

**This study was created for
The Center For Emerging Threats and Opportunities**

ALSO KNOWN AS INDONESIA

Notes on the Javanese Empire

by Ralph Peters

Executive Summary:

Indonesia is of far greater strategic importance to the United States than we have yet realized. The usual reasons cited for engagement with Indonesia are the proximity of vital sea lines of communication; its population of 210 million, of whom almost ninety per cent are Muslim; its struggling democracy; and, recently, the prospect of Indonesia becoming a haven for Islamic terrorists. All of these factors matter, but there is one greater, encompassing issue that could affect not only the future of the region, but of the world: The future of Islam is being decided in Indonesia.

From a combination of habit and immediate interest, the United States has focused on the Arab world as the key to our difficulties with Islam. But in the Middle East, the shape of Islam is poured in concrete and nothing we can do will change that shape. In its old homelands, the potential for positive change in Muslim culture, thinking and behavior is so low it is almost non-existent. But, as I write, a mighty struggle for the soul of Islam is being fought on that religion's frontiers, on its boundaries and edges, in the Philippines, in Central Asia (and Afghanistan), in Pakistan, in the Balkans and Turkey, in India and even in Iran—but, above all, in the most complex of all the “Muslim” countries, Indonesia.

The notion that Indonesia is an Islamic country in the same sense that Saudi Arabia, Egypt or even Iraq are Muslim is profoundly misleading. The diversity of Islamic belief in Indonesia is bewilderingly rich and unorthodox, ranging from the rigorous Muslims of Aceh to the eccentric Muslims of the Javanese countryside, where the old influences of Hinduism, Buddhism and, above all, folk religion, dilute Islam to a degree that outrages

Indonesia's minority of "strict" Muslims (well under 20% would qualify by the standards of Arabian Islam).

In the vast expanse of Indonesia, Islam has not just one history, but varied histories. The faith has been embedded for more than five hundred years in some areas, while in others it is still a missionary religion, vying with Christianity for converts. Saudis and other Islamic fundamentalists have engaged themselves actively in Indonesia—not because it is a Muslim state, but specifically because it has not yet become one. Reactionary forces in the Islamic world do not want Indonesia to become a successful, rule-of-civil-law democracy that would offer an attractive alternative model to conservative, Sharia-law-ruled, anti-Western states.

There is one basic fact that both Westerners and Indonesians must grasp: Islamic fundamentalists from abroad do not care whether or not Indonesia has a successful future—as long as it has a repressively-Islamic future. They would gladly let Indonesians suffer, if that is the price of religious purity. Extremists are interested only in religious discipline, not in public prosperity (in fact, ultra-extreme Muslims from the Arab homelands would prefer a poor Indonesia they can dominate to a burgeoning, self-confident country veering toward greater tolerance and secularism). The fiercest, most conservative Muslims in the Middle East are spending a great deal of money and effort to expand fundamentalist influence in Indonesia, building mosques, schools, and clinics, and buying influence among politicians. What is remarkable is not how much, but how little success the radicals have had to date.

The future of Islam is up for grabs in Indonesia. Our enemies and false friends are grabbing with both hands, while we are not even reaching out.

Within Indonesia, Muslim extremism remains a danger that must be intelligently and diligently countered, but probably is less of a threat to the nation's secular orientation than it was half a century ago, during the independence struggle and the nation's early years. The danger today is that, step by step, Indonesia will become more regressively Islamic and more indulgent of extremists, rather than that fundamentalism will convince all the Muslims of Indonesia to abandon their more liberal, home-grown versions of the faith. While this is a vital struggle, it is not an all or nothing battle. It is about the degree of influence, access and protection terrorists and their sympathizers enjoy. It is a battle that will be won or lost in increments—the sort that tries American patience.

The long-term trend in Indonesia has been toward secularism, not toward religious extremism. But a determined, expanding, fanatical minority can do great damage to any developing country (consider the Balkans). In Indonesia's case, continued increases in the power of Islamic fundamentalists would mean a greater degree of repression and violence, and a corresponding tendency of dissenting regions to demand independence. The integrity of Indonesia's territory in the coming years will be inversely proportional to the power of the strict Islamists—the more secular the government, the more liberality it will be able to display toward discontented regions, while attempts to impose Islamic rule and Sharia law would divide even Muslim Indonesians to the point of civil war.

Because of recent events, we focus on civil strife between Indonesia's Muslim extremists and Christians; however, the 20th century saw far worse Muslim vs. Muslim violence than strife between religions—Indonesia's various schools of Islam are inherently hostile to one another, even though their differences have simmered on the

back burner of late—but there can be no question that the critical division in Indonesia, the fault line that inevitably will re-surface, is between different interpretations of Islam. Because the overwhelming majority of its population is nominally Muslim, Indonesia can appear deceptively unified to outsiders, but this is one of the most inherently-unstable societies on earth--although the big blow-ups happen at long intervals. Based on the rule that “the third generation forgets the suffering of the first,” which predicts the re-emergence of factional strife in fissured societies within a window of forty to sixty years, Indonesia will be ripe for another burst of large-scale violence between 2005 and 2025.

We tend to see danger signs in states and regions where low-level conflict is always in the headlines, as in the Middle East. But the great, sudden bloodbaths come in societies that repress and deny their ethnic, religious or political differences (Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Cambodia, India) until the wrong constellation of events triggers a slaughter. In such societies, the eruptions are much less frequent than in “constant conflict” societies, but when they come, they are appalling in their scale--as in Indonesia in 1965-66.

While the long trend toward secularism could be reversed—and reinvigorated Islamic fundamentalists are intent on doing just that—Indonesia is a state that could respond very well to enlightened American engagement. Indonesian hostility to the United States is largely superficial (except among the most hardcore Muslims), while the fear of religious extremism on the part of the majority of the population has very deep roots. Despite bickering and some political bad blood between the United States and Indonesia, the fact is that Indonesia is ours to lose. At present, we seem to be doing our best to lose it. Obsessed with tactical issues, we ignore the strategic implications.

If there is one clear lessons we can draw from the period between 1975 and 2000, it is that the lack of Western attention to ethnically or religiously complex societies enables genocide or communal massacres. From Southeast Asia to southeastern Europe to Africa, the worst slaughters have occurred when the local powers believed that the West was either inattentive or insufficiently concerned to respond. Certainly, we cannot engage everywhere all the time. But Indonesia is simply too critical to be snubbed over short-term disagreements (at times, we will have to swallow hard and keep our focus on the long game, accepting heartfelt criticism for doing so). Jakarta—with its many domestic political factions struggling for power—needs to know that the West and its allies keep a spotlight trained on Indonesia. Bloodbaths start in the dark. They just need to know we’re paying attention.

At the same time, our engagement must be more subtle and sensitive than is the norm in American foreign policy. Indonesia would not respond well to any U.S. attempts at major surgery. Indonesian-American relations need a long treatment with acupuncture. Of all the major states of the world, Indonesia is the most neglected by the U.S. foreign policy establishment and the intelligence community. Our picture of Indonesia is fragmentary, subjective and often inaccurate—when not bluntly ignorant. Our blindness to the importance and potential—both positive and negative--of Indonesia is likely to be highlighted by future historians as one of the worst errors of early 21st century American diplomacy. The trouble with acupuncture is that you need to put the needles in exactly the right spots. Otherwise, you’re just playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. And if you hit the wrong nerve, the donkey is going to kick violently. Our worst enemy in Indonesia may not be Islamic extremists but our own ignorance.

Terrorists unquestionably have used and are using Indonesian soil for a refuge, for training, and as a rear base of operations. They would be foolish not to do so. This huge state of 17,500 islands, of which about 6,000 are populated to some extent, is the perfect terrorist hideout--especially, since the Indonesian military is under-strength and under-equipped to police the entire national territory on a regular basis. While Islamic sympathies exist within minorities of the military (and government), they remain less threatening than in countries such as Pakistan or even Egypt. Current U.S. policies play into the hands of Islamic extremists, however, by alienating secular-nationalist military officers and undercutting moderate politicians. Nonetheless, the military and the government do not want Indonesia to become a haven for terrorists of any description. But the internal political equation is far more complex than Americans either realize or are willing to credit.

Confrontation does not work with Indonesia; in fact, it is counter-productive, even when we get our way in the short term. In Indonesia, everything that matters happens behind closed doors—sometimes behind doors behind the other doors. At its current, apprentice level, the democratically-elected parliament is still little more than a platform on which its members strike public poses—there has been progress, but the legislative process remains less than fully open, to say the least. Despite its veneer of modern dress and open hospitality, Javanese society—which remains the power center of Indonesian politics--is one of the most secretive on earth. A culture of evasiveness and outright lying to avoid confrontation or public unpleasantness is one of the most enduring Javanese traditions—a key reason why we often misread President Megawati and other Indonesian politicians (even though their backgrounds may be Balinese or Ambonese or Sumatran, the movers and shakers play by Javanese rules). In Indonesia, you cannot make judgments based upon what leaders say—you must watch, very closely, what they do...and what they do is frequently very different from their public statements. Focus on the content, not the packaging.

When a U.S. ambassador publicly criticizes President Megawati for not doing enough to fight terrorism, he makes it even more difficult for her to act effectively. He also betrays his ignorance of what the Indonesian government actually is doing. While President Megawati remains extremely-cautious when dealing with radical Islamic threats, there is much more going on than meets the public eye (recall, too, that her father was overthrown in the wake of a ferocious coup/counter-coup scenario; that, as a woman, she remains a controversial choice to lead a “Muslim” state; and that her power is recent, unfamiliar to her, and dependent upon the support of a complex range of interests and parties). President Megawati and the key arms of her government do appear to have overt, covert and clandestine programs underway to deal with terrorism and its sometime-companion, separatism. Indonesia’s actions are not yet adequate, but they are improving (and, within the government, there is a great deal of veiled maneuvering to achieve a greater consensus on how to deal with the terrorist threat). Meanwhile, Singapore and Malaysia, both of which have more immediate, practical leverage with Indonesia, have been so alarmed by local terrorist activities that they are pummeling President Megawati sufficiently to keep her focused. We can afford to put on a white hat and let others wear the black hats for a change.

The ethnic and religious mix in Indonesia is the most complex in the world. Its volatility is increased by one dominant factor—not fundamentalism itself, but longstanding patterns of internal migration that serve as a safety valve for overpopulated Java—and most Javanese are Muslim, in one form or another. Except in Aceh, virtually every serious outbreak of violence since Suharto’s overthrow four years ago has been sparked by the internal migration of Javanese Muslims into areas where Christianity or folk religions (or a combination of both) have dominated for centuries. Although the fighting breaks down along religious lines—and the violence expands the influence of religious radicals on all sides—it is consistently triggered by the real or perceived expansion of Javanese power over the local economy, land ownership and political power in areas such as Ambon, Maluku, Central Sulawesi, Kalimantan and West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya at Jakarta’s decree, now returned to its “native” name).

The Indonesian government is in a nearly impossible situation, since population pressures in Java, where over half the population of the country crowds together, demand constant internal migration to less-populated islands, such as Kalimantan or West Papua. East Timor ignited because of Muslim immigration into a Christian region. But Jakarta cannot and will not put a stop to these patterns of *transmigrasi*. Viewed from the capital, intermittent bloodshed on the lesser islands is preferable to potential mass eruptions of popular frustration on the crucial home island of Java. The rest of Indonesia is the dumping ground for Java’s excess population, the demographic safety valve, to an even greater degree than the United States is for Mexico. And this situation will not—cannot—change. The implication is continuing violence on the fringes of the “Javanese Empire.”

But the Megawati government has not been passive as seemingly “no-win” situations continue to erupt on Indonesia’s peripheries. In regions as diverse as Aceh and West Papua, the Megawati government and military appear to be following a quiet, but highly sophisticated approach to violent separatism. These campaigns consist of four parts:

1. Allowing increased local autonomy and returning more income to the regions, as well as continuing the Indonesian tradition of buying local influence.
2. Engaging separatist movements in peace talks with implied concessions.
3. Assassinating the most extreme or charismatic separatist leaders while talking peace with more moderate elements.
4. Building up the military’s presence during peace talks and ceasefires.

Thus far, the government’s approach has led to significant tactical successes (not only in Aceh, but in Maluku and Sulawesi, as well, where a modified version of the approach has been applied—without the assassinations, thus far). In part, these successes are due to genuine, if uneven, reforms within the Indonesian military. Despite a handful of apparent assassinations by the military or the intelligence services, the military’s concern with human rights has increased dramatically, even within the long-notorious special forces, and it has been making an effort to be evenhanded in sectarian struggles. The best indicator of this is the changing attitude of common Indonesians, who do not want the military to return to its role as political kingmaker, but who repeatedly praised the military’s improved behavior to me.

For example, while the police are viewed with overwhelming dislike and even hatred, and are infamous for breaking into factions themselves and taking sides in civil conflicts, on Sulawesi, Christians and Muslims alike told me they felt the army had been evenhanded in its efforts to stop the killing in the Poso region. Among the population,

the navy and marines have the best reputation, since they were less tarnished by the excesses of the Suharto years, but the entire force is improving its public image. The United States must be wary of engaging only the “clean” units in the Indonesian military, which could easily alienate the units that most need the benefit of American assistance—and American influence. Any U.S. aid to the Indonesian military must beware of exacerbating the feudal nature of the sole institution that keeps the country from widespread violence and fragmentation.

While the future course of Indonesian Islam is the most important issue for the United States and the world, internally, Muslim extremism is not the most important or immediate threat to the future of Indonesia’s experiment in democracy, its general well-being, or its cultural orientation. The greatest threat to *Indonesians* today is economic.

Economic analysts have described Indonesia as “the next Argentina.” They are wrong on several counts, but the reasons are not very encouraging: First, Indonesia is of much greater strategic significance and poses a far greater potential danger; second, Indonesia has a far weaker sense of national identity and has regional problems Argentina does not face; and, third—the only positive difference—the size of Indonesia’s domestic market and its less developed consumer base provide some insulation from economic shocks. The immediate cause of Indonesia’s grim financial difficulties was its orgy of corruption—phenomenal even by developing-country standards—during the Asian boom years of the 1990s. Indonesia has long traditions of corruption dating back into its years as a Dutch colony, if not beyond (contrary to the popular image in the United States, the preferred Indonesian way of doing achieving solutions is to use bribes, not bullets), but the Suharto government’s long policy of buying off potential opponents and enriching friends and family with shameless deals and exclusive contracts turned into a feeding frenzy as the international community poured investments and massive loans into the “Asian Tigers” in the last decade or so of the 20th century. Far more funds were stolen than were used constructively.

Now the bills are due, Indonesia has no prospect of paying them, and the pervasiveness of corruption—everyone who should be indicted has the goods on dozens, if not hundreds, of others--means the government has made only the slightest progress in punishing the guilty and none in recovering funds. The banks are ruined, Jakarta is dangerously over-built, industry is woefully underdeveloped and outdated, the hi-tech train has passed Indonesia by, and tens of billions of dollars have disappeared offshore. If any single factor is likely to increase the strength of fundamentalist Islam, it is a continued worsening of the economic situation—or a sudden crash. And improved terms for loan repayment will, at best, keep the patient on life support. Indonesia needs massive foreign investment, but has scared off potential investors. The next great crisis in Indonesian history is far likelier to start in a banker’s conference room than in a terrorist incident.

Meanwhile, the safety of an important Indonesian minority, its millions of Chinese, remains fragile—although both the previous government under Gus Dur and the current Megawati government have moved to improve the situation. Despite the bloodletting between Christians and Muslims in Indonesian troublespots, I was startled by the anti-Chinese sentiment expressed to me—often in very blunt terms—by Muslims and Christians alike (even though a substantial portion of the Chinese are Christians). The

Chinese of Indonesia, who have not assimilated (nor have they been allowed to) to any significant degree, are in a position nearly identical to the Jewish citizens of old Europe. I do not mean that they are bound for concentration camps, although anti-Chinese pogroms have recurred since the early 18th century, but that the Chinese, restricted in their opportunities to retail and wholesale trade, investment, banking and a few related professions, have become very successful in the niches into which they have been forced. And their success (and relative wealth) is deeply resented.

The Chinese are, clearly, the most creative, best educated, hardest-working, most cosmopolitan and most successful residents of Indonesia on a per capita basis. Their successes, combined with their defensive clannishness, their enduring foreign connections, the exclusive languages and dialects many still speak among themselves, and their different appearance all combine to make them Indonesia's scapegoats of choice. Indonesia desperately needs the Chinese for their acumen and as a bridge to foreign investment, but any Chinese citizen of Indonesia born today may be confident that he or she will witness bloody anti-Chinese violence at some point—or points—during his or her lifetime. As economic problems sharpen, the Chinese will be the canary in the Indonesian coal mine.

Whatever happens, Indonesia—and Indonesians—will muddle through. But the direction in which their muddling will take them has yet to be decided. There are certainly limits to how much the United States can do to help, but, at present, we are doing virtually nothing. Valid issues, such as human rights abuses during the East Timor crisis, have nearly paralyzed relations between Washington and Jakarta. But it may be time to recognize the turbulent circumstances and governmental chaos that led to the excesses in East Timor (this is not meant to rationalize them away, only to put them in some perspective). Indonesia desperately needs a second chance on many fronts. If we recognize how far this new democracy has come in a few short years--against enormous odds--we might find that we are squandering a historic opportunity we cannot afford to let slip away. American engagement alone will not determine Indonesia's future, but the lack of engagement is a gift to our mortal enemies.

Note: This report is based upon observations made during a trip to Indonesia from late January through February, 2002. The cut-off date for information was mid-March, 2002.

I. HATI HATI! (BE CAREFUL!)

All Wet in Jakarta

It's always a stroke of luck to arrive in a country during a natural disaster. You discover the government's true interests and capabilities.

I landed in Jakarta during the worst flooding in the city's history, unsure if I could make it to my hotel. Riding in a jacked-up van, it took hours to make it through flooded sections of the boulevard connecting the airport to the city, with immersed cars blocking lanes wherever the road dipped and wading beggars "directing" traffic. The rain fell and the waters continued to rise as we drove. The only path to my hotel was through a web of office parking lots, since the streets were flooded on all sides save one of the building, which stood on a slight rise above a canal. Inside the lobby, the usual developing country unreality set in, with everything in perfect order, as if we were in Orlando instead of in a drowned city with four-hundred-thousand people driven from their homes and the death toll already above fifty. An even greater disconnect awaited me in my room. From my window, eight floors up, I looked down on a beautifully-kept, deep-green hotel garden and a blue pool, surrounded by hedges that barely concealed razor wire. Just beyond our little fenced-in hill, not fifty yards from the hotel doors, the surrounding *kampungs*—working class neighborhoods a Westerner would mistake for slums—had water up to their second stories and looked like a flooded battlefield.

Residents waded through water up to their waists, or chests, or necks, with their most cherished possessions wrapped in cloth and balanced on their heads or held as high as their arms could reach. A mosque stood immediately behind the hotel, with a view of the hotel swimming pool (where, between downpours, male and female guests were not particular about the amount of flesh they exposed). Families clustered on the mosque's steps, just above the floodwaters, clinging to what few possessions they could rescue, while pots and mattresses floated by amid boards and plywood, streams of garbage and the occasional swimming rat. Robert Kaplan uses the image of an air-conditioned limousine speeding through a slum to describe encounters between the "West and the rest," but, staring down from that hotel window, with jet-lag distorting the world around the edges (but with room service snappy and the mini-bar full), I felt there could be no blunter image of privilege versus underdevelopment.

I had booked a driver to haul me around Jakarta for the next few days, but by the second morning he could no longer reach the hotel. The only way to see the city—and what was happening—was to walk. I'm getting old, and parasites and skin diseases just aren't as much fun as they used to be, but I had taken the king's shilling to study Indonesia, and I damned well wasn't going to spend my time drinking beer with bloat-bellied businessmen down in the bar. So I set out on foot, finding myself living up to that old Army expression about "wading through the shit."

I'm just not fond of sewage.

Some neighborhoods had disappeared up to their tile roofs, while others merely had slopped-over gutters and slime on the sidewalks. A difference in elevation of a few feet amounted to crucial geography. While women, especially, tried to rescue needed

household goods, children splashed happily in the brown waters as heavy debris swept past in the currents of the canals. A surprising number of men who had been forced from their homes nonetheless seemed to regard the flood as great entertainment, and they especially liked to squat for hours, watching drowned cars which, whether Toyotas or Mercedes, they would never have been able to afford. Any pain inflicted on the upper classes appeared to please them, no matter their own losses.

Taxis could run for short stretches on a few of the main boulevards, but ambitious new office buildings—and all their underground garages—had flooded out. One luxury hotel—the city’s best (and not mine)—was swept by waters from an overnight rain and the guests had to be evacuated by garbage barge. Of course, the poor were left to fend for themselves in most neighborhoods, although a few military boats reportedly showed up after the first few days (I never saw any) and a yuppie rafting company brought in boats on its own initiative to ferry people to safety.

One surreal scene popped up after another. In a low lot, a brand-new Range Rover stood submerged almost to the roof, while perhaps a hundred locals—ragged, some shirtless—watched in silence, sucking on their cheap clove cigarettes. Wherever there was high ground, refugees squatted (sometimes quite literally, given the effect of bad water on the digestive tract; fortunately, the city escaped a cholera outbreak, but it suffered an inevitable epidemic of diarrhea). On the city’s equivalent of Fifth Avenue, an urban mall of designer shops did a booming business, while, hardly a block away, Thamrin Boulevard had flooded until only buses and jeeps could pass. A monument to the enormous wealth stolen by the Indonesian elite, a Ferrari-Maserati dealership stood just above the waters, while more of the dislocated poor loitered between the show windows and the rising slop with dull shock in their eyes.

The diplomatic residence area was only mildly affected, since the floodgates protecting the homes of most of the well-to-do were kept shut for days—diverting the floodwater into the slums and working class neighborhoods--then opened only enough to demonstrate solidarity with the poor (and after a good bit of protest). Some of the rich got flooded basements. The poor had flooded lives.

It says something of the Javanese character, though, that there were relatively few protests—and no violence. Certainly, many of those affected were struggling to survive and had more urgent things to do. But there was more anger in the newspapers than on the streets. Most of the poor seemed to take a resigned “screwed-again” attitude. The point is that when tens of thousands of Indonesians *do* take to the streets in protest against an individual or an issue, it means the matter must be taken seriously and we all had better pay attention. A few bused-in protesters in front of the U.S. embassy are meaningless, except as a political display. But when the Javanese masses move on their own, there’s serious trouble in the wind.

Back along the canals, entrepreneurs from the bottom of the market got up tea stalls on the levee tops, while bruised prostitutes camping out near the low-life entertainment district showed more pluck about the situation than just about anyone else, laughing at the prospect of a Westerner not only wading through the slop, but slipping and sliding as he tried to climb the mud banks. With friendly giggles, they pointed out concrete steps a few feet away. And, everywhere, even in the worst affected neighborhoods, the smell of clove cigarettes wafted against the sewage smells.

In the early days of the flooding, which ebbed and flowed for nearly a month, the governor (super-mayor) of Jakarta, Mr. Sutiyoso, precipitously offered to resign if he failed to manage the disaster properly. The promise lasted about two days, after which he explained that resignation was not really an option, of course, since he had to stand to his post, that he hadn't really meant it exactly as he'd said it, and that, anyway, his fate was for others to decide—only not now. A bit later, as engineers and journalists pointed out that the reason these floods were worse than any in the past was the unrestricted building up in the mountains, from whence the flooded rivers flowed and where nature preserves had been clear-cut to make room for getaway bungalows for the wealthy, Sutiyoso was glad to shift the blame. But when the press then pointed out that lower catchment areas supposed to serve as buffers for Jakarta had been turned into suburban housing tracts without the required permits, clearances and studies, Sutiyoso—notorious for backing uncontrolled development--tut-tutted and blamed his subordinates. A proposed moratorium on further building lasted only a few days before the governor, in the middle of the flooding, explained that he couldn't justify any pause in construction, since that would put innocent people out of work—and didn't the poor need work, now more than ever?

Meanwhile, the city authorities did almost nothing. Most aid was provided by, in order, private aid organizations, the military, then by other arms of the national government. Hospitals and clinics did a great deal—as much as they could—on their own, but got little emergency government support. Yet, the public protests remained few. Indonesia can be a dangerous place—but it is far more dangerous for Indonesians than for anyone else.

As for the drawing power of Islam, I made my way to the massive, architecturally-hideous national mosque, a sort of industrial-design religious factory. As an unbeliever, I was accompanied by a guard inside—not because I was in danger, but because it meant a tip. During the crisis, the people of Jakarta weren't turning to faith. Despite its dry condition and relatively-easy accessibility, noon prayers at the Istiqlal Mosque had attracted less than two dozen worshippers—in a mosque designed for tens of thousands (hundreds of thousands, if the courtyard is included in the count). A few beggars snoozed on the broad marble stairs inside, but the atmosphere was less devout or attentive than a downtown D.C. church at lunchtime during the workweek. And there were more people playing soccer on the muddy Gambir Maidan—a vast yard around the pillar of the National Monument—than were saying their prayers a block away.

This is an Islamic country with good breweries, independent women, a party mentality, and a lively press. When I asked one jeans-clad young woman—a Muslim—about the minority of women who wore Islamic head coverings (affairs that look identical to those worn by German matrons at the end of the fifteenth century), she made a dismissive face and said that, if men couldn't stop themselves from seeing women as sex objects, that was the men's problem. She wasn't having any of their nonsense. The fact that I even thought it might be an issue annoyed her.

Although the situation is different in the villages or in more traditionally-Islamic cities, it becomes very clear, very quickly that the majority of Indonesia's women do not want any part of Middle Eastern-style repression (yet, the women of all persuasions co-exist as men can't seem to do and it was not uncommon for a grocery store to have a cashier in a mini-skirt, while her friend the bagger wore more sedate Islamic dress). And,

once you get beyond the politeness, Javanese women, especially, seem positively dismissive of the local men, as though they were simply minor obstacles to be worked around. Even fundamentalist males in Indonesia rarely exhibit the social fanaticism or fears of the Arab world.

