

Roland Challis. *Shadow of a Revolution: Indonesia and the Generals*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2001. 260 pp.

Matthew Jones. *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia 1961–1965*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 325 pp.

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Changing Western policies and priorities in the mid-1960s had a critical impact on the future, not only of Vietnam and its neighbors on the Indochina peninsula, but of the countries that make up island Southeast Asia—notably Indonesia and Malaysia. These two books offer a British perspective on the history of these years, throwing new light on the accepted versions of some of the key events of the period. Matthew Jones focuses on Indonesia's interaction with Malaysia, Britain, and the United States during the formation of Malaysia and the years of Confrontation, while Roland Challis works on a much broader chronological canvas stretching from the period of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia up to the presidency of Abdurrachman Wahid. However, the events of the mid-1960s are at the core of his book too, for Challis had his most direct continuous contact with Indonesia in the years from 1964 to 1969, when he was based in Singapore as BBC correspondent for Southeast Asia.

Both authors bring into play the factors that influenced British policy towards Indonesia's dispute with Malaysia, as London tried to impose an acceptable post-colonial order on its former territories in northern Borneo and the Malay peninsula. Britain was, of course, one of the key actors in the dramas of that period, and much new information on its activities came to light when many of the archives dealing with these years were opened to public scrutiny during the 1990s after the elapse of the statutory thirty years. (The most sensitive British and American material, however, remains classified.) Challis makes limited use of these documentary sources (most fruitfully of the Churchill archives in Cambridge), but rests his account primarily on his personal experience and interaction with some of the major British, Malaysian, and Singaporean actors of the period. However, Jones, who teaches at Royal Holloway College at the University of London, has delved deeply, not only into the rich British archives, but also into declassified American documents both in the National Archives in Washington and in the relevant presidential libraries.

In Challis's book, it is contended that Britain's role was not restricted to events surrounding the establishment of Malaysia and the response to Indonesian Confrontation, but that policy-makers in London were also deeply involved in undermining Sukarno and assisting Suharto's ascent to the presidency. Challis certainly establishes beyond question that Britain, along with the United States, encouraged the bloodbath that followed the coup of September 30, 1965, giving numbers for those killed higher than conventional estimates. (Challis, pp. 106-7) From both books, the reader is able to gain a more multifaceted view of the turbulent years that ended with the emergence of the new truncated federation in Malaysia¹ and the bloody replacement of the Sukarno government in Indonesia by the authoritarian military

¹ One of its key projected components, Brunei, never joined, and Singapore was expelled in August 1965.

regime of General Suharto. We also gain a deeper understanding of the depth of American and British involvement in these events, and the extent to which Washington and London deemed the outcome of the struggle within and between Indonesia and Malaysia as critical to their own policies, not only in Asia, but also globally.

Jones places the Indonesian Malaysian conflict within an international context, where the UK's growing desire to extricate itself from the colonial incumbrance involved in direct governance of Malaya, Singapore, and the North Borneo territories came up against its determination to maintain its military influence in the region at the same time as it was lowering its military outlays. For the United States, he places these events against the background of the gradual shift from the Manichaean views of neutralism held by the Dulles brothers under the Eisenhower administration to the more nuanced Kennedy attitude. The apparent success of Kennedy's approach, which reached its apogee in mid-1962 after the defusion of the Laotian situation and settlement of the West Irian dispute, began to dissolve with the outbreak of the Brunei revolt in December of that year (Jones, p. 119). Jones also offers a revealing analysis of the evolution of American policy in the closing months of the Kennedy administration and the advent of the Johnson presidency, when all of Southeast Asia gradually came to be viewed through the prism of Vietnam. Even by the end of 1961, it was clear that Kennedy's earlier tolerance of neutralism had undergone a shift under the pressures of that increasingly minatory situation. While still a senator in 1959, Kennedy was able to state that "if neutrality is the result of a concentration on internal problems, raising the standard of living of the people and so on, particularly in the underdeveloped countries, I would accept that" (Jones, pp. 35-36). By November 1961, however, he was insisting that "the time has come for neutral nations as well as others to be in support of US policy *publicly* ... we should aggressively determine which nations are in support of US policy and that these nations should identify themselves" (Jones, p. 37)—a statement with echoes in the current Bush administration's "either with us or against us" rhetoric.

