

# Not So Strange Bedfellows: Indonesia-North Korea Relationship in the 1960s\*

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## Abstract

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Indonesia remains one of the few countries in the world where a significant percentage of its population still thinks positively about North Korea despite the burgeoning relationship between Indonesia and South Korea. This phenomenon can partly be explained by looking at the formation, strengthening, and the peak of Indonesia-North Korea relations, which took place during Indonesia's own tumultuous period of the 1960s. In this period, Cold War politics, notably the Sino-Soviet split that led to China's aggressive policies in East and Southeast Asia, converged with both Indonesia and North Korea's foreign policy goals, leading to a deepening relationship between these three countries. Conversely, once these three

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countries –Indonesia, North Korea and China –no longer shared the same foreign policy objectives due to the dynamics of their own domestic politics, the tripartite relationship cooled, and as a result, the relationship between Indonesia and North Korea has been on the doldrums since then.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, North Korea, China, Sukarno, Jakarta-Peking-Pyongyang Axis, Kim Il Sung, Juche, Berdikari

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## I. Introduction

On July 30, 2015, Rachmawati Soekarnoputri, a daughter of Sukarno, who was Indonesia's first president, announced that her think tank, Sukarno Center, would award its annual prize for global statesmanship to Kim Jong Un. In awarding the prize, she argued that Kim Jong Un “has been consistent in carrying out the ideals of the great leader, Kim Il Sung, which is to fight imperialism (Sihaloho 2015).”

While the Indonesian government was mum over this issue, the bestowment of this award caused a minor controversy in Indonesia, as many pointed out North Korea's abysmal human rights records, not to mention the fact that North Korea is a totalitarian state, in contrast to a democratic Indonesia (*BBC Indonesia* July 31, 2015). Others simply ridiculed the significance and the relevancy of the award as well as Rachmawati herself, who, unlike her sister, former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, is not a powerful political figure in Indonesia.

In defending this decision, Rachmawati stated that it was common for anyone fighting western countries to be branded a dictator (*The Jakarta Post* July 31, 2015), and she also reminisced on the friendship between her father, President Sukarno, and Kim Il Sung (Indrawan 2015), a short relationship that is mainly forgotten in Indonesia.

Even though 42% of Indonesians have a positive view of North Korea (second highest in the world after Ghana), according to 2013 BBC poll (*Globescan* 2013), today very few people in Indonesia remember or put much importance on the Indonesia-North Korea relationship. That is not too surprising, given that the relationship between the two countries is overshadowed by the growing importance of South Korea, both globally and especially in Indonesia. For example, according to the Indonesian Trade Ministry, total trade between Indonesia and South Korea in 2014 was valued at US\$ 22,468,592,000.

In contrast, total trade between Indonesia and North Korea has been steadily declining. Back in the 1990s, Indonesia was North Korea's eighth largest trading partner – though the amount was relatively small (Jeong and Bang 2010, 11), as by then, South Korea was already Indonesia's fourth largest trading partner according to the data from the World Bank. While there were attempts by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, based on his “Thousand Friends, Zero Enemy” principle, to reengage diplomatically (Flores 2012) and increase economic ties with North Korea (Chatterjee and Kim 2013), by 2014, according to the

Indonesian Trade Ministry, the total trade between the two countries was valued at just US\$ 2,976,200.

Aside from growing trade ties, there is also a joint development project between Jakarta and Seoul on the next generation fighter, KFX/IFX, which, despite many uncertainties and postponements, both sides claim they are still committed in pursuing this project as of early 2016 (Retaduari 2016).

Therefore, in light of the strong economic and military ties between Indonesia and South Korea and the mostly minor and seemingly unimportant relationship between Pyongyang and Jakarta, it is quite jarring to recall that back in the 1960s the relationship between Indonesia and North Korea was actually quite close. For instance, during the Independence Day Speech on August 17, 1965, then Indonesian President Sukarno, after blasting the United States' policies, especially on Vietnam, announced the formation of Jakarta-Peking-Pyongyang-Hanoi-Phnom Penh axis (Green 1990, 36).