Perhaps the best metaphor for the Indonesian—especially Javanese—character is the land itself. The dominant islands of Indonesia are volcanic, and the volcanoes lie dormant for decades or centuries, then erupt with sudden, shocking fury. Indonesian history follows much the same pattern, sleeping through occasional tremors, then waking abruptly to massacres that astound and horrify the Indonesians themselves. The last great eruption was in 1965-66, when the murky coup/counter-coup scenario that removed President Sukarno from the national stage led to the slaughter of no less than half-a-million Communists and their sympathizers (perhaps three times that number), with hundreds of thousands of others interned for a decade or more. In comparison, the disturbances of 1998 were minor, indeed, and Indonesia's move to democracy has been smoother than anyone might have predicted. But the latent volatility is always there, down deep. It makes Indonesia one of the most unpredictable states on earth.

On a day when the waters subsided a bit—only to surge back later—I was able to reach the fringes of Jakarta's Chinatown through a combination of cab rides and walking. This report will describe Indonesia's Chinese "problem" in a separate section, but the visual signal that you are entering Chinatown is the sight of burned-out buildings still blackened from the flames of the 1998 unrest in which, despite much lower official figures, hundreds of Chinese may have died, while gang rapes targeted Chinese girls and women. You will not see many Chinese characters, both because they were officially discouraged (books in Mandarin are still regarded as contraband by customs officials) and because the Chinese do not want to attract undue attention to the ownership of their shops. But you cannot hide the color of your skin, and the Chinese identity remains firmly, dangerously separate from that of other Indonesian citizens.

The old city and old port were flooded so badly I could not get into them at all, largely because the Dutch who built Jakarta (formerly known as Batavia) tried to import their system of canals from back home—but tidal patterns were different than in the Netherlands, resulting in the accumulation of stagnant water in Jakarta and the breeding of disease down the centuries, rather than in good drainage. Flooding has been routine, though never so bad as in 2002.

The authorities knew the danger. A far-ranging flood control plan has been on the books since 1973. But a combination of apathy and corruption prevented even the least progress. And now it is hard to see how the state can afford to make the sort of changes that are necessary.

Jakarta is a massive, sprawling, unplanned city with an official population of about 10 million, but with perhaps two million more unofficial squatters, daily and weekly commuters, and constant new arrivals. It is a classic developing-country capital in its contrasts: The skyline is impressive, with some very good post-modern architecture among the recent hi-rises. From a distance—or from a hotel window—it looks like a boom-town, which it was during the mid-nineties. But now those hi-rises, many of which were built as crony investments or to launder money, are often nearly empty (as are the overbuilt hotels), and, as is typical throughout the developing world, the sleek new

buildings rise above crumbling sidewalks and barely-covered sewers. Luxury apartments look down on chaotic slums.

Conspicuous consumption is the common behavior pattern of Jakarta's upwardly mobile—or those who wish to appear so. Indonesia's yuppies, known locally as Indoyups, have made a new religion out of worshipping designer logos. It has, of course, been a scrap of left-wing dogma for generations that Western consumer society is bad, bad, bad, while the people of the old Third World were not materialistic, but enjoy happy lives full of folk wisdom. Boy, is that nonsense.

Consumerism is a basic human impulse. As soon as people in developing societies get a leg up, they start buying by labels and showing off their new wealth. In fact, compared to developing countries, consumerism in the United States is relatively subdued, focused more on value and practicality where the average citizen is concerned. The first indicator that the West was not unique in its greed and consumption was, of course, Japan—and the Japanese, despite their recession, continue to buy by brand and logo (the bigger and brighter the logo, the better). So, while American old-money eschews labels and dresses down, young Japanese tourists shuffle about in Ferragamo shoes, dreadful Burberry-plaid skirts, scarves or hats, Ralph Lauren shirts and brass-logo Gucci handbags—all worn at once.

Any Indonesian who can afford it outdoes the Japanese.

In fact, this consumerism tells us a great deal about the developmental stage—the uncertainty as to identity—of a society. All societies, rich or poor, have outward signs of status, whether scalps outside a teepee or a Lexus in the garage, but the badges of success are most important to those who feel themselves at risk of the loss of a tenuous or newly-acquired status. Today, Indonesians who can afford it travel to shop—shopping sprees are the number one reason Indonesian tourists travel abroad, usually to Singapore or Australia, but often farther afield. And in a boom-bust society such as that of Jakarta, where safety nets exist only for the richest and best-connected and a man can fall far more quickly than he rose, outward signs of status are far more important to identity and image than in more self-confident, settled societies. An Indonesian will sacrifice a great deal to drive a BMW to make a statement—even if his home is of far less value than the car (or merely rented). The cell phones and designer labels become a substitute for enduring productivity and robust success (actually, much of this reflects the traditional love of ornament, marks of status, and ceremonial intensity of the upper reaches of Javanese—especially court—society). Indonesian—especially Jakarta's—society has undergone abrupt, layered changes and there is a struggle to find one's place, to stake one's claim, as the economy retracts. So possessions become totems. The greatest fissure in the Javanese character—and an enduring one—is the tension between religious traditions that focus on mystical inner experiences and a social condition in which the superficial appearance is more important than the inner substance.

Myself, I was wading through the floods in an old pair of khakis and stubby loafers.

The Javanese Empire

The Indonesian government certainly understands the importance of Jakarta to a greater degree than foreign observers do. Of course, it's the capital, as well as by far the largest and richest city in Indonesia. But as modern means of movement and lines of communication have expanded, Jakarta's role has become ever more powerful. Even during the days of the independence struggle and the early years of nationhood, control of Jakarta was essential to control of the overall state. But revolutions could be kept alive in the hinterlands, and distant islands periodically asserted themselves against the center. Increasingly, however, the future of Indonesia will be determined in the capital, by the capital, and for the capital.

It is easy to see Indonesia as crumbling inward from its territorial extremes—and some islands may, indeed, separate from Indonesia in the years to come—but Indonesia is an empire. The island of Java continues to dominate the country, as it long has done, and the Javanese and those others who see the advantage in an overarching Indonesian state run a diverse, extensive empire that ranges from the skyscrapers of Jakarta westward to the fundamentalism-haunted oil fields of Sumatra, and to the stone-age tribes of West Papua in the east. And empires always experience the most frequent (but not the most decisive) turmoil on their frontiers. Despite the immediate local causes, the fighting in Ambon and Maluku, in Sulawesi and Aceh, in East Timor and West Papua, has been related to the fighting done by the Romans on the German or British frontiers, in Palestine and North Africa, or by the British in India—and by the Dutch in the East Indies that became Indonesia. This is fighting about the boundaries of empire, about the rules for and roles of subject peoples. In Kalimantan, the fighting is very much about the preservation of local culture, as it is in Aceh, West Papua and elsewhere. The German tribes fought the same battles against Rome two thousand years ago. The center pushes outward, and the frontiers resist. Even after they have been conquered, the peoples of the frontier periodically test the resolve of the center to hold them—especially when there are upheavals back in Rome.

This is not to suggest that all of the above-mentioned territories wish to break away from Indonesia (although a few do). For some, such as Sulawesi or Ambon, it is a matter of fighting for improved terms for one group or another within the empire. And the idea of Indonesia—an artificial nation that exists within its current boundaries only because those were the boundaries of the region's Dutch imperial possessions—has taken a strong, if imperfect hold among many citizens from diverse groups, just as membership in the Roman Empire (if not citizenship) was attractive to those who saw its advantages to themselves.

Of course, religious fervor is a recurring cancer of empire, weakening the system from within, whether that religion was Christianity in Rome or the secular religion of nationalism in British India and elsewhere. The degree to which Islamic actions and demands may fracture Indonesia is an open question.

The Indonesian government implicitly recognizes the importance of peace in the capital city, though—not least because it was the power of Jakarta's people, students and others, that served as the catalyst to bring down the Suharto regime. Jakarta is as important to Indonesia as Paris is to France or Buenos Aires to Argentina. Despite claims

for Yogyakarta as Indonesia's (or Java's) cultural capital, Jakarta dominates the modern culture that has operational meaning, while Yogya simply educates and preserves old traditions (it is the difference between the power of Manhattan, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles combined, compared to that of Cambridge, Massachusetts). While the body that controls Jakarta does not necessarily control the rest of Indonesia, without Jakarta there is no chance of controlling the rest of the country. The country's dynamism, wealth and legitimacy are centered in Jakarta. Any Indonesian government will tolerate a high level of turbulence elsewhere if that is the price of social and political peace in Jakarta.

Transmigrasi

Thus, the Megawati government is unlikely to put the brakes on the internal migration of the unemployed from Java and other over-populated, central islands to Indonesia's far-flung, less-developed territories. Internal migration (as well as external migration to Malaysia, which recently began deporting Indonesian workers after a spate of riots) is essential to social peace in the Indonesian heartland. But on the periphery, the prospects for recurring flare-ups of violence, as indigenous peoples watch the demographic balance—and local power—shift in favor of Javanese immigrants, are very high. Frankly, lesser islands, such as Kalimantan (geographically huge, but demographically weak and underdeveloped), are dumping grounds for excess population, and even more-highly-developed and more heavily-populated islands, such as Sulawesi, have seen their peace disrupted by an influx of Javanese Muslims.

Laskar Jihad, a radical and violent Islamic group with as many as ten-thousand fighters on its rolls, retains a domestic focus because that is where jihad makes sense. Indonesia is Islam's frontier, where the battle is still being waged over the form and content of the religion--as well as for sheer territorial domination. Java-based Laskar Jihad has brilliantly exploited local tensions between Muslim internal migrants struggling to build new lives on the islands to which they have been driven by economics and local populations resentful of the influx and the perceived favoritism toward the Javanese on the part of central authorities. Laskar Jihad, created and led by a pot-bellied veteran of the Afghan war against the Soviets, Jaffar Umar Thalib, is certainly not above aiding international terrorists when the need or opportunity arises. But Jaffar is being honest when he says that is not his focus. His fight, at least for now, is on the home front.

Laskar Jihad is not a terrorist organization in the sense that al Qaeda is—although it could certainly become one and likely has plenty of kissing cousins in the terrorist world. Laskar Jihad is a militia, half like the colonial militias from our own past, while its other half is shaped by religious fanaticism. Its members are fighting—certainly, without the government's approval—imperial fights against subject peoples on behalf of the empire's Javanese base. They are also waging a true jihad to spread fundamentalist Islam. While Osama bin Laden's jihad has been a false one, aimed not at conversion but at sheer destruction. Laskar Jihad is fighting for a Koran-based vision, expanding the Faith's frontiers against non-believers. The movement could, of course, produce renegades who attack Americans or American interests, or could one day decide that America is an

indispensable enemy. But, for now, Jaffar and his warriors are committed to fighting within Indonesian territory—where there is plenty of conflict to keep them busy.

Jaffar wants political power, probably for a complex of reasons, from selfishness to religious devotion. But if we are going to label Laskar Jihad as a terrorist organization—not merely as a bloody-minded party to civil strife—we had better come up with very convincing proof that can be made public in Indonesia. While only a very small minority of Indonesians sympathize strongly with Laskar Jihad, unsubstantiated American allegations raise far broader nationalist suspicions and anger. As in much of the world, the United States government is not going to be believed automatically just because we think we have truth, justice and reason on our side. Indonesians are *not* rabidly anti-American by any means—but they are (perhaps rightfully, given the historical record) suspicious of foreign hands at work in their country. Indonesia is not a country where U.S. diplomats can “launch on warning.”

Belatedly, the Megawati government has moved against Laskar Jihad—but not in Java. The government’s countermoves have also been on the periphery, or on secondary islands, such as Sulawesi. In Moluku, where Laskar Jihad started, prosecuted and would like to continue the fighting, the government has pledged to ship “Islamic volunteers” back to Java. On Sulawesi, all “non-residents” are to be deported to their home islands. Clearly, the government decided it had to move—though not because of international complaints. Rather, Laskar Jihad threatened to ignite secessionist movements; it threatened to build local power bases the government could not manage; and its violence did immediate economic harm. Also, many in the government remain committed to a multicultural Indonesia, whether from conviction or practicality (or both). If the internal deportations are successful, two dangers arise: Will the holy warriors returned to Java make local mischief? Or, deprived of domestic missions, will more of them begin to look abroad?

While it bears repeating that we cannot discount potential threats from Laskar Jihad and other organizations to Americans and American interests, our automatic assumption that we are primary targets involves a good bit of egotism. Osama bin Laden turned against us because, among other things, the situation in his homeland appeared hopeless. There was nothing he could do in Saudi Arabia, and he is (or was) a man addicted to deeds. So he attacked America, which he saw as immobilizing the situation in the Islamic heartlands—as well as serving his psychological need for a mythical Satan to combat. But Indonesian radicals, apart from a few hundred renegades drifting across the international scene, have plenty to occupy themselves with at home. Indonesia is a country where change—a mighty resurgence of Islamic power—appears possible to hardcore believers. Extremist Muslims in Indonesia are not hopeless, as they often are in the Middle East. On the contrary, they are brimming with hope and believe the tide of history is on their side. They may hate America, and some may wish to do us harm, but most are busy as can be killing their neighbors.

Despite the government’s current efforts, we may look for Laskar Jihad to turn up wherever ethnic-Javanese migrants come into conflict with local populations on the outer islands. Fundamentalist Islam will be presented as the protector of the weak and threatened—as well as a source of welfare support, medical care and education that the government cannot or will not provide. When they were first threatened with expulsion from Central Sulawesi, after the military calmed the inter-faith fighting around Poso,

Laskar Jihad declared that it was only there to help as a charitable organization. The lie was in the word “only.” In fact, Laskar Jihad follows the same pattern as extreme fundamentalist groups throughout the Muslim world, exploiting the local government’s corruption and shortcomings, doing grass-roots community work that directly affects the lives of the poor and working classes. It’s the one brilliant strategy fundamentalists figured out across the past few decades. Laskar Jihad does, indeed, engage in charitable works. When it isn’t massacring people.

The Coming of Islam

Over a thousand years ago, on a day lost to history, an Arab trading vessel put in at the fabled port of Aceh. The sailing ship had left the Persian Gulf many months before, putting in first at Gujarat, then at ports down the western coast of India and, lastly, at a Ceylonese port where it took on a last load of fresh water and provisions. Having survived tropical storms, the threat of plague in port cities, and the attentions of pirates at sea and dynastic wars on land, the dhow raised its sails and headed east, across the blue vastness of the Indian ocean. Familiar with the coastal trade, from Africa to India, the captain was taking a new risk to reach a distant, exotic port rumored to be a great entrepot for the spices from farther east for which Arab traders had been paying a premium in India—cloves, mace, nutmeg... The potential profits were worth the risk of a ship and its crew, the risk of the captain’s own life and the pooled money of Gulf merchants.

The charts were poor and the reckoning rough—done only at night, under the stars. Calms were as terrifying as storms as the provisions dwindled. But, finally, a sliver of land appeared, to the enormous relief of all aboard. Then a cluster of islands rose up in front of the dhow. A few days later the captain put into Aceh harbor, docking among a marvelous variety of ships and boats, from shallow coasters and Malay traders (with dangerous-looking, all-too-curious crews), to Indian vessels and even a huge Chinese junk. The dust spilled from sacks of spices sharpened the harbor smells, and the local ruler’s customs officials hurried from their breakfast to meet the ship with the odd-shaped sails whose coming had been rumored for several days. The ship’s captain slipped over the side and onto the dock, careful of his balance on the sudden firmness of the land. When he could not understand a word the customs officers said, he tried his bit of trader’s pidgin-talk picked up on the Coromandel coast. The officials began to nod...

And so the first Muslim set foot on the soil that would one day become Indonesia.

Beyond the bit of storytelling, the form of this arrival has genuine importance—Islam did not sweep into the East Indies as a sudden, conquering religion the way it spread throughout the Middle East and, a bit later, to Central Asia, Afghanistan and northern India. Instead, Islam arrived with traders and was associated from the start with commerce and wealth. For centuries, it does not seem to have spread at all, and the first evidence of a Muslim presence—from about eight centuries ago—indicates foreign resident traders, not a homegrown Muslim community. Without the sword, the impact of the newest monotheist religion does not seem to have been very impressive. Powerful religions were already firmly in place, and Islam was nowhere part of the greater regional culture. It was a foreign, distant religion, from across the seas or still blocked by the

mountain barriers of Afghanistan, kept away by oceans, by great rivers and powerful civilizations.

But the traders spread out, slowly, in an irregular pattern, beyond Sumatra to the spice islands to the east. By the fifteenth century, at the latest, Islamic holy men—missionaries—appear to have become active, some of whom may have been native converts. But here, too, Islam worked with a difference. The mystic Sufi influence, with its Shi'a echoes, seems to have been the first form of Islam to make marked inroads in Java—rather than the puritanical Sunni strain, which had more influence to the west, in Aceh. In coastal cities, the success of sober, disciplined, internationally-well-connected Arab or Persian traders may have led ambitious locals to convert to Islam. Or the power of the monotheist idea may suddenly have taken hold in one of those sudden collective fractures that change the course of history—the historical record simply does not tell us. But Islam belatedly began to make converts among the courtiers of the kingdoms of the Javanese interior, spreading from the courts—still ever so slowly—downward to the people.

We will never know what excitements of faith or power feuds led members of the Javanese nobility to Islam (there are bits and pieces of evidence of entire Javanese civilizations from the even more distant past—empires and kingdoms for which we do not even have names). The holy men reputed to have been instrumental in conversions are also shrouded in myth, and many of them seem to have been less than orthodox in their doctrine. When Islam started to make headway, it did so against declining Hindu and Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, but even these were eccentric in their practices, with strong enduring folk beliefs and superstitions remaining from still older religions—beliefs that linger on today, even where the only remnants of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms are ruins and puppet shows for tourists.

Javanese Islam, especially, became a syncretic religion, deeply mystical, in which local shrines and saints co-existed with animist spirits in trees and sacred places. Magic—common to all religions, whether or not it is formally recognized—played an especially powerful role. Despite their formal adherence to Islam, Presidents Sukarno and Suharto both turned to *dukuns*—soothsayer or sorcerers—for advice. And both men retained a strong belief in magic, despite Bung Karno's flirtation with socialism and Suharto's delight in the corrupter possibilities of global capitalism. Even today, we must remember that both Hinduism and Buddhism prevailed longer in Indonesia than Islam has yet done (and Christianity, although less influential, has been around Indonesia's territories almost as long as Islam). After half a millenium, Islam is still the new kid on the block, with the new kid's insecurities—extreme fundamentalism is never a sign of self-confidence, but of doubt and fear.

This muddled, but contenting form of Islam prevailed on Java (and other islands) for centuries, although there were recurrent—unsuccessful—efforts to purify the faith. In the seventeenth century, even the laissez-faire local mullahs clamped down a bit, when Sufi mystics began to preach a doctrine that sounds strikingly like Luther's Protestantism: They reportedly said that faith was everything, and that without faith the outward forms and rituals of religion were meaningless, that man had a direct relationship with god and did not need mullahs or any sort of priestly assistance. The mystics mocked those who memorized the Koran without understanding the Arabic they repeated, as European reformers had mocked those who mumbled Latin prayers they did not understand. Now,

Islam is, above all, a religion obsessed with formal practices and behaviors—very much a total-lifestyle religion—and when these reformers argued that attendance at mosque was unimportant and that prayer was a private matter, they were hunted down and executed, one after another (in the end, their efforts were more reminiscent of the Cathars of Languedoc in the Middle Ages than of the Protestant Reformation). Still, there must have been even more to the story—probably involving local power struggles now forgotten—since such martyrdoms appear to have been extremely rare in “Indonesian” Islam.

Already, Islam had mutated into various, often very strange (see below) forms from island to island. In Aceh, and in other ports which had direct and routine contacts with Arab traders, Islam tended to be more conventional, with a recognizable Sunni influence (although mysticism ran through every local form). By the late Middle Ages, Islamic scholars from Aceh had established a small colony in Mecca, where they took in Haj pilgrims from back home and studied the Koran. The normal pattern was for a young devotee to make his way to Mecca, study for several years, then return home to teach. It was a pattern that would grow until, by the late 19th century, *pesantren* Koranic schools, crude village affairs led by Hajis, would be the dominant educational institution throughout the islands—one that still exists today, although the variety of modern *pesantrens* stretches from computer-equipped schools that teach science and business, to backward, remote shacks where a government-directed minimum curriculum gets hardly more than a nod.

In the 19th century, the advent of steamship travel made it easier and cheaper for pilgrims to reach Mecca, and a slow-motion wave of conservative reform began to sweep the Muslim communities in Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and elsewhere. By the early twentieth century, two dominant schools of East Indies Islam had arisen, centered on Java. The first insisted on a strict, Sunni-based adherence to a purified Islamic doctrine in religious practice—but its most-impressive adherents embraced modernity for what it could bring to Islam and welcomed a scientific education, so long as it served the cause of belief. Those who emphasized the importance of rigorous doctrine, purified of the influence of other religions and folk superstitions, were known as *santris*. By the 1920s, the more forward-thinking of these reformers, whose program of a return to religious purity dovetailed with the embrace of educational progress in service to Islam, had founded the movement that became today’s Muhammadiyah. Far more than a political party, this is a network of schools, universities, social welfare agencies, community centers, mosques--even businesses. To outsiders, the Muhammadiyah, with its emphasis on strict Islamic behavior and practice can seem a natural spawning ground for extremists and terrorists. Yet, although the Muhammadiyah’s members are far from pro-Western, this terrorists-in-the-closet view is an unfair interpretation of the movement. Muhammadiyah is a huge, loose, and varied organization, whose formal members and informal supporters number in the tens of millions. Although some terrorists doubtless have and will continue to come from its ranks, what is most striking is how few seem to have done so. By giving a home to individuals who yearn for the comforts of religious discipline, Muhammadiyah probably prevents far more people from becoming terrorists than it inspires to violent action. The organization brings its members a feeling of belonging and empowerment—exactly what most of those who stumble into terrorism lack.

Muhammadiyah certainly has members (and leaders) who are hostile to the U.S. and who would like to impose a much stricter vision of Islam on their fellow countrymen. But that is still not the same thing as terrorism. And their own countrymen have resisted them firmly at the polls and in society (one real danger lies in the high unemployment rate—35% even by official statistics, but even higher among those who have a Muslim education: Businesses don't hire them because their skills usually are lower, and the government bureaucracy tries to avoid hiring them because they're considered potential troublemakers, with the result that an even higher proportion of devout believers lack jobs).

Certainly, we should not wish to see an Indonesian regime dominated by Muhammadiyah—and we won't see it. I met secular Indonesians who strongly disliked and even feared the organization, but none who thought the political parties associated with it could ever achieve a majority or even a dominant plurality at the polls. Muhammadiyah is not presently a threat to us, or to Indonesia's democratic system. Yet, it remains an enduring power within Indonesia, although its strictness has never appealed to more than a minority of Indonesian Muslims. We need not embrace Muhammadiyah, but neither should we exaggerate its menace. The movement bears study and watching, but a stance of outright hostility on our part would be counter-productive. It is a movement that needs to be given the chance to fail on its own, as it will continue to do. Meanwhile, it provides a home and a voice for the minority of Indonesians who are devout conservative Muslims—which is better than having them turn to underground organizations. Far from unleashing radical Islam, Muhammadiyah domesticates it.

The other strain—numerically dominant and traditionally more humane—is embodied by today's Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the movement and offshoot political party led by Indonesia's briefly-tenured president, Abdurahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur. The NU is based on “orthodox” Javanese Islam—which is highly unorthodox by Middle Eastern standards. The NU has much more real power and dynamism than does Muhammadiyah, despite the latter's impressive formal institutions and discipline.

Followers of the religious path associated with the NU traditionally have been known as *abangan*, Muslims for whom personal religious experience is more important than formal doctrine (although, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz pointed out half a century ago, the *abangan* have a deep love of formal ritual, even if they neglect doctrinal rigor—they like the show and the power of tradition, even when the traditions are hilariously at odds with strict Islam). This current of Islam places emphasis on personal mystical experience and is webbed with complex, almost cabalistic folk beliefs, some acknowledged, others practiced quietly. NU certainly has its limits of tolerance, but it is “big tent” Islam compared to the regimented version espoused by Muhammadiyah. Most of the *pesantren* schools of the past were closer to the NU's form of (sometimes semi-literate) Islam, and this approach to religion is deeply embedded in the Javanese psyche (mystical Islam, in a startling range of varieties, is spread across the other islands as well, of which more below, in the section of Sulawesi). The *pesantren* schools normally developed around a *kyai*, or religious leader (often self-appointed), and students with a religious bent might learn what they could in one school, then wander off to study at others, always in pursuit of *ilmu*, or religious enlightenment. The traditional *abangan* religious student resembled the scholar-pilgrims of the Christian Middle Ages (although

the standards of scholarship in the old *pensantren* were consistently low, with much more emphasis on direct religious experience and less on investigative study).

While NU members and supporters are capable of violence--usually over questions of political power--the emphasis on a personal relationship to god and, for want of a better word, revelation, makes them more amorphous and theologically-muddled than the comparatively disciplined Muhammadiyah. NU turns out at the polls in huge numbers, though. Given its power base on Java, it is the one party no government can ignore.

Fortunately, NU has a long, sincere commitment to democracy, which was tested and found to be solid by the fall from the presidency of its leader, Gus Dur. Despite some demonstrations and rank and file anger, the NU did not embark on a broad campaign of violent protest or even civil disobedience. Very much a populist movement, NU seems to know its own strength, whereas the Muhammadiyah-backed parties never poll as well and are given to louder (though still not violent) protests. Indonesian democracy is still a work in progress; at this point, there is a great deal of spoils-sharing, and even Muhammadiyah gets a split. For now, this keeps the peace, but whether the system can move the country forward is another question entirely.

Historically, these two movements occasionally have united against the center, but no alliance endured. There is simply too much bad blood between them—and especially for devout, extremist Muslims, syncretic NU Muslims are heretics and so more threatening than the minority of Christians. Killing Christians is just practice for the big game. Indonesia's strict Muslims regard Christians as the external enemy, but nativist Muslims are the enemy within.

By mid-century, many *abangan* nominal Muslims, who formed the bulk of the rural poor and urban working classes critical to NU's power base, were drawn into sympathy with Indonesia's Communists. Strict *santri* Muslims from the landowning and otherwise-propriety classes found themselves under attack—often literally—by a combination of Communist activists and *abangan*/Javanist Muslims. Violence stalked the countryside—and the economic divisions were intensified by differences in religious practice. In 1948, the *santri* Muslims were glad to lend their support to the army units that put down a clumsy Communist revolt that involved Javanist Muslim support, as well. The strict Muslims slaughtered the provocateurs by the thousand.

