



Indonesia: Key Wars and Conflicts

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Indonesian Conflict (1955-1966)

Between the years 1955 and 1966 Indonesia was embroiled in conflict that took the lives of millions. War erupted between Indonesia and Malaysia in 1962 and 1966. It was a small, undeclared war that came to involve troops from Australia and Britain. The conflict resulted from a belief by Indonesia's President Sukarno that the creation of the Federation of Malaysia, which became official in September 1963, represented an attempt by Britain to maintain colonial rule behind the cloak of independence granted to its former colonial possessions in south-east Asia. Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Dr. Subandrio, coined the word “confrontation” in January 1963



which came to refer to Indonesia's efforts to destabilize the new Federation of Malaysia instituted by Britain. Indonesia launched a series of cross-border raids into Malaysian territory the same year. A band of Indonesian insurgents attempted to seize the enclave of Brunei only to be defeated by British forces.

By 1964 military activity increased along the Indonesian side of the border with regular Indonesian army getting involved in the conflict. Under the banner of the larger British Commonwealth and fighting within the framework of its membership in the Far East Strategic Reserve, Australian units carried out operations against Indonesia in Borneo and West Malaysia. Later to be replaced by the 28th Brigade, the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) arrived in Borneo in March 1965 and served in Sarawak until the end of July.

Strategic and Historical Setting

Indonesia is a Southeast Asian archipelago located between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It has borders with Timor-Leste (228 km), Malaysia (1,782 km), and Papua New Guinea (820 km). Dutch colonists brought the whole of Indonesia under one government as the Dutch East Indies in 1900. And in 1928 a youth conference undertook to work for "one nation, one language, one people" for Indonesia. Four years into the Second World War Japan invaded Dutch East Indies. The Japanese helped independence leader Sukarno to return from internal exile and declare independence in 1945. The Dutch recognized Indonesian independence in 1949 after four years of guerrilla warfare. The Islands of the Maluku (Moluccas) declared independence from Indonesia and fought an unsuccessful separatist war in the 50s. After a successful period of UN administration, the Dutch agreed to transfer West Papua to Indonesia.

Moluccas Islands in Indonesia are an archipelago and are part of the Maritime Southeast Asia region. They are geographically located east of Sulawesi (Celebes), west of New Guinea, and north of Timor. By 1961, the Island of Borneo was divided into four separate states namely: Kalimantan (Indonesia), the Sultanate of Brunei (a British protectorate), and two colonies of the United Kingdom (UK)—Sarawak and British North Borneo (later named Sabah). British protectorate for Brunei ended on January 1, 1984. Borneo is divided between three countries: Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Approximately 73% of Borneo is the Indonesian territory of Kalimantan. Of the rest, 26% comprise the Malaysian Islands of Sarawak and Sabah (East Malaysia) and 1% is the Sultanate of Brunei.

Discussion

In 1950, a year after Indonesia proclaimed independence, a group of Christians in the southern Moluccas islands, backed by Moluccan Christian soldiers from the Dutch colonial army, proclaimed the short-lived independent Republik Maluku Selatan (or RMS, Republic of the South Moluccas). Dutch-educated Moluccan civil servants, soldiers, and loyalists saw no future in a government dominated by hostile Muslim majority and thus on April 25, 1950 proclaimed the Independent and Sovereign Republic of the South Moluccas (RMS). This proclamation of independence by Moluccan Christians led the Indonesian Army to intervene. Several leaders of RMS escaped to Holland. Even though a vast majority of Moluccan Christians currently do not support independence, what resonate to this day in Indonesia are the past aims of the RMS and support for a separatist state. Muslims often accuse Christians of aiming for independence. Currently, Diaspora Moluccan Christians' support for RMS remains the galvanizing force among Muslims. [1]

The surrender of Japan on August 15, 1945 paved way for the independence of Indonesia. The Dutch who were devastated by the Nazi occupation were unable to hold onto Indonesia and so Admiral Earl Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, took over command. The aim of the Allies was not to occupy the Islands of Indonesia but to disarm and repatriate the Japanese and liberate the Europeans held in internment camps by the Japanese.

Between 1962 and 1966, an undeclared war that came to be known as the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation, erupted between Indonesia and Malaysia backed by the United Kingdom over the future of the Island of Borneo. The confrontation evolved after Indonesia's attempts to destabilize the new Federation of Malaysia which came into being in 1963. Negotiations between Indonesia and Malaysia ended the conflict after the two sides signed a peace treaty in Bangkok in August 1966.

Impacts



Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

Under Suharto, Indonesia restored diplomatic relations with the western world. He quickly eliminated the Communist Party of Indonesia and severed ties with Communist China forged under Sukarno's reign though relations with China were reestablished in the 80s. He ended hostility with Malaysia and allowed Indonesia to be a member of the United Nations from which Sukarno had withdrawn in 1965. Suharto ordered the invasion of East Timor after Portugal ended its colonization of the territory in 1975. Indonesia occupied East Timor within days of Portuguese departure after the East Timorese declared independence. The plight of East Timorese captured world attention in 1991 after pro-Indonesian militia opened fire on a funeral procession killing 250 people in the capital Dili.

After intense world pressure, Indonesia allowed for a referendum to be held to determine the fate of East Timorese. Finally, East Timor declared independence on 20 May, 2002 after twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation.

