of its hydropower dams at Sambor and Stung Treng for the next 10 years (Thul, 2020). The decision was made in order to switch to more reliable sources of power that would not continue to harm the Mekong. While this seemed like a step in the right direction, studies determining the impact of the Stung Treng dam restarted in 2022 following an agreement between authorities and the wealthy Royal Group Company (Flynn & Pry, 2022). Such a decision is not likely to be reversed, as the new Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet made it very clear that post-pandemic economic recovery is one of his main goals (Sam, 2023; Khmer Times, 2023). Aiding in Cambodia's economic development through investment would provide the US and its allies with an excellent opportunity to ensure that the livelihoods of local communities are protected, while also providing an alternative to Chinese investment.

### **Vietnam**

Vietnam's four main economic sectors—agriculture, textiles, electronics, and energy—are all at risk due to decreases in water supply. The Mekong delta region of Vietnam is the center of production for these four key industries, as all of them rely upon consistent sources of water as an element of production (Fallon, Sawdon, Tien, & Ketelsen, 2023). Vietnam is a growing economy that is becoming increasingly reliant on manufacturing electronics and textile production as a source of income for much of its population. As with the rest of the Mekong sub-region, Vietnam utilizes hydropower as one of its main sources of energy (Fallon, Sawdon, Tien, & Ketelsen, 2023). While hydropower plants have resulted in a growing energy sector, decreased water and sediment levels have the potential to significantly impact the supply chains of other sectors of industry given insufficient reservoir levels throughout the country (Fallon, Sawdon, Tien, & Ketelsen, 2023). Long periods of drought would thus have significant economic implications, particularly in the industrial delta region. Given Vietnam's industrial specializations, it

is becoming increasingly necessary for them to diversify their energy sector away from hydropower and look towards developing manufacturing practices that will not have an outsized environmental impact. Earlier this year the US and Vietnam elevated their relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with the US pledging to aid in Vietnam's continued development (The White House, 2023). As part of this pledge the US International Development Financial Corporation (DFC) promises to continue to finance private sector projects related to Vietnam's infrastructure, climate, and energy efficiency, with a particular focus on the Mekong Delta region (The White House, 2023). While it is still too soon to determine the effectiveness of these new investments, agreements such as this are incredibly promising.

### **US Responses**

This paper will now go through two recent initiatives undertaken by the US regarding mitigating the impact of harmful damming practices along the Mekong.

Vice President Kamala Harris has announced a number of initiatives focused on strengthening US relations with the Mekong sub-region in areas such as clean energy transitions, building climate resilience, and promoting sustainable development. These initiatives are part of the Biden Administration's larger climate-focused economic goals via the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) (The White House, 2022). While many of the initiatives announced were specific to Thailand, the programs that they would create regarding Thai energy systems, agriculture, supply chains, and economic development can serve as a blueprint for future initiatives with other Southeast Asian states (The White House, 2022). As of late 2022 Vice President Harris had dedicated \$20 million of new funding for the aforementioned initiatives, almost doubling the previous 2019 US investment in regional energy projects through JUMPP (Mcpherson, 2022; The White House, 2022).

The Japan-US Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP) is a great opportunity for international investment in regional power capabilities. JUMPP was created to promote the development of a sustainable energy sector, create quality energy infrastructure, and promote private sector input and investment (Mekong-US Partnership, 2021). Additionally, JUMPP identifies ideal locations for cross-border infrastructure and matches resource concentrations with demand centers (Mekong-US Partnership, 2021). JUMPP also has been conducting feasibility studies, environmental impact assessments, and evaluates existing capabilities of Mekong countries using international standards

(Mekong-US Partnership, 2021). This is incredibly beneficial, as JUMPP has been helping to determine the most effective areas for future investment, the best areas for regional coordination, and potential private partners who can provide economic investment. In April of 2023, JUMPP released the Japan-US Mekong Power Partnership Action Plan, a document outlining cooperative projects and activities focusing on developing wind and solar power, grid integration, power market analysis, and peer-to-peer exchanges (Mekong - US Partnership, 2023). JUMPP is just one example of the many projects currently undertaken by the Mekong-U.S. Partnership, a U.S. Department of State program that promotes peace, security, prosperity, and sustainable development in the Mekong sub-region. This partnership is part of the larger cooperative efforts between the U.S. and ASEAN, supporting and implementing the ASEAN Community Vision for sustainable regional development (Mekong - US Partnership, 2021).

While the work that has already been done regarding mitigating the impacts of damming practices and climate change along the Mekong is commendable, continued support from the US and other interested parties is necessary. US policy towards the Indo-Pacific is heavily skewed towards US-China relations. While this makes sense given China's power and relative influence compared to other regional states, US policy over the last decade has left many Southeast Asian states feeling like an afterthought. If the US is serious about combating China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, it needs to seriously consider dedicating resources to improving its relationship with key regional states. As many Southeast Asian states are reliant upon China economically, the US must identify areas of engagement that all Southeast Asian states are willing to collaborate on. The environment is one of the areas where even more pro-China states like Cambodia or Laos will be willing to work with the US without fear of repercussions from China.

### **Alternative Solutions**

Given the US's competing foreign policy priorities, some may argue that the Mekong sub-region should look elsewhere for mitigating solutions to their environmental and economic problems. While such a desire is understandable, given the severity of the issue and the international influence held by China, it will be incredibly difficult for any other state or international organization to enact an effective solution without significant input from the US.