Again, in 1965 and 1966, the strict Muslims of Muhammadiyah were happy to engage in the worst butchery of Indonesian history as the military enlisted their help to finish with the Communists once and for all—although by this time the NU leadership had also soured on the Communists and Javanist Muslims did their share of red-killing with relish. Often, though, when bursts of killing erupted, Muslims of all stripes simply took the opportunity to settle local scores, making no distinction between real Communists and neighbors who had angered them for any number of personal reasons. Despite the Jakarta-sanctioned campaign to wipe out the Communist Party (PKI), the local violence frequently seemed more of an *abangan* vs. *santri* Muslim blood feud. It cannot be stressed too strongly that, despite the recent spate of Muslim-Christian conflicts within Indonesia—sparked by Islam's international turn to *jihad* and fueled by internal migrations—the violence that has taken place between different sorts of Muslims in Indonesia has been far, far worse, and could erupt again, very suddenly, given the right provocations (this does not appear likely now, but it merits a place in the back of our minds—the divisions go deep, and the Javanist Muslim NU carefully works with the

Christian minority and preaches tolerance, not least to keep Muhammadiyah and its offshoot political parties out of power).

It is ironic that Muhammadiyah supporters historically have been mortal enemies of Indonesia's Communists, since both organizations appealed to the sort of dislocated young man who yearns for clarity, discipline and simple answers (and both organizations focused on the importance of modernization, though within the strict bounds of their organizational culture). Both movements are puritanical and militant, with a distinctly-un-Indonesian focus on organization. NU Islam, on the other hand, can be so obscurantist and doctrinally-fuzzy that there is a widespread contemporary joke about the party's leader (a famed religious mystic and, briefly, Indonesia's president before his fall and Megawati's installation). The joke has several variants, but runs roughly as follows: "There are two great challenges posed to human intelligence: Understanding the will of God, and understanding whatever the hell Gus Dur's talking about now."

A logical analysis of the Indonesian political scene would lead to the conclusion that the greatest threat to American interests will come from the Muhammadiyah, and recent events may bear that out. But messianic leaders—always the most dangerous—bloom far more easily and more frequently from mystical religious roots. At present, the NU variant(s) of Islam is far more tolerant and humane than the rigorous Islam of Muhammadiyah and its affiliated political parties. But the warning that appears along every Indonesian roadway, where construction is as frequent as it is disorganized, applies: *Hati Hati!*

Beware the unexpected.

II. THE FORCES OF HISTORY

Globalization, 1500 A.D.

Strategic geography hardly changes. Although we hear a great deal of the Silk Road, which has captured the popular imagination by chance--with upscale package tours now available from China to Turkey--the ancient and less-remembered Spice Routes have had a far more dramatic effect on human history. Empires fell in the attempt to control those sea lanes and choke points; kingdoms were destroyed and fleets went to the bottom over cloves and nutmeg, and all but one of the world's great religions have been involved in the struggle. More civilizations have clashed along the Spice Routes than oppose each other today in our worried new century. And the islands that compose Indonesia were the nexus of those routes.

Obviously, this was because the rarest and most-desired spices grew on those islands—but the limited strategic lines of communication would have brought the world past the nearby straits even in the absence of spices. Today, spices are hardly an issue, but the old routes along which humanity was channeled remain the stuff of international commerce and global strategy. Even in the age of jet transport, trade follows the old routes—and where the cargo ships converge, so do the concerns of naval planners. The

Silk Road may be for tourists, but the Spice Routes and their choke points matter vitally to container ships and aircraft carriers alike. The sea routes through the straits of Southeast Asia were the world's superhighways for more than a thousand years, and their importance likely will endure for centuries more.

Indonesian waters, straits, ports and resources have been coveted longer than the islands have had a written history. Well before the arrival of the first European traders five hundred years ago, Indonesia's coastal economy was "globalized," conducting trade with other Malay peoples, as well as with Indians, Chinese and Arabs. Arab sailors (think Sinbad) took home the region's spices, for which medieval Europe was desperately hungry, and Arab caravans carried the goods onward across the deserts to Levantine middle men, who sold them over the Mediterranean to the merchants of the Italian city states. By the time the nutmeg of the East Indies reached northwestern Europe—always in inadequate quantities--it was terribly expensive and its flavor was intensified by whispered myths of its exotic origins (prior to about 1500, Europe produced nothing of sufficient quality to merit traders carrying it all the way back to the spice islands, and Europeans simply traded locally-useful goods with middlemen or paid in silver and gold.

Then history changed, with great suddenness. In a burst of creativity, the Europeans mastered navigation, ship design and new armaments. They turned outward, as if they had suddenly become aware of the world. The Portuguese—pioneering navigators—were the first Europeans to arrive in the spice islands in force (Marco Polo and a few other wanderers may have passed through the area over the centuries, but they did not make an impression). In the beginning of the colonial era, it seemed as if the Portuguese would dominate the region's trade with Europe (in fact, the Portuguese would be the last European power to leave the region—from East Timor—but that was only because none of the other powers wanted the poverty-stricken territory). Unfortunately for Lisbon, the identification of the source of the spices whose transport to Europe could bring fabulous profits drew in other powers, one after the other—first the Spanish, who could not hang on, then the Dutch and the English, whose savage, forgotten wars in the islands changed the course of history.

The Portuguese and Spanish soon were crowded to the margins, as their empires withered and went bankrupt from too many failed wars and insupportable ambitions. The Dutch and English went to war over the carcass of those early empires—fighting all the while with local sultans and kings, as well. In one of history's paradoxes, the Dutch of the early seventeenth century, men and women who pioneered the modern, middle-class, humane society back in Holland—in a true Golden Age—were among the most ferocious, cruel and murderous imperialists in history. In half a century of on-and-off naval engagements, sieges, raids and land battles with the English over the spice islands, the Dutch demonstrated a mercilessness they had learned from the Spanish occupiers of the Netherlands—from whom they had so recently freed themselves. Entire islands were stripped of trees to deny their fruits to the enemy, populations and garrisons were massacred, and no treaty was honored long enough for the ink to dry. Thousands died in battle or of disease, all to claim islands whose names are now forgotten—who, except an Indonesia hand, has even heard of Ternate, an island that held the attention of empires for centuries? These struggles in eastern waters, from which only ruined forts and archived documents remain, were pivotal theaters of globe-spanning conflicts--whose ultimate

battles were fought in the Downs off the English coast between the world's two finest navies of the age.

At last, the Anglo-Dutch wars led to exhaustion on both sides. Although the Dutch bested the English fleet more often than not, conquering most of England's East Indies possessions and even raiding English soil just down the Thames from London, the series of conflicts had the long-term effect of nudging Holland into a slow decline, hardly perceptible at first, while England rose to an unexpected prominence eighteenth-century events would expand and confirm. But as the wars between the two great Protestant powers ended, the Dutch were in a position to demand the title to the last scraps of the spice islands to which the English had, barely, managed to cling. Grudgingly, the English made a swap—their claim to the spice islands in return for a far less valuable bit of Dutch territory, New Amsterdam and the island of Manhattan.

Dutch Uncle

The attitude of the Indonesians toward the West has been shaped by the Dutch. And the Dutch were harsh, tight-fisted, violent masters. Until the waning days of their colonial period, when they attempted half-hearted humanitarian policies (always with inadequate funding), the Dutch were behaviorally closer to the Belgians in the Congo than to the British in India. The only saving grace was that the brief Japanese occupation was even worse (see below). Indonesians are fond of saying that “The Japanese did more damage in three years than the Dutch did in three centuries.” But I've also met a Balinese who, watching Dutch tourists eat lunch, casually remarked, “The Dutch killed my uncle. I've never forgotten that.” For Indonesians, the colonial experience is still very near and painful. Yet, without colonization by a single power, the widely-varied peoples and dispersed territories that compose today's Indonesia would never have come together. Ultimately, the Indonesia we know owes its existence to the Dutch, who defined its boundaries. Even the tendency of Indonesians on distant islands to accept that Jakarta runs things just because it's always been that way is a Dutch legacy. But so is a belief that ethnic and religious differences can be resolved by force.

The Dutch never intended to conquer the far-flung islands that became Indonesia. In the beginning, they only wanted to gain a monopoly over the spice trade. That meant occupying a number of smaller, strategically-placed islands and possessing a trans-shipment port. The Dutch East India Company (VOC, or *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), which funded the initial voyages and military adventures, wanted to make money, not to acquire unnecessary real estate. The plan was to establish treaties with local rulers—by coercion, when necessary—giving the VOC exclusive rights to trade with them.

But other powers wanted to trade, as well, and they were willing to fight over it. Local sultans wanted to continue trading with traditional, regional partners. The Dutch (and everybody else, at some point) backed the wrong horse and found themselves in civil wars. And then there were the pirates...

Under a series of savage, brilliant, ferocious governors, such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen (early 17th century), the Dutch defeated one European or native challenge after another.

But there was always another fort that needed to be taken, then occupied as a preventive measure. Another nest of pirates had to be cleaned out, then kept clean. Local rulers reneged on promises and had to be brought to heel, with permanent garrisons assigned to their capitals or courts. And the Dutch needed local allies. The price was often involvement in long dynastic wars. And the locals rose up, in the name of tribe or religion, and had to be put down. Then their lands needed to be policed or administered by Dutch-backed puppets...

The Dutch did not intend to go beyond an enclave on Java's northern coast. With its violent kingdoms deep in the volcanic mountains and its constant bloody bickering between rivals to one throne or another, Java itself had no appeal to the merchants back in Amsterdam. But they needed a centrally-located harbor. So they established Batavia (now Jakarta). But the VOC board in Amsterdam laid down the law: No conquests or adventures in the Javanese interior. Just send the spices. The cost of constant warfare had already wiped out profits in too many years.

But the Dutch could not stay out of it. It's amazing they lasted, given the phenomenal levels of drunkenness on record—the men believed it was the only way to survive in the tropics, and they were bored and homesick, too. In an average year, alcohol killed more Dutchmen than warfare did. The mortality rate from disease was even worse. The most dangerous thugs and psychotics signed on for service in the Indies. And they served surprisingly well, if conquest is the measure. The governors were ambitious, brave, unscrupulous—and greedy. Reasons were found—sometimes good ones—to plunge deeper into the trackless, deadly Javanese interior. Elsewhere, the Sultan of Makassar had to be subdued on Sulawesi...and Ambon could not be neglected in the meantime...

Over the centuries, the Dutch acquired their eastern empire piecemeal, almost by accident. The fighting lasted well into the twentieth century, with a thirty-years-war for control of Aceh only wrapping up on the eve of the Great War, and Bali only subdued a century ago—in horrifically bloody fighting (see below). Unlike the British, who experienced a cultural shift in the 19th century and began to develop serious educational programs and infrastructure in their colonies, the Dutch did only that which was essential—and failed to do much of that, in most areas.

A key problem was that, despite the demand for spices, the VOC's overhead kept it from turning a decisive profit (a problem faced more successfully, though imperfectly, by the British East India Company on the sub-continent). By the time Napoleon swept over Europe, the VOC was played out, bankrupt, finished. The British came, in the years before Waterloo, to keep the French out, and that human dynamo, Stamford Raffles (who would shortly found Singapore) was designing reform programs before he even disembarked. But the Congress of Vienna brought back the Dutch. This time, they exercised direct control by the government.

The first “modern” attempt to make the colony turn a profit, devised amidst another round of bloody warfare on Java, was the *cultuurstelsel*, or systematic farming. An attempt to rationalize agriculture, it also put the onus directly on communities to produce enough of the right crops to pay the taxes demanded by the government. Thanks to a methodical approach, the willingness to deal brutally with natives who failed to measure up, and booming markets in Europe for additional crops, such as coffee (and, later, rubber), the colony soon began to fuel increasing prosperity back in Holland. More young sons came out to try their fortunes, then families came after, and Dutch colonial

communities expanded dramatically—despite the constant ravages of disease. Rudimentary roads went in and some small initiatives were begun to train natives for low-level government jobs. Mansions went up near prosperous harbors, and plantations expanded into the mountains. But the system remained extractive and harsh.

The mid-19th century was an age of social reform in northwestern Europe and this is one of the times when literature actually brought about change. A series of Dutch novels about the brutal nature of the colonial system shocked the Dutch public and a movement to humanize the colonial system began. Its progress was slow and uneven—but there *was* progress—and the 20th century came in on a wave of reforms under the rubric of the “Ethical System.” While the reality never lived up to the hopes of the reformers—and warfare continued on the islands—progress was nonetheless sufficient to allow the emergence of an urban intelligentsia among the Javanese and migrants. University degrees remained rare (and involved study in Holland if the student was serious—the new country would begin its independence at mid-century with only a few dozen citizens whose education reached beyond a basic university degree—and those with degrees of any kind were few enough).

Progress—global progress—brought awareness and the stirrings of nationalism. The inter-war years saw the birth of an independence movement (actually, a bit of a mess of conflicting personalities and parties, but it was enough to worry the Dutch). In the 1920s, large-scale reforms got underway at last—only to come to a dead halt in the Great Depression.

A peculiar phenomenon in the inter-war years was the increased migration of Japanese merchants and shopkeepers to Indonesia, competing with the long-hated, long-necessary Chinese. As proprietors, the Japanese gained a good reputation.. But not everything the Japanese community did made sense...

Until the war came. Many of the Japanese had been spies—it was a surprisingly effective program—and Indonesian memoirs of the period routinely tell of the department store manager disappearing at the beginning of the invasion only to reappear a few days later in the uniform of a Japanese officer, backed by a column of troops.

The Japanese interned the Dutch—along with other European and Australian captives—and the conditions in the camps were typically deadly. In dealing with the Indonesians, the Japanese preached Asian empowerment, as they had done elsewhere. But 1942 was a late year for an occupation, and soon the Japanese were stretched ever thinner and fighting a defensive, rather than an offensive, war in the Pacific. They began to extract more and more raw materials and crops from the population, until, by the last phases of the war, Indonesians were actually starving. The Japanese, as elsewhere, were casually brutal and quick to execute locals, often arbitrarily. Yet, some Indonesians—especially those who were committed to independence but willing to work with the Japanese against the Europeans—prospered. And the Japanese did do several positive things for Indonesia. First, they showed that Europeans could be beaten by Asians—and they physically drove out the Dutch or imprisoned them (except for a few needed to run remote plantations or technical facilities, who were kept on the job). Second, as their own situation grew desperate, the Japanese raised and, belatedly, armed Indonesian forces to fight against a Euro-American invasion.

The invasion never came. The war ended. Relatively few Indonesians had been armed, and some of those had their arms taken away again. But there was the bare

beginning of an army—and it would prove to be enough of a seed to grow the popular forces that ultimately faced down the Dutch. The Indonesians did not win their independence militarily, but their military resolve brought them political support—not least from the United States, which was, in those days, all for dismantling European colonies.

In the weeks after the atom bombs dropped, Indonesia declared its independence. The Dutch did return, and the fighting turned cruel—an interim British force had performed well, but took casualties even among its senior officers. Plenty of young Indonesians were willing to sacrifice themselves for the possibility of freedom. The Indonesians were factionalized themselves, and their leaders were already maneuvering to see who might grab control of the country. But the times were such that Indonesian independence was inevitable. And one man emerged as the most charismatic and clever of them all, a Japanese collaborator and long-time nationalist, Sukarno--Indonesia's indispensable man.

The Spirits of the Earth

In his prime, Sukarno possessed all the qualities a revolutionary leader needs in order to have a chance of success: Charisma, cunning, courage, patience, luck, and a single obsessive, galvanizing idea—that *he* was destined to lead an independent Indonesia. Born to a Balinese mother and a Javanist-Muslim father (who was also a follower of the Theosophist movement, an early “new-age” cult that swept the globe century ago), Sukarno's personal beliefs were rooted in the mysticism of old Java and the Balinese countryside, and he believed in prophecies, spells, spirits and fortune-telling. While we laugh at such “superstitions,” this mysticism appears to have been a source of great psychological strength—it translated into a beyond-the-rational faith in his own destiny and power—as well as allowing Sukarno to speak to the hearts and souls of the common people in a way more analytical leaders could not. And his personal beliefs certainly kept at bay the noisy “Arabist” Muslim reformers, who believed from the first that Indonesia should be formally declared an Islamic state.

Indonesia's independence struggle had its share of bloodshed and civil strife over who would control the government, shape the character of the country, and inherit the spoils from the departing Dutch. But, again and again, Sukarno almost magically reconciled opposing factions when no one else could do so. Each time he was nudged aside during the independence struggle, he reappeared suddenly at the critical moment. He did not force himself too obviously or clumsily on the competing factions, but it ultimately became clear that none of the other aspirants to national leadership would do. Sukarno became the only man upon whom most factions, however grudgingly, could settle.

And he could speak. On the page, his speeches are long, disorganized and Castro-esque. But he could hold a vast crowd spellbound. He had the gift of making men believe in new ideas, of making those ideas seem natural and inevitable, of nourishing an audience with visions. He made men believe in Indonesia and in a distinctly Indonesian identity.

While Indonesia remains a work-in-progress half a century later, without Sukarno it seems unlikely that the idea of “fighting for the red and white”—the colors of the

Indonesian flag—and the sense of belonging together as a unified state might not have taken hold with sufficient power to counter the centrifugal effects of the colonial retreat. Indonesia is not only an ethnic and religious hodgepodge—even its official language, Bahasa Indonesia(n), has a Malay base but incorporates elements from Sanskrit, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, English, Chinese and folk usage. Sukarno kept Indonesia together in the crucial early years almost by sheer force of personality. The Republic of Indonesia is an unnatural, illogical entity—yet it took hold as a concept and has endured decades of trials as a reality. The people—especially Indonesia’s legions of the poor—believed in Sukarno passionately. For many at the bottom, longing at least to begin to hope, he *became* Indonesia, all of its complexities and contradictions unified in one man. And despite a rash of early separatist struggles, abortive coups and bloody pogroms, the center *did* hold.

But Sukarno’s problem was a classic one: The man who can make a successful revolution, who can fire the crowd and re-form the nation, is rarely one who can run a country efficiently and effectively. From the start of his period of formal leadership, Sukarno allowed his mouth to lead his mind. He delighted in speaking—like a Castro or a Qaddafi—and increasingly let himself be carried away by his own rhetoric. But the visionary quality that lets a man imagine his own triumph from the desolation of a prison cell often leads him, later on, to impossible or impractical visions when the battle for freedom has been won and the time has come to build an economy.

Enraptured by “non-aligned” and “third force” hallucinations of a shift in the international center of gravity, Sukarno alienated the United States and rushed to embrace the apparent coming powers, the Soviet Union and China. He never let their clutch smother Indonesia, but a superficial grasp of Marxist-socialist and liberation theories led to an addled, inept view of class roles, business regulation, economic development and monetary policy. And, frankly, such matters bored him, except for passing bouts of hectic folly. To the extent he paid serious attention to economic matters, he bought into mirrors and moonshine. Business and ledger sheets were too tame for him. In his personal life and his public one, he craved constant passion (actually atypical for an Indonesian—almost all major religious streams stress self-control, self-denial and self-effacement—perhaps Sukarno captured the nation’s soul because he unleashed the pent-up frustrations of tens of millions of citizens). To the very end, he spoke as an enchanter, a wizard, although the spells had long since ceased to work.

Words don’t fill bellies. Or build modern economies. Sukarno needed to be inspired, and to inspire, in turn. By the second decade of independence, Sukarno’s mass rallies began to pall not only on the business community, but on the military, who, despite their lack of higher education and advanced training, had the strongest sense of nationhood (as they still do) and the deepest determination to build a powerful, rational state.

Sukarno indulged himself ever more, whether in the aggrieved rage of his words or the desperation of his womanizing. He had come to believe in his own infallibility, as so many strongmen have done. And when he proved fallible, it was always because of a plot or a conspiracy, or because Western powers had done in his schemes. Instead of building factories, Sukarno built monuments—pathetic tributes to triumphs that never arrived. As the military grew colder to him, he turned to the most dynamic political movement in the country, the Communists of the PKI.

By 1965, the Communists believed that they had, finally, become politically invincible, that the country was theirs for the grasping. They, too, had fallen under Sukarno's spell of making the impossible seem to hang tantalizingly within the nation's reach. Imagining themselves as rational, even cynical, they sank into fatal illusions. Despite earlier, costly over-estimations of their own strength, they failed to learn a lesson they already had been taught in blood (in 1948, a premature Communist attempt to seize power had cost them 10,000 dead in the city of Madiun alone). And, by 1965, Communism seemed an irresistible force, on the march around the world. The old colonial powers and the United States together were no longer strong enough to hold back "human progress." The future seemed to belong to the color red.

It did, indeed. But that red was the red of their blood.

The Bloodbath

The details of the coup/counter-coup of 1965 may never come entirely clear. Conspiracy theories abound. Some propose that the army faction that ultimately triumphed had secretly instigated the coup so its members could seize power. Others debate whether Sukarno himself sponsored the coup in an attempt to reduce the military's power, or if he had been taken by surprise himself. The wary majority view today is that the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) misjudged the extent of its power, and that its sympathizers within the military also over-estimated the amount of support they would receive from their fellow officers once the coup began (a minority of officers, assigned to influential divisions, threw in their lot with the Communists—army divisions were feudal entities enjoying great regional authority, and the military was riddled with personal and political rivalries; the air force was much less powerful than the army, but even more sympathetic to the Communists).

The known facts are these: On the night of September 30th to October 1st, 1965, army and air force elements aligned with the PKI attempted to kidnap the military's top generals in a commando action. Things immediately went wrong. General Nasution, the nation's most important military figure, got away—although the conspirators mortally wounded his five-year-old daughter and captured an aide. Three other generals were killed in their homes, while three more, along with Nasution's aide, were carted off to Halim Air Base, outside Jakarta, where a junta of key PKI leaders had gathered. In an apparent fit of temper—or perhaps to make the PKI's move irrevocable for any participants who might be having second thoughts--the four captives were murdered and their bodies thrown down a well.

But the generals who were killed were those *least* likely to respond decisively to a Communist coup—while the plotters did not even attempt to seize one officer who (ironically, in view of later events) had built a reputation for integrity and the rejection of the corruption prevalent among the top brass of the day. He was a man who played his cards close to his chest, a born survivor, and perhaps the Communists and their fellow travelers thought he would be sympathetic to the coup, given his reformist leanings. The officer commanded the one truly crucial unit in Jakarta and the country, the Army Strategic Reserve Command (KOSTRAD). His name was Suharto.

Suharto (also spelled Soeharto in various texts) quickly learned of the abductions, though news of the killings came through later. It was still dark when he appeared at KOSTRAD headquarters, centrally-located on Medan Merdeka, or Freedom Field, a vast open area in the center Jakarta's government district. Outside, a few thousand troops commanded by coup supporters had blocked off three sides of the square, but they left the KOSTRAD headquarters approach unguarded (leading to still other conspiracy theories). No one knew if Nasution was alive or dead, and no one was in national command. Had Suharto thrown in his lot with the Communists and military dissidents—and in those first confused hours it may have looked like they were winning—Indonesia would have become the world's third-largest Communist state. Instead, Suharto demonstrated a steel will and brilliant political skills learned while fighting insurgents and lesser coup attempts far from Jakarta.

Skipping over the formal chain of command, he took control of the armed forces, setting up communications with other senior officers he judged would be supportive—and whose backing would be essential (although the time-lines are unclear, he seems to have made a show of building consensus for his actions—while already doing what needed to be done). His first order commanded all troops throughout the country to remain in their barracks, both reducing confusion and making visible to all which units were involved in the coup and which remained loyal (or at least neutral). As Jakarta awoke, the coup leaders issued a confused radio message to the country, claiming to be the true defenders of the nation—and of President Sukarno—against corruption, against a CIA plot, against a planned right-wing military coup...

A few hours later, President Sukarno appeared at Halim Air Base, something he never adequately explained thereafter. He appears to have gone willingly—perhaps attempting to preserve his power by joining the provisional junta, or perhaps because he had given quiet support to the coup all along. But he left open the impression that he had been kidnapped by the plotters (Sukarno always maintained an escape route in his politics—but this time he had met his match at last). Though Sukarno worded his statements carefully, his presence at the air base, surrounded by senior Communists, could have lent instant legitimacy to the coup, creating popular support for a change of national direction. With Sukarno nodding along with the coup's leaders, the challenge for Suharto and his military backers was enormous.

Suharto saw through the problem with the clarity of a great battle captain. He immediately portrayed Sukarno as an innocent prisoner of the PKI and of traitorous officers—Suharto had the genius not to worry about the truth of events and to concentrate ruthlessly on the goal he needed to achieve. Careful never to blame the “father of the nation,” he set the military wheels in motion. He watched, with a veteran's eyes, how the troops out in the huge square in front of his headquarters grew restless and confused. Tactical-level officers seemed vague as to the purpose of their deployment, senior leaders were absent, rations did not appear, and the weather grew punishingly hot. Avoiding any hint of military-on-military confrontation, Suharto persuaded one battalion of the deployed troops to subordinate themselves to KOSTRAD. The rest of the rebel force soon melted away, with the top battalion still loyal to the PKI junta pulling back to the air base in confusion. Suharto had managed to avoid a battle between military units that could have sparked a civil war, while making himself master of the heart of the capital

without bloodshed. Back at the communications center in KOSTRAD headquarters, he sent out test orders to measure the loyalty of units throughout the country.

From the first, the coup plotters resembled the dog that caught the firetruck. They seemed to have no detailed plan, and they dithered. By the time Sukarno announced that he was taking personal command of the military, it was too late. And the revelation of the murder of the generals enraged the overwhelming majority of military officers. While some units in central Java, most notably the Diponegoro division, whose officers were deeply involved in the coup, rallied to the insurgents, their actions were uncoordinated and ineffectual. Even the PKI failed to mobilize its members until it was too late—and the cost for those belated demonstrations in support of the coup would be a minimum of half a million (perhaps over twice that many) PKI members and sympathizers slaughtered across the coming months, with over a million others arrested and imprisoned—some to be held on barren islands from which the survivors would only begin to return a dozen years later.

