



Mohammad Hatta
on Bangka, April 1949

IN MEMORIAM: MOHAMMAD HATTA (1902-1980)

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Mohammad Hatta, one of the two major political figures of modern Indonesian history, died on March 14 of this year. Together with Sukarno, he held a commanding position both in building the prewar Indonesian nationalist movement and as a leader of the Indonesian revolution. And it was he who played the major role in guiding his country successfully through the difficult seven-month transition period following the official transfer of sovereignty from The Netherlands at the end of 1949. Thereafter he remained largely off center stage, but continued intermittently for almost a decade to exert a significant influence on the course of his country's political life.

Born in Bukittinggi on August 12, 1902 into a prominent and strongly Islamic family, Mohammad Hatta was the grandson of a widely respected ulama from Batu Hampar (near Payakumbuh). His father, Haji Mohammad Jamil, died before Hatta's first birthday, and he was raised by the family of his mother. Coming from a wealthy family, she ran her own mail transport business. Hatta's intellectual precociousness was soon evident. In Bukittinggi he was able to study Dutch as well as the Koran after school, and his family helped direct him towards the best educational facilities available. After attending the Sekolah Melayu in Bukittinggi, he was sent to the Dutch language elementary school (ELS--Europeesche Lagere School) in Padang from 1913 to 1916. When thirteen, he passed the exams entitling him to admission to the HBS (Dutch Language Secondary School) in Batavia, but because of his youth his mother insisted he remain on for a while in Padang and first attend the MULO (junior secondary school) there. With extra time on his hands, he took a job without her knowledge in the post office--for which passing the HBS exam qualified him--while at the same time becoming interested in politics. Via his MULO's soccer association, of which he was made chairman, he broadened his contacts. In the offices of the Sarikat Usaha (United Endeavor), a merchants' educational association led by Taher Marah Soetan, he avidly read the political coverage of the available newspapers and reports of the Volksraad debates. At the age of sixteen, his interest in politics and the nationalist movement already well kindled, he was chosen treasurer of the branch of the Jong Sumatranen Bond that was first established in Padang in 1918.

In 1919 Hatta went to Batavia to attend the HBS, where he completed his studies with distinction in 1921. The next year he departed for what was to be a decade's residence in The Netherlands and entered the Rotterdam School of Commerce. He earned the degree of Doctorandus (Drs.) in 1932, after having studied intensively several fields of economics and completed all requirements for his doctorate with the exception of the thesis, which he never finished because of his immersion in political life.

In Holland Hatta quickly assumed a position of leadership in the major Indonesian nationalist organization, the Perhimpunan Indonesia. He was its treasurer from 1922 to 1925 and then its chairman until 1930. The PI's unequivocal demand

for Indonesia's independence and the military tone of nationalism that Hatta expressed in meetings of the organization and in its journal, *Indonesia Merdeka*, increasingly alarmed the Dutch authorities. Their concern was further heightened by Hatta's activities as Indonesian delegate to the League Against Imperialism beginning with its establishment in 1927. (It was through the League that he developed a close and long-lasting friendship with Nehru; and, like him, he eventually became critical of some of its policies, either resigning or being expelled in 1931.) Later in 1927 he was arrested and imprisoned by the Dutch for nearly six months, along with four other Indonesian nationalists active in the Perhimpunan Indonesia. At his trial he made a spirited defense which gained him greater prominence among Indonesian nationalists, and the subsequent publication of this speech under the title *Indonesia Vrij* (Free Indonesia) became an important document of the nationalist movement.

Upon returning to Indonesia in July 1932, Hatta immediately became prominent in the nationalist movement there, when he assumed the leadership of the more radical of the residual components of Sukarno's banned PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia). With the help of Sutan Sjahrir and others, he built this up into a small but influential political movement known as the Club Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Education Club) or PNI Baru (new PNI). They organized this around the principle that a small body of well-trained, dedicated, and self-reliant cadre would have more staying power--and ultimately more influence--than the type of mass party that Sukarno headed, which they regarded as too reliant on a few vulnerable leaders. Their efforts lasted for only a year and a half, when Hatta found that Dutch concepts of justice were much harsher in his homeland than in Holland.

