



Mohamad Roem

IN MEMORIAM: MOHAMAD ROEM (1908-1983)

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Mohamad Roem, one of the most highly respected of Indonesia's leaders, died in his home in Jakarta on September 24, 1983 at the age of 75. Never at the top of the pyramid of power, he was heavily relied upon by some who were, and during the course of the revolution he emerged as his country's ablest diplomat. He was one of the leaders of the revolution whom I respected most, and our friendship began with our first meeting in Yogyakarta in 1948. Intrinsically Roem was a modest man, known for his openness, absolute honesty, gentleness of manner, and thoughtful regard for others. Many were struck by how genuinely concerned he was to understand the views of those with whom he interacted, whatever their religion--whether in his home or at the negotiating table. But there was also a formidable inner iron to his character that derived from his strong and unflagging adherence to principle. These qualities and an unobtrusive astuteness were what finally brought the Dutch to conclude that Roem was their toughest Indonesian adversary at the negotiating table. From these attributes, too, stemmed his unusual capacity to serve as mediator and conciliator among diverse political factions within Islamic organizations and more broadly in the various cabinets in which he served.

Mohamad Roem was born on May 16, 1908, son of the lurah of Klewogan desa on the outskirts of the town of Parakan in Central Java. His father sent him to a secular primary school and then, from 1917 to 1924, Roem attended the Hollandsch-Inlandsche Schools (HIS) in Temanggung and Pekalongan. In 1924 he passed government examinations that won him a scholarship to the STOVIA in the Weltevreden suburb of Batavia. There after three years he completed the preliminary exams in this medical training course and transferred to a Dutch AMS (Middle School) in Batavia from which he graduated in 1930. After trying unsuccessfully to pass the examinations for entry to the Medical College, he turned to law, entering the Rechts Hooge School in Batavia in 1932, and graduating in 1939.

In the meantime, Roem had become politically active in the nationalist movement. At a 1929 congress in Surabaya of the Jong Islamieten Bond (JIB)--an offshoot of the nationalist organization, Jong Java (Young Java)--he met Markisah Dahlia, whom he married three years later. That marriage was an unusually happy one. The young Markisah Dahlia, too, was an active nationalist, and she was strongly supportive of Roem's work throughout his career. They had two children--a boy, Roemoso, born in 1933 and a girl, Rumeisa, born in 1939.

In 1930 Roem was made head of one of the central committees of the JIB where he came to know H. O. S. Tjokroaminoto and Haji Agus Salim. In 1932 he began to play an active role in the Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII), where he adhered to the more moderate wing of Haji Agus Salim, which believed that the nationalist cause would be best served by working within the very limited representative institutions permitted by the Dutch. When this minority faction emerged in November 1936 as the Barisan Penyadar PSII (League to make the PSII conscious) Roem headed its Central Executive Committee, and remained active in it until the Japanese banned political organizations. During the occupation he quietly continued to practice law

insofar as conditions permitted, and managed to live in relative obscurity until early 1945 when he was appointed vice-chairman of the Masjumi's Hizbullah.

Roem headed the Jakarta Komite Nasional Indonesia, the Republic's representative body for that city, when it was established soon after the proclamation of Indonesian independence. In the early months of their occupation, the British permitted some Dutch (NICA) forces to land behind the shield of the British Indian Army, which sometimes proved unable to control these often aggressive and trigger-happy Dutch troops. On November 21, 1945 a group of these Dutch soldiers forced their way into Roem's house at Jalan Kwitang #10, shot him in the right leg, and abducted a friend who had come to dinner. Though appeals were made to the British authorities for an investigation, the perpetrators were never brought to justice, and Roem's friend was never seen again. After several months of convalescence from what proved to be a very serious wound, Roem emerged with his right leg shorter than his left, and a permanent limp.

As a representative of the Republic's largest Islamic party, the Masjumi, Roem held the important position of Minister of Interior in the third Sjahrir cabinet (October 2, 1946-June 27, 1947), and in the second cabinet of Amir Sjarifuddin (November 11, 1947-January 29, 1948). In Hatta's RUSI cabinet he served as minister without portfolio from December 20, 1949 until he was appointed High Commissioner to The Hague on January 19, 1950. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the cabinet led by Mohammad Natsir (September 6, 1950-April 27, 1951), and as Minister of Internal Affairs in that led by Wilopo of the PNI (April 3, 1952-August 1, 1953). He was First Deputy Prime Minister in the second Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet from March 26, 1956 until he and four other Masjumi members resigned on January 9, 1957.

