

A Parting of Ways

After 20 years, the CSIS began to part company with Suharto. One regret has been the inability to be close to Muslim groups



Meeting President Suharto

When Suharto and I were establishing the New Order, what age were you all? Still in elementary school? Don't you know that it was I who made Suharto president?"

This was the "lecture" I gave to a number of Military Police officers while I was questioned inside the Guntur Detention Center in Jakarta. It was May 1998 and the political situation was very tense. There had been a series of disturbances and bombings all over the country. I and my younger brother, Sofjan, had been rounded up in connection with the bombing in Tanah Tinggi, Jakarta's Senen area, in January that year. The spotlight of suspicion had fallen upon us as a result of an email purportedly sent by an activist from the People's Democratic Party.

Prior to the questioning, I had been summoned by the Strategic Intelligence Agency, which had barred us from traveling abroad for

about two months. The end of the process was the preparation of the final case files by officers of the Jakarta Metropolitan Police. From the outset, the police had been very sympathetic. "Sorry, Sir, this is really nothing to do with us. We don't believe it, but what can we do?" they told us.

I have no idea who implicated my brother and I in that bombing. But our relations with Suharto had grown strained for some time. In fact, ever since I wrote him a memo back in 1987. Ten years later, Sofjan rejected in no uncertain terms the nomination of Habibie for vice president when he spoke to General Prabowo. At the time, Prabowo had thought we were inviting him to stage a coup against Suharto.

After the questioning, a number of media organizations reported that I regretted what had happened. It is true that I had expressed a certain regret over what had happened. However, I did

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not mean that I regretted the political accusation, but rather, I meant that our relations with Muslim groups were not as good as they once were.

Throughout the Old Order, the Catholic Party and Masyumi had been great friends. When Masyumi was banned by Sukarno, we defended them. However, after 1966, an old problem returned to divide us, namely, the polemics over the Jakarta Charter. At the start of his presidency Suharto was not close to the Muslim groups, however, in time, he closed the gap.

The memo that I wrote landed on Suharto's desk one day in September 1987. Golkar had just won its fourth election, and Suharto was once again set to be reelected. The memo contained only two points, with detailed explanations being given for each point. The first one pointed out that society was becoming more complex with the rise of the middle class that Suharto himself had fostered during his 20 years in power. As a consequence, society was becoming increasingly difficult to govern, unlike during previous times of chaos when Suharto had emerged as a hero. Accordingly, I said, Suharto needed to appoint new team members that were better able to govern such a complex society.

Secondly, I told Suharto that he needed to come up with a new vision for Indonesia over the coming 20 years. It was no longer enough to tinker with short-term solutions, I said, while advising him to delegate more powers to his coordinating ministers. "You cannot do everything by yourself." But I knew that this was precisely what he wanted

to do so as to be able to obtain businesses for all of his children.

I was aware that after 20 years I was no longer in a position to advise Suharto what was in the country's best interests. As I had expected, he got upset. He ordered his ministers to have nothing more to do with us. A number of generals who were close to us now had to keep their distances, such as Wiyogo Atmodarminto, who was then the Jakarta Governor. They were also prohibited from giving Sofjan any business project.

Despite the difficulties, the CSIS was able to keep on operating. The credibility this institute had built up on the international stage meant that there was no shortage of patrons and support for our research work.

The business interests of the Suharto children were not only a cause of concern to me. Two weeks before he passed away in 1984, Ali Moertopo dropped by my home. "The situation is getting worse. The Suhartos are everywhere," he said, adding, "If the situation continues like this, it's not only he who will be destroyed. This Republic will be destroyed!"

He had come to ask me to speak to Benny Moerdani. "Ask him to speak to Suharto, to rein in his children." Among old hands like us, only Benny was still in Suharto's inner circle. Ali was now serving as the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA), a post that was outside the Suharto circle.

In fact, Benny had already taken the steps to look after the Suharto children. He first

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withheld the passport of Sigit Harjojudanto, Suharto's first son, to stop him from gambling overseas. In one night, Sigit could blow US\$2 million on the casino tables. This sort of money, Benny pointed out, could go a long way towards alleviating poverty in Indonesia. Benny had also warned Siti Hardijanti Rukmana, Tutut, Suharto's eldest daughter, to watch her step.

The situation became more complex when the children complained to Suharto about Benny's style of supervision. Then Prabowo, Suharto's son-in-law, also became upset when he was pulled out of the Middle East. Then a mid-ranking officer in the Special Forces, Prabowo was known for his short temper and for roughing up his men. As a result, he had a lot of enemies, and who knows what might could happen to him on the ground. Benny obviously did not want any "accident" to befall the son-in-law of the President and chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces.

After 20 years, there was no doubt that Suharto had become arrogant. Back when he was still the caretaker president, I and my friends often gave him advice. Essentially, he was a naturally intelligent person but had not received much

formal education. When he became used to being president and understood what he was doing, he no longer sought advice from others.

After Ali Moertopo died, Suharto reminded everyone that people had previously said he would be unable to perform without Ali. "But here we are," Suharto said, "Ali's gone and I'm still President."

This was also the case with Soedjono Hoemardani. Romo Diyat in Semarang, spiritual advisor to both of them, had once told Soedjono to take care of Suharto as it had been predicted that one day he would be a great man. That was the reason why Soedjono withheld Suharto's letter of resignation from the military.

At the time, Suharto felt he had no future in the military, as he had only been appointed deputy commander of the Mandala Siaga command. In reality, he enjoyed seniority over Omar Dani, who was his superior. In the Army, Suharto was the second most senior officer after General Ahmad Yani. However, Suharto was excluded from Yani's inner circle because he was unable to speak either Dutch or English.



With Ali Moertopo

Conversations with Jusuf Wanandi

Suharto consistently rejected suggestions that Soedjono was his spiritual teacher. “Djono can kiss my hand,” he often said. In fact, it was Soedjono who acted as the go-between in the spiritual relations between Suharto and Romo Diyat.

Suharto was also not averse to insulting people. He would often suggest that Sofjan Wanandi’s success as a businessman was due solely to the fact that he had been on the winning side back in 1966.

After Suharto’s fall from power, Benny told me that he had been visited by Suharto’s daughter Tutut, who accused him of being arrogant for not coming to see her father. Benny immediately responded that if Suharto wanted to see him, he would never refuse. So Tutut arranged a meeting at Sigit’s house, where Suharto asked Benny what he had done wrong to be ousted from power. Benny steadfastly replied, “You left the Armed Forces, even though it was the Armed Forces which gave you your power base all that time.”



Jusuf Wanandi at ISIS Events

