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SUHARTO

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

Suharto is synonymous with modern Indonesia. He came to the leadership of Indonesia amidst extreme social upheaval and mass violence in 1966 and established an enduring regime known as the 'New Order'. He remained in command of the world's fourth most populous country until his dramatic fall from power in 1998. This book provides fascinating insights into a man who rose from humble beginnings to exert extraordinary power over a complex and volatile nation. He presented himself as an infallible father of Indonesia, yet he remained a mysterious and puzzling figure. He sought to transform Indonesia into a strong, united and economically prosperous nation, but he is remembered today for human rights abuses and profound corruption. The system of power he created collapsed with his decline, and he left a problematic legacy for Indonesia's current leaders as they seek to create a new beginning for their country.

R. E. ELSON is Professor in the School of Asian and International Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane. One of the leading historians of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, he has written on the social impact of the sugar industry in Java, a general history of the peasantry in Southeast Asia and was a contributor to *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*.

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Preface

IN A CURIOUS WAY, it is unfortunate that Suharto fell from power so dramatically, in so violent a context, and with such immediately perturbing consequences for Indonesia. Because he ruled so long and, at his height, with such complete and magisterial authority, Indonesia's multiple and apparently intractable problems at the end of the 1990s were laid at his door. It was he who had created a closed and fearful system of institutionalised state authoritarianism, he who had clothed his people in the immobilising ideological torpor of Pancasila, he who had fleeced the country for the sake of his horrible children and his cronies and flunkies. He, indeed, was the reason why Indonesia needed *reformasi total* and a new and more humane beginning. His going presented the long-awaited opportunity to cast off and forever commit to oblivion a shameful chapter in modern Indonesian history.

Such a view is unfortunate not just because the popular foregrounding of his sullied reputation makes longer-term assessment of his legacy more difficult. More important, it renders an analysis of his extraordinary rule, and the means by which he achieved it, strangely irrelevant. Indonesia, it seems, just wants to forget Suharto and his works, and to rationalise the New Order as an aberration from a more wholesome historical trajectory.

This is an understandable attitude. It is also superficial. Whatever moral judgements one might wish to cast on his methods and behaviour, Suharto was undeniably one of the most significant figures of twentieth-century Asia. Within his domestic domain, according to one commentator, 'Suharto has done more to shape Indonesian society than any other figure in the country's history'.¹ He came to power, unknown and unexpectedly, in controversial and chaotic circumstances. Slowly, cautiously, deliberately, he constructed a wholly new Indonesia, one with a growing sense of its identity and purpose, with an economy which developed at a rate and (some hiccups aside) with a constancy which astounded the world. He contrived, with a sense of destiny, a steely purpose and an unwavering will, and seemingly against all the odds, to transform his sinking, impoverished, dishevelled, politically polarised and culturally fragmented country into something

that appeared to be, at the height of his power, a dynamic and formidable success story and a shining example of hope to other developing nations.

That he could so wholly and completely bring so erratic, long-suffering and fabricated a nation as Indonesia to his purpose was an extraordinary achievement. That he could do so for so long seems, on the surface, miraculous. This book attempts to tell the story of how Suharto managed such a feat and – because he came to personify so much of the way in which the modern Indonesian polity came to work – in so doing to portray something of the essential nature of modern Indonesian political practice.

The prospect of a long and defining Suharto era seemed unlikely when the 44-year-old emerged from relative obscurity in the wake of the carnage and uproar caused by the events of 1 October 1965. Despite his military seniority (the rank of major-general and the status of standing deputy to the army commander, Achmad Yani), Suharto was seen as a reserved, introspective and quietly undemonstrative man. Of lowly Javanese background and limited education, he had a reputation as a tough and successful field officer and troop commander, but he seemed to lack any trace of charisma, political flair or social gaiety. He seemed the kind of man more visionary types like to have on hand to get their dreams implemented: dour, reliable, uncomplaining, a person who, properly instructed and mandated, would carry through a designated task to a successful completion. He seemed not at all to be a leader.

Yet lead he did, gathering confidence, demonstrating hitherto unappreciated skills of charm and persuasion and, eventually, decisiveness, and also tactical and strategic skills of the highest order. They allowed him to climb to the top of the mountain, and to stay at the peak for more than three decades. Before age and weariness, together with a gathering arrogance, robbed him of his political acumen, it seemed that Indonesia was unimaginable without the presence of its rotund, ever-smiling president and, more important, that its future was inextricably identified with his own enduring mastery. He became one of the most famous and successful political leaders in the world, as comfortable and competent with the mighty and powerful as he was with his own citizenry.