That speech, in a sense, was a culmination of several years of burgeoning ties between Jakarta and Beijing. Both countries were brought together due to the issue of Malaysia, which, from Beijing's and Jakarta's perspective, was a part of the imperialists' encirclement of both China and Indonesia by establishing a chain of anti-communist regimes in Southeast Asia (Mozingo 1976, 192). For some people, this relationship, forged during the anti-imperialism-colonialism drive in Indonesia, is still fondly remembered by some people in Indonesia

This article asks why Indonesia and North Korea's held strong relations in 1960s – what influenced the decision of both countries to strengthen their relationship in that period.

Below I will discuss how this relationship came to being, during the tumultuous period of the 1960s. At that time, Indonesia was engaged first in a diplomatic offensive to liberate West Irian from the Dutch and then the Confrontation (Konfrontasi), an armed conflict against Malaysia and its allies, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. The United States, stuck in the middle and unwilling to support Indonesia's position, became the target of much vitriol and pressure from Jakarta. At the same time, the Soviet Union also refused to get involved in Konfrontasi. As a result, Sukarno decided to strengthen Indonesia's relations with Communist China, which was supportive to Indonesia's position and subsequently, and North Korea.

From North Korea's perspective, the relationship with Indonesia bloomed during the short period in which Pyongyang's relationship with the Soviet Union hit rock bottom due to Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy and his refusal to back North Korea in pursuing aggressive policies against South Korea. As a result, North Korea aligned itself with Communist China, and subsequently, Indonesia.

## II. Alliance Choice and Leaders' Political Calculations

The literature on alliances operates under the assumption that alliances are formed to increase a state's capabilities through external ties (Geller 2000, 412). Hans J. Morgenthau once noted that a state could pursue a policy of alliances as a matter of expediency in order to compete against other states (Morgenthau and Thompson 1985, 201). As Glenn H. Snyder(1997, 1) noted in his book on alliance politics, "Alliances obviously are cooperative endeavors, in that their members concert their resources in pursuit of some common goal ... [which] is the prosecution of conflict with an outside party."

At the same time, the decision of states to ally is strongly determined by the domestic political calculation of state leaders: that, in short, alignment choices are determined by the interests of the leaders to ensure their political and physical survival (David 1991, 10). Thus, understanding what constitutes states interests means that scholars need to not only look at the material gains of states themselves, but also how a foreign policy decision could have impact on the survival of the state leaders.

In determining alignment choice, states' calculations are a function of two variables: whether the interests of the state are best served with the alliance, and whether the alliance is beneficial in a domestic political sense. In brief, a state should only pick credible, committed potential allies that can actively help it in confronting its opponents and maintaining its security. As noted by Randall L.

Schweller(1994), states calculate the opportunity to gain something in their decisions to pick an alliance partner.

In the period discussed in this paper, China's aggressive foreign policy was in line and in fact complementary with the aggressive foreign policies pursued by both North Korea and Indonesia. This, in turn, led to an improved, strengthened relationship between these three nations. Not surprisingly, though, the relationship eventually collapsed when the interests between these three states diverged.

### III. The Sino-Soviet Split and Indonesia-North Korean Relationship

The relationship between Indonesia and North-Korea before the 1960s was almost non-existent due to North Korean foreign policy, as Pyongyang still considered itself at war with both the United States and South Korea. This was compounded by the fact that at that time, the Cold War was at its height, with tensions between Moscow and Washington sky-high and both sensitive to shifts in alignment patterns. All of that made it extremely difficult to establish any relationship with North Korea without antagonizing the United States, which at that point had a tense but largely cordial relationship with Indonesia.

When Indonesia hosted the Asian African Conference that took place in Bandung in April 1955, both North and South Korea were

not invited to attend. Interestingly, though, both North and South Vietnam were invited to the Asian African Conference, despite the fact North and South Vietnam were both at war with each other. It was reasoned that since one of the main purposes of the Asian African Conference was to help contributing to the solution of the Indochina problem, it would be ridiculous not to invite both North and South Vietnam (Sastroamidjojo 1979, 285; Anak Agung 1973, 218). Still, this did not prevent the North Korean media from covering that conference positively (Armstrong 2009, 4).

