

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

The Asia Chessboard Podcast

“Talking Indonesia with Dr. Dino Djalal”

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SPEAKERS

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- Andrew Schwartz: Welcome to the Asia Chessboard, a podcast that examines geopolitical dynamics in Asia and takes an inside look at the making of grand strategy. I'm Andrew Schwartz at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Benjamin Rimland: Linchpin of ASEAN and sitting astride some of the globe's most important sea lines of communication, Indonesia is a critical part of the Asia Chessboard. Mike is joined by former Indonesian ambassador to the U.S. Dr. Dino Djalal to discuss Indonesia strategic culture and relationship with the United States.
- Michael Green: Welcome back to the Asia chessboard. I'm Michael Green and I'm joined today by a good friend, Pak Dino Djalal, one of the most important thinkers on Indonesian foreign policy strategy in Asia and the United States in this entire region. We're here in Sydney, Australia for a conference and Dino agreed to meet with me. We're going to talk about Indonesia, the world's third largest democracy, largest Islamic state at a geopolitical crossroads in the Indo-Pacific, on the front line of every issue that matters to the United States and its allies. And no one is better positioned to help us understand it than Dino Djalal. So Dino let's start by talking about you, you got into this business because your dad was a diplomat, right?
- Dino Djalal: Yes, my father Professor Hasjim Djalal was a law of the sea diplomat who spent like four decades working on law of the sea issues including the UN convention on law of the sea.
- Michael Green: He was posted overseas. You grew up overseas, so-
- Dino Djalal: Overseas including in New York and Washington D.C. when my dad was posted there. So it's nice for me to come back to Washington D.C. at the Indonesian Embassy.
- Michael Green: Well, you were ambassador?
- Dino Djalal: Well I was ambassador, yeah.
- Michael Green: And you were a very good ambassador and our kids are about the same age and I remember when my son did playdates at the residence. How difficult to explain to him why I didn't have a similar setup for playdates with his friends, but it was great fun. You served there in the Embassy in the 2000s when I was in the White House during the Bush administration, you were also, is national security advisor, the right title for president-
- Dino Djalal: Foreign policy.
- Michael Green: Foreign policy advisor to president SBY. But did you join the foreign office, the diplomatic service right after college?
- Dino Djalal: Yes, I joined in 1987.

- Michael Green: And what did you study in college? How did-
- Dino Djalal: I studied international relations always for my undergrad, my graduate, and also for my PhD.
- Michael Green: And you knew you wanted to be a diplomat from a little age?
- Dino Djalal: Yeah, that's what I always wanted to do and I couldn't imagine doing anything else.
- Michael Green: So and now you're running a think-tank, but it's a very unique kind of think-tank, tell us about it.
- Dino Djalal: It's the largest foreign policy group in Indonesia, it's called Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia. We are more of a cause group where we try to engage the grassroots about global issues because there's still some pockets of xenophobia in Indonesia and it's very important for our group to tell the public that nationalism alone is not enough, you've got to combine nationalism with internationalism, and that's how you get to help them mix off getting the country to the next level.
- Michael Green: So I understand that you have almost like rock concerts-
- Dino Djalal: Yeah.
- Michael Green: With the bands and music and then people talking about foreign policy with thousands of people?
- Dino Djalal: Yes. I'm quite proud of that because we convene what we think is the largest foreign policy conference in the world. The last one-
- Michael Green: How many people?
- Dino Djalal: 11,000 last one.
- Michael Green: It's a little more than CSIS or Brookings.
- Dino Djalal: And people come in and they lineup like they go to rock concert, they lineup starting at seven or eight o'clock and they stay all the way until the end. And gives me hope because it reaffirms that young people are actually interested on global issues. It's just a question of how you package foreign policy to them and how you communicate with them. Sometimes we use too much multilateral, bureaucratic, technocratic language and jargons and that didn't go well with them. But once we start using a different set of language and a way of packaging issues to them they come in droves.
- Michael Green: Now is this primarily in Jakarta or are you-