The coup leaders lost their nerve and fled from the air base, dispersing around the country and leaving their subordinates behind to face the coming retaliation. Loyal forces stormed the base—and found the bodies of the other generals in the well. Dissident military units were isolated and, whenever possible, persuaded to surrender (some coup supporters quickly switched sides again or tried to explain away their apparent sympathies). In the end, the military suffered far less from soldier-on-soldier bloodshed than had seemed inevitable early on, holding together and generously overlooking the “mistakes” of most junior and mid-level officers—thus winning their allegiance through generosity, while leaving a sword remaining over their heads for the rest of their careers. When the coup’s utter collapse became evident, Suharto had a still-cohesive national military under his command. And he would use that military to end the threat from the PKI forever.

If any single event continues to frighten Indonesians back from the brink of massive civil strife, it is the collective memory of the horrors of that purge (but, as noted above, that memory is fading at last, and the possibility of violent eruptions will increase correspondingly). Indonesia, after faltering in the early year’s of independence, was reborn. In blood.

Over the coming months, Suharto consistently outmaneuvered the aging Sukarno, who remained the nominal head of state. Always portraying himself as loyal to Sukarno--as *Bung Karno*’s loyal defender--Suharto managed to push the old man off-stage permanently by 1966. In one of history’s ironies, the coup that was supposed to bring Indonesia into the Communist camp paved the way for Indonesia’s development as a capitalist economy.

Again, one man was at the helm. This time it was Suharto, whose New Order would change the course of Indonesia. Before his own fall from power thirty-three years after the 1965 coup/counter-coup, Jakarta would become a city of skyscrapers and traffic jams, Indonesia would count as a major oil producer, and only devastating corruption would prevent the country from becoming an enduring economic success story.

The Best Thing You Can Do For The Poor...

In the 1960s, a wonderfully-flamboyant African-American evangelist, the Reverend Ike, told his legion of inner-city worshippers that “The best thing you can do for the poor is not to be one of them.” On the other side of the world, Indonesia’s new leader took that advice to heart.

During his long tenure as Indonesia’s leader, Suharto opened the country for business. Certainly, progress was uneven—but by any measure, the Suharto years saw undeniable economic progress.

The first economic boost promised to come from oil, although the succession of government-administered oil businesses that became Pertamina (the State Oil and Natural Gas Mining Company) continued to disappoint the extravagant expectations raised by the oil price boom of the 1970s. The problems were partly due to incompetent management—but by far the greatest impediment to a winning, competitive performance was corruption. When the military became involved in the oil administration, it corrupted the military. As control passed on again, nepotism took its turn. The inability to efficiently manage its oil resources (although the country still profited) due to the greed of the powerful was a harbinger of things to come.

Development accelerated in the 1980s—globalization at work—and ran, quite literally, out of control in the 1990s. On the eve of the Southeast Asian economic crisis of the late nineties, the international community, hypnotized by the prospect of wild profits (which proved to be illusory) in developing Asian economies poured loans, credits, grants and resources into Indonesia. Some Indonesians achieved startling wealth; many joined an urban middle class; the poor became less poor; and, inevitably, the dreams of an ill-informed population outran practical possibilities. Of course, it would be grotesquely unfair to mock the Indonesians for their assumption that the party would never end when the world’s most sophisticated (and highly paid) business analysts called it wrong themselves. The euphoria of easy money took down everybody. But the international investment bankers and their analysts could shift operations. Indonesians had no place else to go.

Even now, it would be easy for a visitor to Jakarta (except during the floods) to assume it was still a boomtown, if he or she didn’t have the proper frames of reference, didn’t ask the right questions, and stayed on the luxury-hotel to business meeting to restaurant “downtown” track. But Indonesia’s banks and many of its most important businesses and holding companies are bankrupt and kept going day to day only by the state’s unwillingness (or inability) to clean house. There is a real fear—perhaps justified—at the upper echelons of government that touching the first card will bring down the whole house of cards. And any attempts at privatization or forcing insolvent organizations into bankruptcy (by demanding repayment of huge state loans) lead to demonstrations by the employees (often egged on by managers afraid of any change). So the government cannot clean house or enforce contract law or loan repayment terms—and thus cannot attract the foreign investment and expertise necessary to get the Indonesian economy moving forward again. Indonesia, today, is living on borrowed time and borrowed money.

But, for Suharto, the intimations of danger came much earlier—not of economic dangers, but of the risk of losing power. True to type, he could not relinquish power as

he aged and erred. And this former general, once admired for his reported incorruptibility, presided over Indonesia as a family enterprise (four years after his fall from power, the state is still struggling to rid itself of his family's influence—only in March, 2002, as this document was being prepared, did Indonesia's courts formally charge Suharto's youngest son, "Tommy," for a few of his famous crimes, in this case the murder of a judge who had gone after him previously, the possession of a private arsenal, and his post-murder flight from justice; yet, even now many doubt he will receive a serious sentence or remain in jail).

The Suharto family's corruption and the web of illicit wealth it spun around itself had begun to alienate key members of the military as early as the 1980s. There were few public signs of a break—there rarely are in Indonesia—but Suharto felt the need for new allies. Like Sukarno before him, Suharto was a syncretic Javanist-Muslim, superstitious and long opposed to the determination of the strict Muslim minority to make Indonesia an Islamic state under Sharia law. But, also like Sukarno before him, he felt the need to build up a counterweight to the military. Sukarno had chosen the Communists. Suharto startled even insiders by making overtures to the Islamic fundamentalists.

Whether or not this helped him preserve his power for his final decade in office, it was a terrible disservice to Indonesia. He opened the door to a stronger role for Middle-Eastern-influenced Islam in Indonesia (and Middle Eastern money followed to strengthen the position of the radicals). Islamic "think-tanks" formed—essentially propaganda machines that financed the careers of fundamentalist politicians and writers. Islamic leaders who had been considered Suharto's personal enemies were welcomed to the president's residence, and unholy electoral alliances were forged. Suharto seems to have believed he could flirt heavily, without making irrevocable commitments. But the fundamentalists had grown more sophisticated tactically and they made real inroads. And long-repeated promises, such as Suharto made to the Islamists, take on a reality of their own.

The wealth that poured into Indonesia in the 1990s probably prevented an open break within the power organs of the state. Everyone at the top was getting rich. And the military got its cut. Meanwhile, the veneer of modernity spread from Jakarta to the country's lesser cities, and dusty provincial capitals experienced their first rush-hour traffic jams. Gleaming bank buildings went up, followed by hi-rise apartment buildings and gated housing tracts. Foreign cars flooded in, and even the middle class swelled in size. But the rage to consume obscured the lack of basic investment, and Indonesia probably squandered a higher percentage of loan dollars than any other country in the world. The nation's industrial plant lagged far behind consumption habits, creating an addiction to imports. Yesterday's industries, such as clothing manufacturing, relied on low wages and other costs to compete globally—while their machinery went unmodernized (since the crash, Indonesia, a long a leading textile producer, has become a major importer of second-hand clothes from Malaysia and elsewhere). Hi-tech hardly made a dent, and the generally-impressive higher education system just did not turn out sufficient numbers of graduates with post-modern skills. Indonesia had made the leap to training good doctors and competent mid-level managers. But it missed the information wave that, despite the realignments of the last two years, continues to separate economies of the future from the economies of the past (in every country I visit, I check the local population's use of the internet and the comfort level of business employees when using

computers—in the IT field, Indonesia reminded me of Egypt; despite some motley internet cafes, the culture lagged fatally behind other regional states such as India—to say nothing of its cutting-edge neighbor, Singapore).

When the economic bubble broke, Suharto's power collapsed. The story is recent and widely-covered, and it will not be retold in detail here, except to note the most important points—which, of course, were largely missed.

First, the media paid a great deal of attention to the handful of students from Triskati University and Semangi University in Jakarta who were shot by the security forces during the *jaman edan*, Indonesia's 1998 "time of troubles." While the student deaths were certainly regrettable, the most striking thing about the popular revolution—and it was exactly that—which overthrew the Suharto regime was its relatively low body count—despite eruptions of violence throughout the country (the actual casualty figures will never be known with certainty, but, by Indonesian standards, this was practically a bloodless revolution—even allowing for the anti-Chinese atrocities). A regime that came to power by way of one of the most gruesome and extensive massacres in the history of the islands fell after a few dozen students had been killed or wounded.

Certainly, violence sparked back up in Jakarta and there was plenty of unrest elsewhere, as different groups vied for power or expressed their frustration at the failure of their efforts to gain control of the revolution. But the remarkable feature of this great change in the country's political history was the avoidance of outright civil war and the relative ease with which the old order crumbled. After initial doubts, the military refused to fire on the people en masse—that, too, should be taken into account when judging the Indonesian armed forces (and, since Suharto's overthrow, the military has seen its power over the government reduced almost relentlessly—but there has been no hint of a coup thus far).

Second, this was a democratic revolution that embodied the values on which we insist elsewhere—while marginalizing the extreme Islamists. Indeed, other than Suharto's family and their cronies, the most disappointed group in the aftermath of the regime's overthrow has been the extremist and even the merely-strict Islamic parties (twelve to twenty at the last election, depending on who's classifying them). The parties aligned with the Muhammadiyah movement have not been able to approach a majority or even a "kingmaking" plurality at the polls, and the largest Muslim movement, the NU, has consistently stood in opposition to the extremists.

There are times when an impartial observer simply has to shake his head and ask, "What on earth does the United States want from Indonesia?" Indonesia is a country that has staged its own near-bloodless democratic revolution, a Muslim-majority country where democracy not only works but works against Islamic extremism, and a country where the military—long the most powerful single voice in the political system—has returned to its barracks. It is also a Muslim-majority state with a female president, a state struggling back to the rule of law, a state that, after the errors of East Timor, has carefully resisted the slaughter-solution to separatist movements, a country that has moved to liberalize its treatment of its most persecuted minority (the Chinese), and a country whose key leaders desperately want constructive engagement with the West. Meanwhile, U.S. policy toward Indonesia focuses almost exclusively on the negatives—which are explicable and comparatively small. We insist that we will tolerate no more East Timors—well, the Indonesians don't want another East Timor, either. We attack the

Megawati government for not doing enough to fight terrorism, refusing to recognize the government's difficulties (real and perceived) and refusing to give that government meaningful assistance. This appears to be a classic case of America's diplomats and policymakers failing to see the forest for the trees.

III. BEYOND THE BELTWAY

From the new to the old

Yogyakarta, in Central Java, is always described by guidebooks and history texts as "Indonesia's Cultural Capital." It isn't. Not anymore. The real cultural capital today is Jakarta.

But Yogyakarta *was* Java's cultural capital for centuries, and it still contributes to the preservation of old-fashioned "high" arts. Founded in the eighteenth century as a result of a dynastic struggle in nearby Surakarta (today's Solo, see below), Yogyakarta quickly became and remained the heart of Java's, and later Indonesia's, struggle against the colonial occupation. Through rebellion, enlightened rule and public service, its ruling family has gained enduring respect that extends far beyond its former territories, and even today the sultan is one of the minority of the old nobility who maintains an active role in government—but as governor, not as sultan. The current sultan enjoys enormous moral authority, and he has maintained a steadfast devotion to the idea of an inclusive Indonesia. During my stay, the Australian prime minister, John Howard, also visited the country (despite temper tantrums by legislators still unhappy about East Timor, he conducted himself with admirable statesmanship and patience). Howard made a special trip down from Jakarta to meet with the sultan, who is viewed not only as a progressive force, but as perhaps the most knowledgeable individual in the political system—and an enduringly-respected voice that no government dare ignore.

The sultan's family traditionally supported the arts and public welfare. Benevolent rulers, when the old system fell they adapted gracefully to the new. The present sultan's father was a leader—and a military officer—in the independence struggle, and from the end of the Japanese occupation to the achievement of independence in 1949, Yogyakarta served as the provisional capital. The former sultan also founded the first serious, secular university in independent Indonesia, the Gaja Mada University (GMU), whose modern campus hosts serious, jeans-clad students of both sexes and appears indistinguishable from well-funded campuses in more developed countries. Yogyakarta produces Indonesia's finest doctors and it hosts additional universities, as well as a number of the country's best hospitals—with the finest run by Christian charitable organizations. While the sultan's kraton, or palace compound, is in need of paint and renovation, the city boasts gleaming modern shopping centers and serious traffic jams. Dunkin' Donuts starts the day, followed by McDonald's for lunch and Kentucky Fried Chicken for dinner. By regional standards, this city of half a million appears prosperous and pleasant, a success story...

But it's yesterday's city, a charming place closer to Williamsburg, Virginia, than to a 21st century power center. Jakarta has all the pulse and vibrancy of the media, publishing and contemporary arts, while Yogya largely preserves traditions, from music and theater to batik-making. Yogya is a nice provincial town in which to study...but it will not determine Indonesia's future the way it helped shape the past. The center of gravity has shifted decisively and, despite some impressive institutions and facilities, Yogya has not managed to achieved the right combination of university research, corporate density and social dynamic that has allowed a number of Indian cities, such as Bangalore and Hyderabad, to become world-class business draws.

After the initial positive impression wears off a bit, you begin to feel something just slightly wrong, as though the city backed the horse that came in third (though not last). There is a complex, difficult to quantify combustion that happens in take-off cities, something beyond the reach of the vocabulary of development. Yogya feels like it will be rolling down the runway forever, waiting to take off.

During my flight down to Yogyakarta, I read in the *Jakarta Post* that political riots had rocked the city the day before and that security forces had cordoned off the downtown. Having arrived in Jakarta during its worst-ever flood, I figured I was on a roll. According to the newspaper, there had been a fevered street battle between supporters of President Megawati's PDI-Perjuangan (the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, whose raging-bull on a red field symbol is about as aggressive as you can get without flashing weapons) and followers of the PPP (the United Development Party), whose 28th anniversary rally had turned violent.

I was terribly disappointed.

The city was functioning absolutely normally, there were no signs of destruction, and the only police in evidence were (lackadaisically) directing traffic. When I asked around, some of the locals were utterly perplexed, while others smiled and said, "Oh, some of the young people got drunk and noisy. No problem." Having read of burned vehicles and widespread looting, I found the entire matter amounted to a few black eyes.

Journalists, clearly, show the same enthusiasm for a good story everywhere. And there is a point in this instance of exaggerated reporting beyond my personal disappointment at not being able to add another crisis to my been-there file: If you rely on the press (and the Indonesian-language press is far more hysterical than the relatively-sober, English-language *Jakarta Post*), you are not going to get an accurate picture of what's going on. It's almost as bad as relying on State Department cables.

While the culture of the future is being shaped in Jakarta, Yogya remains a useful stop because it lies in a heartland of successive civilizations—there is no other place in Indonesia where you can, so quickly and so clearly, gain a sense of how complex the country's heritage truly is. A fifteen minute drive to the northeast brings you to Prambanan, a magnificent complex of Hindu temples rivaled by only a few in India. Prambanan is over a thousand years old, dating to the rule of the Hindu Mataram empire. Drive to the northwest, instead, for half an hour and you reach Borobudur, a massive Buddhist shrine that predates Prambanan by one to two hundred years. Drive an hour and a half to Solo (old Surakarta), and you enter the city by passing the gleaming campus of the Muhammadiyah Islamic University (more below). Despite—or because of—all this,

the countryside retains a heavy NU loyalty, with that Javanist mystical bent under the Muslim surface. The closest Western equivalent would be a cross between a Pentecostalist, an Episcopalian, a Quaker and a devotee of Wicca--hedging his or her bets by worshipping Caspar the Friendly Ghost. The region's elite families, all nominal Muslims of one variety or another, send their kids to Christian-run schools, since the education is better. My favorite visual effect was a big Bintang Beer poster next to a madrassah—an Islamic school.

I did meet some aggressive people in Yogyakarta. They were women. And they were aggressive toward Islamic fundamentalists, whom they regarded as nuts.

Running on Empty

In *The Shining*, a 1980s film made from a Stephen King novel, a writer and his family mind a huge, empty, isolated hotel for the winter—and find it gruesomely haunted. I kept thinking about that movie as I traveled through Indonesia, from one big, nearly-empty hotel to another...each haunted by a worried staff desperately hoping the tourists will come back.

While I will write more about personal safety in Indonesia below, I must state here that I never felt threatened during my month in Indonesia—not even when I strolled into a “fundamentalist” rally. Polls that portray Indonesians as hostile to the U.S. simply baffle me. The attitudes I found (and I have learned over the years to get past the superficial politeness and hospitality toward the visitor) ranged from ignorance of America (one old Christian tribesman in up-country Sulawesi asked me, “Is America a Christian country, sir? Do you have Christian people?”) to wounded bafflement (“Why has your country blacklisted us as terrorists?”) to outright enthusiasm (“After your army’s done with the Phillipines, you should come here and kill our extremists.”) Over and over again, I heard “How do I get a visa to the United States, sir?”. Which leads me to an unforgivable sin our State Department has committed:

After the terrorist attacks against America on 9-11-01, smallish groups of Islamic fundamentalists demonstrated outside of the U.S. embassy in Jakarta. The largest demonstration involved between one and two thousand Muslims, and the size quickly dropped off. Local Indonesians scoff at the demonstrators, insisting that most were paid to be there and that none had a brain in his head. There was one incident of violence against American tourists down-country, and a few down-market hotel desks in the boonies were visited by young Muslims inquiring whether or not the establishments were sheltering Western guests (they weren’t—but the fundamentalists didn’t dare enter any upscale hotels of the sort Westerners actually use, since they didn’t really want trouble with the local authorities).

The State Department’s response was to warn Americans not to travel to Indonesia. It was a thoughtless, hasty, punitive action, which only encouraged the fundamentalists to imagine they held the power to frighten us. I suspect, frankly, that Amembassy Jakarta just did not want to have to bother with any potential incidents, in case something *might* happen. Now, just to put things in perspective, if the European Union applied the same standards to the United States, the EU would have warned its citizens not to travel to the

US years ago—every major European country has seen its tourists suffer far worse violence in the US, and the number of murders of German citizens in southern Florida alone would have resulted in our going on the travel blacklist. For Americans, visiting Indonesia is far safer statistically than highway driving back home—and much safer than visiting Mexico. The State Department’s travel warning on Indonesia was disgraceful.

The result was to shatter the Indonesian tourist industry, on which hundreds of thousands of Indonesians depend for their livelihood, directly or indirectly. While the Australians never quit coming, the Rest of the West canceled tours and hotel reservations, even on Bali—a devout Hindu island where the tourist is king. Shops collapsed, restaurants stayed empty, luxury and lesser hotels were so silent you could hear a single person walking throughout an entire floor. Guides lost their sources of income. And, most importantly, the people of Indonesia believe that the State Department warning (which many Indonesians misunderstand as a ban) has put eight million Indonesians out of work. That figure is much too high—but the truth isn’t what matters here. What matters is what people believe. And the people believe that the United States was so afraid of the bogeyman that Americans were told not to come to Indonesia.

For now, more people actively blame the fundamentalist extremists, who are widely despised. But if the travel industry does not recover, an increasing amount of the negative emotions will turn toward us, since we “warned the world to stay away.” The good news is that you can get a great room anywhere in Indonesia for about a third of the listed price. The bad news is that we have done serious harm—casually and thoughtlessly—to the most pro-Western citizens of Indonesia, those involved in the tourist trade, who have better-than-average educations, speak foreign languages, and look Westward with longing. If I could, I would punish, severely, the fool who did so much harm without thinking through the consequences. But, then, ambassadors are known to be infallible.

Going Solo

With our Department of State warning that travel to Indonesia was risky for Americans and the Western press declaring the central Javanese city of Solo (known as Surakarta during its centuries as a royal capital) a hotbed of violent fundamentalism, I decided to drive up to Solo and have a beer.

I have traveled enough to know how empty most such warnings are. The Department of State sees horned devils in every corner and runs away—leading local populations to conclude that Americans are cowards (anytime there’s even a hint of a terrorist incident, our embassy staff should make it a point to show the flag—displays of cowardice strengthen the appetite of the terrorists and harm our image with the locals; as I write, “non-essential” embassy staff are being sent home from our embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, which amounts to a public victory for the terrorists—the Americans run crying to mommy again). Even our intelligence agencies, spread thin and uneven in their talents, often exaggerate local threats--while missing big ones entirely.

Let me offer just a few of my many personal experiences in this area to provide background for my judgements:

In 1994, my wife and I took our honeymoon in Turkey. We traveled up to the Iranian border in the Northeast, then down to the Kurdish area around Van. There was never any serious danger, although at the crossing point into Iran we did have to stay inside after dark because of armed smugglers—but there are parts of Washington, D.C. I won't walk through after dark, either. Shortly after my return, Pentagon duties took me out to a “special meeting” at the CIA headquarters, where, among other things, a CIA employee just back from Turkey gave us the “real picture.” He proceeded to tell all of us around the conference table that, based upon his observations in Istanbul and Ankara, it was simply too dangerous for Americans to travel east of Ankara. So much for the daring of the CIA. But, more importantly, consider the damage that CIA staffer may have done to our government's perceptions of Turkey with his silly claim—made without first-hand knowledge about the areas of which he spoke.

Earlier, in 1992, when I took a summer vacation in Armenia during the worst of the Karabagh fighting, our embassy staff, which had arrived seven months before, locked itself into its well-guarded, edge-of-town, hotel-room offices at night for safety. Visiting unofficially, I went wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. I attended the big patriotic rallies held downtown in the evenings (after the heat broke), chatted with the troops loading up on trucks for the front (there were plenty of tearful goodbyes, since the war was going badly for the Armenians just then), and ate kebabs with locals desperate to tell me how precarious the situation was. During the punishing daytime heat, hundreds of refugees with no other place to go formed a human sundial in a circular plaza downtown, shifting to follow the shade along the walls and waiting—always waiting—for their one meal of the day to arrive. The embassy staff, clinging to their desks, didn't have a clue and didn't want one. I drove up-country where I stumbled onto some nasty, unreported fighting going on across the Armenian-Azeri international border, just east of Lake Sevan. When I stopped by the embassy on the way back to report the fighting, I was told, essentially, that I was a liar, since the Armenian government had assured our staff that the only fighting was in Karabagh, and that no Armenian troops were involved. Of course, I saw convoys departing every night, followed by midnight shoot-outs between rival Armenian factions, but our embassy, in their guarded hotel out on the edge of the presidential compound, knew nothing of it and did not want to know. Since the embassy's establishment, not a single staff member had left the Yerevan city limits, except for a single weekend fishing trip in the placid west, near the Turkish border.

I could cite examples like this from a range of other countries, but this report is about Indonesia, not about my adventures. I offer these two examples simply to illustrate why I disregard State Department advisories.

Still, I'm no fool. I had read that Solo was home to the extremist Islamic school that served as the headquarters for the Mujahidin Council of Indonesia under a cut-rate Osama, Abubakar Ba'asyir—who is also reputed to be the director of the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya. Although Mr. Ba'asyir denies any contact with terrorists, of course, the evidence seems good that he's calling the plays for international killers. The organization's operations have ranged into Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines—shocking the local governments into a fury over Indonesia's lax attitude toward terrorist groups (but, then, Indonesians have a lax attitude toward just about everything—and, as mentioned above, the Megawati government seems to be doing a great deal more behind the scenes than we recognize). Mr. Ba'asyir's school reportedly indoctrinates a few

thousand students at a time and he makes no bones about his dislike of America, which he has never visited, and American culture, which he doesn't understand (typical of those who hate us most). So, while I didn't take the State Department's warnings very seriously—and the locals down in Yogya told me there was nothing to worry about—I made certain I had a driver whose loyalty was to money, not to Mohammed (money protects you far better than weapons will in most countries of the world). And I kept my eyes open.

The drive up from Yogyakarta passed through continuous villages, typical of overpopulated Java. The standard contrasts were everywhere—modern Japanese excavating equipment working at a new bridge site, while twenty meters away farmers bent over their paddies, hacking away with short-handled hoes as if we were in the eleventh, not the twenty-first century. The road wasn't badly paved (at least not compared to downtown Washington), the shops were full and busy, and new houses were going up wherever there was space. Children in neat uniforms walked to school, masses of them, and only a minority of the young girls wore Islamic head coverings. The one unusual feature along the route was the high number of military installations.

A sign of government worries about Islamic extremism?

No. Solo has a long history of unrest of many kinds. Sometimes fighting against the Dutch, occasionally siding with the occupiers against other Javanese, the city saw its share of death down through the centuries. Like Yogya, Solo played an active part in the independence struggle, but, far from having a tradition of Islamic fundamentalism, Solo was a center of the Indonesian Communist Party, and the massacres of Communists after the 1965 coup attempt were at their most savage here—massacres led by the strict Islamic minority as the army watched in approval. Yet, those Islamic extremists never “took over” Solo. When the killing was done, the military quickly herded the fundamentalists back into line, disappointing their perennial hopes for an Islamic state based upon Sharia law (of which the overwhelming majority of Indonesians want no part). Even now, the local hereditary ruler, who is still revered by the people although he has no formal governing power (unlike his counterpart in Yogya), is officially a “Muslim,” though he wouldn't pass muster in Mecca.

Each year, the *susuhunan* (sultan) holds a massive ceremony on the grounds of his palace—in honor of the Goddess of the South Seas, the traditional divine protector of Solo, its dynasty, and its people. The fundamentalists hate it, of course (I promise you—the Goddess of the South Seas is not in the Koran), but the ceremony is so popular, attended by many thousands more than any fundamentalist demonstration could attract in Solo, that they can do nothing about it. Now, I will accept, evidence pending, that Mr. Ba'asyir is a vicious fellow and a supporter of terrorism. But he knows very well that he had better not try those tricks at home—the local people will not put up with it. His terrorism is for export, to other islands and other countries (he does appear to have international ties and interests lacking in Laskar Jihad, the other militant group of the moment, whose focus is overwhelmingly on the domestic struggle).