It was not until in the late 1950s that Indonesia and North Korea started to engage each other, especially economically. There were several reasons for this development, most importantly was the deterioration of Indonesia's relationship with the United States. From America's perspective, the growing strength and influence of the Indonesian Communist Party in Indonesia was an alarming development that the Indonesian government had been unwilling to tackle (Glennon 1989a). From Indonesia's perspective, though, there was a growing disappointment with the unwillingness of the United States to support Indonesia's desire to gain West Irian, which at that time was occupied by the Dutch. In contrast, both the Soviet Union and China openly supported Indonesia's position (Glennon 1989b). And West Irian was a very popular domestic issue in Indonesia, as the Indonesian Vice President Mohammad Hatta noted in 1957:

The claim to West Irian is a national claim backed by every Indonesian

party without exception; but the most demanding voice, apart from that of President Soekarno himself, is that of the Communist Party of Indonesia (Hatta 1958, 486-7).

Even though Indonesia was wary about the communists (Glennon 1987), the West Irian question was a particularly salient issue in Indonesian politics, and, as a result, there was a growing rapprochement between Indonesia and the Communist countries. In August 1956, Sukarno visited Moscow, where he signed an agreement in which the Soviet Union promised to extend US \$100 million in credit to Indonesia, and then visited to Beijing in October in the same year (McMahon 2006, 84). By 1957, Kim Il Sung told A. M. Puzanov, the Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, that North Korea and Indonesia had concluded a trade agreement whereby North Korea supplied pure zinc, lead, cement, window glass, silk fiber, fertilizer, among other things, in exchange for Indonesian rubber, tea, vegetable oil, coconut products, coffee, quinine, and so on (Puzanov 1957). By June 1961, North Korea had established trade and consular relations with Indonesia (Armstrong 2009, 6).

Even so, by 1962, the trade between two countries remained negligible, such that Indonesia actually exported more to South Korea than to North Korea, in spite of tensions between Indonesia and South Korea (due to the latter's support of a failed regional rebellion in Indonesia back in 1958) (Kahin & Kahin 1995, 185-6). In fact, according to the United Nations Commodity Trade

Statistics Database, in 1962, Indonesia exported \$735,997 worth of sugar to South Korea, while in contrast, the total Indonesian export to North Korea was too small to merit its own entry in that Database.

The relationship between Indonesia and North Korea began to improve as the international landscape began to change, which in turn altered each state's political calculus. Most important was the Sino-Soviet split, in which China vehemently disagreed with the Soviet Union on the issue of cooperation with the capitalist powers. While Post-Stalin Soviet Union, led by Nikita Khrushchev, stressed the idea of peaceful coexistence between capitalist and communist states, notably through enhanced economic cooperation, China sought to focus on "wars of national liberation," presenting a belligerent attitude and posture toward capitalist countries, and embracing an ideology that focused on economic self-reliance and state capitalism, and virulent, anti-imperialist nationalism (Simon 1969, 16).

This Chinese foreign policy attitude and vision, in turn, was in sync with the Indonesian foreign policy that Sukarno pursued in the 1960s. After years of frustration in not having the West Irian issue resolved peacefully, Sukarno decided to up the ante by framing the issue of the "liberation of West Irian" within the framework of "non alignment movement" and "anti-imperialism." This new approach was evident during the conference of non-aligned nations at Belgrade in 1961, when Sukarno brought out the idea of the "Third World countries," as the "Newly

Emerging Forces,” (NEFO) in a struggle against the imperialist and colonialist powers of “Old Established Forces” (OLDEFO), and that this was reflected in Indonesia waging “confrontation” against the Dutch. This compatibility in perspective, in turn, drew China and Indonesia closer together, even after the issue of West Irian was solved to Indonesia’s satisfaction a year later, in 1962 (Anak Agung 1973, 330-332, 334, 431-432; Simon 1969, 23).