- Dino Djalal: Only in Jakarta.
- Michael Green: Only in Jakarta?
- Dino Djalal: Yeah, the annual conference is in Jakarta, but occasionally we do events outside Jakarta as well.
- Michael Green: Great. Tell us, how would you describe the strategic culture of Indonesia? You've seen it from your dad's time and your own time in the foreign office, a lot of change. But some fundamentals, non-alignment and things like that. How would you describe the strategic culture of Indonesia, how it changed in your career?
- Dino Djalal: Well first the desire to be independent has always been central to the way we see our role in the world. So this reflected in the Asia-Africa conference, in non-aligned movement-
- Michael Green: Which started Bandung in 1955 and confounded the Eisenhower administration, they didn't know what to do with this.
- Dino Djalal: Yes, exactly. I think someone said that to be neutral is to be, what is it?
- Michael Green: Not on our side?
- Dino Djalal: Yeah.
- Michael Green: You're with us or you're against us.
- Dino Djalal: More or less something like that.
- Michael Green: From time to time U.S. foreign policy slips into that. But the Bandung conference included Japan and other countries that were allied to the U.S.
- Dino Djalal: Yes. So the desire to be independent and to make our own mind up when we make a strategic move, that has stayed until now. So that's why the doctrine that has remained is the independent and active doctrine. Others come and go, the ecumenical loop, diplomacy, this and that, but the one that has stayed through generations since we became independent is the independent and active doctrine.
- Michael Green: There was a brief period in 1964 and five when Sukarno declared the Jakarta-Pyongyang-Beijing-Phnom Penh-Hanoi Axis, which was alliance of socialist-communist nations in the Cold War. And then he was overthrown in a coup, other than that one case, Indonesia has never sought allies.
- Dino Djalal: That was seen as a deviation, and that was the time also that we pulled out of the United Nations and were seen too much closer to those sides of Beijing-

Pyongyang-Hanoi Axis. So that was the exception, but overall desire to be independent and also in our strategic culture, we cannot allow any alliances, military alliances, military cooperation, yes but not alliances and no military base in Indonesia, so that remains until today. And another aspect is some kind of complex in dealing with major powers, perhaps because we are middle powers and then there was this historical upbringing that we were colonized for centuries. So whenever we dealt with United States or China, this complex about dealing with great power is always there. There is a need to have some distance and some caution that we don't have when we deal with fellow major powers or smaller powers.

Michael Green: Indonesia is in MIKTA, right?

Dino Djalal: MIKTA, yes.

Michael Green: Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia. So this middle power identity, is it important for Indonesian foreign policy?

Dino Djalal: It is important because it gives us a sense of placement and role.

Michael Green: But not alliance.

Dino Djalal: Not alliance. No. And even then I think all middle powers have not found a format yet, institutionally speaking. There's no real convergence of interest, the way Western powers' interests converge. So in that sense Indonesia is still grappling with it, but the instinct now is to go with fellow middle powers whenever there is a global issue to be tackled, which means to go to Korea either bilaterally or in a larger context to Australia, we have very close relations.

Michael Green: But in a sense, Indonesia is not like Mexico or Turkey or Korea because in the immediate neighborhood you live in, you are the big power. Indonesia could be the hegemonic power of Southeast Asia and a lot of people in Washington, Canberra and Tokyo would actually like to see Indonesia have that kind of ambition. Is that also something that's too complicated or do people in Jakarta start thinking in those terms?

Dino Djalal: Well, there are two instincts at work when it comes to Southeast Asia. The first instinct is to lead Southeast Asia because we always say we're the largest country there, largest population, largest area and largest economy and so on. But at the same time, we know if we lead Southeast Asia too much out in the front, then that will be problematic, so this is why we always say the concept of equality is critical to our leadership in region, which means we may be much bigger than Singapore or Timor-Leste but when we talk to them, we are as equal with Brunei and so on. And that has been a principle that was upheld by Suharto, and this is, I remember reading Lee Kuan Yew's memoir, and he stated that this was his main strategic ambition when dealing with Suharto, securing dispensable or notion of equality between Indonesia and Singapore. So that's

what we wanted to do, what we want to lead, but also we want humbly to be the equal of all Southeast Asian nations.

Michael Green: So ASEAN centrality, the idea that multilateral diplomacy in Asia architecture should be centered on ASEAN and therefore on the consensus based approach of the 10 member states. That's the talking point for every member of ASEAN, but how seriously do people in Jakarta take ASEAN? I mean, I get different vibes. ASEAN is a critical part of this equal view of neighboring states that you described, it's consistent with non-alignment, but Indonesia is the biggest country in ASEAN and sometimes I get the feeling reading Indonesian scholars that they feel a little bit constrained by ASEAN and ready to move beyond it. What's the thinking about ASEAN?