In the field of foreign affairs Roem also played an important role as a member of the Republic's delegation to the Linggadjati and Renville Conferences; and in the crucial discussions with the Dutch during the spring of 1949 he was its principal negotiator. These negotiations culminated in the Roem-Van Royen Agreement of May 7, 1949. While a major and essential step on the way to the Round Table Conference wherein the Dutch finally yielded their claim to sovereignty, the agreement at the time was highly controversial. Even some of the Masjumi and PSI leaders who had been close to Roem believed he had made too many concessions to the Dutch in achieving it. He, however, clearly had a keener perception of the realities of Dutch domestic politics than they, and was convinced he had secured as much for the Republic as the Netherlands government could accept. Backed by Hatta and Sukarno, he was able to prevail. And the Roem-Van Royen Agreement did lead to the return in early July of the Republic's top leaders from Bangka where they had been interned following the Dutch capture of Yogyakarta on December 19, 1948. This was followed by a cease-fire in mid-August, and the final round of negotiations at the Round Table Conference held under the auspices of the UN's Good Offices Committee at The Hague from August 23 to November 2, 1949.

One cannot go through recently declassified US government documents bearing on the Round Table Conference without appreciating Roem's central role there. The Dutch clearly regarded Roem as a formidable negotiator, as did Merle Cochran, the American representative on the United Nations Commission for Indonesia (UNCI), who perceived Roem as holding "a key position" particularly with regard to his opposition to further concessions to the Dutch. Roem's effectiveness was undoubtedly enhanced by his realistic assessment of Cochran. He had taken the measure of this pivotal member of the UNCI more accurately than most other members of the Indonesian negotiating team. Although respecting Cochran's negotiating ability, Roem did not bank on the assumption that he would secure the best terms possible for Indonesia, particularly with regard to the question of the proportion of the Dutch

East Indies' debt the successor independent Indonesian state should be obliged to take over. A debt settlement that was reasonably beneficial to the Netherlands was obviously in harmony with the Europe-centric policy of the US at the time, and it was for such a settlement that Cochran pressed and which he ultimately secured.

Cochran's strategy in achieving such a debt settlement was to gain for himself sole responsibility for mediating the issue between the Dutch and Indonesian representatives, rather than sharing this function with the other members of UNCI. In order to block this move, Roem strove hard, but unsuccessfully, to promote a compromise formula whereby UNCI as a whole would assume responsibility for the mediating role, with Cochran acting as its agent but remaining accountable to its full membership. (Only after Cochran had had his way with the issue of the debt settlement did Roem and his supporters finally manage to reestablish UNCI in its proper role.) With Cochran occupying the pivotal role as mediator, the new Indonesian state was obliged to shoulder 70 percent--4.3 billion guilders (approximately \$1,130,000,000)--of the debt of colonial Indonesia, which totaled altogether 6.1 billion guilders (\$1,732,400,000). Members of the Indonesian delegation particularly resented the fact that most of the debt they were required to assume represented military expenses generated by the Dutch effort to subdue the Republic. Denied access to the details of the Netherlands Indies budget, Roem found it difficult to make his case. But the correctness of his argument is supported by a report to the Department of State of January 3, 1950 from the US Consul General in Jakarta, Jacob Beam, that recently came into my possession. This incorporates a breakdown of the internal Dutch East Indies budget for 1949, which shows that in that year alone more than a billion guilders was spent on the Dutch armed forces (964.6 million guilders on the Army and 77.2 million guilders for the Navy). Another 125 million guilders were spent on the police (not including the cost of the Marine Police and the police of the Dutch-sponsored states). Since the total budget for 1949 alone was in deficit by 1,304,900,000 guilders, it is evident that a substantial part of the internal debt assumed by the Indonesian government did indeed derive from the military effort mounted by the Dutch against the Republic. Had Roem's judgment prevailed, Indonesia would probably have secured significantly better terms.