One avenue that the Mekong States may be tempted to pursue is that of International Law. The UN Convention on the Protection and use of Transboundary

Watercourses and International Lakes was passed in Helsinki in 1992 to promote the sustainable management of shared water resources and avoid conflicts over water (UNECE, 2021). Under this agreement states that border the same transboundary waters must cooperate in order to promote sustainable water management, avoid pollution, share information, and assist other parties in case of environmental emergencies (UN-Water, 2021). Under the UN definition of transboundary waters, the Lancang-Mekong River would be protected if the states bordering it were party to the agreement. At this point in time none of the six states bordering the Lancang-Mekong transboundary waters are party to this treaty, so there are currently no international laws that would assist with constraining the actions of China. Having all of these countries become party to this agreement would be beneficial, as according to this agreement all states must “share information in a timely manner” and responsibly manage transboundary waters (UNECE, 2021). An argument can easily be made that China has not responsibly managed the water, negatively impacting the environment of the Mekong and the Delta Basin. Therefore, it would certainly be in the best interest of the Southeast Asian states to join this agreement, as they would have additional leverage in getting China to halt their restriction of water and assist in maintaining the fragile Mekong ecosystem.

While joining such an agreement and allowing International Law to impose a punishment on China for their damming policies along the Lancang would be beneficial for the five Southeast Asian states, it is unlikely that China would ever join such an agreement, as it would prevent them from being able to use their resources as they see fit. While it is of course possible that China may choose to join this agreement or make an external agreement or treaty with the five Mekong countries, it is impossible to know what difference this will actually make in Chinese behavior. As seen following the South China Sea arbitration with the Philippines, China does not follow international law that does not serve its own interests (Campbell & Salidjanova, 2016). Therefore, even if China were to join this agreement, there is no way of knowing if they would follow-through or if they would accept any sort of case brought against them. Furthermore, International law moves slowly in terms of negotiations, ratifications, and bringing cases to trial. If current drought conditions continue the people who rely on the Mekong for food and income will only continue to suffer and insecurity within those states will only increase. Setting a precedent under International Law can certainly be a part of the continued work towards protecting the Mekong, but it cannot be the only action taken by governments.

Efforts by regional groupings and international organizations, under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and United Nations Environment Program

(UNEP) respectively, appear on the surface to have made significant progress. The LMP launched in 2016 to provide the six states along the Mekong with an opportunity for open dialogue and expanded cooperation. While having an open dialogue between China and the states of the Mekong sub-region is preferable to not having any communication between states, these dialogues are largely spaces for states to share information, raise awareness, and debate best practices regarding water management and environmental protection. Very little concrete action has actually been taken, and it remains to be seen if the Five-Year Plan of the Lancang-Mekong Water Resources Cooperation will include any substantial changes in behavior from China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022; UN.org, 2023). While spreading awareness about the societal impact of poor water management and ecological protection is key, without any enforceable agreement between states, it is impossible to know whether any actual changes in behavior will occur.

### **Conclusion**

Unsafe damming practices, climate change, and an overreliance on hydropower have resulted in significant problems facing the states along the Lancang-Mekong River. Massive Chinese hydropower dams along the upper portion of the River have resulted in a significant change in water levels and flooding patterns further downstream. The agriculture and food systems of many of these downstream countries rely on consistent flooding patterns for rice and fishing and these downstream states also rely on water from the Mekong for their own hydropower and manufacturing. A major economic downturn or food shortage crisis would pose significant political and security risks to the region and would worsen the quality of life for those living within the Mekong sub-region. With little indication of a change in behavior from China, and minimal concerted action being undertaken by international organizations, investment from the US could be the best choice for mitigating these harmful effects. The current US administration has made environmental protection and improving its relations with Southeast Asia part of its broader strategic goals. However, it appears as if many in the US have not yet made the connection between the pursuit of the US's regional goals and its global environmental goals. If the US hopes to improve its relationship with Southeast Asia, it must work to improve its reputation within the region. Southeast Asia sees US Indo-Pacific policy as overly concerned with China, leaving their states to serve as pawns in great power competition. If the US wants to change this perception, it must ensure that it can engage with Southeast Asia in the areas that impact them most significantly. Focusing on the

environment and regional energy sector is a great way for the US to increase regional engagement in a way that both Southeast Asian and domestic populations will approve of.

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## **Approaches in the Indonesian maritime identity construction: from Independence era to the introduction of the Global Maritime**

### **Fulcrum vision**

Briliantina Putri

PhD Candidate, Australian National University

*As the largest archipelagic country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is by nature surrounded by the seas and strategically situated between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Given this geographical circumstance, the Indonesian government claims that the country can be identified as a maritime nation. This article elaborates maritime identity construction in Indonesia by looking into constructed historical narratives of the country's past maritime glory, and the policies taken by the Indonesian presidents in the maritime sector. The former signified the bottom-up approach in maritime identity construction, while the latter represented the top-down approach, underlining the role of state in maritime identity construction. The article concludes that Indonesia's maritime identity has evolved through different presidential eras, with President Joko Widodo's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision marking an important milestone. The GMF not only influenced government priorities in national maritime sector but also shaped Indonesian government's perception of an increased global role in maritime affairs.*

### **Introduction**

The year 2014 marked an important milestone for Indonesia when President Joko Widodo coined his vision of making Indonesia a global maritime fulcrum. His maritime vision marked a reorientation of Indonesian maritime outlook and a commitment to strengthen Indonesia's maritime identity that arises from the country's archipelagic nature. The vision requires Indonesia to focus more on maritime security, maritime economy, and maritime culture if it wants to play more significant roles as an emerging global maritime power. The importance of the maritime sector in Indonesia is inextricably linked to its geographical condition as an archipelago and its strategic location in the middle of two strategic oceans, the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Historically, the Indonesian archipelago had been a vibrant place for trading, allowing foreign merchants from the Middle East, India, China, and Europe to do commercial activities, notably the spice trade.

In this particular context, one may question, what is actually the maritime identity of Indonesia and how it was constructed. Following the popularity of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) idea, we might hear much about maritime identity (*identitas maritim*), but there are questions worth examining: whether we have an appropriate understanding on what maritime identity is and how it is constructed as part of Indonesia's national identity. The author examined the dynamics of the Indonesian maritime identity construction from the country's independence to the introduction of the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision by president Joko Widodo.