Even at the very heights of his power and visibility, however, Suharto remained enigmatic. For so prominent a figure, one whose professional life was wholly led in the public domain, his remoteness and inaccessibility were astounding. He was the most privately silent of public men. No one, not even the closest of his working colleagues, knew with any certainty what drove him; no one could safely predict how he might react to particular circumstances, what he might be thinking, or what tactical moves he was hatching behind those strong eyes. His personality remained elusive, masked by an impeccable charm and the broad smile which became his trademark. He proved just as cryptic to the journalists and academics who tried to understand him. One experienced foreign commentator found ‘the president himself ... the most difficult and least accessible area of analysis in Indonesia’,² while a scholar remarked in the early 1990s that, ‘even after twenty-five years of thoroughly dominating his “New Order” regime, President Soeharto enjoys only a spectral presence in the social science literature on Indonesia’.³

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Different writers have employed different approaches in their efforts to penetrate the wall of unknowing that surrounded Suharto. Some saw him in terms of ruthless and all-encompassing political ambition; thus, in one account, 'Indonesian politics since 1965 are best understood in terms of a totalitarian ambition'.⁴ His relentless, unscrupulous drive for power above everything else shapes such analyses. Others have chosen culture and tradition as their analytical gateway to the ineffably Javanese Suharto. Typically, in such accounts, Javanese culture is 'the well-spring not just for the style of the current president and his government, but also for ... the conceptions that underpin the logic of the Indonesian state'.⁵ Despite their usefulness, there sometimes appears in such culturally grounded accounts the tendency to regard Javanese culture as 'an all-purpose explanation for complex and opaque behaviour'.⁶ Others again have come to see him as a creator and natural centre of a certain kind of bureaucratic patrimonialism, so that 'meaningful power [was] obtained through interpersonal competition in the elite circle in closest physical proximity to the president'.⁷

All these approaches have their merits, but none of them seems of itself capable of making incisive inroads into the complexity and hiddenness of the man. The fundamental assumption of this book is that Suharto can be understood, and that the best tool for that analysis is narrative history – the detailed, nuanced exposition of the complex and changing dialectic of idea, circumstance and milieu in Suharto's life and career. The reader, therefore, will find no explicit theoretical formulations or models to drive the analysis; there is, rather, a reflectiveness on how and why Suharto mapped, negotiated and organised the changing circumstances of his life and how those circumstances imposed themselves on him.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEARCHING FOR SUHARTO

Given Suharto's centrality to Indonesia and its politics – 'no study of contemporary Indonesian politics can fail to consider President Soeharto who has dominated Indonesian national life for thirty years'⁸ – it is in one way surprising that he has received so little systematic biographical attention. But tracking and probing Suharto is no simple matter. The range and flavour of the sources mirror his personal elusiveness, notwithstanding the renown he came to enjoy. The documentary record is uneven, to say the least. He appears not at all until the middle 1940s, and then only as an insignificant figure in the greater drama of the revolutionary struggle, occasionally mentioned in newspaper reports, and his name routinely listed in the fastidiously organised (if pretentiously titled) Dutch military intelligence reports of the Indonesian Army's 'order of battle'.⁹ His shadowy and patchy appearances in the Indonesian newspaper record of the 1950s tell us little about him. His rise to public notability – even then a limited notability – came only with his leading role in the military side of the West Irian campaign. Only with his decisive intervention on the morning of 1 October 1965 does he obtain real prominence, but again he enjoys only a ghostly presence in the contemporary reporting. Thereafter, of course, he is famous; no day goes by without

his being mentioned in some capacity, greeting heads of state, delivering speeches, conferring with colleagues.

But as his New Order grew in authoritarian intensity, and as we learn more of his daily activities and read ever-longer reports of his utterances, the mystery of the man remains. It is a mystery heightened by the New Order's propaganda machine, which shielded him almost completely from criticism and which, especially from the time of his true ascendancy from the early 1980s, began to magnify him into a figure of singular, remote and heroic proportions. Such efforts reached their height in his 1989 autobiography, *My thoughts, words, and deeds*, in which he appears as in a lonely moonscape populated only by himself, in which he alone is the fount of wisdom and the source of Indonesia's true direction.¹⁰ The six-volume collection of his 'diaries', running from 1965 to 1993, performs a similar hagiographic task.¹¹ Suharto's effort at self-aggrandisement, however, is not as self-serving as he would have wished; in presenting himself so fully formed, so much in control, he denies us insights into his true strengths: his nimbleness of mind, his patiently modulated indecisiveness, his voracious capacity to learn from his personal past and from his contemporaries.

