

RETROSPECTION BY A DEPARTING AMBASSADOR

REMARKS BY SOEDJATMOKO
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(Ambassador Soedjatmoko served in Washington as the Representative of the Government of Indonesia from the summer of 1968 until July 1971. During these three years he gained the admiration and affection of countless Americans in Washington, and across the country, not less of government officials than scholars and intellectuals, young and old. Departure from Washington, for Soedjatmoko and his American friends, was an occasion for sharing of experience, thought and emotion, quite unusual in a world where the transfer of diplomats is known to be inevitable. During his final days in the United States, Soedjatmoko met with friends to discuss his country and the United States as he had come to understand them during his three years in Washington. The following is a slightly abbreviated transcript from a tape made of his remarks to members of the Indonesian Council in New York City.)

I cherish this opportunity to be with so many old friends. I have an opportunity here to reminisce with you and to reflect with friends upon the nature, the significance, the adequacy and inadequacy of the friendship that exists between the United States and Indonesia.

In looking back at the contacts I have made in the United States and the audiences that I have faced, I cannot be but impressed by the degree of sympathy that exists for Indonesia today. What I am not sure about is how deep and how adequate is the understanding behind that sympathy. Quite often in addressing meetings of businessmen, of tourist agents and even of academics, I came away with the feeling, "Is this friendliness with which I have been met really reflective of an understanding that is adequate to meet the test of the future?" I often got the feeling that Indonesia is receiving now a great deal of sympathy but for the wrong reasons. I sometimes felt that Americans like Indonesia because they think that with the decline of the Sukarno government now finally the "good guys" are on top and that things will stay that way. Many businessmen are sympathetic simply because Indonesia is now open to business. But what if at some point in time, Indonesia's own business starts developing? What if Indonesia wants to change, however slightly, the discrepancy in power that exists between the

rich and the poor nations in this world? Would friendship survive these changes?

If we look at the future, there is one thing that is clear and certain: there are going to be changes throughout the whole Asia-Pacific region. The changes will reflect the shift from the bipolar world of the 1950's -- in which the Communist and the democratic "free world" camp were facing each other -- towards a multipolar constellation of forces in which the United States is going to be just one of the major powers -- the United States, Japan, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union. Implications and consequences of the shift towards this new constellation of forces is not fully realized, neither in the United States nor in many parts of Asia.

We should realize that while the shift will bring in its wake its own dangers and risks, it will also bring new possibilities and new opportunities. And frankly speaking, Indonesia is one of the countries which looks forward to, rather than dreads, the emergence of this new multipolar constellation of forces. It may, after so many centuries, bring the real end of the colonial period. Given some luck, it may provide the opportunity for us in Southeast Asia finally to be on our own.

One of the problems to be faced by those of us who have a very strong realization of the need and a strong desire for continuity

in the friendly relations and the cooperation between the United States and Indonesia is a realization that Indonesia is not going to conform to the expectations of many people in the United States. Indonesia is a large nation, with a large population, and with large problems. While many of our goals sound familiar in the framework of values of the United States, we may require means to solve them that will not fit the easy preconceptions that many Americans associate with the kind of government they would like to see in the area.

Indonesia is in the process of trying to solve its political problems in a way that will make possible both the thrust for economic development as well as the cohesion for the continued existence of the nation. It will have to mobilize people, but also insure a degree of freedom that will make it tolerable for them to be mobilized. They will have to modernize without losing their soul in the process. They will have to set themselves goals of which they are only vaguely aware, and which no one will be able to articulate very clearly because there is no model for the objective towards which we aim. Frankly speaking, the Western model has become rather unattractive; so has the Russian model; so has the Japanese. Somewhere in our national soul, in the awareness of our national self,

there is a notion that it should be possible to create the social conditions that will enable man to live with a reasonable degree of comfort but also with a sense of spiritual freedom and self-fulfillment. And in that sense, neither the so-called developed nor the underdeveloped world is really prepared to meet the future. On this level we find ourselves equal.

Indonesia is in a process of painful, uncertain social transformation -- complicated by population pressure, urbanization, unemployment, the emergence of a large number of youth who are bound in a very fundamental way -- but in ways unknown -- to change the complexion of Indonesian politics. We will need all the sympathy and support that we can get in order to stay on top of those problems, and will be lucky if we do so. And, I am not even speaking about satisfactory solutions: the human capacity to manage problems seems to be dwindling in the face of the increasing magnitude of government. Calcutta, Djakarta, like New York, all seem to be close to being ungovernable. So all of us together share a need for a search to increase our capacity to manage affairs and to keep problems manageable, livable and human.

It is then the very magnitude of problems which makes it unlikely that in the future Indonesia will conform to stereotyped expectations that are present, and developing, in the United States. Therefore,

in discussing relationships between the United States and Indonesia, one must speak about a very curious prescriptive element that has always been part of the way in which the United States has looked at Asia -- at Japan, at China, at Vietnam, at Indonesia. It may explain the deep sense of loss that you feel when it turned out that other nations, because of their own internal dynamics, do not conform to expectations in the United States.

I would not speak about soul-searching in the United States as to national self and as to international role, if the stereotypes of the older generation were being replaced by new stereotypes of greater realism and greater relevance. But the new stereotypes are not any better than the old ones. A new stereotype about Asia seems to be crystallizing that all revolutions are good, that all elites are, by definition, bad, that friendship with the United States is inimicable to the interests of "the people", and that only from "the people" salvation can be expected. These illusions are all harbingers of difficulties for the relations between Asia and the United States.