The geography of a country plays an important role in shaping its national identity. Geography of a region explains people's attachments to the places in which they live, and to understand a country's place in the world. Indonesia is situated strategically at the crossroad of international trade routes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and between the Asian and Australian continents.<sup>13</sup> The vast area of water surrounding and connecting the Indonesian islands makes the sea an important element for the Indonesian people to support their livelihood. Since the announcement of Juanda Declaration 1957, the Indonesian government considered the seas an integral part of the country's territory.

One of the arguments that the author proposed in this research is that maritime identity construction has taken place through bottom-up and top-down approaches. The bottom-up maritime identity construction mostly took place during the pre-modern period where activities of the ancient maritime communities in the pre-modern Southeast Asian archipelago formed a collective maritime identity characterised by sea mobility and sea trade. Meanwhile, top-down maritime identity construction took place since Indonesia became an independent state in 1945 and is observable through the role of the state as the agent of maritime identity construction. Maritime identity also influenced the Indonesian government's tendency to prioritise on the issue of protection of territorial unity and integrity.

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<sup>13</sup> The total Indonesian national territory covers about 7,810,000 sq.km with land to water area ratio 2:5. Indonesia's maritime territory is about 5,800,000 sq.km. See <https://kkp.go.id/djprl/artikel/21045-konservasi-perairan-sebagai-upaya-menjaga-potensi-kelautan-dan-perikanan-indonesia>. Regarding the number of islands, the Indonesian Coordinating Ministry of Maritime Affairs recorded that Indonesia has listed 17,504 islands under its sovereignty. As per August 2017, the names and locations of 16,056 islands in the archipelago are registered with the UN. See "16,000 Indonesian islands registered at UN", *The Jakarta Post*, 21 August 2017, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/08/21/16000-indonesian-islands-registered-at-un.html>.

### **National identity and maritime identity construction**

The use of constructivist perspective helps us to understand how identity is constructed. Constructivism focuses on the ideational factors that shape state identity and policy. It explores how identity is constructed, what norms and practices accompany their reproduction, and how they construct each other (Hopf 1998: 192). Constructivism emerged among the perspectives in international relations in order to address the shortcoming of material theories such as realism or neorealism (Reus-Smit 2005). It assumes that the world politics is “socially constructed”, which involves two basic claims: that the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material, and that these structures shape actors’ identities and interests, rather than just their behaviour (Wendt 1995: 71-72; Adler 1997: 324).

The concept of national identity is attached to that of ‘a nation’ (Anderson 2006: 6). Nations are to be understood as mental constructs, as “imagined political communities” that are represented in the minds and memories of the nationalised subjects as sovereign and limited political units. People who define themselves as members of a nation have, in their minds, the image of their communion (Anderson 2006: 1-7). Guibernau (2007: 11) regards a nation as a “community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future, while claiming the right to self-determination”. A nation is the imagination of a community in terms of shared cultural, political, and socio-economic elements, such as history, language, religion, ethnicity, territory, and attainment of recognition (Elgenius 2011: 7).

National identity can be defined as “a collective sentiment based upon the belief of belonging to the same nation and sharing most of the attributes that make it distinct from other nation” (Guibernau 2007: 11). National identities have been formed in different kinds of historical and cultural circumstances. When state actors interpret the international situation and define state interests, they see it through their country’s individual historical and cultural perspective. As a result, actors do not perceive the world in the same way (Onuf 1989; Adler 1997). Constructivism disputes the idea that any state could have a single eternal identity across time and space, and assumes instead that state identities are variable; they likely depend on historical, cultural, political, and social contexts (Hopf 1998: 175). The construction of national identity can be understood through the bottom-up and top-down approach. The bottom-up approach emphasises agency at the individual level, as well as the collective agency of actors at the grassroots level. It emphasises ordinary people’s role in constructing national identity through a

daily conversation about belonging and self-categorisation (Billig 1995). The top-down approach treats the state actor as the leading agent in cultivating and constructing national identity (Todd et al. 2008: 4). This can be done by various means, for example by campaigns, education, state institutions, and the media.

The term “maritime identity” is subject to multiple interpretations arising from many different perspectives, hence understanding of the term cannot be limited to a single definition. Maritime identity is a heterogeneous field that encompasses a wide range of aspects. Fusaro (2010: 280) defined maritime identity as an identity held by those societies who treat the sea not only as a physical element but also part of social construction. In this case, maritime identity arises out of a sense of belongingness to the sea as a feature of the environment a society lives in, and which it further develops into maritime culture in the forms of values or symbols, tools, stories, habits, and rituals.

Similar to other dimensions of national identity, the construction of maritime identity takes place within an identification process. The adaptability of the maritime societies to the functions and values of an existence based around exploitation of the sea created an identification process. During this process, maritime societies internalised certain attitudes, behaviours, and values towards the sea and treated them as important components in their lives. For maritime identity shared by societies to become part of national identity, it requires the role of the state to create, identify itself with, and sustain it through political action. Construction of maritime identity at the national level can take place in the form of symbolism of places or objects, naval demonstrations, and festivals, maritime instruments like ships and ports, arts and literature, or seafaring activities (Lambert 2018: 332).

To understand Indonesia’s maritime identity, it is important to take into account the historical analysis of the past maritime communities who have lived in the archipelago since the pre-modern era. Historical analysis also useful to investigate the history of colonialism in the archipelago, and the history of Indonesian nation-building and national development, and how these impacted to maritime identity construction or deconstruction. The independence of Indonesia in 1945 marked the pivotal role of the state in reconstructing maritime identity narrative. The newly formed government under Sukarno constructed the definition of Indonesian territory referring to the unity and integration of the land and the seas. The government effort resulted in the emergence of the archipelagic state principle as the primary concept in the Indonesian maritime construction.