Simultaneously, relations between Beijing and Pyongyang were also improving due to North Korea’s own internal politics. Even though North Korea tried to stay clear from the struggle between Moscow and Beijing, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Pyongyang had gravitated toward Beijing. After all, Moscow’s ongoing campaign of de-Stalinization had the possibility of impacting Kim Il Sung himself, especially his own cult of personality. Moreover, Moscow’s idea of “peaceful coexistence” ran counter to Kim Il Sung’s ambition of kicking the United States out of the Korean peninsula and forcibly reuniting the two Koreas under his rule (Haggard 1965). Fearing Khrushchev’s intentions, North Korea started to keep its political distance from Moscow and began purging pro-Soviet North Koreans; and at almost the same time, Moscow was reducing the number of Soviet advisers in North Korea (Lankov 2005, 186, 193, 199-201).

By 1961, Kim Il Sung was so secure in power he bluntly told an Albanian colleague, “just like [Khrushchev] cannot remove me from power. I hold the power here and whoever rises up against me, I will cut his head off and take measures against him

(Weathersby 2008, 13).” With Moscow’s support declining, Kim Il Sung’s idea of Juche, North Korean economic self-sufficiency and independence, became more and more important. In Kim Il Sung’s own words, Juche captured the essence of “having the attitude of master toward revolution and construction in one’s own country” and displaying the “revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving your own problems for yourself on your own responsibility under all circumstances.” With Moscow’s continuous insistence that socialist countries should focus on forming an “integrated” economy rather than a policy of autarchy, the relationship between Moscow and Pyongyang grew further apart, and North Korea further gravitated to China (Martin 2004, 112-113, 123).

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was the last straw, as the Soviet’s backing down against America in the crisis virtually destroyed the Moscow’s credibility in the eyes of North Korea. China, with its aggressive and militant policies, was seen a better, more convincing bulwark against the United States, thereby prompting North Korea to throw its lot with China (Haggard 1965).

With China played an increasingly important role in the foreign policies of both Indonesia and North Korea, the stage was set for the improvement of the relationship between Indonesia and North Korea.

#### IV. Konfrontasi and Jakarta-Beijing-Pyongyang-Phnom Penh-Hanoi Axis

The relationship between Indonesia and North Korea became stronger in 1963, which, for Indonesia, marked the beginning of what today is called the period of Konfrontasi, when Indonesia was involved in a military conflict against the new state of Malaysia, which was backed by the British and its Commonwealth allies, notably Australia and New Zealand.

The origin of Konfrontasi rested on the dispute concerning the status of the British owned Northern Borneo, which today constitutes the Malaysian state of Sabah and Sarawak. Back then, in order to dilute the power of the Communists in Singapore and Sarawak, the British decided to decolonize Northern Borneo by integrating it with then the State of Malaya and Singapore to form the Federation of Malaysia (Mackie 1974, 65; Jones 2002, 65). This decision ran afoul of Indonesia, with Jakarta believing that the formation of Malaysia was a way for Great Britain to maintain its empire in Southeast Asia, with the future goal of also occupying the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Kalimantan (Easter 2004, 68; Patterson 2000).

Even though in the end Indonesia granted a concession by showing its willingness to accept the formation of Malaysia, on the condition of having the United Nations Secretary General U Thant ascertain the public opinion in Sabah and Sarawak (Jones 1971, 280-281), the British blundered by declaring that Malaysia would

be created regardless of the results of the referendum (Mackie 1974, 158), thereby insulting Sukarno, who later stated in his autobiography:

Setting another arbitrary date two weeks later despite the fact that the poll was not completed showed Britain's utter disregard of the outcome of this puppet survey.... I was infuriated. The Indonesian government had been tricked and made to look like a dummy. The subsequent demonstrations of enmity happened because of our bitter sense of betrayal .... This highhanded announcement, made while the ascertainment of the people's wishes was only in the opening stages, is ludicrous. Britain never even awaited the outcome of the U.N. assessment. I state that under the nose of the United Nations, internal conditions in Brunei were cleverly juggled by the colonialists who had considerable rubber, oil, and tin fortunes to lose. Indonesia has been duped and humiliated in the eyes of the whole world. This affront to my country is a personal hurt (Adams 1965, 301-302).