How might one escape from what might otherwise be the strangling, dutiful and dreary prose of New Order reporting to search for the real man? There are, unfortunately, no archives accessible which might detail his thinking and the base mechanics of his politics and policies. Their absence can be compensated for, partly at least, by interviews (both the direct and reported kinds) with his contemporaries, but they present their own difficulties. Past interactions are distorted through the lenses of current interests and the natural tendency to recreate the past to magnify the interviewee's influence (or, as the case may be, to diminish it). The difficulty becomes the greater because the period in which the research for this book was undertaken is neatly divided by the dramatic events of May 1998. While it might be expected that interviews conducted under New Order orthodoxy might reveal little compared to those done in the unfettered atmosphere of the post-Suharto era, in fact the scrambling for self-justification and distancing from problematic pasts engaged in by many elite players in the post-fall period make the information gleaned from them just as problematic. To this problem, one scholar remarks with considerable justification, must be added the fact that 'Indonesian politics and public debate had always had an element of untruthfulness, lack of factual evidence, wilful distortion, plotting, double-dealing, and groundless insinuation in it'.¹² There is, fortunately, a considerable quantity of high-quality foreign analysis of modern and contemporary Indonesia, both of a journalistic and academic kind (much of it the work of Australians), against which such material can be read.

In the end, however, historians must view this mountain of grist with a jaundiced, critical and sensitive eye, and do their best to draw balanced, measured and sensible conclusions from it. I have sought to achieve this goal but am embarrassingly conscious both of the limitations of my data gathering (pursuing all that has been written and spoken about Suharto would devour many lifetimes) and even more of the halting and provisional nature of my conclusions. I can but

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hope that this early, stumbling attempt to explore the significance of Suharto’s remarkable life for the history of Indonesia may generate other efforts to comprehend and evaluate so elusive a personality. No matter how many Indonesians may wish to forget him, there is no escaping his profound and far-reaching legacy. Indonesians must seek to understand and be reconciled with that legacy before they can move forward.

To conclude on a technicality: the spelling of Indonesian personal names is a difficult matter. For the sake of simplicity and consistency I have rendered them in the text (but not in the Acknowledgements) according to the current mode of spelling (thus, Suharto not Soeharto, Selo Sumarjan not Selo Soemardjan). Readers should be aware that under this spelling regime ‘c’ is pronounced as ‘ch’.

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SEARCHING FOR SO large and imposing a subject as Suharto has placed me in the debt of a proportionately large and often imposing group of people and institutions. The Australian Research Council granted me the resources needed for travel and to free me for periods of uninterrupted reflection and writing. Numerous archives and libraries provided access to rich collections, and assisted me in finding my way through them: The Centraal Archiefdepot of the Ministerie van Defensie, Rijswijk (especially S. Martijn), the Sectie Militaire Geschiedenis, Koninklijk Landmacht, The Hague (especially P. M. H. Groen), the Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, The Hague (especially R. J. H. van Laak), the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam (especially Elly Touwen), the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague (especially Francien van Aanrooij and Sierk Plantinga), the Library of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden, the Griffith University Library (especially Christine Cordwell), the University of Queensland Library, the National Library of Australia (especially Ralph Sanderson), the Menzies Library at the Australian National University (especially George Miller), the Monash University Library (especially Helen Soemardjo), the Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta (especially Paul Permadi), and the Library of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta. I thank them all for their enthusiastic and skilled assistance.

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Any errors are, of course, my own doing.
On a personal note, I want to record my deepest gratitude to my beloved wife and children, Elizabeth, Charles, Kathryn, Brigid, Jane, Gretchen and Jerome, who put up with me, and without me, as I wrestled with Suharto.

Timeline

1921	
8 June	Suharto born in Kemusuk (Central Java), to Kertosudiro and Sukirah
1923	
23 August	Birth of Siti Hartinah, future wife of Suharto
1940	
1 June	Suharto accepted at KNIL military school, Gombong; assigned to Battalion XIII at Rampal, near Malang; duty at Gresik
2 December	Suharto accepted at Military Cadre School, Gombong
1942	
March	Japanese invasion of Java
1 November	Suharto joins Japanese-sponsored police force, Yogyakarta
1943	
October	Suharto joins Peta; undertakes platoon commander course, Yogyakarta
1944	
c. April	Suharto undertakes company commander course, Bogor
1945	
17 August	Indonesian proclamation of independence
29 September	Arrival of Allied troops in Java
October	Suharto joins BKR; involved in clashes with Allied troops
1946	
January?	Suharto appointed lt. col. and commander of Regiment III
2–3 July	Suharto involvement in 3 July affair
12 November	Linggajati agreement
November	Suharto commander of 22nd Regiment, Division III (Yogya)
1947	
21 July	First Dutch ‘police action’
26 December	Suharto marries Siti Hartinah