### **Indonesian maritime identity construction: The bottom-up approach**

To understand the importance of the sea to Indonesia, one cannot disregard the historical perspectives of Indonesia's identification as an archipelagic state. It is widely known that many Indonesians are familiar with the song "*Nenek moyangku orang pelaut*", representing a popular awareness on the history of the ancient seamen and maritime communities living in the archipelago. We also often hear the historical narrative of maritime identity in the past being used by authorities to remind us about the bravery and the skills of our forefathers in sailing the seas. This kind of historical narrative reconstruction has been used by the Indonesian government to create an awareness on the importance of the sea for the country and a collective identification among the population of being a maritime nation.

Indonesian maritime history can be traced to the Austronesians' migration into the islands of the Southeast Asian archipelago, estimated to have begun around 4000 BC (Pelras 1996: 39). Some of the groups of the ancient maritime communities settled in the islands that make up present-day Indonesia and became the ancestor of the Indonesian people (Bellwood 2007). In the pre-modern times, maritime identity construction in the ancient Indonesian archipelago initially took place at a "collective identity" level and had not yet developed to a "national identity" level. The construction of collective maritime identity during the pre-modern period had taken place at the communal level by groups of maritime communities. Maritime identity grew in the collective setting as part of the group's adaptation to the sea environment, manifested in maritime skills and knowledge, and maritime cultural products such as boats or fishing tools (Sather 2006: 254; Oktaviana 2012). The popularity of the ancient Indonesian archipelago as a venue for spice trade had influenced further construction of maritime identity among maritime communities. In this case, maritime identity was manifested in the popularity of sea trade and the development of trade networks (Hoogervorst 2012: 250). Sea trade had gradually developed into an economic and social institution, involving monetary, transport and tax systems, as well as socio-cultural interaction among various communities (Evers 1988: 91; Steensgaard 1991: 4).

One notable aspect of maritime identity construction during the pre-modern period was the manifestation of maritime identity in the form of an expansion of the spheres of influence of the local polities, such as kingdoms or sultanates, beyond their territorial bases. The success of Sriwijaya and Majapahit maritime kingdoms in using their naval power for expanding their spheres of influence still largely lives in the minds

of the Indonesians today (Pradhani 2017: 189; Cribb 2000: 76; Andaya 2000: 96). The ability of these kingdoms to develop thalassocracies has been a source of inspiration for contemporary Indonesian leaders in rebuilding a maritime vision for the country.

Looking back on the maritime history of maritime communities in the pre-modern Indonesian archipelago, it can be argued that maritime identity construction during the pre-modern era took place using a bottom-up approach from the communal to the polity level. In this case, identity construction was not initiated or imposed by political authorities to the population. Instead, identity construction emerged from habits, daily activities, and inter-communal interactions that gradually formed into collective maritime identity. Following the rise of maritime kingdoms like Sriwijaya, Majapahit, Samudra Pasai and others, construction of maritime identity was gradually institutionalised by the kingdoms' authorities, marking the top-down approach of maritime identity construction, for example through the implementation of rules, for instance with regard to the development of naval power, protection of sea routes, sea trade rules, and territorial expansion.

However, the history of the European colonisation in Southeast Asia, especially during the Dutch occupation over the territories of the Dutch East Indies, impacted to a deconstruction of maritime identity in the Indonesian archipelago in the past. There had been the difference of sea trade characteristics before and during colonisation, and a shift from sea-based to land-based orientation of the locals as a result of the VOC's enforced plantation policy. The period of Dutch colonisation lessened the maritime outlook of the local maritime communities. The VOC imposed a cultivation system that focused on the intensification of plantation and agriculture commodities production (Breman 2015: 11; Reid 1993: 22). The VOC also implemented strict measures of controlling the sea routes which hindered the freedom of the seamen and merchants to sail (Parthesius 2010: 165, 167). These policies marginalised the sea-based economy during the colonial period and limited the locals from accessing the seas.

### **Indonesian maritime identity construction: The top-down approach**

Since the Indonesian independence in 1945, the maritime aspect had become part of national identity, institutionalised in the government's institutions and regulatory system. It is also important to note that during the years of the national awakening movement, maritime identity reconstruction has taken place as part of the nation-state building process. Popular awareness among the Indonesians or the "*pribumi*" to freedom and

territorial unity gained momentum along the rise of the nationalist movement in the 1920s, particularly with the emergence of the youth movement culminating in the “Youth Pledge” or “*Sumpah Pemuda*” in 1929. At this stage, the urgency of realising territorial unity and integrity could not be separated from the context of the nation-state building process. “*Sumpah Pemuda*” represented an identification of the Indonesian people with the identities of the future Indonesian state. There are three elements of state’s identities that were mentioned in the Youth Pledge: the nation (people), the homeland (territory), and the language. The youth’s reference to “one homeland” represented the people’s aspiration to be liberated from colonial oppression, in a new state governed by the Indonesians that had to be established along the ex-colonial boundaries (Suryadinata 1988; Aspinall and Berger 2001). This implied the youth’s claim that a physical territory was a prerequisite for the existence of the new Indonesian state. In referring to the physical territory of the state, an Indonesian phrase, “*tanah-air*” (land-water), has been used to reflect a unity between the land and the water as the constituting elements of state’s territory. The word “*tanah-air*” became a symbol of nationhood associated with the physical existence of Indonesia as a new country.

After 1945, the Indonesian government under Sukarno began to legally define Indonesia’s geographical existence in terms of the unity of the lands and the seas. Construction of maritime identity during Sukarno’s era was closely linked to the territorial integration effort and a revival of ‘maritime greatness’ awareness among the Indonesian population. From security perspective, Sukarno attempted to fill in the gap due to the existence of pockets of open seas<sup>14</sup> separating the islands of the archipelago where the Indonesian government could not exercise its sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

A key milestone of maritime identity construction during Sukarno’s era was the Declaration made by Prime Minister Juanda in 1957. The Declaration gave the foundation for Indonesia’s new territorial configuration came to be known as the “archipelagic state concept” which treated “all waters surrounding, between and connecting the islands constituting the Indonesian state, regardless of their extension or breadth, are integral parts of the territory of the Indonesian state” (Juanda Declaration 1957).