The beginning of Konfrontasi also marked the lowest ebb of the relationship between Indonesia and the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States, while complaining that the British unnecessarily provoked Sukarno (Hilsman 1967, 404), refused to support Indonesia and bluntly told Sukarno that “He should not attempt to block Malaysia which [the United States] intend[s] to support vigorously (LaFantasie 1994).” The Soviet Union, fearing the possibility that it could get dragged by Indonesia to a war against the United States, refused to support

Indonesia (Ermarth 1969, 35).

The only big country ready to lend support to Indonesia was Communist China, which saw the formation of Malaysia as ominous evidence that it was about to be encircled by the Western powers. When President Liu Shao-chi visited Jakarta in April 1963, he declared his support for Indonesia's policy against Malaysia and praised Indonesia as "an important force opposing imperialism and colonialism and safeguarding peace and security of Southeast Asia and Asia as a whole (Anak Agung 1973, 432; Simon 1969, 26-27)." Sukarno himself was shrewd enough to see the potential of China as a strong bargaining chip in his desire to destroy Malaysia. Indeed, Sukarno admitted the following in a private conversation:

He was deliberately allowing the PKI to expand its influence and deliberately bringing Indonesia closer to Communist China for one important reason: he expected Communist China and the United States to be at war within a few years, either through American escalation of the Vietnam war or through a direct American attack on Communist China. Sukarno said he is confident that the United States' will be so worried about Indonesian support of China, should a war break out, that it will go to any lengths to bring Indonesia back into the neutral camp. Sukarno said he believes that the United States may even turn its back on Malaysia and withdraw support to that country in return for an Indonesian commitment to pull away from Communist China (Central Intelligence Agency 1965, 3-5).

Thus the best foreign policy option for Indonesia was to put the United States' feet to the fire by aligning itself with China. Beijing's growing intimacy with Jakarta had an impact on the Jakarta-Pyongyang relationship. With China as the supporter of Indonesia's policy against Malaysia, the stage was set for the strengthening of relationship between Indonesia and North Korea, which at that point had a much closer relationship with Beijing than Moscow due to reasons specified above. Moreover, similar to Beijing, North Korea also saw Indonesia as common traveler in the fight against "the forces of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism (Joint Communiqué 1964)."

On November 15, 1963, Indonesia and North Korea agreed to promote and expand trade relations and to increase technical, scientific, and cultural relations between the two countries. (Technical Agreement 1963; Trade Agreement 1963) In April 1964, Indonesia and North Korea finally established diplomatic relations, followed by Sukarno's visit to Pyongyang in November 1964. During the visit, Sukarno expressed Indonesia's support for Pyongyang's stand on Korean unification, which in return, led to Pyongyang's "undivided support and militant solidarity" for Indonesia's "struggle against [the] 'British neo-colonialist project of Malaysia' (Joint Communiqué 1964; Simon 1969, 60)."

At the same time, the visit bolstered Sukarno's admiration of North Korea. He was impressed with North Korea's industrialization process, which led to North Korean's Gross National Product almost doubling from 1956 to 1960 (Lankov 2005, 185), and also

its Juche philosophy of self-reliance, which struck him as something to emulate (Wanandi 2012, 36), considering Indonesia was experiencing massive economic problems thanks to years of continuous conflicts. The cost to liberate West Papua was enormous. The Soviet Union demanded to be paid for the armaments that they supplied Indonesia, as Khrushchev bluntly stated, “We do not engage in charity. The Soviet Union gives help on a fair commercial basis (Pauker 1961, 14).” Thus North Korea industrialization, along with the idea of Juche, was very attractive to Sukarno as a way to salvage the Indonesian economy without having to rely on either the United States or the Soviet Union (Simon 1969, 59-60; Hanna 1963, 21).