As Jones sketches the background history of Malay-Indonesian relations, it becomes clear how so many of the tensions over Malaysia's creation that came to a climax in Confrontation had their roots in the regional dissidence in Indonesia during the 1950s and the active encouragement given to the rebels, not only by the United States, but also by Kuala Lumpur. Malayan prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman encouraged the unrest in Sumatra, even entertaining the hope that the island might be included in a future Malaysian federation, and in the early 1960s was still providing sanctuary to former rebels. Indonesian foreign minister Subandrio made clear reference to "the presence of refugee Sumitro² . . . in Kuala Lumpur, and the Tunku's activities in Sumatra" (Jones, p. 130) when expressing to Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew his suspicions of the Malaysia concept.³ Jones notes that the Tunku had aggravated

² Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, formerly dean of the Economics Faculty at the University of Indonesia, had fled to Sumatra at the end of 1957, and served as foreign minister in the rebel government. He was recalled to Indonesia under Suharto, and appointed minister for trade and commerce in 1968.

³ The Tunku was not alone in seeing possibilities for attracting Sumatra away from Indonesia. After the failure of the Maphilindo concept and the formation of Malaysia, British foreign secretary Home spoke to Kennedy of Indonesia's vulnerability, mentioning that "Sumatra could be pinched off quite easily." (Jones, p. 212) At that time the Tunku made "little secret of the way his mind was moving over the possibilities of

Indonesia's underlying distrust of his intentions by his wavering over the West Irian issue. After first proposing a transfer to UN trusteeship, he retracted this proposal following a visit to The Hague in late 1960, and subsequently spoke merely of a UN inspection commission.

The volatility and unpredictability of the Tunku were not only a problem for Indonesia. Britain too was constantly faced with its inability to control its protégé, and feared that in reaching a negotiated settlement with Jakarta and Manila, the Tunku might well agree to the removal of British bases from his territory. To prevent such an outcome, they threatened him, employing "the ultimate sanction that British policy-makers could use to influence Malaysian behaviour: any 'Asian solution' which led to an agreement to change the status of the Singapore base and Britain would revoke its security guarantee to the Federation, leaving Malaysia prey to a revival of Indonesian pressures." (Jones, p. 250) The Tunku also alienated his potential partners, apparently feeling no respect for the heads of two of Malaysia's proposed component states, describing Lee Kuan Yew and the Sultan of Brunei "respectively as a snake and an old woman." (ibid., p.161) He furthermore showed his contempt for the peoples of North Borneo he was trying to incorporate into the federation by stating to British Commonwealth Secretary Duncan Sandys that "all the anxiety in the Borneo territories merely showed the silliness of the local inhabitants who were very immature." (ibid., p. 189)

Jones's book also highlights the evolution of the attitudes of Britain and the United States towards Indonesia. During the time that Averell Harriman and Roger Hilsman were the major formateurs of American policy in the region, and Harriman had a direct link to President Kennedy,⁴ American policy evidenced a sympathy to the Indonesian viewpoint, and viewed Duncan Sandys as "the villain of the piece," believing "that provocative British behaviour had served to make it impossible for the Indonesians to find a face-saving way out of their brash venture into confrontation." (Jones, p. 203) As in so many discussions of the Kennedy presidency, there are intriguing glimpses of what might have happened had Kennedy not died, and had Harriman and Hilsman remained the strongest voices in US policy towards Southeast Asia. Jones narrates how, in the fall of 1963, these two officials, using a possible Kennedy presidential visit to Indonesia as leverage, were actively working to persuade Sukarno and the Tunku to accept a solution patterned on the one reached in West Irian, and agree to a plebiscite to be held in Sarawak and Sabah in five or six years' time. This path had received Kennedy's tentative approval three days before his assassination.

But over Indonesia, as over Vietnam, Harriman and Hilsman were opposed by the more hawkish secretary of state Dean Rusk, who, together with defense secretary Robert McNamara, was "determined to check the growth of a Harriman-Hilsman axis

confrontation leading to a break-up of Indonesia." (ibid., p. 214) Secretary of State Dean Rusk too, not only gave a sympathetic hearing to British concerns, but also encouraged the idea of their making trouble for Sukarno in Sumatra. (ibid., p. 227)

⁴ Governor Averell Harriman was assistant secretary of Far Eastern Affairs until October 1963, when he was succeeded by Roger Hilsman, being himself then promoted to the post of under secretary for Political Affairs.

at the State Department.” (Jones, p. 207) Rusk’s stock rose rapidly after Lyndon Johnson succeeded to the presidency.