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<sup>14</sup> The existence of the pockets of open seas was the impact of the Dutch rule *Territorial Zee en Maritieme Kringe Ordonantie 1939* (TZMKO), that established a three-mile *territorial sea* around each island of the archipelago, so the islands were separated by the high seas.

<sup>15</sup> Sukarno viewed that the open seas between the islands posed several security concerns. He saw the danger of foreign warships passing freely through the seas within the archipelago, which made Indonesia susceptible to external security threats Djajal (1996). Moreover, the fragmentation of Indonesian territory due to the country’s maritime nature also rendered Indonesia prone to the threats of separatism (Doeppers 1972: 189).

Sukarno undertook further political actions to incorporate maritime identity into the institutions of the state. In this way, maritime identity was codified into national regulations through the issuance of “Perpu No. 4/1960 on Indonesian Waters”, providing a legal basis for the new Indonesian territorial structure. He also created the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Compartments, and the national shipping company PELNI (*Pelayaran Nasional Indonesia*), to provide inter-island transport and reduce Dutch-operated companies in Indonesia.

Indonesia since mid-1960s began its participation on the Law of the Sea (LOS) Conference which culminated in the adoption of the UNCLOS in 1982. Indonesia’s diplomatic activism during the LOS negotiation can be seen as part of the process of state identity formation. Domestically, the announcement of Juanda Declaration and its subsequent formalisation into Perpu No. 4/1960 marked an internal identity formation process. Externally, Indonesia’s identity formation took place along the LOS negotiation. This process resulted in the international acknowledgment of Indonesia’s identity as an archipelagic state endowed with sovereign rights and obligations set out by the Convention. For Indonesia, UNCLOS has important meaning. It ensures maritime governance underpinned by a rule-based regime instead of power competition. It also serves as key legal reference for Indonesia in exercising maritime claims and settling maritime disputes with other countries.

When Suharto assumed the presidential term, he demonstrated the same awareness as Sukarno with regard to the significance of Indonesia’s archipelagic nature. Suharto shared Prime Minister Juanda’s perspective on the unity and integrity of the land and water elements of the Indonesian archipelago. He further solidified maritime identity by incorporating the archipelagic principle into national development doctrine, known as *Wawasan Nusantara* or archipelagic outlook. However, Indonesia’s archipelagic outlook was focused toward land-based rather than sea-based orientation. The New Order’s land-based orientation can be explained by two reasons: one, Suharto’s focus on the agrarian economy, and two, the predominant role of the Indonesian Army in national defence.

The focus of the New Order on the agrarian economy started when Suharto introduced a rice self-sufficiency program aimed to address food shortages and poverty in 1972. Agricultural production became a development necessity for Suharto to bring Indonesia out of its food shortage problem and alleviate poverty. Later in 1974, rice policy became closely tied to the government’s Five-year Development Plan (*Rencana*

*Pembangunan Lima Tahun–Repelita*) document. Suharto undertook extensive measures to increase rice production and distribution (Mears 1984: 127-129; Vatikiotis 1998: 35).<sup>16</sup>

The New Order's land-based orientation can also be seen in the predominant role of the army in national defence. The long history of the army dominance in Indonesia stemmed from the Indonesian government's threat perception since Sukarno's era. The inward-looking characteristic of *Wawasan Nusantara* also contributed to the execution of territorial command system focusing on countering threats from the inside rather than from the outside. The tasks to exercise control over the population and detect any potential internal threats was assigned to the Indonesian Army, and hence it became the most important and the largest branch of the Indonesian military, especially compared to the navy or the air force. The inward-looking orientation of *Wawasan Nusantara* and the dominance of the army inadvertently contributed to the lack of comprehensive maritime outlook, particularly during the New Order regime.

Although Suharto's development paradigm gravitated towards a land-based orientation, the incorporation of the Indonesian maritime identity into *Wawasan Nusantara* emphasised the role of the elite in the identity construction process. At this stage, Indonesian maritime identity construction that had begun in Sukarno's era was further reinforced through a top-down approach. *Wawasan Nusantara* is an articulation of the Indonesian government's principle of archipelagic state.<sup>17</sup> By incorporating *Wawasan Nusantara* into the regulatory framework, the geographical setting came to be considered with other development aspects, such as demography, natural resources, ideology, politics, economics, social and cultural aspects, and defence and security (Buntoro 2016: 477).

In its development, *Wawasan Nusantara* was used to reinforce Suharto's inward-looking perspective in order to maintain domestic stability. The aim of the incorporation of *Wawasan Nusantara* into the government's development strategy was to reinforce the idea of national unity and stability to make way for economic development. *Wawasan Nusantara* was characterised by "self-reliance and an inward-looking strategic posture, based on an assumption of the unity between the military and civilians" (Anwar 1996: 3). Based on this characteristic, Suharto's regime was predisposed towards a land-based

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<sup>16</sup> These measures included strengthening the role of the National Rice Stock Authority from one of price stabilisation to include that of supplying rice to the Indonesian armed forces and civil servants, providing financing for maintaining reserve stocks, conducting rice marketing and procurement systems, and giving subsidies on fertilizers and pesticides. See Mears (1984) and Vatikiotis (1998).

<sup>17</sup> The term "*Wawasan Nusantara*" itself was mentioned initially in 1966 in a seminar held by the Indonesian military. See Danusaputro (1982). The archipelagic concept is deemed as a basis to create national resilience to cope with any challenges, directly or indirectly, from the outside as well as from within the country (Hardjosoedarmo 1979: 144-150).

perspective, while practicing benign neglect of the more outward-focused maritime perspective (Habir et al. 2014: 53).