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1948

- 17 January Renville agreement
- 18 September Madiun revolt
- 19 December Second Dutch 'police action'

1949

- 23 January Birth of daughter Siti Hardiyanti Hastuti (Tutut)
- 1 March General assault on Yogyakarta
- 7 May Rum-Van Royen agreement
- 27 December Sovereignty transferred to Republic of the United States of Indonesia

1950

- January? Suharto confirmed as lt. col. of TNI
- 26 April Suharto commander of Garuda Mataram Brigade, Makasar
- 17 August Formation of unitary Republic of Indonesia
- September Suharto commander of Prince Mangkubumi Brigade, Yogya

1951

- 1 May Birth of son Sigit Haryoyudanto
- 15 November Suharto commander of Pragola Brigade, Salatiga
- 8 December Rebellion of Battalion 426

1952

- October 17 October affair

1953

- 1 March Suharto commander of Infantry Regiment 15, Solo
- 23 July Birth of son Bambang Trihatmojo

1955

- February Army reconciliation conference in Yogya
- April Afro-Asian conference in Bandung
- September First parliamentary elections

1956

- 1 March Suharto chief of staff of Diponegoro Division, Semarang
- September Suharto assumes command of Diponegoro Division
- December Regional military coups in Sumatra

1957

- 1 January Suharto promoted to colonel
- 2 March Proclamation of Permesta in Sulawesi
- March Army-led councils take over in East Indonesia
- 14 March Declaration of State of War and Siege
- May Establishment of National Council by emergency decree
- 29 November West Irian vote fails in UN; seizure of Dutch businesses

1958

- 15 February Proclamation of PRRI
- 17 February Permesta rebellion

1959

- 14 April Birth of daughter Siti Hedyati Haryadi (Titiek)

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- 5 July Constituent Assembly dissolved; 1945 Constitution reintroduced
- 9 July Sukarno appoints 43-member cabinet with self as prime minister
- October Suharto removed from Diponegoro command and posted to SSKAD
- 1960**
- 1 January Suharto promoted to brigadier-general
- 5 March Sukarno suspends elected parliament
- 25 June Installation of newly appointed DPR
- September Sukarno appoints provisional MPR; Suharto commander of Army Reserve Corps I
- December Suharto deputy I (operations) to army chief of staff
- 1961**
- 1 March Suharto appointed commander of Caduad
- June Suharto's first overseas trip
- 1 October Suharto commander of Army Air Defence Command
- 1962**
- 9 January Suharto appointed Mandala commander, promoted to maj.-gen.
- 23 January Suharto deputy commander of East Indonesia Territory
- 15 July Birth of son Hutomo Mandala Putra (Tommy)
- 15 August Agreement on West Irian transfer to Indonesia
- late Beginning of Confrontation against Malaysia
- 1963**
- 1 March Suharto commander of Kostrad
- May MPRS makes Sukarno President for Life
- 1964**
- 23 August Birth of daughter Siti Hutami Endang Adiningsih (Mamiek)
- 1965**
- 1 January Suharto first deputy commander, Kolaga; Indonesia leaves UN
- 1 October 'Coup attempt' of 30 September Movement
- 10 October Formation of Kopkamtib
- 14 October Suharto appointed army commander, promoted to lt. gen.
- 25 October Formation of student action front (KAMI)
- October Beginning of massacres
- 1966**
- 10 January KAMI campaign of demonstrations begins
- 11 March Supersemar
- 12 March PKI banned
- 18 March Arrest and dismissal of 15 cabinet ministers
- 27 March New cabinet, headed by 6-man team
- 25 July Ampera cabinet; Suharto appointed chair of presidium
- 28 July Suharto promoted to general
- 11 August Normalisation of Indonesia–Malaysia relations
- 28 September Indonesia readmitted to UN
- 3 October Economic stabilisation measures

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TIMELINE

1967

- 10 January Foreign Investment Law
- 22 February Sukarno transfers powers to Suharto
- 12 March Suharto appointed acting president by MPRS
- August Indonesia founding member of ASEAN
- October Freezing of relations with China

1968

- 27 March Suharto sworn in as full president
- 6 June First Development Cabinet appointed

1969

- 1 April First Five-Year Development Plan begins
- July–August 'Act of free choice' in West Irian
- 16 September West Irian declared an autonomous region of Indonesia
- 22 November General Election law passed by DPR-GR