One final possibility for the Harriman/Hilsman proposals came when the late president’s brother, US attorney general Robert Kennedy, was sent to the area in January 1964 on a mission to defuse tension, and work out conditions for some kind of negotiated solution to the problems between Indonesia and Malaysia. Kennedy put forward a proposal for another tripartite meeting (between Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila) after a ceasefire declaration by Sukarno, again envisaging a solution patterned on that reached in West Irian. But any progress he might have made was torpedoed again both by British fears that any concessions would lead to pressure on the UK to give up its Singapore base and by the eclipse in Washington of Harriman and Hilsman by the hard line group led by Rusk and McNamara. In London, Duncan Sandys at the Commonwealth Office also successfully blocked an approach by more moderate senior officials in Whitehall, who “felt the time had come when the Tunku should be advised that he offer a plebiscite in five years’ time in Sarawak and Sabah, contingent on the Indonesians carrying out the plebiscite they had promised for West Irian.” (Jones, p. 257)

Sandys and his colleagues played on Washington’s fears by raising the threat of a possible “‘Asian solution’ for Malaysia leading to a neutralization of that country under the influence of Indonesia,”—an outcome they knew was anathema to the American administration, which was fending off neutralization proposals from France with respect to Indochina. In maintaining Washington’s support for Malaysia, the British consistently emphasized the crucial influence the Malaysia situation could have on the struggle in Vietnam and the Western position in Southeast Asia. From the beginning, the top policy-makers in the Johnson administration, represented primarily by Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, and McNamara, viewed the Malaysia-Indonesia dispute in terms of its influence on Vietnam. As early as February 1964, Rusk was willing to make a public statement coupling the two, and prime minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home’s February visit to Washington ended in a communiqué wherein he reaffirmed UK support for United States policy in Vietnam, while the president reciprocated by voicing US support for “the peaceful national independence of Malaysia.” (Jones, p. 261) The more confrontational stance adopted by the Johnson administration had by then led to the permanent jettisoning of any possible North Borneo plebiscite on the pattern of the West Irian settlement.

Most noteworthy in Jones’s account is his depiction of how in the eighteen months following Home’s visit to Washington, the attitudes of the two major Western powers experienced a complete reversal. By the summer of 1965, Washington was pressing the British Labour government under prime minister Harold Wilson to remain in the region to bolster Western power, while London was increasingly reluctant to stay, largely because of the costs involved. Indonesia was at the same time taking advantage of these uncertainties by launching sporadic and unsuccessful attacks on the territory of peninsular Malaya, according to Challis on a much larger scale than has previously been acknowledged. (Challis, p. 66)

Singapore’s ejection from the federation on August 7, 1965 broke “in dramatic fashion ... the bonds tying together the federal framework of Malaysia.” (Jones, p. 269)

Together with the United Kingdom's parlous economic situation, it strengthened the British inclination to reappraise their policies in Southeast Asia and to consider defense secretary Dennis Healey's proposal that they reach some compromise with Sukarno that would enable them to withdraw from the Borneo territories—a change at which the Johnson administration was "aghast." In response, and with support from Australia and New Zealand, early in September 1965 Washington offered to prop up sterling in return for Britain sending a token force to South Vietnam. They followed this up with talks in London on September 8 and 9, when "Ball outlined American opposition to any reduction of the British presence in South East Asia, or any attempt to reach a compromise solution to confrontation," (Jones, p. 289), and made clear that any offer to relieve sterling "was inextricably related to the commitment of the UK Government to maintain its commitments around the world." (ibid.) In response, the British capitulated, confirming that they would seek no compromise with Sukarno.

Jones's book reveals the interesting coincidence of key developments in Indonesia and Malaysia that has not often been noted. In the summer of 1962, the final talks on West Irian between the Netherlands and Indonesia coincided with the conclusion of negotiations in London over the Cobbold Report and the future of Malaysia (Jones, p. 98), and the coup in Indonesia at the end of September 1965 followed hard on the heels of Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia the previous month—and the resulting disarray in London's plans for the region.