Dino Djalal: Indonesia and ASEAN really depends on who the president is. So when I served president SBY, he was very determined that Indonesia should be a leader in ASEAN, so a lot of initiatives came from Indonesia. President Jokowi is a different kind of president, he was not a foreign policy president as he admits himself. He had a different way of functioning within ASEAN compared to President SBY, but still in Indonesia the present foreign minister talks a lot about collective leadership for example, and a lot of ASEAN still expect Indonesia to lead.

Michael Green: Was it good politics for SBY to convey that kind of ambition in domestic politics or is it purely his own vision?

Dino Djalal: Well, he wanted Indonesia to become a regional power and global player. So he thought that was a responsibility for Indonesia, a duty for Indonesia.

Michael Green: And that's not true with the current Jokowi government in the same way.

Dino Djalal: Yeah, no, the priorities are different. President Jokowi in some way is similar to other countries, including United States are aware the priority is more domestic. He doesn't call it Indonesia first, but still everything is about domestic considerations. He's a man in a hurry to fulfill his election promises, which is mostly economic.

Michael Green: And very big, very big ambitious promises where he's making only limited progress, I think most international observers would say, but with a second term and a chance to try to do more.

Dino Djalal: And I would add that, I do think Indonesia should always pursue an ASEAN first foreign policy. In response to your question, I know that there are people who say, let's go to G20, that should be our priority and so on and so on, but G20 has limitations. And what makes Indonesia relevant elsewhere is our ability to say, not just Indonesia is number fourth in population in the world and so on, but the fact that if you want to engage Southeast Asia, you have to engage Indonesia primarily as a largest country and so on. So ASEAN first strategy adds

to our strategic importance to the rest of the world and whoever is in power, they should play that card.

Michael Green: Indonesia doesn't have formal allies, but you have friends and the relations with big powers and neighboring countries have changed for example, Australia relations, we're pretty good right now compared to 25 years ago. Who are Indonesia's friends? Japan's another one where I think relations have really improved, and for your president SBY that was a real priority. How would you characterize the countries where friendship has increased in recent years and then countries where it's become a little more complicated?

Dino Djalal: The closest, definitely China no doubt about it, and especially in the last five years.

Michael Green: Closest in what sense?

Dino Djalal: Closest economically, Indonesia now trades with China almost three times more than we do with the United States. Chinese tourists to Indonesia is more than Japanese, American and Australian and Russian tourists combined, and China-

Michael Green: But Chinese PLA ships and coast guard ships are entering your claimed waters, dwelling near your oil exploration, and there is of course a history of anti-Chinese pogroms really going back to the '60s and '70s in Indonesia, so are you describing the people's feelings towards China or the-?

Dino Djalal: No, I'm saying the most impactful country now to Indonesia.

Michael Green: Impactful.

Dino Djalal: Yeah, in economic terms.

Michael Green: How about friendship and trust?

Dino Djalal: Now that remains a work in progress, especially with what happened in Natuna recently, there is a lot of thinking and rebalancing being thought of in Jakarta.

Michael Green: I was in Jakarta two months ago and saw some senior level people and heard a lot about Natuna and the Chinese ships were being reinforced and supplied from the artificial islands in the South China sea that they built, and there was a real concern that this might be the new normal. Japan-

Dino Djalal: Just one quick point on that China, Indonesians find it very weird that a country that we studied in the book to be situated way, way up North, now is actually a next-door neighbor because of what they claim to be nine-dash line and North Natuna sea overlapping and so on, so that explains the anger in Indonesia and Beijing should understand it. What if Indonesia was claiming waters off Hainan for example, the Chinese would go nuts, the mood in Indonesia in the last few

weeks was like that, people were like, seriously the Chinese are claiming ours? There's a disbelief about that. So I think we're going to see a little bit or a lot of rebalancing being done from Jakarta.

Michael Green: Without going to form alliances, but who are the countries Indonesia might rebalance towards?

Dino Djalal: Well obviously the United States. In the last five years President Jokowi has not visited the White House, I think if you look at all Southeast Asian leaders, it's probably only Jokowi and Duterte, and president Trump has not visited Indonesia. I think you'll see some changes in efforts at some diplomatic bilateral visits.