In February 1934 Hatta was arrested, along with Sjahrir, Bondan, Burhanuddin, and several other members of the Club Pendidikan, and incarcerated for most of a year in Batavia's Glodok jail. Then, still without trial, they were exiled to the notorious fever-ridden jungle concentration camp of Tanah Merah at Boven Digul in western New Guinea. In 1936 the Dutch transferred him, along with Sjahrir, to indefinite internment on the remote but more salubrious island of Banda Neira, where they joined two other prominent, exiled nationalist leaders, Iwa Kusumasumantri and Dr. Tjipto Mangunkusumo. There Hatta remained until late 1941, when, on the very eve of the Japanese attack, the Dutch evacuated him and these other nationalist leaders to Java.

Hatta was regarded by officials of the Japanese occupation administration as a prominent Islamic leader, whose influence in Indonesia was so great that they had to avoid antagonizing him too far. Like Sukarno, although Hatta cooperated with Japanese authority, he is generally credited with having attempted to use his position to build Indonesia's nationalist spirit, with ultimate independence his goal. During the occupation he was appointed Vice Chairman of the Poetera (Poesat Tenaga Rakjat) and later of the PPKI (Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia--Committee for Preparation for Indonesian Independence), as well as a member of several advisory bodies.

With the outbreak of the Indonesian revolution, Hatta immediately moved to the forefront of its leadership alongside Sukarno. Together they declared their country's independence on August 17, 1945, and, sharing top authority as President and Vice President, they constituted the essential apex of the national leadership that saw their country through to independence. Throughout the five years of national revolution that, in fact, ended only in September 1950, they usually worked well and harmoniously together. Their individual qualities and the popular images they evoked were complementary and mutually reinforcing, contributing to the attainment and maintenance of national unity--an objective that obsessed both of them--

as well as to the drive and effectiveness of the revolution's leadership. Both were convinced that the price of unity was for socio-economic revolution to wait until the national revolution was completed, and their agreement on these priorities helped hold them together until well after the transfer of sovereignty. To Sukarno's charisma, keen political perceptiveness, and ability to inspire mass support, Hatta added organizational and administrative talent and an understanding of economic problems. Although no one could have described him as charismatic, he very clearly projected a quality of firm, self-assured, no-nonsense authority that few men were prepared to contest openly. In the symbolism of his dual leadership with Sukarno, Hatta was seen as representing Sumatra and, more generally, those Indonesians who took their Islamic religion most seriously.

Hatta's influential position in government gave many Sumatrans a greater confidence in the revolutionary Republic and its policies. During the struggle against the Dutch, he served as Yogyakarta's main liaison with, and representative in, Sumatra, making numerous--often hazardous--trips to the island. For six months following the launching of the Dutch attack of July 1947, he remained based in Bukittinggi as head of the Republic's government on Sumatra. Although only partially successful in overcoming schisms among Sumatran civilian and military leaders, he provided an important countervailing force for unity.

In January 1948, he returned to Yogyakarta to take over as Prime Minister at a time when the bitterness of interparty strife ruled out another party-led government. It was then that, in the face of a well-founded disillusionment and embitterment towards the US, he successfully insisted on Indonesia's continuing adherence to an independent and nonaligned foreign policy--an objective to which he was to adhere throughout his life.

There is still no soundly based historical judgment as to how far his forceful insistence upon seeing through the draconian army rationalization for which Colonel Nasution and some other army leaders were pressing, provoked the defection of pro-Communist military commanders whose positions were thereby threatened and consequently led to the Madiun rebellion. But there is no doubt that, once that challenge was underway, he dealt with it decisively and firmly. The major regret he expressed when I talked with him about this episode was that some army officers directly violated his orders that prisoners who had been arrested in connection with the rebellion be released--not massacred--if they could not be evacuated ahead of the attacking Dutch forces.

Hatta had only recently returned from one of his many trips to Sumatra, and was ill, largely from overwork, when the Dutch launched their surprise blitz assault on Yogyakarta on December 19, 1948. One consequence of his internment on the island of Bangka for the next half year was that, relieved of his administrative burdens, he was able to recover his health. And for me, there was the advantage that he could spare the time for long, searching discussions such as had been impossible in the Republic's capital.