Following the fall of the New Order regime in 1997, a phase of political transition and domestic reform took place in Indonesia (Suryadinata 1999). In this political context, the Indonesian government policies in maritime affairs showed gradual changes. The Indonesian government slowly demonstrated a return to a sea-based orientation from the previously land-based orientation that had been prevalent during Suharto's era. Construction of Indonesian maritime identity during the period of democratic transition took place as part of political and military reforms that involved institutional and regulation changes. Military reforms opened the way for doctrinal change of the armed forces known as the "new paradigm", marking to the transformation of the military's main function from internal security to external defense. Several implications of this change were the redefinition of the political role of the military (Rabasa and Haseman 2002: 26) and increased government's commitment for strengthening the role of the Indonesian Navy to improve maritime security. Amidst funding constraint, Indonesian government implemented naval modernisation project, such as by strengthening the navy's coastal protection role, acquisition of new patrol vessels (Goldrick and McCaffrie 2013: 83), and advancing national strategic industries. The reform also inspired a shift in the government's threat perception, from one focusing on internal threats to one encompassing non-conventional and transnational threats (Keliat 2009).

During President Yudhoyono's term, the issues of maritime defence and security received more attention than before. The process of maritime identity construction can be seen from President Yudhoyono's key policies aimed at strengthening the regulation framework and institutional capacities on maritime issues. First, Yudhoyono issued Presidential Regulation No. 5/2010 that adopted the strategic concept of Minimum Essential Force (MEF). It set forth a military modernisation agenda, including the Indonesian Navy.<sup>18</sup> Second, Yudhoyono issued Law No. 32/2014 on Ocean Affairs (*Undang-undang Kelautan*). It restates the principle that Indonesia is an archipelagic maritime state and provides an umbrella guideline on the conduct of ocean affairs at the national level in wide-ranging sectors, such as maritime resources, environment,

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<sup>18</sup> The Minimum Essential Force (MEF) is one of Yudhoyono's strategies to reform the Indonesian defence sector to make the military more professional and more modern. In addition to introducing MEF, Yudhoyono increased the number of promoted naval and air force officers to key military positions and also gave special privileges to army officers that came up through professional combat units, such as those from the Strategic Army Reserve Command. Yudhoyono further professionalised military education by establishing the Indonesian Defence University, and sending more officers to study and train overseas. The military's international engagements, from multilateral exercises to defence diplomacy, also rose under Yudhoyono's tenure. See Laksmana (2015).

education and culture, law enforcement, human resources and global diplomacy. Third, in 2014 Yudhoyono also created the Maritime Security Agency or *Badan Keamanan Laut* (BAKAMLA)<sup>19</sup> to integrate maritime patrolling under one command. The creation of BAKAMLA aimed to shift the law enforcement paradigm from multi-agency to single-agency as well as create effectiveness and efficiency in law enforcement in Indonesian waters. BAKAMLA's main duty is to coordinate sea patrol activities, especially in border areas (Kurniaty et al., 2021).<sup>20</sup>

These policies represented the top-down approach in maritime identity construction, in which Yudhoyono attempted to strengthen the manifestation of Indonesia's identity as a maritime nation. He established the regulatory and institutional frameworks to further mainstream maritime policy into the national agenda, such as by the issuance of Law No. 32/2014 on Ocean Affairs, and the creation of BAKAMLA. To strengthen maritime defence capability and to create a more professional Indonesian military, Yudhoyono increased the navy's budget and pushed for naval modernisation. Although Yudhoyono's national agenda did not specifically focus on the maritime sector, his policies contributed to the revival of a maritime outlook that had been marginalised under Suharto's regime. The construction of maritime identity during the post-reform era has undergone more concrete steps through structural reform introduced by President Yudhoyono.

President Joko Widodo's speeches in 2014, made the reconstruction of Indonesian maritime identity explicit. In his election victory speech, Joko Widodo envisioned that Indonesia would develop into global maritime fulcrum, a condition Indonesia sought to achieve in the future:

*“The spirit of gotong-royong [mutual cooperation] will help the Indonesian people survive challenges, and help Indonesia develop into a global maritime fulcrum and establish its position as a great political civilization in the future”* (Rosyidin 2021: 10).

Following the display of maritime symbols, construction of maritime identity was further made by Joko Widodo in his 2014 presidential inauguration speech in front of the parliament:

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<sup>19</sup> The roles and functions of the BAKAMLA is regulated in Presidential Regulation No. 178/2014 on Maritime Security Agency.

<sup>20</sup> BAKAMLA also performed an important role in deterring foreign vessels attempting to unlawfully enter Indonesian waters (mostly in the Natuna region) or committing illegal fishing activities.

*“We must strive hard to make Indonesia a maritime nation once again. The oceans, the seas, the straits, the bays, are the future of our civilization. We have been for so many years turned our back against the seas (...). Now it is the time to bring back our glory at seas, Jalesveva Jayamahe, the jargon of our great grandfathers. (...). We must remember what our first President, Bung Karno, once said, to be a big, strong, prosperous and peaceful nation, we must have inside us the spirit of “cakrawati samudera”, the spirit of a brave sailor (...). As the ship captain, I will ask all of us to board the ship of Indonesia and we shall sail together toward a glorious Indonesia. We will spread our sails and face the sea waves with the power that we have”.*<sup>21</sup>

In this speech, Joko Widodo used the past glory from Indonesia’s maritime communities to bring about collective identity in order to rebuild Indonesia’s status as a maritime nation. The re-construction of historical narratives is important for President Widodo’s regime to generate a sense of identification and legitimize government policy, particularly maritime policy (Rosyidin 2021). Joko Widodo’s speech helped to promote his maritime agenda to the population and shaped public policies that gave more focus on advancing Indonesia’s maritime sector.