Michael Green: Primarily to signal Beijing.

Dino Djalal: Yes.

Michael Green: And does Japan or Australia do they plan, or India do they plan on-

Dino Djalal: In Indonesia, if you ask me what is the most intensive rivalry, is not U.S.-China, it's China-Japan.

Michael Green: Interesting.

Dino Djalal: And we saw this in the railway Jakarta-Bandung and so on-

Michael Green: Where the Japanese were proposing a bullet train and the Chinese proposing a bullet train, Chinese, did they win? It's not clear to me.

Dino Djalal: They won now, the Jakarta-Bandung they say by next year it will be completed or so '22 or '21. But the Japanese are getting the longer one now, the Jakarta-Surabaya, and so on. There's a lot of efforts to woo Japanese investment in Indonesia and Indonesia welcomes the shift in Japan's defense posture.

Michael Green: I remember when you were working for President SBY, he welcomed Prime Minister Abe's change in the interpretation of the constitution to allow collective defense. Quite a change from when the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka visited Indonesia in the early '70s and his motorcade was stoned, also Australia.

Dino Djalal: But Australia is very close. The closest Western nation to Indonesia now is Australia.

Michael Green: Not just geographically, but you mean in terms of feelings of people?

Dino Djalal: Yeah, because I think Australians, they have a lot of officials who go to Indonesia, who understand Indonesia, who deal with Indonesia, whereas in the

United States now you look at the administration, I think you're going to have hard time finding somebody who knows Indonesia from long time experience and so on. And the will in Canberra towards Indonesia in strategic imperatives is much stronger to have close relations with Indonesia, I mean that's why Jokowi is coming here and speaking in the parliament in a few days coming.

Michael Green: Here in Australia where we are. I think part of that must've been Australian policy changes too, 25, 30 years ago, Australian defense policy was primarily focused on Indonesia. For Americans and for Washington, what's the most ambitious the U.S. should be for U.S.-Indonesia relations? It's not going to be an ally like Japan or Australia obviously, it's probably not going to be a strategic partnership like India or could it? How far could the relationship go? And what does the U.S. have to do to get Indonesia right? What do we have to do to get our policy right on Indonesia?

Dino Djalal: First we already have a good strategic and comprehensive partnership, Indonesia and U.S., so the framework is there. But what is important within that framework is the institutional relationships, how often is the state department or Pentagon talk to their counterparts in Indonesia? At what level? And is there a strategic trust that should be re-earned? The strategic trust was...I remember when I was in Washington. We talk all the time and we had good team on both sides and we talk about global issues together and we talk on the same length. These kinds of things have to be re-earned, every administration they have to redo it, otherwise, you know-

Michael Green: And this administration has to earn it and Jokowi administration also I guess has to earn it.

Dino Djalal: Both sides, yes. The policy gap in the last two years or so, the Jokowi's intention to win second term, and especially when the Islamic votes, that kept him away from Washington because when president Trump moved embassy to Jerusalem, that became a grassroots issue.

Michael Green: That was a big problem for our relationship.

Dino Djalal: Yes. 1 million people on the streets and then all Islamic groups are saying, look, if you move closer on this or you support the U.S. move on this, then you're going to pay electorally. For two years and especially during campaign Jokowi kept Washington at an arm's length, he would never be seen embracing, hugging President Trump.

Michael Green: I wonder if the Trump administration even considered the impact this move would have on what they say as the most important strategic challenges, the rise of China and relations with countries like Indonesia or Malaysia, but we were in the timeout chair, now I have an opportunity to rebuild that trust.

Dino Djalal: Yeah. Okay. I'll be honest with you.

Michael Green: Please.

Dino Djalal: There is a fear as Indonesia look at Washington. Maybe it's best for us to be at an arm's length because if you get closer, you get clobbered, clobbered with terrorists, we're taking away the economic incentives that were within the relationship.

Michael Green: Is this particular to the Trump administration?

Dino Djalal: Yes. So there is that concern and White House needs to send the signal, look, let's get closer and you don't need to worry about it. There is no, what do you call, negative consequence of getting closer. But Washington should look at what China has done in the last 10, 20 years or so and ask how can we be as impactful to Indonesia as China has been or is doing now here?