When Kim Il Sung later reciprocated by visiting Indonesia in April 1965, he received plenty of attention from the Indonesian government, especially on the issue of “self reliance,” which in Indonesia became popular as the principle of *berdikari* (Simon 1969, 64; Wanandi 2012, 36). In fact, Sukarno liked Kim Il Sung, whom he called “our comrade-in-arms and our close friend (Brackman 1969. 219 n4),” so much that he named an orchid *Kimilsungia*, after Kim Il Sung showed his interest on the flower, on the spot (Soediono, Arditti, & Soediono 2011, 108). Later, in his Independence Day Speech on August 17, 1965, Sukarno further declared the formation of a Peking-Pyongyang-Hanoi-Phnom Penh Axis (Brackman 1966, 266).

## V. The Failure of the Axis

This proclamation of a Peking-Pyongyang-Hanoi-Phnom Penh Axis, however, was a hollow one, as these countries were neither really that invested in making the alliance work. Cambodia was especially an odd-man out. Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, personally disliked Sukarno, seeing him as “an ill-behaved boor.” Privately, Sihanouk denounced Sukarno as “scatter-brained old man fond of virgins (Osborne 1994, 10).”

Sihanouk also distrusted his neighbors, China and both North Vietnam and South Vietnam, which he believed had designs on Cambodia’s territory and did not respect its borders. In fact, even though Cambodia’s relationship with the United States had deteriorated due to various factors, such as his belief that the United States was actively undermining his rule and lack of commitment in safeguarding Cambodia’s territorial integrity, Sihanouk still saw the United States as a counterbalance against what he believed as “Chinese expansion southward.” He also feared that should the United States really leave Vietnam, “Cambodia will then be at the mercy of ‘her neighbors’ and China (Manee 1967; Osborne 1994, 161-164).” Thus he believed that Cambodia should keep adhering to the policy of nonalignment in foreign affairs to prevent the interference of these various players (Smith 1968).

The case of North Vietnam was also not so clear cut. Granted, North Vietnam received much help from China, which it began

back in 1950 when China offered massive military aid and sent military and political advisers to help organizing and training the Vietnamese. In addition, similar to both North Korea and China, North Vietnam also vehemently disagreed with Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" policy, believing this policy a betrayal to its goal of uniting both North and South Vietnam.

After the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 and the United States bombing of North Vietnam in February 1965, however, the Soviet Union again changed tack, this time rendering more assistance to North Vietnam. This new Soviet policy was taken against China's objections that the Moscow was now encroaching on China's sphere of influence. Moreover, the Cultural Revolution in China, which distracted China's foreign policy, and massive Soviet aid to Hanoi, combined, led Hanoi to take a more independent path from China (Chen 1987, 11, 16-19).

The final straw was when North Vietnam demonstrated its interest in negotiating with the United States for a possible peaceful solution of the war, leading Mao Zedong to tell Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's Prime Minister, that "what could not be achieved on the battlefield would not be achieved at the negotiation table." And when that advice fell on deaf ears, China decided to withdraw its military units (Chen 1995). It could be argued that while Hanoi was squarely in China's camp during the proclamation of the axis, Hanoi was already on the path to pursue its own foreign policy independent of China.

Even Indonesia's membership in the axis only lasted for a short

time. Within few months, Sukarno's axis was gone due to internal politics within Indonesia. In the evening of September 30, 1965, several mid-ranking military officers launched what they believed was a preemptive counter coup against a cabal of senior military officers. Supported by the Indonesian Communist Party, the coup plotters arrested and later murdered six high-ranking generals whom they believed had the ambition of deposing President Sukarno. The reaction from the army was swift: after losing their leaders, the army regrouped under the leadership of General Suharto and launched a bloody but successful counter-coup that virtually destroyed the Indonesian Communist Party. While Sukarno remained as president for a brief period, he was finally deposed from his presidency by army officers who were fed-up of his political maneuverings, in March 1967.