Following September 11th, Solo became infamous for “sweeping,” as Islamic fundamentalist students (a handful of them) went from hotel to hotel, inquiring whether there were any Western guests in residence. Since no Western guests were found, the press reported this as a massacre barely averted. Now, let me tell you what really happened: the Islamic kids went only to the down-market hotels where Westerners never

stay—had they gone even to one of the city’s middling hotels, they would undoubtedly have found Western guests—if the hotel staff hadn’t simply blown the madrassah students off (when I stopped for lunch at a threadbare little hotel run by a member of the old ruling dynasty, I found sunburned Australians drinking beer around the pool—no worries). My sense of the notorious sweeping, at least in Solo, is that it was the equivalent of frat boys on a tear—“Go Osama!” instead of “Go Lions!”—though the fundamentalist students were much better behaved than those on major American campuses.

Even if the evidence that the event was grossly exaggerated was not as strong as I believe it is, consider the logic—Mr. Ba’asyir may have his share of bad intentions toward Uncle Sam and all his nieces and nephews, but he hasn’t survived for decades as a vocal radical by soiling his own nest. He would be the last person to want to bring down the police or military—or the world’s eyes—on Solo as a terrorist hotspot (indeed, although Mr. Ba’asyir seems to be enjoying his current celebrity, granting interviews right and left, he consistently denies—smiling, no doubt—that he has anything to do with terrorism). I suspect that, as soon as he heard about the hotel sweeps, Mr. Ba’asyir saw the implications of the folly of those over-zealous students and called them off. Further, had those students actually found a Westerner, I don’t think they would have known what to do with him—or her.

All those barracks lining the highway? They go back to the days when Solo was hard to control—not because of Muslim extremists, but because of its Communists. The Communists are dead, the world has moved on, but barracks tend to stay put.

The CNN Defect

As with the overblown reporting of those hotel “sweeps,” during my stay I saw repeated showings of the same Indonesia clip on CNN International. Perhaps two dozen young fundamentalists, in shining white robes and armed with staves, descended on a ramshackle bar where the poorest of the poor get their drinks and began smashing things up. As an old intel hand, I usually know when I’m being set up—the odds that a CNN camera crew just happened to be in that particular slum at just the right moment were zero. Clearly, the fundamentalists agreed to put on a show for CNN (everybody wants to be a star). But they didn’t go to any of the upscale bars where the rich and powerful party hardy—they went to a dusty neighborhood, off the beaten path, and tore up some little guy’s booze shop—nothing more. Another tip-off was that all of the attackers’ robes were of flawless white—if you’ve just spent a long, hard day destroying dens of vice in Third World slums, you’re bound to show a little dirt on your sleeves, but these boys had come right from the dressing room. Yet, the CNN reporter made it sound as though the Bastille had just been stormed by the Ayatollah Khomeini, Osama bin Laden and Charles Manson.

The event was completely staged—and that reporter knew it, because it had been done just for him. Had those fundamentalists tried to kick up the least fuss in a downtown Jakarta hotel or a bar where the Indoyups go for their cocktails, the police would have

beaten them bloody and locked them up. But 24/7 news shows have young reporters all around the world competing desperately with one another for the air-time that builds careers. In Indonesia, a reporter rigged the news, and it was broadcast globally. It fit everyone's preconceptions, and no one questioned it: Fundamentalists on the rampage in Indonesia. That's a good example of the quality of information we get about Indonesia from the media.

A Nice Place to Visit...

It would, nonetheless, be easy to convince yourself that Solo is Allah's own version of Dodge City if you judged only on the basis of a few glimpses of the place. As you enter the city limits on the Yogya road, you pass the imposing, modern Muhammadiyah University. Well-funded, the university is an attempt to make Islamic higher-learning competitive, and it has very impressive facilities—as well as a student body on its best behavior. Certainly, some disaffected students may turn to terror—but I'm not certain that the Unabomber's resume means we should fear Harvard or embargo the University of Michigan, the schools that spawned him. As so often is the case, it's vital to look past the surface: Doubtless, Solo's Muhammadiyah University isn't a center of pro-American sentiment—but it also isn't Ba'asyir's school for terror (which is, by comparison, a small, poor and backward affair). The Muhammadiyah University in Solo is conservative Islam trying to cope with the modern world, instead of simply denying that change is necessary, as we see in the hopeless stubbornness of the Middle East. The syllabus includes religious studies, to be sure, but also offers a broader, more scientific course-load than many fundamentalist Christian colleges in the United States.

Again, we must try to be objective and ask ourselves: What do we really want from the world's Muslims? If we want them to love us, they won't. But if we want them to learn and earn, to achieve the sort of success that defuses the worst strains of radicalism, then we should not fear such institutions. Conservative Islam, especially in Indonesia, does not automatically equal terror. Instead of warning people away from such places, our embassy staff should be volunteering as guest lecturers. The danger, invariably, comes from the small, eccentric madrassahs or *pesantren*—such as Abubakar Ba'asyir's scandal of a school—which often receive under-the-table donations from the Middle East. We need to learn to tell the difference between serious, if conservative, educational institutions and the real (and few) schools for terror, instead of just assuming that all devout Muslims are terrorists-in-the-making. Otherwise, we diffuse our efforts and make needless enemies.

A bit farther along the road into the city, on the opposite side of the boulevard, there's a burned-out shopping center. It is, indeed, the memento of violence. But not of Islamic unrest. In 1998, when protests swept the country, the people of Solo spent two days rioting and torching any property thought to be owned, all or in part, by the Suharto family (which was quite a bit). One of Suharto's daughters owned that shopping center.

Otherwise, Solo is an easy-going city with modern banks, fast-food restaurants (KFC again), old-fashioned markets and tree-lined streets. Comparatively prosperous, with a

thriving merchant culture, it seems a well-fed, livable place. I never got a hostile glance, although one Muslim schoolgirl spontaneously decided to explain a bit about her city to me—when she learned I was an American her eyes lit up as if I had stepped out of a fairy tale. I did get questions from idle tour guides and the bored staff in that dusty little hotel where I had lunch: When were the tourists coming back? And why did people say that Solo was dangerous when no Westerner had been harmed there? When I mentioned Ba’asyir and the terrorist threat, my conversational partners invariably waved it all away as nonsense, much as an educated American would dismiss the threat from right-wing survivalists to tourists visiting our own country.

A couple of times, I will admit, I was nearly mobbed—by children anxious to practice the English they were studying in school.

So much for living dangerously.

The Power of Positive Doubt

In one crucial respect, Indonesia encapsulates the basic human struggle of our time: The battle—often a real and bloody one—between those determined to crush doubt and those willing to ask questions.

Doubt has a bad reputation, but it is an essential ingredient (perhaps the most fundamental requirement) for evolution into a modern culture, economy and society. In the twenty-first century, the society that insists it already has all the answers knows only how to fail. Our many-layered strategic struggle against violent Islamic extremism, as well as our immediate operations in Afghanistan, can be reduced to a historic struggle between those who fear change and those who embrace it—between those terrorized by doubt itself, and those societies (still a minority in the world) comfortable with tough questions. We want to learn. Our enemies want to believe.

Even in our own society, a minority would prefer to have things one way and one way only—and, predictably, this minority is drawn from statistically less-successful elements of our society. Our schools and universities (except for a few silly and irrelevant liberal arts departments, where academic Stalinism holds sway) are based upon a Western tradition of asking questions, of dialog and experiment, rather than on the rote learning that prevails in most educational institutions in developing countries. Allah may or may not want you to memorize the Koran, but Cisco Systems definitely wants employees who can create. At times, our sometimes-cynical questioning can appear defeatist, but it really isn’t. It’s just that we Americans are all from Missouri, and you have to show us. We’re a nation of spring-butts. And that has helped us become the wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth.

Still, doubt has a lingering bad name, even in the West. Since the mid-eighteenth century, scholars and theorists have sounded Cassandra-like warnings in every generation that our loss of respect for tradition and our doubts, whether about God or government or the usefulness of learning Latin, were destroying Western civilization. And all the while we confounded the “great thinkers” by growing ever stronger.

All of Western modernity is based upon doubt. Doubt is liberating and energizing (although it can also be terrifying—which is why a minority even in successful societies

insists that God has spoken, and that's that). The Protestant Reformation—the key turning point in the rise of the West—introduced doubt about the “one true path” to salvation. The eruption of competitive denominations, establishing a multiplicity of possible paths, opened the door for Science, the last great Western path. For centuries, of course, religion fought a long holding action, against Copernicus and Galileo, Edward Jenner and Charles Darwin—and the battle against Darwin continues to this day. For operational purposes, however, it doesn't even matter whether or not Darwin is right (sometimes, when dealing with the broadcast media, I suspect monkeys are descended from men, rather than the other way around) as long as we can debate any issue, test its value, improve it through questioning, and arrive at useful innovations. And, in the West, most of us have learned to reconcile religion and science. Elsewhere, the struggle has barely begun.

Doubt has always alarmed insecure men and women, whether popes or peasants, from the Europe of the Middle Ages to the Islamic world today. But given the historically unique situation within the Islamic heartlands at the beginning of the twenty-first century, where an ancient civilization is failing, on every front, before our eyes—without foreign conquerors or plagues to excuse the failure—a significant minority of humankind feels itself psychologically threatened by the overwhelming power and terrifying requirements of Western civilization. The twentieth century's great wars were waged between successful states for hegemony, but our new century will see wars between successful states and failed cultures over systems of belief and social organization. And, although it is difficult for Americans to understand and accept, the failures do not want simply to be left in peace—for them, the only acceptable solution would be to drag us down to their level and impose their values on us. Our success is intolerable to them.

The tormented soul of a great religion—Islam—has hit a practical and psychological stone wall. The boldest Indonesians—and Turks, Bosnians, Iranians and even Afghans—have begun to try to find a way over that wall, a way to the future for Islam. But millions upon millions of their fellow Muslims would rather drag them back down into the hopeless world of dogma and discipline than make the difficult effort to climb up themselves. It always bears remembering that, in the Islamic world, the first goal of fundamentalists is to insure that progressive Muslims fail. This may prove to be the greatest internal struggle in the history of Islam, the battle between those willing to consider change and those determined to prevent it in the name of Allah. The battle will be played out from Mindanao to Detroit, and we are part of it, whether we like it or not. And we haven't even realized there is an even greater war—a war for the souls of a billion people—blazing behind our immediate fight against terror.

If I could summarize the deepest fears of the Islamic world, I would do it in two words: sex and science. Women's empowerment in the West, the epochal historic shift from Woman as property to Woman as partner in a free society, threatens every traditional social hierarchy in the culture of Islam's homelands (the only hope for constructive change is on Islam's frontiers). Although it is hardly a subject of discussion in Washington think tanks, which are always a decade behind events in their conceptual understanding, sexual order is the fundamental issue in the organization of human societies. For the first time in the history of Humankind, permissible sexual roles in civilizations have diverged utterly—and they have done it in the blink of an eye, given that the change in the West has been accomplished, essentially, in less than a century. As

I have written elsewhere, this liberation of our female human capital has supercharged American society. But it terrifies those whose core beliefs—and ingrained fears—demand that women be subordinated, sequestered and deprived of rights and freedoms that have come to seem elementary in the West.

The other key word is “science.” Traditional societies rely on the repetition of the same myths and tales, told exactly the same way, with the same ending every time. But science introduces alternatives to the human narrative. Yes, science has brought the world the electric light and the internal combustion engine, modern medicine and the internet, all of which are used even by Islamic extremists. But the physical manifestations of science are not what matters here. Science threatens fundamentalists everywhere simply because it insists on imposing unexpected—often undesired—outcomes.

The willingness of even conservative Indonesians to study science, and to begin to question—even if the first questions remain divorced from religious issues—should encourage us. For every terrorist produced by that Muhammadiyah University in Solo, thousands of students, male and female, will learn that the world is not quite as simple as they thought. Of course, many will remain fervently conservative and reflexively anti-American. But any university that teaches science seriously, even if the courses are sandwiched between lectures on antique superstitions, is doing our work for us. We are afraid of many of the wrong things—in our foreign policy, at least, we seem to have forgotten the need to ask tough questions. Sometimes, our diplomats and analysts make judgments based upon assumptions and prejudices as rigid as those of our most backward enemies.

When The Stories Change

A valued friend of mine, who is a psychiatrist, shares my interest in the American Civil War. Last year, I complained to him about the low quality of the glossy Civil War magazines published these days, which always seem to cover exactly the same battles and the same handful of generals, more often than not with a Rebel-yell bias.

The psychiatrist smiled.

In his fascination with the era, he spends a great deal of time with the hardcore Civil War buffs, those who dress up on weekends and pretend to be someone else. They sometimes become fanatical about each detail—although many are just out to have another peculiar American version of a good time. But my friend is a clinical observer.

“You know,” he began, “how a child wants to have the same story read to him, over and over again? And how, if you miss a word, the child will correct you? It’s exactly the same thing with a lot of the Civil War buffs—they’re not particularly successful people, by and large, and they need to believe in something they can depend on, something that gives their lives a greater meaning. They take comfort and reassurance in their simplified myth of the Civil War. They cling to the verities they’ve accepted. Psychologically, they’re often infantile. They don’t want new stories—they want the same reassuring stories told over and over again...and you’d better not change a word.”

I remembered that conversation in Indonesia.

As noted above, Islam never conquered Indonesia through the sword. It was accepted slowly, and local people often put their own spin on it. They “negotiated” how much Islam they would accept. And, despite their formal conversions to the Muslim faith, for centuries the primary public entertainment form of the people of Java was the *wayang* puppet show based upon the great Hindu epics. Using two-dimensional paper or leather puppets against a back-lit screen, and accompanied by either a few musical instruments in a remote village or a full gamelan orchestra in a court performance, the puppeteers told the same stories over the centuries, drawn from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*. In some regions, one of these classic narratives was favored over the other, but no Islamic stories intruded and the narratives of the performance did not change. The characters were always the same, as was the plot and the outcome. Creativity was permitted only within the puppeteer’s range of applied skills and in the quality of the music.

Today, a few traveling troupes still perform the old puppet shows, but they only attract the old crowds in rural areas, or during abbreviated performances staged for tourists (the real thing runs all night, the tourists get an hour or so). In art schools, the form will be preserved as a treasured artifact of the nation’s culture, but, as a popular form of entertainment, it’s going the way of the medicine show in the United States. Western academics will, of course, complain that modern intrusions, such as films and television, are, once again, destroying a beautiful native way of life...

Nonsense.

The waning of the *wayang* puppet show, with its rigid repetitions and frozen vision, is a healthy sign of a society that is opening itself up to alternative endings. Even the most fundamentalist Muslim movements down the centuries could not destroy the puppet shows—since they only sought to replace one set of verities with a less entertaining one. Now, largely within a generation, we are seeing the replacement of “This is the truth,” with “What if?”

Note the Taliban’s insistence in Afghanistan on banning music, television and films—and even Iran’s more advanced society tried, and failed, to ban satellite dishes back in the nineties. We see this as lunacy. But the mullahs know, better than we do, exactly what they’re up against: They’re fighting, desperately, to preserve their treasured one-way world, in which there are no possible alternatives to strict faith. Even the most innocent Western film opens up new human possibilities.

Now, the Indonesian transition from puppet shows to evening soap operas certainly is not going to lead directly to a replication of American society. We don’t know exactly where it’s going to lead, and neither do the Indonesians. Social transformation is a long, uneven and complex process, nor does the citizenry consciously sign up for it. Social progress may seem to send obvious visual signals, from fast-food restaurants to short skirts, but the psychological progress—the progress that matters—occurs by stealth. Attitudes shift without conscious decisions, the tide simply changes, as if by night. Given the chance, the average man and woman will *not* make a great leap, but will step carefully from stone to stone in the cultural stream. One example of this is the growing appeal in Indonesia of India’s Bollywood films in competition with Western releases. We look at the Bollywood films and see the same plot and characters (though with different names and costumes) over and over again, with absurd song-and-dance numbers erupting at the same predictable points in every film, and the same happy ending guaranteed.

Sound familiar?

The embrace of Indian films is an opening, but it's a psychologically-easier one than leaping right to *Pulp Fiction* or *American Beauty*. True to their own traditions (after all, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* epics are of Indian origin), the Indians have created narratives with modern whistles and bells but which reassure the viewer by providing the same themes, characters and outcomes over and over again. Yet, as silly and monotonous as those films seem to us, there are bits of variety and change here and there—increasingly, the women in the Indian films are more independent, for example, and corrupt officials appear ever more frequently in the bad-guy roles. Those movies, too, are doing our work for us, leading Indonesia's common men and women, slowly and gently, from a world of assigned places to one of multiple possibilities, of criticism of the one-true-path approach to life.

When the stories change, everything begins to change in a society. That is why Islamic schools around the world insist, fiercely, on telling the same stories over and over again, on making students memorize them, and on fighting for them to the death.

But before we feel too superior about all this, it's worth remembering that our own transition is less than five hundred years old, which really is not much time in civilizational terms. Until the sixteenth century, European public theater performed the same allegorical tales over and over again, the numbing, religious-lesson "mystery plays." Then, about a hundred years after the movable type printing press began to make the dissemination of knowledge cheap and fast (enabling, above all, the Reformation), something happened. In current pop jargon, English society, leading the way, hit a "tipping point." In the span of one long lifetime, English speakers leapt from the insistent sameness of mystery plays to the stunning varieties of Shakespeare—whose endings are often anything but reassuring. It is the greatest creative leap in our history, greater even than the jump from the telegraph to the internet. From stiff, cardboard figures speaking lifeless lines meant to teach audiences how to behave, we jumped to the most profound cast of characters in any literature and to questions so powerful they remain unresolved today.

And so the West began to rise, on multiple fronts, as it learned to ask questions. Strategists may turn up their noses, but Shakespeare—the powerful openness to doubt he represents—was every bit as important to the triumphs of the imperial age as gunpowder. Revisionist historians write book after book trying to explain that the West didn't possess any inherent human superiority, but conquered the world either by exporting diseases, or with superior weaponry, or through any number of other tangential factors. In fact, the West rose so suddenly and achieved so much because it had learned, with remarkable swiftness, to *think* differently. It may be politically-incorrect to say it, but, even today, we continue to develop at an ever-accelerating rate, while our would-be competitors fall ever farther behind, because we out-think them. We are open to new possibilities, they are not, and that is a basic factor shaping our world.

Indonesia, moving from puppet shows to Indian movies, is struggling to get from "This is God's true law" to "To be, or not to be." Indonesia is trying to learn to think, to open itself to alternatives outcomes. It will be a long struggle, with inevitable setbacks. But I do not believe the extreme fundamentalists, even should they resort to greater violence, will be able to turn back the clock permanently (although we may see reactionary periods in Indonesia's future if internal events spin out of control). The

mullahs could not stop the march of history in Iran--a far more religiously-homogenous and devout culture--and their counterparts in Indonesia will fail, as well. It is a question only of how long the future will take to arrive, and how much blood, repression and suffering Indonesia will see in the interval. Indonesia is not the Middle East, where meaningful progress is almost impossible. Indonesia is a human frontier of the twenty-first century, and frontiers are always realms of possibility.

The mullahs and their most fanatical followers sense the dimensions of the battle they're in, which is why they are so determined to do whatever it takes to stymie social liberalization—even if they must resort to terror. When there's blood on their hands, they know exactly what they are doing.

Astonishing, really, that the heirs of Shakespeare don't recognize what's happening in Indonesia as clearly as the mullahs do.

The Devils Of Corruption

In a previous report for the CETO, on India, I detailed the network of negative effects of corruption in a society. In order to avoid repeating myself, I will say here only that corruption is the number-one obstacle as societies and economies attempt to modernize. And Indonesia is so pervasively corrupt that the dishonesty of virtually every politician and member of the country's elite brakes all attempts at reform, while playing into the hands of religious extremists who, although often corrupt themselves, have successfully portrayed themselves as having clean hands and the will to reform the system. The average Indonesian is not drawn to religious extremism—but the average Indonesian does, indeed, feel the burden of corruption and longs for cleaner government and a cleaner economy (although that average citizen would be glad enough to benefit from corruption himself). The most consistent complaints heard in Indonesia are about corruption, and if any factor could allow Islamic fundamentalists to increase their share of the national vote, it would be the shamelessness of corruption in the public sector.

Even President Megawati's family isn't clean—and she is about as worthy a political leader as we are likely to find in Indonesia. Her husband, Taufik Kiemas, or “Mr. Taufik,” has ugly ties to the extensive cabal of business tycoons and bankers whose insider loan schemes artificially shored up failing banks and businesses after the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis hit. Essentially, Indonesia's banks were bankrupt, and the government saved them with infusions of credit and phony deals that made the corrupt men who had stolen Indonesia's international loans and aid even richer. Now, the loans are due to be repaid, the bankers and businessmen say they have no money, insisting that they need a long moratorium on debt repayments in order to “save Indonesia's economy.” Except for a few minor cases, the loans have yet to be repaid even in part, while the same oligarchy flourishes and Indonesia veers toward insolvency (despite a positive domestic growth rate, which cannot begin to generate the funds to service the country's massive internal and external debts).

Tommy Suharto, ex-President Suharto's youngest son is, finally, going to trial as I write—for the murder of a supreme court judge who tried to prosecute him. Average Indonesians are skeptical and believe that, first, he has only been brought to trial because

of the political elite's fear of public dissatisfaction should "Tommy" literally be allowed to get away with murder and, second, that the fix is in and that he will be given a short sentence of which he will serve, at most, a part. Still, this is a time of continuing instabilities—not all of them bad—in Indonesia, and there is at least a chance that Tommy Suharto will be found guilty of murder and awarded an appropriate sentence. We shall have to wait and see—but this case, in which the evidence of guilt appears overwhelming, will be a test case for cleaning up the judicial system. Of course, it's an unenviable position to be a presiding judge in a trial which centers on the assassination of the last judge who tried to prosecute the same defendant—and in a lesser case. Even should the trial proceed to a guilty verdict and the requisite punishment, Indonesia's corrupt elite is known for forgetting its debts, but remembering its enemies. The judge will have to be a very brave man, indeed.

Numerous other corruption cases have either been sidetracked or have been handled with token sentences. Again and again, politicians have been caught stealing, only to be let off with a slap of the wrist. Even the Golkar political party, associated with the deposed Suharto and which has plentiful enemies in the government, has not been called to serious account. Its members have been harassed with desultory corruption charges, but these appear to have been used primarily as political nuisances, not as serious efforts to redress the damages done by Golkar's extravagant corruption. In Indonesia, it appears that only the little guy, or a fool, goes to jail.

The problem is that everyone has the goods on everyone else. Indonesia has a long history of corruption, dating back through the Dutch colonial period, but the corruption of the nineteen-nineties was exuberant by any standards. With international loans pouring in, the economy was nothing but a grab-fest—and the new wealth was spread around sufficiently to taint nearly everyone likely to gain access to political power at the national level. There is a sense that, if I put X in jail today, a change of government may put me in jail tomorrow—if X and his party don't expose my own dealings in the meantime. Even among those who sincerely want some level of reform—those who realize its necessity—there are few unstained white knights.

Corruption is the number one practical impediment to economic recovery and progress in Indonesia. There are many other factors involved, from deficient physical infrastructure to work-force skill levels, but nothing is as make-or-break as the issue of unrestrained, remorseless corruption.

And the corruption goes all the way down to the street corner—if any individual is hated in Indonesia, it is the policeman.

"Let Him Die"

As we passed a traffic check point, an Indonesian translating for me remarked spontaneously that, "In Indonesia, if a policeman is in a traffic accident and he is recognized, no one will help him. They will let him die. They think: Now let *him* learn what it's like for the rest of us."

It is common for the police to be despised in developing countries, from Egypt to India, from Russia to Mexico. But I have never encountered such outright hatred toward

the police as I have in Indonesia. Without a single exception, I found that people believed the police would never help them (unless they were rich), but that the police would always do them harm, from extorting bribes for imaginary traffic violations to supporting one ethnic faction over another in civil strife. Now, the usual model for police organizations in the developing world is for the line cops to be severely underpaid, driving them to supplement their incomes from petty exploitation of the people they are pledged to protect. Mid-level officials have standard rates for their services, such as making legal problems disappear. At times, reformist generals or directors are imposed at the uppermost echelons, but the absence of adequate salaries, supervision or training at the field level stymies serious reform. While that is a general, prevalent model, Indonesia still appears to be a particularly bad case.

This matters immediately to the United States, because we decided, in March, 2002, to focus our anti-terrorist aid on supporting the Indonesian police. First, the police are dreadfully ineffective, as well as corrupt, but, perhaps more importantly, the U.S. is aligning itself with the most hated symbol of government. In the eyes of the average citizen, we're backing the bad guys.

Certainly, efforts to help reform and train Indonesia's police may prove beneficial, and our aid is likely to concentrate on special units not associated with petty bribery and extortion. Yet, we also decided that, because of human rights concerns, no corresponding aid would go to the Indonesian military.

Although my visit to Indonesia was unofficial and, therefore, my observations of the military were only external (well-kept barracks seen from the highway, public works projects, etc.), I was struck by the divergent attitudes Indonesians had toward the police and the military. I did not speak to a single person who wanted the military pulling the government strings again, but the majority of those to whom I spoke felt that, since 1998/99, the military had made—and was continuing to make—genuine progress in reforming itself. Also, there was a good bit of pride in the military, although not unmixed with wariness. On Sulawesi (see below), for instance, Christians and Muslims both felt that the police had taken sides in the bloody factional fighting around Poso, in Central Sulawesi, but that the military, once ordered to intervene, had been impartial and effective. People sensed that the military would protect them, but that the police force was a loose cannon.

Also, the Indonesian military is not uniform in its history. The navy and marines were not tainted either by the repression of the Suharto years or by widespread human rights violations. But even the army, including the sometimes-dubious special forces command (KOPASSUS), seems serious about reform.

There are, of course, many difficulties. Counter-insurgency campaigns easily corrupt soldiers, unless they are very well-trained, well-led and carefully-monitored. I expect we will continue to hear of intermittent excesses in strife-torn regions of Indonesia. But I also believe that the Indonesian military recognized that it made serious mistakes in its handling of the East Timor crisis and, unless fiercely-provoked, would be unlikely to respond so indiscriminately again. I do not suggest that every Indonesian general has become a humanitarian, only that they recognized that, both tactically and strategically, the techniques employed in East Timor were failures.

At present, it appears the government will direct senior generals to testify before the recently-established national human rights board regarding East Timor. If the military

breaks with tradition and, despite its grumbling, testifies with reasonable willingness (they've been avoiding this for months), the country will have turned a significant corner in its march toward democratization. The real danger may be that a few over-zealous politicians will grandstand and try to make the interviews into a witch-hunt, spooking the military back into stubborn recalcitrance.