Michael Green: In the Bush administration, you mentioned you were in Washington, Karen Brooks was there, leading Indonesia expert in the White House, Bob Zoellick at USTR and then Deputy Secretary of State. The Obama administration Indonesia desk officer was president Obama, do you think people in Jakarta know who their go-to guy is in the Trump administration?

Dino Djalal: No.

Michael Green: Is there somebody-

Dino Djalal: In the White House, so we hardly have a connection there, in the State Department the position has been vacant for quite some time, and so on. As I said earlier, there's hardly a strong Asia hand at the relevant level in Pentagon and State Department, maybe I'm wrong on that, but that seems to be a procession at least compared to...

Michael Green: What I mean, It's a mathematical fact that Trump administration has been very slow to get people into these jobs and they've had trouble keeping them in the jobs.

Dino Djalal: Sorry, and on top of that America first.

Michael Green: It's just too unpredictable and people are afraid of getting burned?

Dino Djalal: We just not used to the message America first, because we see America throughout historical periods as a giver. It's a bit hard to digest America first and then America wants to play leadership in the region, so how do you square these two tendencies?

Michael Green: And then there's the question of how the U.S....or more partnership with the U.S. can help Indonesia with the security challenges people worry about. So there's a geopolitical concern about China, you mentioned in the U.S.

relationship and Japan, Australia, can be important for that. Are people still worried about terrorism? I was struck when I was in Jakarta, how much people talked about concerns about fighters returning from Syria, the new cabinet put a military man in charge of religious affairs for the first time is to be also candid with you and you knew this, after 9/11 we were very worried about Indonesia and terrorism, maybe too worried but very worried and that's kind of receded. But my sense is maybe there's a concern now in Jakarta about returning fighters and extremism and terror.

Dino Djalal: Yeah, we had quite a few people fighting in ISIS and many of them have returned and the government is keeping a close watch on them, they cannot be arrested due to our law and so on. Definitely what we see is a new trends in terrorism in Indonesia, the last one being a suicide family bomber who bomb two churches in Surabaya. And this also reflects a trend whereby instead of attacking a mall and shooting everybody or bombing everybody, they should add members of a particular religion who are praying in the house of worship. We started the same time in New Zealand where Muslims were shot in mosque and then in Sri Lanka as well, Christians were shot or bombed in churches.

Dino Djalal: So we seeing mutated terrorist cells and someone attacking non-Muslims in their house of worship. But what is also of concern, is the way terrorists are recruited now, before it took some time, like two years before you get baptized, so to speak, now you can do it online and they can happen it within less than a month and before you had to go to military training and jungle and so on, and now you don't have to do it anymore, so there's a lot of new transformations of how the terrorists are adapting themselves.

Michael Green: So Indonesia is the third largest democracy in the world, has hosted the Bali Democracy Forum, but it has this tension between that identity and non-alignment. How important is democracy to Indonesia's foreign policy identity?

Dino Djalal: Okay, this is interesting question because for the U.S. promoting democracy is part of your values that you want to-

Michael Green: Now we say supporting democracy to be a little more modest.

Dino Djalal: India, I hope my friends in India, forgive me for saying this, India, I think have an approach whereby democracy is ours but we are very careful about exporting democracies to other countries. I think Indonesia is halfway within the U.S. and India, we want to promote democratic values, but we are very careful about doing it. I think Myanmar is a good case, we push for democracy, but the methodology was through a private correspondence between president SBY and senior general Than Shwe at the time, I knew because I was handling the personal correspondence.

Michael Green: Interesting, so it's quiet, face matters.

- Dino Djalal: Yes.
- Michael Green: But it's there?
- Dino Djalal: It's there and we push, we say this is what you need to do, but we don't do it for the gallery, we don't go public with it.
- Michael Green: Look Pak Dino Djalal, you are a great asset for your country and for Indonesia's relationship with the U.S. and for the many thousands of young Indonesians who are learning about foreign policy in the world. I'm a little jealous, I don't know if I could get a couple thousand people at Georgetown to my class even if I had a rock band, keep up the good work.
- Dino Djalal: Thank you.
- Michael Green: Thanks for helping us figure out Indonesian's role on the Chessboard.
- Dino Djalal: Thank you Mike, my pleasure.
- Andrew Schwartz: Thanks for listening, for more on strategy and the age of programs work, visit the CSIS website at csis.org and click on the Asia program page.