The fall of President Sukarno signaled the end of Indonesia's flirtation with the Jakarta-Beijing-Pyongyang-Hanoi-Phnom Penh. The fall of Sukarno led to the breakdown of the relationship between Indonesia and China. Beijing was painted as the mastermind of the coup, the country that encouraged and supported the coup attempt in order to "lessen pressure on itself arising from the concentration of U.S. military power in Vietnam and the presence of a CPR confrontation with the Soviet Union (Simon 1969, 161)." On October 30, 1967, the relations between two countries were suspended, and would not be restored until 1990.

Beyond China, however, Indonesia still maintained a relationship

with other communist countries, as new President Suharto still claimed Indonesia as one of the non-aligned countries. In light of the fall and the destruction of Indonesian Communist Party, however, the Communist and the nonaligned countries treated Indonesia as if it was now siding with the United States. Surprisingly, North Korea's ties with Indonesia survived. Indonesia still maintained a diplomatic relationship with North Korea, even though it was reported that the Indonesian ambassador in North Korea found himself treated as a representative of a capitalist country with restrictions on his movement (Weinstein 1976, 179-180, 180n). And following the establishment of consular relations with South Korea, Indonesia made it clear that it would pursue an even-handed policy toward the two Koreas (Koh 1977).

The survival of Indonesia-North Korea's relationship ironically was due to the rapprochement of North Korea with the Soviet Union in 1967. The fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 and the Cultural Revolution in China that were mentioned above also had reverberations in Pyongyang. These two events led to the strengthening of the relationship between Moscow and Pyongyang. The relationship between North Korea and Beijing especially soured as the "Cultural Revolution" took hold in China, as the Red Guards widely made Kim Il Sung a target of criticism (Jian 2003, 7). Following the Pueblo incident, in which Pyongyang tried to cover its disastrous attack on the Blue House by provoking American aggression, Kim Il Sung became further dependent on Moscow for diplomatic, military, and economic backing, and thus

was pulled closer to Moscow. Even so, he managed to maintain considerable degree of political autonomy within the Soviet bloc (Weatherby 2008, 17). In short, the relationship with North Korea survived because North Korea was not seen as a part of China.

At the same time, sufficient time had passed in Indonesia after the coup that by 1969, Jakarta had finally moved toward improving relationship with Moscow (though not with Beijing). And by 1975, Indonesia agreed to purchase rice from North Korea (Weinstein 1976, 173n). In the long run, however, the growing trade with South Korea finally eclipsed Indonesia's trade relations with North Korea. And while Indonesia still maintains a relationship with North Korea, the closeness and importance of this relationship has not approached the intensity of the relationship in the 1960s.

## VI. Conclusion

It could be argued that the Indonesia-North Korea relationship was sparked by economic considerations in the beginning, and it turned sour also due to the economic considerations. In a sense, the Indonesia-North Korean relationship was a medium benefit-low cost exercise, in which both sides started their cooperation in order to gain economic benefits, while the alliance itself was not threatening enough to warrant the attention (and ire) of regional and global powers.<sup>1)</sup> Indonesia's relationship with North Korea declined sharply when South Korea's Gross Domestic Product

finally surpassed North Korea's in 1975 (Robertson 2010).

That said, economic factor cannot singlehandedly explain why Indonesia-North Korean relationship grew more intense in the mid-1960s. I believe that at the time both states are viewed each other and China as a way to increase their bargaining chips. In Indonesia's case, the alignment with both China and North Korea was useful to pressure the United States to listen and give concessions to Indonesia, especially on what Sukarno really desired: the end of Malaysia. Once Sukarno was overthrown, however, the alliance was no longer that useful because the new regime under Suharto was no longer interested in pursuing the conflict against Malaysia, and in fact, seeing China as a major threat. This shift in political calculus caused Indonesia to drift away from North Korea.