There is a curious relationship between the old stereotypes in America about Asia -- both in their religious and their secular manifestations -- and the new stereotypes: they seem to be the inversion of one another. The stereotypes of the young and those of the old are both equally wrong. They are both one side of the same

thing: an over-estimation of American power for good as well as for evil in Asia and in the world in general. The constellation of forces which is emerging in Asia will force us into a much more realistic, unromantic understanding of realities. We must not be guided by a general anarchistic, anti-institutional and non-historical approach to Asia's problems if we want to maintain the depth of understanding and the continuity of friendship that has now been started between Indonesia and the United States, and between the United States and much of the new Asia.

The image of Asia in the United States is very much -- one comes to realize more and more -- a product of the United States preoccupation with its own national self. Many of the very good and the very bad writers in the United States -- and I am not going to say in which category I put "The Greening of America" -- have written about the crisis in America. An Indonesian sees the agony through which the United States is going at present in the difficulty of a great nation to consider the whole question and the implications of defeat as well as victory, domestic problems of race, unexpected poverty and urban blight, growing resistance to emasculation and dehumanization by large bureaucratic structures, and reassertion of man as a human being against runaway technology.

I have no intention of elaborating on these problems, but I think it would be useful to realize that Asians, too, are aware of

the tremendous magnitude of the agonies through which the United States is going at present and that we are aware of their implications. How the people in the United States come to grips with their cultural revolution is not simply an American problem but a problem of all industrial societies. Its importance goes beyond what is important to the American people themselves. And, in this connection I do want to make a few remarks on their subjective aspects.

What strikes an Asian is not the crisis as such, which is understandable, but the apocalyptic undertone of the process of national soul-searching -- the deep cultural pessimism which seems to pervade the country. There seems to be for the first time in American history a sense of loss of virtu in the classical sense. No country has set its goals so high as has the United States.

What we Asians, living in the United States and worrying about our future relations with the United States, feel is a faltering sense of direction and of faith in America's commitments to herself and to what is best within her. We worry because this dream is not yours alone; it belongs to mankind.

I have tried to make myself understand this apocalyptic sense, this sense of doom, this deep cultural pessimism. To recognize the magnitude of the problems through which the United States is going still does not explain this apocalyptic sense. Other countries have

gone through terrible crises, crises which have made them question the fundamental justification of their existence as nations. There are a number of countries in Asia -- and Indonesia is one of them -- which have faced serious crises. It occurs to me that quite possibly this sense of doom, this sense of crisis, this loss of a sense of self-righteousness which is part of the greatness of a nation comes from a lack of sense of historical, moral, and cultural relativity. The terrific magnitude of your crisis may be the last manifestation of the idea of ultimate uniqueness in American society and American civilization. If that is true, then of course the struggle is not lost. It would be flippant, irresponsible, and cheap for me to tell you how you should solve your problems. In the final analysis, a nation itself must generate the power, the perspective, the vision to overcome the crises of its existence. Still I wonder whether it might not be the self-centeredness of a big nation that causes it to fail to realize that the things it experiences, have been experienced in the past by other nations, and indeed by most other nations. Most nations, very early in history, come to realize that there is limit to power. The United States has come to this realization only now, after more than 200 years of its existence. Most nations come to realize quite early in their existence that external reality is not simply shaped by what one's own nation wants and how one's own nation likes to see

reality. Only recently, and for the first time in its history, the United States has become aware that its resources cannot be used for all purposes at once.

These are only some of the aspects of the cultural and national crisis through which your country is going. I think it useful to realize that the cultural pessimism one finds in the United States has antecedents -- quite respectable ones -- for example, in Europe after the First World War. To know that all nations, including the United States, are subject to the laws and regularities of history can only add to maturity. I am not trying to diminish or reduce your national agony of choosing on Vietnam, on the cities, on youth. But, I must remind you that for mankind very much depends upon just how the United States and the people in the United States survive and recover from their agonies.

Restoration of America's faith in itself is a need that transcends the national needs of the United States. If the United States gives up on the notion of the universality of certain fundamental values and retreats into isolationism and protectionism, it may not be possible for all of us to survive in that different world. But as I said before, it would be presumptuous for me to say that you should solve your problems in this way or in that way. Each of us will have to work out his own problems even if the problems have

a significance beyond the limits of a nation's borders -- as is the case of the United States.

And now, a few concluding words about our two countries. For all the bad times we have had, perception of interest in Indonesia has pervaded awareness of American policy-makers even though there was at times no similar response on the Indonesian side. But, a simple perception of interest is not enough. We need resilience and the kind of friendship and cooperation that can give the kind of shape to East Asia and the Pacific that we would like to see. For that, deep and wide understanding is necessary. Still, I find it very hard to speak in Indonesia about America. America is difficult to talk about, not only because it is big and powerful, but its knowledge-factories stand in the way of deep understanding. The false certainties of American academia stands in the way of a real understanding of America. When I came to America, I had many resentments which were still lingering in my own mind about some of the instances in which America's behavior did not measure up to our expectations. I have now come to discover how much more likable America is when it is uncertain of itself than when it is too certain. If, out of your present turmoil, we gain a greater sensitivity toward each other, a greater sense of cultural relativity, a greater awareness that one can only be enriched by the differences that are

there, then I think there is a chance to deepen the basis that has now been laid to increase the depth of real understanding.

The role of institutions, like yours, become very important. It is fitting that I am saying these things at the Asia Society which has played so much of a role in deepening understanding through various ways that go beyond the immediate political interests between our two countries. In the final analysis, of course, institutions cannot operate without people and it is the network of people who have become sensitized to each other and whose lives have become enriched by knowing other cultures that the deepening and elaboration of this friendship and cooperation becomes possible. And, finally of course, all men are brothers. As a good American friend of mine said, "All men are brothers and all men are different, and the difference is beautiful."