In early July, after Indonesian resistance and mounting pressures from other countries and from within Holland had forced the Dutch government to move towards accepting the Republic's claim to independence, Hatta resumed his position as the active head of its government. From August 23 to November 2, he led the Republic's delegation to the Round Table Conference at The Hague for the final negotiations with the Dutch. Although for the most part an effective negotiator, in the view of his colleagues Hatta placed too much trust in Merle Cochran, the American representative there. While serving as Chairman of the UN's Good Offices Committee, Cochran clearly misrepresented the actual temper of a US Senate that had finally interested itself in the Dutch-Indonesian dispute, and the scope that the

Truman Administration was willing to give Cochran himself in the negotiations. On at least one issue--the amount of debt that the new Indonesian government was obliged to take over from the colonial administration--it is clear that Cochran seriously misled Hatta as to Washington's attitude, inducing him to agree to a considerably larger debt load than was either equitable or necessary. (Hatta's subsequent fridity towards Cochran reflected his realization that the man in whom he had placed so much confidence had deceived him, and this was undoubtedly one of the reasons for Cochran's ineffectiveness as Washington's first ambassador to Jakarta.)

In the first seven months of 1950, just after the formal transfer of Dutch sovereignty, Hatta made one of his finest, though, I think, often insufficiently recognized, contributions to his country's political development. With great skill and tact, he served as the respected moderator in this tension-ridden transition period during which the federalist legacy of Dutch efforts at divide and rule gave way before the pressures of the broadly based unitarian movement that demanded its liquidation. This involved not only delicate and arduous negotiation, but also a difficult process of constitutional revision. And it was during Hatta's last tour as Prime Minister, which ended on September 6, 1950, that the complex, emotionally charged, and dangerous program of reducing the armed forces and fusing the armies of the Republic with the residual KNIL (the Dutch Colonial Army) was mostly accomplished. In this period he was also able to make important progress in the parallel effort to fuse, rationalize, and reduce the enormous bureaucracy left by the struggle against the Dutch--some 240,000 Republican and 180,000 Federalist civil servants. Though the planned overall reduction to a composite body of 230,000 civilian officials was never attained, Hatta probably tackled this thankless job as effectively as anyone could have done under the circumstances.

That the potentially explosive passage from the Dutch-imposed federal order to a unitary Republic in September 1950 was attended by so little political trauma and bloodshed must, I think, be credited to his statesmanship more than to that of any other man. It was one of the cruel ironies of his life that, having led his country away from the discredited artificial federalist order that the Dutch had established, he was never able, despite persistent effort, to move it towards the genuine decentralization that he believed its character and political health required.

Thereafter, on only three occasions, and in every case only briefly, did Hatta again assume a central political role. When in mid-July 1955, Sukarno, momentarily outmaneuvered by elements of the army, absented himself from the country on a tour abroad, Hatta assumed full presidential power. In that capacity he designated Burhanuddin Harahap of the Masjumi as formateur of a cabinet that endured through the long-delayed elections and the emergence of a new parliamentary government led by Ali Sastroamidjojo and the PNI on March 24 of the following year.

Beginning in the last months of 1956, Hatta once again moved under the political spotlight with his strong public criticism of the Guided Democracy with which Sukarno and the army were aiming to supplant the elected parliamentary government. Hatta saw the system of parliamentary government as basically sound and potentially well suited to Indonesian conditions. It had failed thus far in Indonesia, he believed, because it had not been appropriately adapted to local conditions. Its application in the postrevolutionary period, he argued, had been a simplistic mirroring of a variant borrowed from The Netherlands, one attuned to Dutch requirements and experience--not Indonesian realities. Despite the force of his arguments, he was unable to prevail against the powerful marriage of convenience between Sukarno and the army. Wanting no place in the authoritarian government they were introducing, he resigned from his position as Vice President on December 1, 1956.