President Widodo’s speeches underpinned the formulation of a national maritime vision known as the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) and was integrated into the government’s policy agenda.<sup>22</sup> Widodo’s GMF vision would be realised through a number of policies, for instance, in the field of law enforcement, foreign policy and maritime diplomacy, maritime industry, fisheries, sea trade, environment protection, and natural resources management. Within the first three-years of his term (2014-2017), Widodo has notably speed-up maritime infrastructure development, such as port, sea-tolls development, and procurement of new transport ships.<sup>23</sup> The development of maritime infrastructure facilities helped to address the problem of inequality and

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<sup>21</sup> English translation is made by the author. Full text available in Bahasa Indonesia. See “Ini Pidato Lengkap Jokowi Saat Pelantikan Presiden”, 20 October 2014, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2723911/ini-pidato-lengkap-jokowi-saat-pelantikan-presiden>

<sup>22</sup> A notable policy document on the Indonesian national development policy is the “*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional*” (RPJMN/The national medium-term development plan) year 2015-2019. In this document, the development of the national maritime sector was one of the Indonesian government’s priorities, aimed at increasing people’s welfare through the maritime sector.

<sup>23</sup> See “Menhub: Program tol laut terus meningkat dan berkembang”, 26 October 2020, <https://hubla.dephub.go.id/home/post/read/8078/menhub-program-tol-laut-terus-meningkat-dan-berkembang>

development gaps among the regions in Indonesia (Sulistiyanto 2018: 162; Sa'adah et al. 2019: 297).<sup>24</sup>

Following the GMF announcement, a strong-yet controversial-policy was taken by President Widodo to combat illegal fishing. In November 2014, Widodo instructed his Minister for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Susi Pudjiastuti, to seize and sink any foreign vessels found fishing illegally in Indonesian waters. He said:

*“Just sink those [illegal] vessels, don’t just detain them. If we don’t sink them, our maritime resources will be depleted”*.<sup>25</sup>

President Widodo’s instruction displayed nationalism sentiment and the will to protect the Indonesian economy, especially in the fisheries sector. The annual cost of IUU fishing for Indonesia is estimated at around USD 3 billion (ASEANnews 2017). Since 2014 until 2019, Minister Susi has sunk around 556 illegal fishing vessels mostly from Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand.<sup>26</sup>

In the foreign policy domain, the implementation of GMF involved maritime diplomacy programs such as maritime border delimitation, bilateral maritime cooperation, and increased multilateralism. Indonesia stepped up its engagement in maritime cooperation in various forums. Among those engagements are Indonesia’s commitment to ocean sustainability through the Our Ocean Conference forum since 2014,<sup>27</sup> and in marine management of the archipelagic and island states.<sup>28</sup> In addition, Widodo regarded Indonesia’s role in the India Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as an important element elevating Indonesia’s role as the centre of the Indo-Pacific region. With the mainstreaming of the GMF vision, Indonesian foreign policy under Joko Widodo emphasises on the implementation of maritime diplomacy to achieve Indonesian interests in maritime affairs. The mainstreaming of maritime issues in foreign

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<sup>24</sup> See also “Intip Kinerja 7 Tahun Tol Laut Jokowi, Apa Hasilnya?”, 22 October 2021, *Kompas.com*, <https://money.kompas.com/read/2021/10/22/104528926/intip-kinerja-7-tahun-tol-laut-jokowi-apa-hasilnya?page=all#page2>

<sup>25</sup> English translation is made by the author. See the Cabinet Secretariat (*Setkab*) press release “Timbulkan Efek Jera, Presiden Minta Menteri Susi Tenggelamkan Kapal Asing Pencuri Ikan”, 18 November 2014, <https://setkab.go.id/timbulkan-efek-jera-presiden-minta-menteri-susi-tenggelamkan-kapal-asing-pencuri-ikan/>

<sup>26</sup> “Selama Jadi Menteri, Berapa Kapal China Ditenggelamkan Susi?”, 6 January 2020, <https://money.kompas.com/read/2020/01/06/160600226/selama-jadi-menteri-berapa-kapal-china-ditenggelamkan-susi?page=all>.

<sup>27</sup> The Our Ocean Conference started in 2014 as a multilateral forum that fosters cooperation for concerted and integrated actions for protecting the oceans. The forum covers areas of action such as climate change, sustainable fisheries, marine protected areas, marine pollution, sustainable blue economy, and maritime security. See <https://www.ourocean2018.org/?l=home>.

<sup>28</sup> The Archipelagic and Island States Forum (AISF) was established in 2018 by 17 archipelagic and island states. The forum focuses on marine management, climate change mitigation, biodiversity protection, marine conservation, and blue economy. See “Indonesia: SOM delegation agree to establish archipelagic and island states forum”, *Asia News Monitor*, 2 November 2018.

policy also placed the maritime infrastructure project as one of key priorities of Joko Widodo's administration. To implement this project, Widodo pursued a deepening of the Indonesia–China economic relationship, mainly to secure financial resources (Weatherbee 2017: 166-168).

During Joko Widodo's era, the Indonesian government's attention to the issue of territorial sovereignty remained as focused as in previous eras. Aspinall (2015) observed that since Widodo's campaign for president, a new nationalist sentiment was visible in Indonesia, expressed in increasingly aggressive rejection of alleged foreign interference in Indonesia's internal affairs and demands for greater international recognition of Indonesia's power and status. President Widodo showed a firm position in protecting Indonesia's territorial unity and integrity, particularly in responding to the case of Chinese incursions into the Natuna waters. The Chinese repeated infringements into Indonesia's Natuna waters have challenged the Indonesian long-standing norm of protection of territorial unity and integrity. As a response, Joko Widodo took a tougher stance towards China to signal the Indonesian government's resolve in protecting its territorial sovereignty. In Indonesia's view, China's aggressive actions have undermined the rule of law, particularly UNCLOS 1982. Hence, Jakarta has been calling upon Beijing to abide by the UNCLOS provisions and to continue working with ASEAN in seeking a peaceful settlement of the South China Sea dispute.