In Indonesia's internal politics Roem's personal qualities enabled him to serve as a bridge to understanding and compromise among individuals and groups with differing perceptions of important and often critical problems. Within his own party, the Masjumi, he must be credited with making a significant contribution to maintaining coherence among its often disparate elements. But his influence as a force for consensus transcended his party and was exercised much more broadly in the Indonesian political community. He did not, of course, always prevail, but one cannot help but be impressed by how persistently he labored, even in the most exacting of situations. One of the most difficult challenges came in the 1957-58 PRRI rebellion. He worked hard, with great political understanding and skill, in seeking a mutually acceptable compromise among the disputants. In the end he was unsuccessful, but I believe he came as close to success as anyone could. Had the dissident military commanders been less committed externally and a bit more flexible, or had Prime Minister Djuanda and Sukarno been a little more patient, his efforts might have averted the tragedy that ensued.

He made clear his opposition to Sukarno's system of "Guided Democracy" and was among those leaders of the Masjumi and PSI who attended the Anak Agung's convocation on Bali in August 1961, ostensibly held to celebrate the cremation of Agung's father. The President learned that some of those present at the ceremonies held discussions as to the nature of a post-Sukarno Indonesia, and when a few months later he was the object of an assassination attempt in Makassar, Sukarno's suspicions regarding the Bali meetings precipitated moves against the top Masjumi

and Indonesian Socialist Party leaders. (There was certainly no evidence that Roem was guilty of the charge of plotting Sukarno's overthrow that was leveled against the group, but Sukarno appears to have suspected all of Anak Agung's guests.) Roem was arrested in January 1962, together with Anak Agung, the Masjumi's Prawoto Mangkusamito, and the PSI leaders Sutan Sjahrir and Subadio Sastrosatomo. After three months of interrogation in Jakarta they were imprisoned in Madiun, where the former Masjumi leaders Isa Ansjari and Yunan Nasution soon joined them. (During the last seven months of this imprisonment the prominent writer and journalist Mochtar Lubis joined the group.)

It tells something of Roem's character that these comrades in detention elected him to be their "lurah" (village head), with the responsibility of dealing in their behalf with the prison authorities. The confidence Roem's comrades had in his diplomatic abilities was not misplaced. Admittedly, political detainees during the Sukarno period were normally better treated than common criminals, but, so far as I am aware, none ever won the concessions that Roem negotiated for his little group. Starting with improvements in their living quarters and food, he moved on to secure a badminton court, a weekly movie in their quarters, and finally weekly visits to a local movie theater, and to a nearby swimming pool. In early November 1965 the entire group was moved briefly to the Jakarta Military Detention Center, and then to a large house near Glodok where they remained under house arrest until their release in May 1966.

Like many other former Islamic leaders, Roem assumed that Suharto would lift the ban on the Masjumi that Sukarno had imposed, and that scope would be given for the establishment of a new modernist Muslim party by those whom Sukarno had jailed. He was, however, soon disappointed. Though by acclamation he was chosen to head the newly established Partai Muslimin at its congress in Malang on November 7, 1968, President Suharto overruled this decision, and Roem was denied the possibility of resuming an active role in politics. The Partai Muslimin (Parmusi) became an obedient instrument of the government.

Deeply disappointed in being shut out of any possibility of playing a constructive political role, Roem devoted most of his remaining years to study and writing, making trips to the United States and Holland in connection with these. Already in February 1968 he and his wife had visited Cornell for six weeks as the guests of the Modern Indonesia Project, where Roem ran a seminar on modern and recent Indonesian history. Unassuming and patient, Roem gave his time unstintingly to faculty and students. He deepened their understanding of the Islamic leadership's perspective on Indonesia's problems and history, and at the same time, both he and his wife through their kindness and generosity made warm and lasting friendships.

Through his writings on post-colonial Indonesia's political and diplomatic history Roem has significantly enriched that record. His major works were his three volumes of *Bunga Rampai dari Sejarah*, but he also devoted much effort to promoting memorial volumes describing the political contributions of some of Indonesia's outstanding leaders. He was still actively occupied with this writing when he died, and it was fitting that the last memorial volume commemorated Haji Agus Salim, the man to whom he had stood so close during the nationalist phase of his political career.

Mohamad Roem's persistent modesty has probably obscured for the present generation of Indonesians his significant and sustained contribution to the revolution and the post-revolutionary decade. But when that history is fully elaborated the importance of his role will be clearly evident.