For most of the next two years he was occupied in mounting a rearguard action against the proponents of Guided Democracy and in attempting to head off the threat of regional separation precipitated in part by efforts at increased centralization of power in both the government and the military. In early 1958, with the outbreak of the PRRI and Permesta rebellions in Sumatra and Sulawesi, he was once again in a position of potential political importance. It is logical to conclude that he stood a reasonable chance of succeeding in his strenuous efforts to find a common ground for compromise between Sukarno and the dissident Masjumi political leaders within the PRRI. However, he had little rapport and influence with the dissident colonels, on either Sumatra or Sulawesi, who had been the original instigators of the rebellions. From the talks I subsequently had with him about these developments, it always seemed to me that in his mediating role he had been seriously disadvantaged by the extent to which he was cut off from important intelligence that needed to be factored into any successful effort at compromise. Thus, Hatta and the Masjumi political leaders on Sumatra with whom he was trying to negotiate were apparently almost equally ignorant about the extent of the ties of the dissident regional colonels and their financial adviser, Professor Sumitro, with the CIA and the US and Taiwanese military establishments. Had Hatta still been Vice President, he would presumably have been privy to this information--which clearly affected the attitudes of Sukarno and Prime Minister Djuanda, as well as General Nasution--and his efforts at mediation might have been more effective.

Although these abortive rebellions against Jakarta led to greater centralization of its power, Hatta continued for many years to argue cogently for a devolution of political, administrative, and fiscal authority in keeping with the country's expanse and diversity. He held that, for a state of Indonesia's proportions and character, "democracy is incompatible with the principle of centralism. . . . the larger the national territory and the more differentiation in the various aspects of life, the more specific problems there are pertaining to these separate areas that cannot be dealt with from the central seat of the national government." He refused to support those who advocated a senate, believing that such an additional representative body would slow the process of national government too much. He regarded the existing pattern of decentralization through provinces as largely a facade, and was convinced that the kabupaten and its outer island equivalents were the appropriate units for local self-government and national elections, and that the province's chief function should be as a coordinating body for the several kabupaten in its territory. Single-member election constituencies based upon the kabupaten unit, voting on an absolute majority basis would, he was convinced, have had a politically integrating effect, as well as more effectively representing regional needs. Political parties adapted to such a system could, he was convinced, have provided a much stronger foundation for parliamentary government than the party and election system that had been so mindlessly borrowed from The Netherlands.

If the kabupaten were the major unit of national autonomy, Hatta believed it would be possible to guide the gradual development of village self-administration; but without this devolution and an increasing self-rule at the village level, it would be impossible to realize his long-cherished plans for village credit and sales cooperatives. Having justifiably earned the name of "father of cooperatives" in his country, Hatta was deeply disappointed that, a decade after the revolution, his long efforts to root them in the villages had proved a failure. In discussing this with me in early 1960 he ascribed their weakness to two main causes--insufficient training of local administrative personnel and too little financial support from the government to get them far enough underway to stand on their own. He saw Indonesia's Chinese as still performing a necessary role in marketing and dispensing credit in rural society and believed that considerably more time and preparation

would be necessary before it would be feasible to replace them with peasant cooperatives. He continued, however, to see cooperatives as potentially providing the means for lightening the peasants' burdens, and helping insure that they could hold on to their land. Cooperatives were, he believed, the most promising instrument available for giving the village the strength to maintain a healthy autonomy in the face of the central government's growing weight and for insuring greater social justice for Indonesia's exploited rural majority, or, as he put it, "a bridge toward economic democracy."

Although I was fortunate enough to talk to Hatta many times from 1948 to 1976, the last time I visited Indonesia, there were three periods which were especially conducive to extended and intensive discussions and which proved particularly helpful to me in exploring and understanding his views. The first was in May 1949, when I visited him on Bangka where he had been interned by the Dutch along with several other prominent leaders of the Republic. The second was during my next visit to Indonesia in 1954-55, when I was in the process of establishing the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project. Among the leaders with whom I discussed its plans, he was especially interested and helpful in establishing the guidelines of its research--both for its Indonesian and Western participants; but there was an unexpected extra benefit, for in the course of talking about the kinds of research that would be more useful to Indonesia we touched on a wider range of subjects than we would probably have otherwise discussed. Another occasion for such extended talks arose during his visits to Ithaca in 1960 and 1968 as a guest of Cornell's Indonesia Project. Although some of these discussions were on subjects well covered in Hatta's writings, others yielded impressions about important aspects of his thinking that I believe have not been widely appreciated. In the hope, then, of making his character and ideas a little clearer, let me refer to a few of them.