One aspect of the situation, however, that Jones ignores in his depiction of events during 1964–65 and the drawdown of the policy of Confrontation are the ties that Suharto's emissaries established with members of the government in Kuala Lumpur, notably with Tan Sri Ghazali Sjafile, in their efforts to bring Confrontation to an end. (He does, however, note Sukarno's tentative attempts at the end of 1964 to reach some compromise with the Tunku. [Jones, pp. 271–72]) Challis lists a series of contacts, including not only the well-known mission of Benny Murdani in Bangkok, but also probes by Ibnu Sutowo, Chaerul Saleh, and an approach to the British in Paris by Maj. Gen. S. Parman, one of the generals murdered in the coup. (Challis, pp. 68–69) Challis, however, makes little attempt to link these contacts to the events leading up to the crushing of the Untung group, though he makes a few unsupported statements regarding earlier ties between the US and Suharto, for example: "[A]lthough he never went to the USA for training, [Suharto] was already being nurtured as a likely candidate for US sponsorship should it appear necessary to replace General Nasution." (Challis, p. 74) He also records an intriguing comment made to him on the day after the "putsch," when the Malaysian prime minister said that the coup "could have been the right one—or the wrong one." (ibid., p. 86)

Neither author makes any real contribution to sorting out what really happened on the night of September 30, both relying almost exclusively on secondary sources in narrating the events of those hours. Challis implies some British involvement by citing an agreement between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan more than three years earlier, in April 1962 "that it would be desirable to liquidate President Sukarno, depending on the situation and available opportunities" (Challis, p. 95).⁵ He

⁵ Neither Challis nor Jones cites any later indications of British thinking, for example, the intriguing comment penciled on the outside of a folder dated December 18, 1964, that "A premature PKI coup may be the

recalls this in connection with the instructions given to Norman Reddaway of the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD), to "do anything you can think of to get rid of Sukarno." (ibid.) However, Reddaway did not get to Singapore until the end of October 1965, so these instructions were clearly tied to the later British and American policy of doing all they could to ensure that Suharto emerged triumphant in outmaneuvering Sukarno and crushing leftist opposition in the post-coup period.

Challis in his book provides interesting sidelights on several of the actors and a few valuable insights into events of the period. He reminds us, for example, that Sukarno was not always the staunch advocate of a unitary state for Indonesia that he later appeared, noting that Sukarno "attached more importance to arousing the spiritual will to be one than to prescribing particular and potentially divisive institutional goals," and citing a comment Sukarno made to Cindy Adams that he had initially believed that "the motto [of Indonesia] should be federation ... [which] must leave intact the personality, the individuality, the character of the cooperating parties." (Challis, p. 19) In addition, Challis gives an interesting, if not always accurate, overview of Indonesia's history from independence to the presidency of Abdurrachman Wahid. (A few obvious errors, especially with names, should have been corrected before publication, e.g. still attributing to Sukarno the fictional first name of "Ahmed" and rendering Amien Rais as "Damien Rais.")

Jones's book is essential reading for those who wish to understand the realities behind the rhetoric that masked the motives and actions of the politicians in Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, London, and Washington as they maneuvered to shape island Southeast Asia into a form that accorded with their individual priorities. Scattered too within his account are flashes of clarifying honesty and insight by the actors themselves into the actual situation that are usually concealed by policy needs and ideological imperatives. These are most clearly seen, strangely enough, in comments by Lord Selkirk, formerly Ambassador to Washington and during this period British Commissioner General of Southeast Asia, who shows an acuity of perception often at odds with his public stance. He noted in 1961, for example, that the only long-term effective answer to China becoming the "dominant force throughout South East Asia" was to "do everything we can to promote nationalism as a counter to communism and to avoid policies (especially with an imperialistic flavour) which may lead nationalists and communists to join forces against us" (Jones, p. 26); he opposed the Cold Storage arrest program in Singapore in July 1962 which, he realized, would "be presented as our plan for preserving our bases with the Tunku allowing himself to be used as our stooge" (ibid., p. 92); and with respect to Brunei he recognized that the revolt there was "a manifestation of predominant opinion within the territory." (ibid., p. 112) Jones's meticulous analysis of so many of the relevant documents provides a firm base from which to view the Southeast Asia that emerged from this period of turbulence into a form that basically endured for the rest of the twentieth century.