As I attempt to analyze the current situation and make useful recommendations, I find myself in a difficult position. I firmly believe that support for human rights is not only morally right, but strategically wise for the United States in the long term. But I must ask myself if, by continuing to focus on the need to punish the generals implicated in East Timor, we aren't clinging to a tactical issue from the past and missing strategic opportunities for the future.

Judicious engagement with the Indonesian military would not only assist our global efforts against terror, but could encourage reform. The East Timor killings remain inexcusable. But they also must be viewed in the context of the times—in 1998/99, with the tremendous confusion surrounding the fall of Suharto, Indonesia seemed in real danger of coming apart. The military misjudged the situation—as did the government—and believed that East Timor would only be the first domino to fall. To many insiders, there seemed a real danger of national dissolution. Today, many separatist movements remain, but the military appears to have developed more methodical, successful and less brutal techniques for coping with them. Certainly, a national emergency could trigger future atrocities—but a military engaged over the years by the United States would likely be less atrocity-prone than a military spurned by us.

Finally, we should engage the Indonesian military more broadly than at present if only for intelligence reasons. Given the layered relationships within the military (and throughout Indonesian society), we will never achieve a sufficient understanding of the Indonesian military and its probable courses of action with even the best defense attache staff in our embassy. While there are many dangers in any such relationship, and respect for human rights is vital and non-negotiable, it seems to me now that the most useful course of action for us would be for us to keep up behind-the-scenes pressure on human rights issues, but to focus more attention upon a future we can affect, rather than on a past we cannot change. Put bluntly, we are allowing a tactical issue to block strategic progress. Travel in Indonesia changed my views on many things—especially since the press reporting is so superficial and inaccurate—but I now believe, firmly, that we are foolish for not engaging the Indonesian military through a broad and generous range of contacts and programs—if and when they want them. Standing outside and complaining will not defeat terrorists or prevent human rights violations. We need to accept the risks involved and begin anew with Indonesia and its armed forces.

IV. ISLAND HOPPING

Bali Not So High

If you want to begin to understand Indonesia's complexity, do not skip Bali. Don't go for a vacation—Bali is one of the most overrated tourist destinations on earth. Perhaps it was a tropical paradise in the past (although I'm cynical about any reports of paradise on earth), but today's Bali is polluted, overcrowded, noisy and dirty (although anyone who likes sewage, stray dogs and garbage will love the beaches). Take your second honeymoon elsewhere. Instead, go to Bali to experience the most religiously-devout culture in all of Indonesia.

Bali is Hindu. Catholicism came late, in the nineteen-thirties, but made significant converts. Evangelical Christian missionaries have been active more recently. Yet, Bali remains almost ninety per cent Hindu—and, if anything, it is more devoutly so than India. But the Hinduism of Bali is different, and more humane than that of the sub-continent. First, the worst blood cults are absent, and, second, the untouchable caste does not exist as it does in India, while other inter-caste relations are more fluid. While most Indians will have a small shrine in a corner of their homes, every Hindu household in Bali has a temple complex in its backyard—often a very elaborate courtyard within a courtyard, even in relatively humble homes. Even new houses—which seem to be under construction everywhere—are designed with traditional temple precincts as an integral part of the project. Daily worship and housekeeping duties blur together, and devotion is taken very seriously, though religious extremism is almost completely absent (occasional violence between Hindus and Christians is more often about village spats than about religion *per se*—Hatfields and McCoys stuff). While we encounter sensational stories about Islamic fanatics in Indonesia, those are but a small portion of the minority of Muslim conservatives. Islamic worship for most Indonesians is a *laissez-faire* business (and business will usually take precedence over prayer). But the quieter devotion in Bali is the real thing—and it pervades the society.

As part of its efforts to improve its public image, even the local military garrisons—by no means all Hindus—send troops in exercise suits to clean up the grounds of public temples before religious holidays (of which there are many in the Balinese religious calendar of 210 days). And whether one-star or five-star, no hotel is without a shrine or temple on its grounds. The grace and relative calm of Balinese religion is striking.

It was not always this way. The Dutch turned their attentions to Bali late in the colonial game and only finished conquering it a century ago. The fighting was particularly brutal, though often one-sided. The Balinese kings (essentially local nobility—every town and major village seems to have had its own “king”) had no modern weapons or Western-style military formations. But neither would they simply surrender. With a long history as fierce warriors (who sometimes intervened in Javanese dynastic struggles), the Balinese fought the Dutch with startling ferocity. And when it was clear they could not win, many of the kings and their courts dressed themselves and their families in sacrificial white robes, armed themselves with staves and krisses—short, ceremonial daggers—and men, women and children charged suicidally into the ranks of Dutch repeating rifles and artillery.

Today, Bali appears lulled by its prosperity, and the profits from the tourist trade have made the Balinese content with their place in the Republic of Indonesia; also, the Balinese, who even today number only about three million, have long enjoyed a disproportionate influence in Jakarta—not least through family ties to both Sukarno and Suharto. But even this “tropical paradise,” packed with cheap Australian quickie tour groups (our warnings have kept many up-market tourists away, but the Aussies aren’t easily spooked as long as the beer’s cold and cheap), the possibility of violent disturbances is not as remote as it might seem as you dodge through the traffic jams in front of the endless rows of tourist shops and bars in any of the big towns.

Bali may be in danger of killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Development is out of control—environmental concerns never stand up against a bribe in Indonesia—and international tourism, which alone has funded Bali’s unusually-high level of development, may fall off sharply in the future. Bali traded first on its reputation as a tropical Eden, then, more recently, on its upscale resort hotels, a few of which are routinely judged among the world’s best. But, increasingly, the grand resort compounds are a bit like luxury prisons, with the world outside the gates nothing but traffic fumes and garbage, and the degradation of nature is all around you in the resort towns. Even the gorgeous rice terraces and mountain lakes have caught the garbage plague.

But the Balinese are determined to keep building. Perhaps the worst-conceived project in all of Indonesia is one started, before his father’s fall, by Tommy Suharto (the son currently on trial for murder). Toward the end, the Suharto regime, like the Sukarno regime a generation before it, indulged in massive showpiece projects. Tommy Suharto, who seemed to have a blank check from the government, decided to honor his familial ties to Bali—where he was deeply involved in corrupt development grabs—by removing a hilltop behind the most expensive luxury hotels and building the world’s largest Hindu statue, a monstrous creation about ten times larger than the statue of liberty, depicting Vishnu, the Preserver (an irony, under the circumstances) riding on Garuda, his demi-god eagle and transporter (Muslim nation or not, Indonesia’s airline is named after Garuda). The fraction of the statue now complete is already massive—and visually revolting, almost as if the builders thought to impress tourists by setting up a huge statue of the Frankenstein monster. Despite Tommy Suharto’s fall from grace, the locals are determined to continue the project, imagining that it will be a tourist attraction, and the first phase of a surrounding shopping and entertainment center is complete—although it was empty when I stopped by. A necklace of condos, private homes and more hotels are to be added in the statue’s very long shadow. I understand that, writing about this, it would be easy to sound like a smug Westerner—but this statue, apart from being phenomenally ugly, will, literally, haunt the most prestigious corner of Bali, where tourists can pay thousands of dollars a night for ultra-luxurious bungalows. The only statue I have seen that comes close in scale is the Mother Russia statue in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad)—and that is not nearly so large, or so unappealing, as the statue being built in Bali with money much needed for other purposes.

If, in the future, the tourist industry fails to recover from recent reverses and, instead, goes into a long decline—what will be the effect on the rising expectations of Bali’s population, where long-poor farming villages now have neat new homes, with new cars and motorbikes blocking their streets? Will Bali always be an island of (relative) peace? Certainly, there are no danger signs yet. And Bali may muddle through by catering to

package tours that slowly slide lower down the market scale. Its furniture exports are booming—thanks, in fact, to the economic crisis, which gave manufacturers an exchange rate advantage.

Overall, the Balinese social fabric appears strong to an outsider—although there is growing resentment at the old practice of men dumping wives whenever they feel like it and simply starting a new family (a practice widespread in much of Indonesia—despite all the alarmist warnings by our domestic critics, the two-parent family is actually in better shape here than in much of the developing world—and especially as regards Indonesia). Women are, indeed, becoming more conscious of their rights. And one fellow who boasted to me that he had just moved on to his fourth, much-younger wife may soon find his world changing. Traditionally, Balinese and other Indonesian fathers have founded successive families, producing, not infrequently, dozens of children, not all of whom were cared for adequately. In addition to driving up the birthrate, it impoverished families in those parts of the society where inheritances traditionally were divided, harmed education efforts, as young men needed to work to support abandoned mothers, and continues to provide orphans or poor children for fundamentalist Islamic schools (though not on Bali, of course).

Today, Bali appears to be the most stable island in Indonesia, providing the most equitable opportunities for its citizens along with the highest average standard of living. Tomorrow is an open question. The island relies overwhelmingly on tourism, and so is fervently anti-terrorist, since any hint of terrorism means instant hotel cancellations (in neighboring Lombok, after a tourist murder by a small group of Islamic radicals, the locals banded together in an anti-terrorist front). If broader problems in Indonesia really do close down the tourist trade, even Bali may appear surprisingly volatile.

Fear of Federalism

If Bali is content within the Republic of Indonesia, plenty of other islands and populations are not. Traditionally, power has been centralized in Jakarta, and Jakarta took the money earned in the outer islands while exporting Java's excess population. Since Suharto's overthrow, successive democratically-elected governments have begun to develop policies designed to placate angry populations in areas such as Aceh, Maluku, West Papua and Kalimantan. The Megawati government, despite its caution in other fields, has moved with some urgency to insure that the bulk of wealth earned by oil-rich regions or those with the most lucrative other natural resources either remains in or is returned to those regions in the hope that this will quell the separatist ardor. Local authorities have been granted greater powers and Jakarta has tried to lessen the weight of the central government's heavy hand. But there is, nonetheless, a serious danger that the national government's efforts may prove too little, too late.

To anyone comfortable with the United States and its traditions of balanced authorities, a federal solution would seem natural for Indonesia. But no party in Jakarta will even utter the word, except to excoriate the idea as anti-Indonesian. The word "autonomy" isn't taboo, although it technically can imply even greater local powers than

a federal system (which has many possible variations), but no politician or general will discuss the prospect of an Indonesian federation, since fears among the ruling elite—no matter their political persuasion—are that any move toward federalism would start the state down the road to dissolution. Jakarta will contemplate neither peaceful secession, nor the transfer of broad political authority to its restive territories. What Jakarta views as a generous compromise is often viewed by locals as nothing more than Javanese—or Indonesian—colonialism. Objectively speaking, the local dissenters are right. Their islands and regions have been and continue to be colonies of “Greater Java” and the Jakarta government.

The danger is that, in trying to impede any possibility of secession, Jakarta’s foot-dragging will play into the hands of the secessionists. Religious extremists already recognize the opportunities the government’s neo-colonialist posture hands them—and, for the Muslim extremists throughout Indonesia, violence can easily prove to be a win-win situation: If the government suppresses them with violence, they become martyrs, while, if the government fails to confront them successfully, the radical movements only become stronger. The government’s multi-track policy to combat separatism, discussed above, has made impressive tactical progress in Aceh, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Maluku (the jury is still out on West Papua), but it still could lose the strategic game if it cannot overcome Jakarta’s image as a distant, corrupt and extractive power. Another severe economic downturn could pour gasoline on the numerous separatist fires smoldering throughout so much of Indonesia.

Jakarta just cannot let go. It will not tolerate secession, because it believes—not necessarily correctly—that, were one island or territory allowed to secede, others would rapidly and inevitably follow. So Jakarta is left with a country too big to administer effectively and justly, but remains unwilling to take a slimming course (the military, especially, views itself as the defender of both the idea of Indonesia and every inch of territory inherited from the Dutch). Nor is Jakarta—yet—willing to cede sufficient autonomy to the outer islands to content local populations that feel they have only been cheated and discriminated against since the nation’s founding. On one hand, given the historical record, it is surprising that most Indonesians are as content with the state of the nation and their membership in it as citizens as they are; on the other hand, it does not take a majority, only a small but determined minority, to create and sustain a brutal civil war.

Bottom line: Indonesia is unlikely to collapse into numerous smaller entities, but there is a better-than-fair chance that, lacking more enlightened policies from Jakarta, some of the toughest separatist movements will prove ineradicable and, in times of economic or social crisis, may pose an immediate threat of violent secession on the periphery. The military would feel compelled to intervene and, unrestrained by international engagement, might over-react (especially if, given its isolation by the U.S. government, it feels it has nothing to lose, anyway). While Indonesia won’t dissolve, it may lose a few outer territories—or be forced to maintain its national integrity with extreme force. The best hope for a peaceful, integral future for Indonesia would require economic progress, a reduction in Jakarta-centric corruption, the devolution of real self-governance to Indonesia’s disparate regions, and material evidence of the advantages of remaining “Indonesian.” The many different ethnic groups and religious factions of Indonesia need to see that it is to their advantage to belong to Indonesia. In the absence

of tangible benefits, local empowerment, and tolerance, separatism will continue to extract a blood-price and damage Indonesia's international image.

The political challenge is severe for any government in Jakarta, and, to be fair, President Megawati appears to be doing all that she believes she can get away with doing at present. Indonesia's political parties, long denied real power, have remained in a state of political immaturity and rush to score points against every other party, irregardless of the content and value of the issue. Megawati runs the risk of being attacked for pandering to the secessionists if she hands off too much power, and she will always be wary of the military, given her family history. Indonesia's parliament, while democratically-elected, is not a sophisticated democratic body and has difficulty passing constructive legislation. Elected officials from all parties put personal interest first, client interest second, party interest third, the interests of their particular group of voters fourth, and national interest fifth and last. Even in our own government, of course, we see distasteful displays of political jockeying—but in Indonesia's parliament, fratricide is something of a national sport. Given her reliance on a combination of very different political parties for her government's continuance in power, Megawati is unlikely to make any sudden moves. Yet, it is likely that only a series of bold gestures toward disaffected regions offers the hope of a peaceful future for Indonesia.

How Britney Spears Whipped Osama bin Laden

Waiting in the airport in Bali for my morning flight to Makassar (Ujung Pandang), a rush of pictures of Osama bin Laden caught my eye. Television sets positioned around the waiting room were tuned to Indonesia's version of *The Today Show* and suddenly there were smiling faces onscreen, admiring a row of images of Osama.

Still in need of a second cup of coffee, I thought, "This doesn't look good—they're pushing Osama for breakfast and there goes everything I thought I'd learned about the average Indonesian's distaste for terrorists."

I sat down and watched. The faces on the television didn't look Indonesian, then I noticed that the interview was subtitled into Bahasa. I started distinguishing odd words, then the camera panned to a familiar skyline that had nothing to do with Indonesia. The segment, over in two minutes, was an isn't-this-crazy? story on a Thai in Bangkok who, for whatever reason, adored Osama and had built a Buddhist temple to honor him (Islam takes another interesting turn in the East).

I kept watching.

The next segment, about five minutes long, covered the opening of a new art exhibit at the Tate Modern in London, complete with loopy paintings, short-skirted commentators and the opening-night-party-glitz Indonesians love. A fascinating commercial break featured a modern, American-dressed and Western-housed Indonesian family savoring a new frozen food selection—toward the end, grandma arrived in her Islamic head covering, and she loved the frozen dinner, too, smiling her maternal approval of her son's clever wife (whose tight, short skirt made it look like she was nostalgic for the dating scene). Everyone munched happily ever after. It was a brilliant commercial, reconciling modern youth and a Western lifestyle with respect for tradition, hitting all age groups.

Then, wham! The next five-minute segment covered the Berlin Film Festival, complete with a good bit of flesh and gore footage, excused by perfunctory intellectual commentary. Thus far, the show looked impressively globalized and more sophisticated than the good old *Today Show* or *Good Morning, America* back home. But the best was yet to come.

The last ten minutes of the broadcast was devoted to America's blond ambassador of triumphant mediocrity, Britney Spears. Osama got two minutes, Lolita got ten. Britney was out to win the hearts and minds of every red-blooded Indonesian male and discontented teenage girl, baring her midriff in a succession of her famous "virgin-tart" outfits and shaking her bottom as if fire ants had gotten into her impressively-tight jeans.

I glanced around me. None of the Indonesians had turned away in embarrassment; on the contrary, although only a bored few had paid any attention to the *Osama Does Bangkok* segment, men, women and children crowded beneath the television sets to enjoy Britney's energetic demonstration of American culture. Perhaps it helps her global appeal that she doesn't really speak English.

Keep the academic analyses, ladies and gentlemen. Indonesia certainly harbors some terrorists. And it may nurture more in the future, if we get it wrong. But I'll trust the interests of the crowd in the end. By mid-bout, at the latest, Britney's going to whup Osama on a t.k.o.

Osama's Fickle Fans

During my travels on Java, Bali and Sulawesi, I encountered no visible signs of support for Osama bin Laden, unless you count two t-shirts with his portrait. The first was hanging on a tourist kiosk outside a Hindu temple on Java. The stand also offered crucifixes, Hindu gods, Buddhas, heavy-metal t-shirts and Indonesian handicrafts: Something for everybody. The second t-shirt showed up at a wild Christian funeral in the Torajan highlands of Sulawesi, worn by a boy in his mid-teens who seemed to think it was a pretty cool act of rebellion—no one paid him any attention.

Had I spent all my time hunting for Osama's fan club, I suspect I could have found something or other to present as sensational evidence of support for terrorism—but I wasn't interested in sensationalism. Westerners are easily misled by matters as simple as camera angles—for example, when CNN (by far the worst America-based offender) shoots anti-American demonstrations, they also film from ground level, close to the demonstrators. The frantic movements and yelling implies that the demonstration is huge and threatening—although a shot taken from a rooftop might have shown mere dozens of demonstrators, or perhaps a few hundred—but not the enraged thousands the cameraman and reporter suggested. After 9-11-01, the demonstrations in front of the U.S. embassy in Jakarta never got out of hand (although the embassy staff immediately lost their nerve), and the numbers quickly dwindled. But the camera angle never changed—and it looked to all the world as if Indonesia was ablaze with anti-American fervor. Indonesians themselves believe that most of the demonstrators who did show up were paid to do so (nothing unusual in this--Indonesian political parties across the spectrum routinely bus in

demonstrators when they wish to make a point, providing them with what the political culture of Washington or Chicago knows as “walking-around money”).

I believe that, after September 11th, there probably was a superficial wave of admiration for Osama and his crew in Indonesia—and elsewhere. It’s human nature to enjoy seeing the mighty humbled. The important question is how deep the support goes, and the best answer I can get at is that, in Indonesia, it doesn’t go deep. Osama’s real fans are comparatively low in number.

I’m not certain why, but Americans routinely fail to understand the fickleness of crowds. A mob can turn with lightning speed, for you or against you. When judging the level of support for an enemy, such as Osama bin Laden, in any country we need to try to get beyond the any-excuse-for-a-party gang to the true believers willing to sacrifice for his cause.

By that measure, there’s an enormous difference in the embittered, self-exculpating enthusiasm many in the Arab world—or in Pakistan, for example—feel toward Islamic terrorists and the more casual, generally-fleeting interest others experience. It may sound offensive to some, but even taking satisfaction in seeing America hurt and humbled doesn’t automatically mean a person—or a population—is seriously anti-American. While we will never convince—and I really do mean never—the average Egyptian or Saudi that America isn’t the enemy of Islam (although they’d all like U.S. visas, thanks), the majority of the Islamic world’s population beyond the Arab heartlands is up for grabs. In fact, many non-Arab Muslims *want* to believe in America, in possibilities, in the prospect of progress, pleasure and a better future—especially for their children. If we are to have any enduring success in dealing with the “Islamic world,” we must begin by recognizing how various and even contradictory that world is. As noted above, there is a tremendous struggle underway for the soul of Islam, for the future of Muslims in dozens of countries. In some areas, there is little or no hope (again, one thinks of the Arabian peninsula and Egypt); elsewhere, the jury’s still out and the odds keep shifting (Lebanon, Kuwait, difficult Pakistan); and in quite a number of countries, the people have a fighting chance of adapting Islam to the twenty-first century (India, with its minority of 130 million Muslims, Malaysia, Turkey, Iran—and Indonesia, among others).

The U.S. Government, with its well-meant, general declarations to the effect that Islam is great religion and that we’re not at war with Muslims *per se* has only a weak effect abroad, while actually hindering American understanding at home. Until we find an acceptable formula to explain to the American people how complex the Islamic world happens to be, our touchy-feely statements have the unintended effect of lumping all Muslims together as good guys (except, of course, for the terrorists). With their indestructible common sense, the American people know very well that this isn’t true—and the unfortunate result is that such generalities actually lead Americans to take a negative view of the Islamic world overall. We must find a way to distinguish between the good guys and the bad guys in an honest, believable manner.

What we unwittingly are saying with our happy-talk generalizations about Islam is that “All Muslims look the same.” They don’t. And we need to grow serious about recognizing the differences. Anti-American sentiment in Indonesia, to the extent it exists, may appear broad if a pollster asks an archly-phrased question, but it does not go deep. By failing to note the difference between a few shabby demonstrations in Jakarta

and the powerful anti-Americanism in the Middle East, we're declaring enemies where we should be making friends.

The "Jews" of Indonesia

In 1997, months before the disturbances of 1998 that led to Suharto's ouster, hundreds of Chinese residents of Indonesia were slaughtered in Makassar. Hundreds more were beaten, raped or burned out of their homes. According to local eyewitnesses, the pogrom began when a mentally-ill ethnic Chinese rushed from his home one afternoon, waving a sword. He attacked a Muslim schoolgirl on her way home and hacked her to death. Within an hour, mobs began a rampage through the Chinese sections of the city, looting Chinese goldsmiths' shops and appliance stores. All the non-Chinese ethnic groups appear to have participated in the attacks, whether Muslim or Christian. And, when the violence ended, the Chinese began to put their lives back in order as best they could, as their ancestors had done before them.

The press was encouraged—strongly—by the Suharto government to play down the attacks, just as the level of violence against Chinese Indonesians in Jakarta the following year would be under-reported. Only over the last two years, first under the preceding president, Gus Dur, and now under Megawati, have the Chinese begun to be recognized officially as fully-entitled citizens of Indonesia. It's been a long three or four hundred years.

The situation of the Chinese in Indonesia is strikingly similar to that of the Jewish populations of "Old Europe." I do not mean that they are headed for concentration camps; rather, they have done the best they could to pursue the few professions permitted them and then have been penalized for their successes as businessmen, bankers and financiers. For centuries, they were the local shopkeepers and moneylenders in Javanese villages, and they were the quiet (during the Suharto years, not quiet enough) financial backers of business deals large and small. As with the Jews, some ethnic Chinese grew rich, resulting in the folk belief that all were secretly rich and hoarding their money like misers. As with the European Jews, their different appearance and "private" language set them apart. And, as with the Jews, when a scapegoat was required, the Chinese were readily available.

The first severe pogrom against the Chinese on Java was not launched by the natives, but by the Dutch, in 1740. Dutch treatment of Chinese immigrants and small businessmen had grown so oppressive that it sparked protests, then a local revolt. The Dutch responded with the thorough sort of slaughter the Spanish had perpetrated against the populations of the Netherlands a century and a half earlier—and which had inspired the mythologized tales of the Dutch struggle for freedom. Thereafter, the Chinese went carefully with the Dutch, supporting the colonial authorities and exploiting the situation to their advantage. In turn, this antagonized the natives, who periodically killed Chinese. Finally, the turmoil of the twentieth century saw the Chinese shopkeepers expelled from many of Java's towns and villages in the interior, while they were bunched together in the cities in Chinatown ghettos.

Through it all, the Chinese hung on. But, as in Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere, their culture developed separately from both the local native culture and mainland Chinese culture, while feeling the influence of both. Chinese communities also developed differently on different islands and in different cities, not only because of different roots in China, but because of different political and cultural circumstances during decades and centuries of relative isolation. In today's Jakarta, for example, young Chinese from the educated classes may be more at home in English than Chinese, while, in a provincial city such as Makassar, where the community is more close-knit and guarded, Chinese dialects remain a form of armor against the rest of the world.

What is common throughout Indonesia, however, is the reflexive public hatred of the ethnic Chinese. During my travels, I encountered only one middle-aged woman who liked and trusted the Chinese (she was Javanese), while I repeatedly met with vituperative language directed toward them that resembled the sort of hate-speech you might have heard about blacks in the American south during the Great Depression, or about Jews in Hitler's Germany. And not only the Muslims felt that way—although the Chinese population has a strong Christian flavor, some of the fiercest verbal attacks came from native Christians--one college-educated young man, employed by a Chinese firm, said, "We call them 'garbage bellies,' because they eat filth. They can't be trusted. They steal from everyone. They're not Indonesians...they don't care about the country at all. They just suck the blood out of the rest of us..." To anyone who has read much history, this language--especially the bitter tone in which it was spoken—is chilling).

And the Chinese are always wary. When you walk down the goldsmiths' street in Makassar today, you need to look up to the second and third stories of the narrow houses (the shops are always on the ground level, with living quarters above). The houses have been converted into family fortresses. And, except for the jewelers, whose wares must be displayed, most Chinese merchants—especially the most powerful—play down their success. Small, grubby electronics shops look impoverished to a strolling Westerner—but they often serve only as the headquarters for an extensive inter-island trade in appliances and other goods, with the firm's owner functioning as broker and wholesaler. Most goods never reach the shops, but pass directly from a cargo ship in the modernized port by truck to a coastal schooner (*pinisi*, a term probably taken from the European "pinnacle") for delivery to outlying ports—if you walk down to the native docks any morning, you will see lines of coolies lugging cut-rate refrigerators, television sets and other appliances onto the decks and into the holds of the old-fashioned boats that still make their inter-island runs "by nose," without the aid of any modern navigation gear.