First, despite the perception that many have had, Hatta was not--at least in the middle years when I knew him best--dogmatic and rigid. He did always insist on intellectual precision, and he had strong views on a number of subjects; but I found him refreshingly open-minded and independent in his political and social thought. One of my first impressions when we talked in 1948 and 1949 was his refusal to talk in doctrinaire and stereotypical terms. This was evident even when we talked about men who were strongly opposed to him politically. Thus, he saw Musso as being "more of an anarchist than a communist." Sjarifuddin was "too religious to be a communist," and, if he insisted on calling himself one, then it "must be a new kind of communism." Tan Malaka he respected as a dedicated nationalist, whose communism served his nationalism, who was unwilling to accept any direction from Moscow, and who had a sound understanding of Marxism. (Hatta was always justifiably proud of his own command of Marxist theory and literature and at this time recognized only one PKI leader--Tan Ling Djie--as being really knowledgeable.)

But certainly about the principles he held most strongly he was steadfast and unyielding. He never abandoned his belief in Indonesia's maintaining strict adherence to independence and nonalignment in foreign policy. Alignment on a particular issue at a particular time, yes; but never surrendering her independence and freedom of choice to a long-term commitment to any power, no matter what the inducement, economic or otherwise. He probably argued his position most eloquently in the April 1953 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. The date of that article was important, for it appeared at a time that John Foster Dulles was making clear that such independence was impossible in the bipolar world he and Eisenhower perceived, and that Indonesia's nonalignment meant aiding and abetting the Communist bloc. In later years, I sensed that the economic dimension of the problem of maintaining an

independent foreign policy was the one which most concerned Hatta, and thus he appeared increasingly worried over Indonesia's growing dependence on the United States and Japan.

His deep commitment to democratic government is, of course, well known, and it surfaced in nearly all of our discussions. He felt that to have taken over the Dutch system of parties and elections was a major mistake and that, as a consequence, Indonesia had never had a fair test of democracy. He was strongly opposed to functional representation, regarding it as a device employed by governments for manipulating politics so as to insure their own continuing dominance. He was contemptuous of the military's assertion of a right to a "dual function," seeing the army's spread into administrative and economic life as grossly incompatible with maintenance of professionalism and morale among officers and soldiers, and as involving a level of corruption and mismanagement of the economy that was ruinous for the country.

There was, however, another subject about which he seemed to me to feel even more strongly. This was the socio-economic role of Islam in Indonesian society. It was on May 4, 1949, in one of our discussions on Bangka, that he first introduced this subject. "The basis of Islamic thought," he said, "is in the direction of socialism, and it would be possible in Indonesia to make a working synthesis" of Islam and socialism, with individuals following Islam and socialism together. He went on to observe that "social justice and the brotherhood of people are the pillars of Islam; if I have only one loaf of bread for today and tomorrow, I must give half to a dying man; that is the economic basis of Islam." As we discussed the situation further, he made clear that what he believed best suited to Indonesia would be a mixed economy with a large socialist sector, a substantial cooperative sector--primarily at the rural level--and a limited capitalist sphere whereby small business would continue to coexist with these larger sectors. He did not think it would be necessary to develop "a capitalist middle class before a basically socialist society could be established, or even in order to have the necessary administrative personnel to man the apparatus of a socialist society." Most suitable for Indonesia, he believed, would be a mixed, but heavily socialist, economy, resting on democratic political foundations. According to my notes, he concluded that discussion with the observation that he felt that within his lifetime his people would have formed such a society.

Hatta was, of course, disappointed in his expectations, and in later years he came to lower his sights. But never did he abandon his belief that Islam could play a progressive socio-economic role that would lead Indonesia to greater social justice. That idea was very much in his mind in talks I had with him in 1967, and then and in subsequent talks he expressed great disappointment and bitterness that the Suharto government prohibited his establishing and leading a political party dedicated to that goal. That one of the two principal founding fathers of a nation was denied such an opportunity and had his political freedom abridged for the remainder of his life, reveals the sense of insecurity of those who made these decisions.

But even though shut out from participation in politics, Hatta remained something of a political symbol, one that was disturbingly awkward for those who held power. For in the face of a government that was increasingly dictatorial and corrupt, he stood out as a sort of stubborn reminder that political leadership in Indonesia had been possible without these qualities, and that one of the country's truly great men remained intellectually honest, uncorrupt, and genuinely devoted to social justice and democratic government.