Through the intervention of the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (Unmiset), the rebuilding of East Timor became a success story. In 2006, after an outbreak of gang violence, the UN was prompted to set up a new peacekeeping unit, Unmit. With the end of the Indonesian conflict, newly independent sovereign states have emerged; democracy has become the driving force in the region, and economies continue to flourish aggressively. Indonesia is a partner of the U.S. in the global War on Terror. Indonesia has been a victim of several terror attacks in the past, most notably the Bali bombings of 2002 that resulted in the deaths of 202 people and 209 injured.

Preceded by Megawati Sukarnoputri who became the fifth and first female president and daughter of Sukarno, she was replaced by retired General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. General Yudhoyono received his master's degree in management in 1991 from Webster

University while attending military training at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS. Surprisingly, the writer of this paper also graduated from the same university in 2011 with a master's degree in International Relations. The current president of the archipelago is Joko Widodo.

The legacy and impacts from Indonesia's wars and conflicts seem promising to the U.S. and to Indonesia's past adversaries. President George W. Bush visited Jakarta in November 2006 despite escalating insecurity and mass protests while his successor, Barack Obama, undertook a more historical venture in 2010 by retracing his steps in the land of his childhood years. Obama forged cordial relationships with an archipelago that has transformed from a cornucopia of conflicting ideological foundations to that of a plural liberal democracy. For now, both Malaysia and Indonesia remain beacons of peace in Asia-Pacific. Despite the dwindling of the global economy, both nations seem to be doing fairly well for the moment.

Biographies of Key Personalities

Sukarno

Born in 1901 in Blitar, East Java, Sukarno was the first president of Indonesia. Sukarno was a key nationalist and an opponent of Dutch and Japanese occupation. The most popular figure



among Indonesians, Sukarno became a symbol of independence. Known for his forthrightness and eloquence of speech, Sukarno was passionate about having Indonesia among the international community of nations. By proclaiming independence on 17 August, 1945, Sukarno picked Mohammad Hatta as his vice president. Upon taking the reins of power, Sukarno suspended parliamentary democracy and the system of Guided Democracy. He was known to explicitly castigate western imperialism.

Sukarno

His inclination to the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) or the Communist Party of Indonesia angered the military and student movements. He was deposed by General Suharto who took over power in a bloody coup on March 11, 1966. He died under house arrest on 21 June, 1970. [2]

Muhammad Hatta

Sukarno's follower in the liberation of Indonesia was Muhammad Hatta. He has been described as a diligently modest, sincerely Muslim yet open to all faiths, and unswervingly direct. Before and after assuming office, Muhammad Hatta aspired to have an Indonesia that would be egalitarian and tolerant land with dignity for all. Hatta was born in Sumatra in 1902

but moved to the Netherlands in 1921 where he lived for over a decade as a student. While in the Netherlands, Hatta formed the Indonesian Association in the Netherlands. This happened at a time when mention of the name Indonesia was a crime (the Dutch called the archipelago Netherlands Indie).

By launching “non-cooperation” campaign, Hatta managed to draw a wide range of nationalists and supporters to his cause. He was jailed by the Dutch in 1927 for being anti-government and then released after being found innocent. He returned to Rotterdam to continue with his studies. In 1932, Hatta returned to Indonesia to found an anti-Dutch movement. This placed him in the wrong side of the Dutch colonial administration who jailed for ten years. He served eight of his ten-year term. He was released from prison in 1942 after the Japanese ousted the Dutch. The Japanese wanted the help of Sukarno and Hatta in running the sprawling archipelago.



After the surrender of the Japanese and in the run-up to independence, Hatta “persuaded Islamic leaders to drop their demand that the President had to be Muslim and that shari'a law be enacted for Muslim citizens, and enshrined in the constitution the recognition of other religions and the rights to assembly and expression”. [3] After breaking up with Sukarno a decade later, Hatta taught economics and history at a university in Yogyakarta. He died in 1980 at the age of 77 and was buried in a common graveyard.

General Suharto

Suharto, the man who came to be known as the “smiling general”, was born to ethnic Javanese parents of peasant background on 8 June, 1921 during the era of Dutch East Indies in the village of Godean, 9 miles west of Yogyakarta. His parents divorced when he was an infant and he was placed under the care of different relatives often changing homes until he came of age. He attended local Javanese schools; in a brief period, young Suharto worked in a village bank and thereafter plunged into a long military career after enlisting in the Dutch colonial army in 1940. By 1942 he had risen to the rank of sergeant. That same year, the Japanese captured and occupied much of Indonesia. Suharto switched allegiance by joining the Japanese-led militia that gave him further military training. He did join the Japanese believing they offered hope for Indonesian independence.



When the Japanese surrendered in August of 1945 and Indonesia proclaimed independence, Suharto hurriedly joined the newly established Indonesian army. He fought a five-year war against the Dutch who wanted to reoccupy Indonesia to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawing Japanese. The Dutch prevailed and captured much of Java in 1947 and Yogyakarta the following year. However, in March of 1949, troops under the command of Suharto recaptured Yogyakarta prompting the Dutch to leave the whole of Indonesia except Dutch New Guinea (West Irian) later that year. Suharto rose steadily through the ranks of military over the next fifteen years. In 1957, Suharto took command of the central Javanese division and in 1960 he was promoted to Brigadier-General. In 1962 Suharto was put in-charge of a military operation to recover West Irian (now the province of Papua; formerly Irian Jaya) from the Dutch. By 1963 he was in-charge of the military strategic command. Suharto came to power on March 11, 1966 in a military coup.

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