In Jakarta, by contrast, the Chinese population itself is divided. Rich Chinese—and there are plenty, not least thanks to the corruption of the Suharto years and the superior discipline, international connections and business skills of the Chinese—live in ethnically-mixed, upscale developments many of which would look at home in Southern California. In Chinatown, where the less-successful or more traditional Chinese make their homes, you enter past the remains of burned-out buildings from the 1998 riots (the number of dead varies widely in reports, but what seems to have hurt the Chinese most deeply were the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of rapes and gang rapes—especially since the Chinese have their own pronounced racist attitudes about the Indonesians, whom they regard as feckless, incompetent and vicious in both senses of the word). The riots shocked a great number of Chinese who assumed that, given the country's modernization,

Jakarta would not see such a pogrom. Of the eight-to-nine million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, most stayed put during the violence (many had no choice, unless they wanted to abandon everything), but up to 100,000 of the educated, moneyed classes fled the country—exactly the people Indonesia needs to retain. Many have since returned, but others—especially the youngest and most talented—began new lives abroad and will not come back.

The Chinese matter to Indonesia. Despite their unpopularity, they are extremely well-connected, especially in Southeast Asia; they have access to onshore and offshore funding; they are better-educated (despite longstanding restrictions on their opportunities for university positions); they have a distinctly stronger work ethic; and they have a “globalized” outlook that has matured over centuries. Even Indonesians who dislike the Chinese often will admit that the country would be worse off without them. They form an engine of productivity the country needs desperately.

For their part, the Chinese are going to have to find new methods of interacting with Indonesians in the business sphere. The role of *cukong*, or silent boss—the behind-the-scenes money-man role—culminated in Chinese participation in the phenomenal corruption of the last decade of Suharto’s rule. When the average Indonesian claims that the Chinese have stolen the country’s wealth, they’re wrong about the small shopkeepers, but painfully close to the mark as regards the Chinese magnates and the most powerful families. In this regard, of course, the Chinese are behaving as any other members of the Indonesian elite would—stealing everything they can every way they can. But when an ethnic Javanese or Balinese or Ambonese profits from corruption, he’s still “one of us.” And corrupt Javanese and other “native” Indonesians spread wealth around and build patronage systems. The Chinese have failed singularly to build good will in the population at large. When they are implicated in corruption, the Chinese become “them.”

Former President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), a Javanist Muslim who long preached tolerance and, despite the weaknesses of his interrupted term in office, practiced what he preached, began a series of reforms of the treatment of Indonesia’s Chinese that President Megawati has continued and expanded upon. Wisely, both have focused heavily on symbolic liberalizations, which, in developing societies, must take precedence over reforms of greater substance.

Public celebrations of the Chinese New Year had been banned since 1967, due to perceptions that the Chinese were too close to the People’s Republic of China in those days and much too sympathetic to the Indonesian Communists behind the 1965 coup attempt—and out of old-fashioned resentment toward Chinese success. Two years ago, Gus Dur announced that public observance of the Chinese New Year was again permissible. This year, Megawati took the liberalization one step farther, declaring that, henceforth, the Chinese New Year would be recognized as a national holiday.

This is powerful stuff. The closest comparison would be if St. Patrick’s Day celebrations had been outlawed in the States as unAmerican, then suddenly allowed again—but even that comparison falls short, and the severe discrimination the Irish suffered in nineteenth century America still did not include ethnic pogroms against immigrant men, women and children.

Megawati is moving to make life easier for the ethnic Chinese in other respects, as well. The Chinese have always been second-class citizens in Indonesia, faced with insidious bureaucratic obstacles. Applying for a passport, a land title, a bank loan or

university admission required far more paperwork (and, inevitably, bribes) than for other Indonesians, and the system could arbitrarily turn ethnic Chinese down, leaving them little recourse (except a larger bribe). For decades, Indonesia's customs service (considered by Indonesians the most corrupt arm of government) classified books in Mandarin as banned items, along with hardcore pornography. The "KTP" identity card carried by Indonesians still carries a special, instantly-recognizable code for the ethnic Chinese, a more subdued version of the Star of David mandated for wear by Jews in the Third Reich. Positions in the military, civil service, medicine and universities were largely closed to the Chinese (even in the German-speaking lands of Old Europe, Jews were allowed to serve in uniform, to become doctors and to teach in universities). There is a long way to go...but as we criticize the human rights violations in East Timor during Indonesia's time of troubles, we also should recognize the current government's concrete actions to improve the human rights situation for almost ten million citizens of Chinese descent. Of course, the wrong chain of events might unleash more pogroms tomorrow—but, for the first time in thirty-five years, there are rational causes for Indonesia's Chinese to hope for a more equitable role in the nation's future.

The attitude of many Chinese is one of caution, though. They've paid a heavy price for over-confidence in the past. When, on my last full day in Makassar, I had a look at an Islamist rally on the *maidan*—the open field in the heart of the city—I broke for lunch in a Chinese restaurant a block away. The restaurant remained open, but the customers thinned out fast and the staff were clearly nervous, keeping a careful watch on the street—most were women, and their fear soaked the air like the smell of sweat. As the size of the rally grew, I went back to my hotel to drop off most of the documents and money in my wallet, in case I was destined to get mugged for Allah, before returning for a closer look at things. I passed the Catholic High School, which many Chinese students attend. The streets nearby were crammed with private cars, as parents rushed to pick up their children and take them safely home. In the end, the rally was a pathetic bust (see below), but the possibility of a sudden outbreak of popular anger was no joke to the city's forty-some thousand Chinese citizens.

It is unlikely that the country's ethnic Chinese will get through the coming decades unscathed—that future will be turbulent to some degree, and the Chinese will always be available as a target for the rage of frustrated "native" populations. And, like the Jewish populations of Europe prior to 1939, the Chinese feel they can weather any storms to come and that patience will get them through as it has for centuries. But that is where the comparison ends. Indonesia in 2002 is not Germany in 1933. The country's leadership appears determined to incorporate the ethnic Chinese as full-fledged citizens at last. Whether or not the effort will be successful will depend on three variables: economic progress that calms internal divisions, the ability and willingness of the Chinese to demonstrate their "Indonesian-ness," and the willingness of the average Indonesian to accept the Chinese as Indonesians. The difficulties dare not be underestimated. But there is genuine cause for hope—not for a perfect situation, but for an improved one at long last.

Crazy in Sulawesi

When I visited Sulawesi, the Indonesian government was both discouraging too much interest in Poso—focal point of the recent violence—and beginning to deport troublemakers. I never want to attract unnecessary attention when I travel, so I entered the island through Makassar, a threadbare city whose existence predates Dutch rule, but which spent centuries as a Dutch colonial port and fortress. It turned out to be a stroke of luck. Had I flown into Poso, I would have missed some of the most revealing lessons I learned anywhere in Indonesia.

I planned to drive north—this time with a locally-hired Muslim driver and a Christian translator/guide, figuring one of the other could talk me past just about any problems I might encounter. Predictably, the two locals got along perfectly well, united by their intense dislike of the local Chinese. As it turned out, the Muslim driver understood a good bit of English and spoke it understandably, if hesitantly, so the two worked as jovial correctives to each other's views—and I was able to interact easily with members of both religious groups.

As you head north along the coastal highway from Makassar—a city whose name was arbitrarily altered to Ujung Padang back in the seventies, but which has recently, at local insistence, gotten its old name back—you pass gorgeous, bizarrely-shaped hills and low mountains that look as if they had been borrowed from Chinese landscape paintings. Then the hills smooth out and rise in long green ridges. The road leads through village after village, with only brief intervals of open fields to the right or seascapes on the left, and each town or village has marked differences in affluence.

This is the country of the Bugis, notorious pirates down the centuries, from whom the English term “bogyman” may have been taken—given that the Bugis did not like to be burdened with prisoners on their swift little coasters and rather enjoyed torturing captives. Occasionally, one village stands out as much more prosperous than its neighbors, with larger, newer, handsomer houses rising up above the flood plain on ironwood stilts. The richest villages supposedly still engage in piracy—not against international vessels, but against the smaller boats that carry bulks goods between island ports. Other villages concentrate on fishing—of which more later. But, overall, there is a sense of progress, of lives improving. One of the signs of prosperity (and of outside funding, as well) is the proliferation of tacky new mosques.

If you did not stop and take time to speak with people, if you did not listen, and if you lacked the sense of the absurd necessary to get anywhere in native societies (from rural Virginia to Burma), you would assume that you had entered a region falling into the clutches of fundamentalist Islam, based upon the epidemic of new minarets. Had you gone just when I did, your concerns about a return to a strict, anti-Western version of the Muslim faith might have been compounded by the convoys of buses (with police escorts, to show respect) of Haj pilgrims en route to the Makassar airport to fly to Mecca. And, by the way, the Republic of Indonesia recently announced plans to fund dormitories for one-hundred-fifty-thousand Indonesian pilgrims in Mecca, where the competition for beds has grown frenzied.

If, however, you had been a Saudi visitor to the Bugis, and you had pried the least bit beneath the surface, you might have had a heart attack.

More Bugis go on Haj now than ever before, thanks to increases in affluence and well-run package tours. The equivalent of \$ 2,700 gets you a bus from the local hub town to the airport, your flights, tours on the ground—even a cash rebate for meals once you reach Saudi Arabia, to insure that no one goes hungry. There is a true sense of pilgrimage among many of the travelers, akin to that among Catholics going to the Vatican to see the Pope hold mass, or traveling to Lourdes in France or to the Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico—or, for some, to Graceland, in Memphis, TN). But, overwhelmingly, making the Haj has become a mark of social status—of keeping up with the Joneses. It is also a shopping trip. Young people don't bother with it, but elders like to go (taking out cosmic insurance, as the aging in any religion tend to do), and they're so determined to take their turn that the local fishermen use dynamite and hand grenades to kill fish in the coral reefs, or dump cyanide or fertilizer in the water, anxious to increase their catch to raise Haj money. It leads, by the way, to extensive destruction of the reefs, which are one of the few features that might have been able to attract tourists to this part of Sulawesi in the future.

The well-organized tours rely on outside help, though. Britannia Air, an English charter company, flies the pilgrims to and from Saudi Arabia. I met a number of the pilots during my stay on the island—all heavy drinkers from the UK or Australia—and they thought the whole business a bit loony, but the pay was good. And their down-time on Sulawesi was all right, since alcohol was readily available (they hated Jiddah). No Islamic country was able to provide the aircraft for charter, and the national airline, Garuda, is struggling as it is. So inebriated Christians flew the pilgrimage planes.

What would have gotten to a Saudi visitor, though, was the religious reverence for transvestites. In the best traditions of locally-adapted Indonesian Islam, rural and village Bugis believe that transvestites, known as *bencong*, have a direct line to Allah. They distinguish between the transvestite prostitutes who haunt Indonesia's cities and beg in traffic jams and the sedate, homegrown, village cross-dressers. Considering "their" transvestites blessed and holy, since they "never know women," the local mullahs have them stand in for deceased parents at weddings. At a daughter's marriage, the guests will come up in turn and congratulate the transvestite sitting in for a dead mother as if he/she were the birth mother. And, on the evening before departure on Haj, a family is obliged to hold a banquet, inviting the mullah for the blessing and a transvestite for good luck. Transvestites are also highly valued as nannies...

Driving through Bugis country, along the coast, then through the hills into the mountains, where the hill Muslims eat pork, drink palm wine, beer and moonshine, and follow "Christian" burial practices, a clear division of labor emerges on Fridays. Middle-aged and older men stroll to the mosque, prayer mats over their shoulders, their sandals kicking up dust in the sunshine. Some lead little boys by the hand and a few young men wander toward the Friday prayers, as well. But, here, the mosque is clearly a men's club. The women keep the markets going and the shops open, whether wearing traditional dress, jeans or short skirts and blouses. As elsewhere, you get the feeling that Indonesian women are willing to tolerate a reasonable amount of religious nonsense from their husbands (they way American wives put up with sports on tv), but that they are ready to draw a line the moment devotion interferes with business—or threatens their rights (one Indonesian woman, talking about her female boss, said, "Oh, she's very religious. She doesn't pray or anything, and she drinks alcohol. But she's a very good Muslim).

My sense was that, if you insulted or attacked the religion of these people, they would certainly turn against you and defend their faith—but that they have no interest in joining a global jihad, or even in giving up the occasional bottle of beer that was always available from under the counter even in the “strictest” Muslim villages. And the boys and girls riding about together on motorbikes look like boys and girls anywhere.

Of course, every society has its prejudices. In one market town where I paused, the people were very proud of having driven out every last Chinese years before. Pointing to the distinctly Chinese-style shops lining the main street, a fellow smiled at me and said, “Ours now.”

Old Parties Never Die...but Indonesia has its own NATO

A few hours up the coast from Makassar, the small port city of Pare Pare seems to lie in a constant drowse. It ships fish and serves as a trans-loading point for goods bound for or coming from the highlands—and, on the weekends, it attracts Muslims from the villages who want to do some serious boozing out of sight of their local mullahs (those who are really flush with cash go to Makassar, where the nightlife is considerably more vivid). But the one site that every citizen of the town will be anxious to show you is the home of Dr. B.J. Habibie, the would-be technology czar, sometime vice-president and presidential pretender, and gray eminence of the Suharto era. Despite the tremendous, if unintentional, harm Habibie did to Indonesia with his outrageously-expensive amateur schemes to develop the country’s scientific-industrial base, and the fact that he now finds it convenient to remain in Germany, where he holds a nominal teaching position, Habibie, who did heap benefits upon his home region, remains a favorite son—and Golkar, Suharto’s old party, remains solidly popular, despite the ceaseless revelations of its corruption and inefficacy. As with individuals, so with political parties in Indonesia: few ever disappear for good, but merely bide their time until they can “transform” themselves. This is one of the many reasons why Megawati proceeds cautiously in prosecuting corruption—or even coming down too hard too publicly on Muslim extremists.

Habibie’s house, which locals insist remained his favored home until his departure from the country, is a mild, middle-class affair on a busy street. In fact, Habibie had several other homes and a far finer residence in Jakarta, but he was wise enough to play the populist card with his home constituency. An intelligent, if not brilliant, man, Habibie enjoyed a career that was almost a classic in terms of Third World aspirations and disappointments. Educated in Germany as an aircraft engineer, he worked there happily until, a quarter-century ago, President Suharto asked him to return to Indonesia to help the country develop its technological base and its industry. Habibie agreed and his power expanded steadily, until he could command a daunting share of the national budget. Unfortunately, he believed what European academics had taught him about development and, given his background in the aircraft field, he decided that what Indonesia needed was to build its own airplanes—the theory supposing that the process of building them, however uneconomical, would teach skills to the locals and develop a

corps of engineers familiar with cutting edge technologies. Although Habibie invested in numerous other fields, aircraft remained his passion. Eventually, Indonesia managed to build sturdy, simple, second-rate planes that were technologically well behind those built elsewhere. But the infrastructure pay-off never materialized. The world didn't need more third-rate aircraft by the nineteen-nineties, but wanted information technologies, communications, service-industry support—and, at the industrial levels, increased efficiencies. Habibie's projects were consistently inefficient and dated—similar to the steel mills every developing country insisted on building in the early Cold War years. Today, Indonesia is left with massive debts and no single competitive industry—even its simple textile industry has been left behind by cheaper, higher-quality products from Latin America and elsewhere.

But in Pare Pare, Habibie is remembered as the local boy who delivered the goods. And, although he proved an inept politician and manager, he may one day return if his health doesn't fail him and corruption charges don't keep him away.

Despite vituperative rhetoric, Indonesia's political world is small and most politicians are wary of going too far in persecuting their enemies. The corrupt official charged today may be in the accuser's desk chair the following year. This cycle is one of the toughest challenges faced by the current government. At present, harsh charges leveled against the leaders of the Golkar Party appear to be dissipating; Amien Rais—an Islamist and perhaps the most opportunistic politician in the country—seems immune to prosecution; and nobody wants to pry into military corruption under Suharto. If “Tommy” Suharto does go to prison for a lengthy stay, it may only be because the political collective judges that his family's power has been forever broken and they can't take revenge. But I'm not certain many Indonesians would bet on it.

Meanwhile, everyone complains about corruption, past and present. But Indonesia's intellectuals are especially feckless, most having been bought off by jobs in “think tanks” or other government- or party-sponsored ventures. Indonesian students joke that “Our intellectuals have formed their own NATO: No Action, Talk Only.”

Perhaps the best direct indicator of Indonesia's limping development isn't the love of theory and dread of labor on the part of the thinking classes, or even the corruption of the political system, but the enduring allure of government jobs for university graduates. In a developing country, a decline in the appeal of jobs in the state bureaucracy is a sure indicator that opportunities are expanding in the economy. In India, long burdened with one of the world's heaviest bureaucracies, bright young graduates no longer want any part of a clerkship in a government department. But, in Indonesia, the appeal of sauntering in to work at eight or nine in the morning, doing a bit of this and that on days one feels particularly energetic, and leaving by two in the afternoon, along with job security, still draws many of the nation's best and brightest—despite the low salaries (which are too often augmented by bribes). In the United States, the challenge faced by military recruiters and government offices short of workers may pose real difficulties, but it is also a direct measure of the wealth and opportunity offered by our society and system.

It's a surprisingly simple test, really. Go to country X, anywhere in the world, and ask the students what kind of jobs they hope for after graduation—not their dream jobs, but the sort they realistically look for. If the students routinely tell you they hope for government jobs, you're in a country whose economy is either lagging behind (despite

any skyscrapers in the capital) or in crisis. Government jobs are life-preservers in countries adrift.

Controlling the Killing

While I was on Sulawesi, the Megawati government held a conference at a hill resort above Makassar to broker an end to the Maluku fighting. The resulting pact, into which the Muslim and Christian combatant parties were strong-armed and cajoled, specified that the local militias would all be disarmed, that about three-thousand members of Laskar Jihad, the Muslim fundamentalist group, would be sent back to Java (Laskar Jihad immediately protested that they were only in Maluku to conduct humanitarian operations), and the military would see to it that everyone behaved.

Reaction to the news on Sulawesi was interesting—it did not break down along religious lines. A Christian complained to me about the fanaticism of Christian fundamentalist warriors from Ambon, who had been involved, and he deplored the aggressiveness of evangelical Protestant missionaries in volatile areas (a complaint I also had heard from Australians in Canberra the autumn before). A Muslim, on the other hand, said that the Laskar Jihad had no business stirring up trouble in Maluku and resented being told what made a person a good Muslim.

The government seems to have realized, clearly, that Laskar Jihad is a serious threat to internal stability, and it has moved against it elsewhere (see below). But, sometimes, Laskar Jihad is self-defeating. The feudal nature of Islamic groups within Indonesia is crucial to understanding the country's problems and its potential. The situation is so complex, though (and this report can only hint at the complicated nature of belief in Indonesia), that even Indonesians get it wrong. In February, Laskar Jihad—a Java-based organization, decided to hold a solidarity rally with its fellow fundamentalist Muslims in Banda Aceh, traditionally the strictest Islamists in all of Indonesia. A few dozen members of Laskar Jihad traveled to the western tip of Sumatra, expecting to be welcomed with open arms—after all, the local government had recently announced a crackdown on “lascivious” dress in beauty parlors and hotels, and “strongly discouraged” the employment of women in barber shops. But a Laskar Jihad rally in the city's main mosque failed miserably, with the visitors outnumbering the locals. Both Achenese religious groups and the GAM separatists told the Laskar Jihad that they didn't need or want outside help or advice, thanks, and especially not from Mustapha-come-latelies from Java. It was an embarrassing setback for Laskar Jihad chief Umar Thalib. The GAM guerrillas even accused the Indonesian military of sponsoring the Laskar Jihad rally in an attempt to undercut the GAM.

But I was far away, on Sulawesi. I had hoped to get all the way to Poso through the back door, but the police and military had established a series of roadblocks a few hours above Torajaland, and they wanted to know why anyone had a need to go farther north. Now, the fighting in the towns around Poso and in the city itself had been virulent, and it had broken down strictly along religious lines—until the army belatedly—but effectively—intervened. It began with a series of church burnings, supposedly sparked

by the resistance of the local Christians (the native population) to the growing number of Muslim immigrants from Java and elsewhere. Initially shocked, the Christian community rallied and began attacking mosques and Muslim neighborhoods. The death toll may have reached the low thousands—figures are simply impossible to trust or verify—and a dozen or more Christian villages were burned and their inhabitants driven off. It appears, to an outsider, to be a clear example of religious hatred.

When I raised the issue with a few locals, I got knowing smiles and the same explanation repeated to me. I cannot judge the truth of the story, but it does sound distinctly Indonesian:

Under President Suharto, licenses were granted to logging interests that stripped much of the countryside. When the scale of the devastation became clear and local consequences began to tell, protests increased and Jakarta contracted with several firms (including the same logging companies who had done the damage) to do extensive reforestation. The contracts were paid in advance (also not unusual in Indonesia). The money disappeared, but no reforestation had been done. Normally, the firms could have avoided serious trouble—perhaps even landing further reforestation contracts—but Suharto fell. And the subsequent reform governments, under pressure from Central Sulawesi, began insisting that the already-funded contracts be carried out. The locals are convinced it was the logging firms that began importing troublemakers, taking the far cheaper option of financing Laskar Jihad's activities in the Poso area, rather than doing the large-scale reforestation for which they had been paid extravagantly. The scale of the violence eliminated the prospect of any reforestation projects for the immediate future—and diverted the government's attention away from the original corruption issue.

I cannot judge if this version is true—although it rings true to anyone with experience in developing countries—or if it is simply a fable passed around by locals who really do not want to believe that this unexpected violence was purely religious in motivation. All of Sulawesi has had its past experiences of religious conflict, and Muslims and Christians alike recall, with bitterness, the violence of the previous generation, from the fifties and sixties (although all recall the oppression of the Dutch and the cruelty of the Japanese with greater emotion), but the populations through which I passed clearly did not want the violence to spread to their regions. Of course, trigger incidents can always lead to sudden bloodbaths. But the local populations have generally worked out their boundaries and means of getting along. Whether or not the Poso scenario outlined above is true, I am firmly convinced that the worst violence in Indonesia today is the result of external forces interfering with local arrangements—whether those outside forces are radical movements, internal immigrants, or domestic terrorists.

The Megawati government recognizes the extent of the problem much more fully than Jakarta is willing to admit. Admiral Widodo, from his office in the Defense Ministry, stated that Indonesia must not be allowed to become a “hotbed of terrorism,” but then he coyly added that the military could do little under current laws. Intelligence chief Hendropriyono plays peekaboo, seeing terrorists, then not seeing them. And we grow frustrated at what seems to us Indonesia's determination to ignore the evidence in front of everyone. But there is a great deal going on behind the scenes. To us, the government will continue to downplay the extent of violent extremism (comparatively small as it is in a nation of 210 million) and the presence of foreign terrorists (still few, but worrisome), since public statements gain the government little or nothing at home while leaving its

leaders open to fundamentalist charges that they're American stooges. But pay close attention to the government's actions, rather than to its words. The Indonesian government is alarmed—but it is also determined to act, if carefully and methodically. Thus far, its actions remain inadequate, but the progress made and the skill of the most recent interventions is still greater than we have credited.

V. RITUALS AND RALLIES

Christians, cults and cattle

If many branches of the fertile tree of Indonesian Islam appear to bear strange fruit, the harvest in the Christian orchard gets positively weird. Indonesia, given its eccentric traditions and the continuing isolation of many of its regions, provides the soil for unusual sects to thrive.

Above the Bugis lowlands, the two-lane main highway threading toward Central Sulawesi (where road conditions worsen rapidly) leads through stunning mountains, whose higher elevations grow some of the world's finest coffee—on offer at your local Starbucks. In fact, while I was having lunch alone (I needed a break from constant talking and listening) in an open-air shanty of a restaurant, I tuned in on the conversation at the only other occupied table, where two locals who seemed to be politician (and, therefore, businessmen) were seated opposite a Chinese businessman with that polished, wish-I-was-home-in-my-air-conditioned-office Singapore look you learn to recognize if you travel to Southeast Asia. The locals did not speak English, although, when the Chinese threw in an English word his pronunciation was distinct and educated. I was not certain if they were speaking Bahasa or a local language, but the outline of the conversation was surprisingly easy to follow. They were talking about buying and selling coffee. And to get the gist of it, you only had to hear the repeated words “coffee,” “Starbucks,” “dollars,” and “American market.” The Chinese was a broker interested in buying bulk beans, and the locals, over spicy pork and beer, held the price line, telling him that Starbucks would pay more than he was offering. *We are* doing our part for the downtrodden. Or at least for their landlords.

But Torajaland, a solidly-Christian territory, with both Protestant and Catholic parishes, is as bewildering as it is beautiful. In the boom years of the nineties, there had been high hopes for developing a tourist industry, given the lush mountain landscape and the unusual, brightly-painted (but, frankly, disturbingly ugly) traditional houses in the villages. Speculators built a number of Western-style hotels, and a few local entrepreneurs even put computers in their front rooms and hung up signs reading “Internet Café.”

The internet cafes closed first. In their euphoria, no one had considered that the nearest server site was in Makassar and that surfing the net would involve an expensive long-distance connection over outdated, overloaded lines. When I tried to find a place to

log-on, I was told everywhere that it could not be done. The already-obsolescent computers sat gathering dust, except where two kids were playing a computer game.

Most of the hotels are shut now, too. The tourists never came in adequate numbers, then the violence just to the north closed the industry down. In Rantepao, the county-seat, I stayed in a French-built hotel, the last hold-out. When I arrived, there were a few other guests—four drunken Britannia Air pilots on a weekend lark (and very disappointed by the absence of enthusiastic local women or anything much to do except look at open-air burial sites) and a half dozen French tourists anxious to move on. On my last night, I was one of three guests in the sprawling complex. With their dreams dashed—and, honestly, the place is a backwater that is never going to become a major tourist destination, even if the current peace deal holds—the locals absolutely hate the idea of terrorism, which they blame for their economic collapse.

Actually, there is one other thing for visitors to do in Torajaland besides visiting the open-air graves cut into mountainside and caves (with bones and skulls and beer bottles littering the ground; so much for respect for the dead). You can go to a funeral.