Covering seven main pillars, Widodo's GMF policy served as an umbrella guideline for the Indonesian government to revisit its maritime policies that have been marginalized for so long. However, the manifestation of GMF has been mostly inward-oriented aimed to achieve national developmental strategy to narrow the economic gap in the archipelago. Hence, infrastructure is one of key symbols in Widodo's construction of maritime identity to bring Indonesia towards a global maritime hub. The narrative of "Sriwijaya and Majapahit glory" was translated by President Widodo into making Indonesia a strong maritime country in terms of economy and regional influence.

During Joko Widodo's second term (2019-2024), however, the narrative of maritime identity was missing from the president's inaugural speech in 2019.<sup>29</sup> This raised doubt of whether the president's commitment to enhance Indonesia's maritime sector remained the same as the first term. Observers criticized that the GMF was already lacking realization, hence was not mentioned in the president's speech.<sup>30</sup> Although

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<sup>29</sup> See Joko Widodo's full speech in article "Pidato Lengkap Jokowi 'Visi Indonesia', Sentul, 14 Juli 2019", 15 July 2019, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/07/15/06204541/pidato-lengkap-visi-indonesia-jokowi>

<sup>30</sup> "Angin Lalu Poros Maritim di Pidato Jokowi" 15 July 2019 <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20190715182845-32-412333/angin-lalu-poros-maritim-di-pidato-jokowi>.

maritime development and maritime diplomacy programs are still being implemented by relevant ministries and agencies, the absence of maritime identity enunciation in Joko Widodo's political speech gave the impression of shifting government priority away from the praised GMF vision. Moreover, the commitment to maritime policy was hampered by the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. President Jokowi's administration needed to conduct austerity measures to reallocate budgets in various ministries and institutions to accelerate the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

Although President Widodo's GMF narrative subsided with other priorities, the introduction of the GMF concept back in 2014 fortified Indonesian government perception of the country's international role as a linkage or hub between Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, by taking into account its strategic crossroad location. President Widodo's maritime vision influenced Indonesia's response to the Indo-Pacific cooperation. Joko Widodo emphasized the Indo-Pacific in a much more maritime setting. He voiced Indonesia's rightful aspirations as a seagoing Indo-Pacific power that plays role as an archipelagic country connecting two oceans (Bandoro 2014). Further, Indonesia advocated the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) that emphasized on maintaining the centrality of ASEAN (Auliya and Sulaiman 2019).

Despite the short-lived narrative of the GMF vision, Indonesian government has enacted policies that brought about changes towards improving Indonesia's maritime sector. A palpable influence from the GMF vision can be seen in foreign policy domain where Indonesian government recalibrated the country's geopolitical strategy in order to safeguard its national interest (Radjendra et al. 2022). The GMF vision was manifested in Indonesia's increased leadership role in various maritime cooperation initiatives at both regional and multilateral levels (Anwar 2020), and its adaptation to the Indo-Pacific geostrategic concept.

## **Conclusion**

This research concluded that the Indonesian maritime identity construction has taken place through the bottom-up and top-down approaches. The bottom-up construction of maritime identity has taken place since the pre-modern period of the Southeast Asian archipelago. The agency of maritime identity construction was at the individual and community level of the pre-modern seafarers and the local maritime societies. Maritime identity was formed as a result of people's identification with culture and activities related to the sea environment, rather than a state-imposed identity. Maritime kingdoms, such

as Sriwijaya and Majapahit, had grown into thalassocratic polities with extensive areas of influence across the archipelago.

The history of the ancient maritime communities has been reconstructed by contemporary Indonesian leaders to socialise and internalise maritime awareness among the population. Indonesian presidents, from Sukarno until Joko Widodo, have always referred Indonesian maritime identity to the history of Sriwijaya and Majapahit to inspire the nation, suggesting that the sea has always been a unifying element of the country. Using socialisation instruments, such as political speeches and regulations, the Indonesian government uses its authority to initiate the “identification process” of Indonesia’s maritime character and build the population’s collective identity of being a maritime nation.

After Indonesia became independent, the top-down approach of national identity construction began to emerge. At this time, the Indonesian government’s priority was to ensure that the nation-state building process would provide solid foundations for the newly born state. Maritime identity as national identity was manifested in the idea of territorial unity comprising the land and water elements of the state. The Indonesian government’s role as the main agent of maritime identity construction can be seen through several measures, for instance, internalisation and institutionalisation of maritime identity into state doctrine, state institutions and government programs; and the formulation of the international law of the sea regime (UNCLOS).

The New Order government internalised maritime identity through the *Wawasan Nusantara* doctrine that was used as a strategic and development paradigm. In practice, however, Suharto focused more on land defence than maritime defence which gave the army a dominant role in the Indonesian politics. The post-reform period brought in a wave of optimism that brought maritime identity back to the government’s attention. The elite factor, notably the leadership of President Yudhoyono, was instrumental in carrying out a number of institutional reforms that consolidated Indonesian maritime policy.

The introduction of President Widodo’s Global Maritime Fulcrum vision was one of important milestone in Indonesia’s maritime identity construction. Through the implementation of the GMF, the mobilisation of maritime identity is closely linked to national development and economic aspects. In this context, maritime identity narrative was mobilised by the government to achieve economic growth. Joko Widodo reconstructed historical narrative of the legacy of the archipelagic maritime kingdoms during the pre-modern era and created a future orientation or “vision” of what Indonesia

should become as a maritime nation. In regional context, Indonesian government perceived that the GMF vision has relevance with its Indo-Pacific policy. Joko Widodo accentuated Indonesia's central Indo-Pacific geography by promoting an inclusive character of Indo-Pacific cooperation. Joko Widodo's GMF vision shaped an aspiration for the Indonesian government to expand its role by interpreting the country's strategic location as a linkage or hub between Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

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