From North Korea's perspective, the alignment with China helped it in its squabbles with the Soviet Union, not to mention its internal disputes. As noted above, Kim Il Sung was wary with the Soviet Union's interfering in North Korean domestic affairs, and thus he decided to gravitate to Beijing. Later, however, seeing his domestic position already secure and Beijing seemingly unable to defend him from the United States, he switched his alignment option again to the Soviet Union, which obviously rewarded North Korea with more military and economic aid. And by this time, with Indonesia no longer sharing the same goal of eliminating the America's influence in Asia, North Korea no longer felt the need

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1) Special thanks to Bradley N. Nelson for this insight.

to maintain a relationship as close as before.

The relationship between Indonesia and North Korea blossomed simply because it happened at the right moment. It was right after the Sino-Soviet split, which provided an alternative option for North Korea, other than Moscow, for a security and economic partner. For Indonesia, the collapse in the relationship between the United States and Indonesia due to the West Irian question allowed Indonesia to seek partnerships with other nations, including North Korea. With China as a common link, the relationship between Indonesia and North Korea began to grow more extensively. Even though both Indonesia and North Korea didn't share the same foreign policy goal, and actually had very little overall in common, the alignment between both North Korea and Indonesia happened because of their choices in aligning with China. This opportunity for creating an Indonesia-North Korea alliance, in turn, allowed them to improve their bargaining power and thus the payoffs from both the United States and the Soviet Union.

In essence, foreign policies were crafted by actors with their own divergent interests, with no one single factor that served as the main motivation. It was a very useful coincidence for both states, a rare opportunity to improve their bargaining position, which eventually ebbed as the interests of each state diverged.

The side effect of this alignment, however, is the surprising fact that the relationship between Indonesia and North Korea still exists today, and more importantly, as mentioned earlier in this article, why 42% of Indonesians still look at North Korea positively in

spite of its abysmal human rights records and constant nuclear provocations (*Globescan* 2013).

The most likely explanation is the idea of *Juche*, which is still considered as important in Indonesia decades after the fall of Sukarno, and surprisingly, even among staunchly anti-communist military personnel. The alignment with North Korea exposed Indonesians to the idea of *berdikari*, which remains attractive to a large number of nationalists in Indonesia, many of whom still believe that Indonesia is constantly embroiled in a struggle against neo-imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism - the foreign forces that bent on destroying Indonesia. Some of those nationalists, represented by Rachmawati Sukarno, see themselves as the true inheritors of Sukarno's legacy of anti-imperialism and colonialism, unlike her sister, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who they consider a sell-out. North Korea, with its constant fight against the United States, is still seen, at least to them, as a beacon for the struggle, worthy of praise and support.

In all, it was a strange relationship but also, in retrospect, a not-so-strange relationship, a mutually beneficial one-night stand that fulfilled each state's short term foreign policy objectives.

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요약

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## 그리 낮설지 않은 동료들:

### 1960년대 인도네시아-북한 관계

요하네스 솔라이만(Yohanes Sulaiman)

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인도네시아는, 한국과의 관계가 급속히 발전했지만, 꽤 많은 국민들이 북한을 긍정적으로 보는 세계에서 몇 안 되는 국가다. 이 현상은 1960년대 인도네시아의 혼란기에 일어났던 인도네시아-북한 관계의 형성, 강화, 정점을 보면 부분적으로 설명될 수 있다. 이 시기에 동아시아 및 동남아에서 중국의 공격적 정책을 초래하였던 냉전 정치, 특히 중소 분열이 인도네시아와 북한의 대외정책 목표상 집중된 관심사였고, 이 3개 국가 관계를 심화시키도록 이끌었다. 반대로, 이 3개국, 즉 인도네시아, 북한, 중국은 자국 국내 정치의 역동성으로 인해 동일한 대외정책 목적을 공유할 수 없게 되었고, 3자 관계는 냉각되었으며, 마침내 인도네시아-북한 관계는 그로부터 침체기에 처하게 되었다.

주제어: 인도네시아, 북한, 중국, 수카르노, 자카르타-북경-평양 축, 김일성, 주체, 버르디까리(Berdikari)