Christians though they are, at least on Sundays and during daylight hours, the Torajans live their lives around funerals—and often ruin their lives to pay for lavish send-offs for family members. The practice predates the arrival of Christianity, but endures. The Torajans still divide themselves into four castes (although there is no record of Hinduism in the region): Gold (the nobility), Silver/metal (the middle class), Hardwood (the working class), and Softwood (the servant and day-laborer class). The extent and expense of the funeral is regulated by caste, for example, a member of the gold caste must sacrifice at least twenty-odd water buffalo at the funeral, but cannot cut the throats of more than fifty-two. The next caste down is allowed fewer. Pigs, however, can be sacrificed without limit. A successful funeral feeds not only the extended family (hundreds show up), but the entire village. Anyone who fails to honor their dead loses status and is looked upon as having shamed themselves, and even young Torajans who have finished university and moved away to decent jobs come back to squander their savings on funeral parties for their elders.

Now, Tuesday is market day (and gambling day, where Torajan men ruin themselves betting on cockfights, as they do throughout Indonesia) in Rantepao. And the centerpiece of the market is the large field where buffalo are sold for sacrifice. A healthy buffalo with a nice belly and shining coat costs about three thousand dollars, with the price of prized albino buffalo several times that. Now, this is a poor region, where even the highest caste is just scuffling along by Western standards. The costs of funerals impoverish families. Yet, the event's social importance is so high that families will forego a car or a better house—or even a higher education for their children—to hold a suitably lavish funeral. If the money isn't there when the death occurs, the body is embalmed and kept in the family's house. When I asked whether this doesn't spread disease, I got a baffled look followed by a convoluted explanation of the embalming process—but, then, the overall Indonesian hygiene situation has been summed up gently by one writer who spoke of the average Indonesian's "casual attitude toward sanitation." So, a body might sit in the parlor for years while the family scrimps and saves for the funeral celebration—and it really is a celebration, a happy-go-lucky carnival, to honor the departed.

Of course, the missionaries and priests see the practical folly of this, as well as the pagan roots, and they have tried for decades to discourage it. But the locals, picking up quickly on Western sensitivities, tell the priests and ministers, “It’s not a religious ceremony, it’s only our tradition...it’s our culture...”

Right.

Visitors are allowed to have a look around the funeral festivities, since the families are always proud of their largesse. But if you really want to get at the party atmosphere, take a gift. I was advised that a carton of cigarettes would be much appreciated, and the advice was taken. With the help of a guide, I found my way up a rocky trail to a village of about a dozen of the banana-meets-spaceship traditional Torajan homes, where extensive temporary pavilions had been set up for the funeral, since this was a noble family’s celebration, which was to last a full four days.

The first thing I saw were temporary stands where old women sold beer, soft drinks, cigarettes and candy. Thumping amplified music was interrupted by the voice of someone who sounded like an auctioneer barking over a cheap public address system. Working into between the huts to the central courtyard, I found an open-air slaughterhouse—literally. Gangs of butchers from the lowest class, stripped down so they couldn’t steal any meat by hiding it in their clothes, were cutting the throats of buffalo and pigs, one after the other. The ground ran from crimson to black with blood, while the “auctioneer” yelled, “Everybody look over here, look at that, ladies and gentlemen! Another magnificent buffalo sacrificed in the memory of X!” Then he would take a moment to snarl at the poor butchers, cursing them and warning that they’d better not try to sneak off with any meat. I have never in my life been anywhere so covered in gore.

The food smelled great.

I quietly presented the carton of cigarettes, along with a bag of candy for the kids (I don’t know how they divided it, since there were dozens upon dozens of kids with the hundreds of adults. This brought me an invitation to have lunch with the family, along with a nice cool glass of well-water. All around the courtyard, people had crowded into ramshackle structures that provided a bit of shade, with the grown-ups sitting on mats as they chatted and munched while the children ran playing among them. A few feet away the animals shivered in their death agonies then were butchered on the spot, slopping the dirt with innards. I was pushed and pulled into a circle of old men and young, Western-dressed, pregnant women, who—I was quickly informed—were from the local nobility. The younger men were playing cards and knocking back a few Bintang beers over in the shade of the trees. Slips of brown paper were laid in front of us to serve as plates, then plastic tubs of food came round, rice, vegetables and hell-hot pepper sauce, followed by cracked-open bamboo tubes in which freshly butchered pork had been cooked, none too thoroughly, in pungent spices. A confusion of hands reached into the masses of food and dumped portions on my leaf, and one old fellow with a friendly drool made sure I got my share of the nice fatty stuff, while pigs squealed in terror and dying bulls bellowed a few feet away. Well, in a situation like that, you dig in, have a good time, and worry about the parasites later. And the food was superb, the best lunch I had in Indonesia. Children stepped in the food now and then, checking me out, and one young girl kept repeating, in her best schoolgirl English, “America pretty.”

After a respectful interval, I rose from the buffet and offered my thanks and regards, volunteering that anyone could tell the deceased had been a great man much respected by his family. In parting, I was presented with an old plastic bag, leaking blood and filled with just-butchered pork. Fortunately, I had been warned about this eventually. I thanked my hosts profusely for the heartfelt, generous but “symbolic” gift and bowed, handing the clump of meat on to an old woman who had been cackling happily by my side for the past hour. She grabbed it with glee, patted my hand, and scuttled off.

Now, I’m not particularly timid, but I know from experience that blood is much harder to get out of your khakis than sewage or floodwater. I stepped carefully through the butcher’s yard. With the amplified voice still admiring the buffalo slaughter of the moment (cut that throat wrong, and the blood spurts a long, long way), I made my way over to the ark where the dead man’s coffin had been lodged above our heads, cooking in the sun. I paid my respects by nodding to the village elders seated in their positions of honor, then slipped off.

I realize that all this detail is little more than a tourist narrative, but I include it here to try, in one more way, to give a sense of the complexity and variety of Indonesia’s many cultures and sub-cultures. If that didn’t quite do it, let me add that there is one even more elevated Torajan ceremony, only conducted once every year or so, back in the mountains and well out of sight of the priests, parsons and police. In a very old, very dark ceremony, supposedly of great spiritual power, men dance themselves into intoxication and pierce their bodies with knives to test their faith—I suspect it’s much more complicated than that, but that’s all my conversational partner would tell me. He seemed spooked by the very thought of the ritual, and all I know for certain is that, due to the physical harm done, the police moved in to stop one such ceremony the year before (similar ceremonies linger in local traditions elsewhere in Indonesia, in both Hindu Bali and Muslim areas, and must be a lingering remainder of very, very old practices from cults lost in time). Like their Muslim neighbors, the Torajan Christians believe strongly in magic and spells, and certain subjects get their voices down to a whisper as their eyes shift about. Nonetheless, virtually all of the young people have Western, Biblical first names—Matthew or Matthias, Sarah or Judith, Mark or Mary...

The Christian missionaries and charities have, in fact, done a great deal of good in a poor land, and I was impressed by a rural orphanage where, despite the poverty, things were kept clean, the children were well-schooled, and the small staff exuded that peculiar gentleness and love for which political science, at least, does not have a term. But the persistent cult of extravagant funerals clearly holds back the economy—as you travel along the roads through the paddies and rice terraces, you see men lovingly tending the single buffalo they are raising to sell, and the Torajans joke that men take better care of their buffalo than they do of their children. To us, as to the missionaries, the waste seems inexcusable, when so much else is needed.

But there are continuities—global human continuities—in all this. In every single culture, marks of status, in one form or another, matter. The New York lawyer who runs himself massively into debt (despite his mid-six-figure-or-higher income) to take a house in the Hamptons every summer, to have the right home or apartment, to wear the badges of status...or the new lieutenant who goes into debt to buy an expensive sports car...or the man who spends inordinately on his lawn to put his neighbors to shame...in the end, they’re all related to the Torajan family sacrificing itself to hold that vast funeral. And, in

developing countries, where status is often fragile, the outward marks matter even more than they do in Manhattan. The inner man or woman matters less than the outward display that affirms and confirms the human being's place in his world. We just kill our buffalo more cleanly.

Later, in Makassar, I spoke briefly with an American missionary who had worked on Sulawesi for several years. I mentioned a few of the Torajan practices and asked if he really felt the Torajans qualified as paid-up Christians. His facial expression tensed and his eyes shifted away from me.

"Oh, they're Christians," he said softly. "But there's a lot underneath."

Your Great-aunt Lizzie and Indonesia

If you are as old as me—pressing fifty—you may remember childhood visits to the house of an elderly relative, a spinster or widow who, in the 1950s, still wore the long, dark dresses of a bygone era and whose front parlor (the good room for company) smelled of wood polish and mothballs. If you looked through the shafts of dusty afternoon light at the old, plush chairs you saw white doilies draped over their backs, positioned just where a man's head might touch the fabric. Those doilies were called "anti-makassars," and their purpose recalled an America whose sons, bright-eyed and bathed clean each Saturday, had not yet met the mademoiselle from Armentieres. The jazz age of the twenties was their last period of utility, then the hair oil exported to all the world from Makassar (then spelled Macassar in the West) fell from common use. But in its days of glory, macassar oil slicked down many a cowlick to a helmet-like gleam and did its best to stain, brutishly and permanently, Aunt Lizzie's "best" chairs and sofa.

Today, Makassar is a dreary city, with unrealistic hopes and a few shady, pleasant streets surrounded by the instant-decay of the tropics. Old Makassar had been the lair of pirate sultans--the Dutch, who learned to divide and conquer, employed the Bugis against the Makassarese. After conquering, expanding and re-christening Fort Rotterdam, the Dutch turned on the Bugis with the assistance of hired Makassarese and mountain tribesmen. In its day, Makassar was one of the most important military harbors and trade entrepots in Southeast Asia, and Joseph Conrad and lesser writers set their tales of Europeans gone to seed and treacherous Muslim pirates in the old port and on the surrounding islands. Now Makassar is a backwater, whose minor contribution to international trade remains the island's natural products.

Politically, the city remains very important, though, and Jakarta wants it kept calm. Governor Basri is reportedly a favorite of President Megawati, who is expected to award him a high post in the government after his term in Makassar ends. The governor is admired locally for enlightened, but no-nonsense administration that has kept the peace in South Sulawesi, even as Central Sulawesi bled. The city does have a modern port facility of moderate size, and there is an atmosphere of modest progress. But the local powers want to share in globalization badly and have developed a scheme for "Future Makassar," based on the assumption that the world can't wait to invest in Sulawesi.

Certainly, there are business opportunities for the well-connected or financially-muscular (such as Starbucks—as a bean-buyer, not as a retailer), but the project now underway to reclaim marshland to the south of the old city, putting up western-style homes, condos, “hi-tech” facilities and offices appears overly-ambitious, to say the least. While well-to-do locals may well subscribe to the residential areas, Makassar lacks the productive center of gravity, the tech-trained young workforce, the general infrastructure and the dependable laws to attract Western and East Asian investors in the numbers the project’s backers anticipate. Already, the brand-new showrooms and offices have a desolate look, with only a few frumpy occupants with local roots. Plans for resort facilities, a country club and shopping centers may appeal to those investors who *must* establish a presence in Makassar, but there seems to be little local awareness of more competitive facilities elsewhere. The development is an impressive example of boosterism—but like those empty hi-rises in Jakarta, its ambitions have leapt ahead of the practical opportunities Makassar has to offer. Above all, Indonesia lacks the human infrastructure, culturally-attuned and technologically-proficient, to make the sort of leap some of India’s cities have done.

One Makassarese man I met invited me to his home. In his mid-thirties and university trained, he was typical of a number of other Indonesians I encountered who lacked the family connections to help them to insider jobs. He had drifted from workplace to workplace and was full of unrealistic schemes about which he never really did anything (he did mention that he had tried to go back to the university several years before to take an advanced degree, but that an educational loan, the availability of which the government touts with pride, not only would have come with a formidably-high interest rate, but would also have required a kick-back off the top of 15% to the loan officer). My host was aware of broad trends in the world and liked to send e-mails from the office where he worked (Chinese-owned, but with a European hired as the manager and public face of the company), but he had no detailed sense of the world beyond his home. He had been, once, to Jakarta, but a promised job there had fallen through. He was quite proud of the home he was building, slowly, for his family, and he wanted me to see the unfinished structure—in which his parents, his separated sister and her child—refugees from the violence in West Papua--and a jobless cousin in from the country had long been living. His sense of proportion was such that he expected me to be impressed (and, of course, I made flattering remarks), but the house, in a garbage-strewn, lower-middle-class neighborhood on the banks of a canal, was hardly more than a concrete and brick shell with pirated electrical connections. The front was open to the weather and chickens and cats wandered in and out. His elderly father lay dying—politely—on a ragged bed, and the place looked as though it had never been cleaned. Possessions consisted of a bit of cast-off furniture, a small, cranky Korean television, and a few family photographs. In most countries, such an invitation would have been a prelude to a proposition to start a company or to sponsor a visa application. But this man—good-natured, except when the Chinese were mentioned—already had a sense that his life was over and that his one accomplishment would be finishing the house. He wanted me to reflect his accomplishment, to acknowledge that he had achieved something in his life.

Now, excessive expectations on the part of the population in a developing country can lead to problems ranging from civil unrest to terrorism. But, perhaps, a lack of ambition, an acceptance of fate, is an even worse dilemma. On the one hand, I was impressed by

the maturity of those Indonesians who argued that Megawati needed time and that real change would happen only over decades. But already, after the brief euphoria of 1998/99, the prevailing sentiment seemed to be that nothing would really change for the population as a whole, that the rich would still control the country for their own personal benefit. For my host in that unfinished shanty in Makassar, the number one effect the government had had on his life was to make his father's medicine more expensive, as the new, democratically-elected central government imposed cooperative fees—small, but painful—on public health services. Except for the bright, well-groomed staff you meet in the tourist hotels—where the atmosphere is always misleading—Indonesia seemed the least ambitious major country I had ever visited, at least in practical terms as opposed to pipe dreams. The prevailing sense was that hard work doesn't get most people anywhere, and there was an inherent belief (which I've encountered elsewhere, to be fair, from Latin America to Russia) that the only way for the average person to get ahead was to have a great stroke of luck—a lottery mentality. Certainly, Indonesians work hard to survive—Americans have little sense today of the brutality of physical labor, of coolies loading ships all day or of construction work without the least of safety precautions—but the locus of economic development comes from the middle class, and that is where Indonesia is weak, in numbers, skills, opportunities and even ambition.

Daydreams don't build much of a future.

That Red Snapper You Just Ate?

Whenever I am trying to get a sense of where a country is going, I make it a point to have a look at the industries that are succeeding in the local economy—especially those firms, large or small, with international connections. One of the export businesses doing nicely in Makassar is the transshipment of live up-market seafood, such as red snapper, shrimp, lobsters and some rare catches destined for the Japanese market. I started at the morning fish market, down by the native docks, and asked my way to the top fish exporter, whose ramshackle “plant” was nearby.

The path led through mud and the ever-present garbage to a concrete warehouse on the edge of the harbor, where the water was black with sludge and garlands of trash splashed against the pilings. Inside, I was informed, proudly, that the firm specialized in shipping live fish caught out on the reefs, and that they used DHL, FedEx and other carriers to move fish daily to rich markets, such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Japan and Taiwan—and even to the United States (hey, remember those menu listings about Asian red snapper or tiger prawns?). Then I got the tour. Rows of concrete tanks, open-topped, were dense with live fish. The water was constantly refreshed—directly from the horribly-polluted harbor outside. Shirtless workers scuttled about the dirty floor, filling orders. Scooping out fish, they punched each one with a grimy hypodermic syringe before dropping it into a shipping container.

“What's that?” I asked. “What's he injecting?”

After a thoughtful pause, the manager said, “Penicillin. It makes them strong for the flight. So they are alive at the other end.”

The syringes appeared as though they got a lot of repeat use before being discarded. The liquid contents looked like corn syrup.

“Very good fish,” the manager added. “Very fresh.”

Actually, the rule is that, when something spooks you, face up to it immediately. I love fish. So, although the plant was repulsive, to put it kindly, I made it a point to have fish for lunch.

North of the old harbor, a shabby industrial park sprawls across blackwater meadows. I could not visit all of it, but saw no major international firms in residence. In the hotels, the few businessmen were regional—largely ethnic Chinese, some in good Singapore suits, others less well-dressed. Kentucky Fried Chicken was present, as always, along with McDonald’s. But there was a sleepiness about it all, an Indonesia-wide lack of the vibrancy and punch you encounter in the most promising cities in India, or in Thailand, to say nothing of a make-it-happen place like Singapore. While Jakarta certainly has energy—capital cities usually have the strongest pulse in developing countries—it ultimately seems a bit aimless. And Makassar, despite its rush-hour traffic congestion and high hopes, seems to be drowsing even when its streets are full of crowds.

Not everything is quantifiable. In some places, you just get an intangible sense that nothing very impressive is going to happen on the economic side. The best that Makassar—and, perhaps, all of Indonesia—can hope for is slow, intermittent progress after the corruption and illusions of wealth of the late Suharto years.

Rallying The Hillbillies

On my last full day in Makassar, one of Indonesia’s many Islamist organizations, the Java-based *Yamisa*, held a rally to protest Jakarta’s prohibition on the movement’s expansion as a political party (though not as a grass-roots organization) into Sulawesi. Jakarta refused to license *Yamisa* because its loony rhetoric looked like a sure bet to worsen tensions on Sulawesi, and the organization had a spotty record elsewhere. Abdul Rahman, the party’s head, who was flying in from Jakarta for the rally, insisted that *Yamisa* wasn’t really a political party, didn’t really back political parties—at least it had no intentions of doing so on Sulawesi—and that it was simply a welfare organization working for the betterment of the lot of poor Muslims.

The population of Makassar wasn’t interested. But, by late morning, convoys of old, smoky buses began arriving from the countryside. *Yamisa* looks for support to the less-educated and less-successful, recruiting followers from villages and farms. For attending the rally, the country folk got a free trip to the big city, along with walking-around money for the day. *Yamisa* had announced a massive show of strength, a revelation of the popular will, but the timid folks who climbed down from the buses, in their neat, plain, “Sunday-meeting” clothes, simply went where they were led, gawking at the urban world around them. The Makassarese found them amusing—the hillbillies come to town—and, wisely, the governor did not let himself be panicked into a show of force. While uniformed police were present—along with a larger number of unmistakable plain-

clothes officers—no one tried to interfere with the rally. Elsewhere in the city, life went on unconcerned (except for the Chinese, as mentioned above).

I tuned in on the rally briefly in the late morning, had lunch nearby, then returned later in the afternoon when the party boss was scheduled to appear. One of the best perspectives from which to get the pulse of a rally or mob is actually the middle-distance, before you get too close. Once you are in a mass of people, the cheers always tend to sound powerful. You get a better sense of the real passion and energy from a few blocks away. This rally, though the people cheered on cue, did not sound to me like it was going anywhere near trouble--and most of the people I saw going toward it during the day were middle-aged, Ma and Pa Kettle types, although there was a leavening of young men of the sort who can turn things bad very quickly. I did not sense any serious danger.

Still, there are simple rules to follow when dealing with large, foreign groups who may not have your best interests at heart:

1. Do not let anyone know in advance that you intend to show up (a basic rule the Wall Street Journal reporter who was recently murdered in Pakistan failed to follow).
2. Do not go all the way into the heart of a potentially-hostile crowd—play the edges, both for ease of escape and because the people on the edge of the rally or mob are less committed (except for stray gangs of teenagers—watch them).
3. Never let a fence-line, a wall or a homogenous group of locals get between you and the open streets.
4. Know exactly where the police or military are arrayed in the background. If things turn bad fast, head for toward their lines. Better to be embarrassed than badly beaten or killed. The second best course is to head straight for the dignitaries on the podium, since, even if they are hostile, they will not want to be publicly implicated in violence and there will probably be Press cameras present to record the situation. Use the Press—get your face on camera if you are being threatened.
5. Go alone. It may seem counter-intuitive, but the sudden appearance of one Westerner is less likely to arouse antagonism than two or a small group. One outsider is a curiosity (Who's the white guy? Somebody from the Press?), while even a small pack of Westerners starts to look like an invasion—in such cases, safety does *not* lie in numbers.
6. Unless you are from National Geographic, leave your camera back in your room. While some thugs love to pose, cameras make people very nervous if they are worried about their participation in the event.
7. Don't overstay your welcome in one place. Either check things out and leave, or move around to different spots sufficiently far from one another so that nobody from the previous spot can see you (tough, if you're a head taller than most of the locals). Don't keep looking behind you. Turn your whole body, casually, if you want to have a look around. When I have to do a 360-degree scan, my fall-back is to look impatiently at my watch, then take a sweeping look into the distance as if waiting for someone.
8. If you have the least suspicion that someone has followed you from one point to another, get out—calmly, but directly. Trust your instincts—but control your behavior.

9. Never strike up a conversation in the heart of the crowd or with a group of people. If you have questions you must ask, find an individual or, at most, a pair of friends, and try the older people first, both because you will get calmer answers and because their age gives them some authority to protect you from younger people who may get fired up by the rhetoric from the podium (or who, in the case of a mob, feel like taking a break from the looting).
10. If you are being followed by one or two people (not more) after leaving the site, do not try to lose them by being clever. Walk to a populated, neutral street, then turn back and, with a smile, ask the person or two people what they want. Usually, they will stammer and fade away (this has even worked for me with thugs in the Caucasus). Above all, do not show fear. Human beings are just like dogs—when they sense fear, they become aggressive (this is the hardest thing for me personally, because I am not a particularly brave person).

The papers the next morning stated that *Yamisa* claimed that twenty-thousand supporters had appeared. The police estimate was ten thousand. I judged the crowd at about seven or eight thousand. When it seemed clear that there really wasn't any dynamism in the rally, I walked off toward the governor's mansion, past a small line of uniformed police and a very relaxed group of plain-clothes officers gathered behind them. I saw no military personnel—and that is always a strong indicator that trouble is not expected. In any national or provincial capital in the developing world, the police will not be trusted to handle serious trouble alone and, as a minimum, you will find military reaction forces ready in the side streets between the gathering site and the government quarter. In this case, there were no troops in evidence and the military police barracks just short of the governor's residence seemed utterly unconcerned.

Shops are another excellent barometer of the local temper. Shopkeepers are usually among the first to sense trouble. If you see shops closing up, leave. If shops fail to open, stay away. If business life seems normal, just use common sense.

I learned that, after I left, Abdul Rahman, *Yamisa*'s leader, made a show of daring the police to arrest him, since the government claimed he was a political leader and his appearance as such had not been authorized. Wisely, the local authorities ignored him. Mr Rahman then repeated an earlier promise that, were he ever to be empowered officially, he would reward all of his followers with riches from the long-dead Sukarno's private fortune, which, according to Rahman, had been hidden away all these years. It all had a tawdry, child's bedtime story quality, Aladdin and the treasure-house cave of the Forty Thieves and so on. I'm not certain even the most gullible country people believed him. But they got their day in the city, and the sense that they mattered to national events.

Later, it began to rain. The rally dissolved. I was impressed by the ability of the local officials to judge the situation soberly and avoid the over-reaction for which *Yamisa* clearly had hoped. But I was disappointed, too. A little excitement never hurts, and it would have been dramatic to end this report with a story of Muslim fundamentalists run amok. But Makassar turned out to resemble Indonesia in one last way: The Islamic threat was greatly exaggerated.

In the morning I flew out to Singapore, leaving behind a country that wants to behave sensibly, if only its small minority of extremists can be managed and its elite can act a bit

more responsibly. I left Indonesia convinced that the overwhelming majority of its people want no part of radicalism. But if we behave foolishly toward Jakarta, we may accomplish what Islamic extremists have failed to do and make the ranting of demagogues sound attractive and convincing.

Drafter's Note:

Indonesia seemed to me the most complex country I have ever encountered, except for the United States (whose complexity is always underestimated, especially by Europeans). It was even more layered and contradictory than India, that masterpiece of human confusion. This report can offer, at best, a stimulus to others to think more creatively about a country whose importance we fail, even now, to appreciate to an accurate degree. Other observers should be sent, through a variety of official and informal means, to explore other aspects of this dauntingly-varied state. This report hardly scratches the surface, despite my best efforts, and I would be disappointed if anyone imagined it to be conclusive. We must learn far more about Indonesia, and that will require the long-term dedication of appropriate assets.

I concentrated on the "feel" of Indonesia, on ordinary encounters and the tenor of daily life on three major islands. I did not focus on high-level personalities, since our embassy staff, military visits, and intelligence services can do a far better job on that subject. Likewise, our government can do vastly more than can any individual to study the Indonesian military, so I only observed it casually, when I encountered it in the course of my travels, and asked a few questions of common Indonesians about their perceptions of their armed forces.

Although I have tried to get at the facts to the degree possible, I am equally concerned with what Indonesians believe, whether true or not. One of our failings in our efforts to understand foreign environments is our insistence on concentrating exclusively on facts when, for most human beings, belief is far more important to their behavior, attitudes and decisions.

The most important part of this report, to me, is the treatment of Indonesian religion. It is also, to be honest, the least adequate portion, because Indonesian Islam is such a complex of hybrid sects. If I have managed to communicate one thing—that Indonesian Muslims are not uniform in their prejudices, preferences or beliefs—that is, nonetheless, a good starting point for those who must deal with Indonesia as our country's military representatives or policy-makers.

Finally, the pre-travel research for this project was unusually frustrating, since sources disagree so wildly with one another. Whether speaking of religious content, the meaning of major events, or the motivation of historical figures, one text contradicts the other. I applied my career-intelligence-officer skills to make the judgements that felt right to me. But anyone who disagrees with my take on things can certainly find a book somewhere, by an anthropologist or a political scientist, indicating that the truth is very different. I called it as I saw it, without a personal or professional agenda. That's the best that I can do.

Most importantly, I have long been confident that I could size up a situation fairly well from a distance, given my long experience of studying foreign countries and their cultures. Although travel gives you the telling detail, I have not been surprised in a long time. But Indonesia surprised me. Having read everything relevant I could find across the autumn of 2001, I went to Indonesia prejudiced against U.S. involvement with the Indonesian military. On the ground, however, the situation looked and felt much different from the Indonesia reported by the press or portrayed in agenda-burdened books. The visit changed my views fundamentally, and I had to swallow my pride and admit to myself that I had been wrong.

I now believe that, despite real dangers and myriad potential pitfalls and misunderstandings, judicious engagement with each branch of the Indonesian military—at a pace set by the Indonesians themselves, not one forced upon them—would not only be to our mutual benefit, but is essential if we are to influence the future course of the Republic of Indonesia and its 210 million people.

This is a struggle that matters.

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