1970

- January Student protests against corruption
- 31 January Appointment of Commission of Four on Corruption
- 21 June Death of Sukarno
- 6 September Suharto attends Non-Aligned Movement conference in Lusaka

1971

- 5 July First New Order parliamentary elections, won by Golkar (62.8%)

1973

- Beginning of oil boom
- 8 January Muslim parties merged into PPP
- 10 January Non-Muslim parties merged to form PDI
- 23 March Suharto inaugurated by MPR as president for second term (Sultan of Yogyakarta, vice-president)
- 27 March Second Development Cabinet formed
- 5 August Anti-Chinese riots in Bandung

1974

- 15 January Malari riots on visit of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka

1975

- 10 August UDT coup in Dili
- 6 October Beginning of Indonesian covert war in East Timor
- 28 November Fretilin declares independence of East Timor
- 7 December Formal Indonesian invasion of East Timor

1976

- 3 March Ibnu Sutowo dismissed as Pertamina director
- 17 July East Timor integrated into Indonesia as 27th province
- September Sawito plot uncovered

1977

- 2 May Second New Order elections: Golkar (62.1%), PPP (29.3%), PDI (8.6%)

1978

- 20 January Closure of leading newspapers; troops sent onto campuses

22 March	Suharto president for third term (Adam Malik, vice-president); MPR approves decree on Pancasila (P-4)
29 March	Third Development Cabinet formed
15 November	Devaluation of rupiah
1980	
14 March	Death of Hatta
13 May	Petition of 50
1982	
18 March	Election riot, Banteng Square (Golkar rally)
4 May	Third New Order elections: Golkar (64.2%), PPP (28%), PDI (7.9%)
1983	
March	Beginning of ‘mysterious killings’ (Petrus)
10 March	MPR names Suharto ‘Father of Development’.
11 March	Suharto president for fourth term (Umar Wirahadikusumah, vice-president)
16 March	Fourth Development Cabinet formed
30 March	Devaluation of rupiah by 27.6%
1984	
12 September	Unrest and shootings in Tanjung Priok (Jakarta)
1985	
May	All social organisations required to adopt Pancasila as sole foundation
14 November	Suharto addresses FAO meeting in Rome
1986	
12 September	Devaluation of rupiah
9 November	Suharto names Sukarno and Hatta independence proclamation heroes
1987	
23 April	Fourth New Order elections: Golkar (73.2%), PPP (16%), PDI (10.9%)
1988	
11 March	Suharto president for fifth term (Sudharmono, vice-president)
March	Fifth Development Cabinet formed
5 September	Kopkamtib replaced by Bakorstanas
27 October	Deregulation of banking
December	East Timor declared opened
1989	
23 February	Suharto meets Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen
September	Suharto visits Soviet Union
1990	
8 August	Normalisation of relations with China
16 August	Suharto speech on democracy and openness
5 December	ICMI established

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1991

- April Establishment of Democracy Forum
- June Suharto pilgrimage to Mecca
- September Indonesia chosen as leader of Non-Aligned Movement
- 12 November Massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor

1992

- 9 June Fifth New Order elections: Golkar (68.1%), PPP (17%), PDI (14.9%)

1993

- 11 March Suharto begins sixth term as president (Try Sutrisno, vice-president)
- March Sixth Development Cabinet formed
- May Xanana Gusmao sentenced to life imprisonment (later commuted to 20 years)
- December Megawati voted chair of PDI; finally endorsed

1994

- April Riots in Medan
- 22 June Banning of *Tempo*, *De Tik*, and *Editor*
- November Indonesia hosts APEC summit

1995

- 18 December Indonesia signs defence pact with Australia

1996

- 28 April Death of Suharto's wife, Ibu Tien
- 20–22 June Megawati ousted from PDI leadership (Suryadi elected leader)
- 27 July Anti-PDI (Megawati) disturbances in Jakarta
- October Nobel Peace Prize to Bishop Carlos Belo and Jose Ramos Horta
- 26 December Anti-Chinese riots in Tasikmalaya

1997

- 30 January Anti-Chinese riots in Rengasdengklok
- January–February Dayak massacres of Madurese in West Kalimantan
- 23 May Election riot in Banjarmasin; shopping mall fire kills >100
- 29 May Sixth New Order elections: Golkar (74%), PPP (23%), PDI (3%)
- July Beginning of currency crisis and severe economic slump
- July–November Forest fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan
- October IMF bailout package
- December Suharto suffers mild stroke

1998

- 15 January Second IMF bailout package
- 11 March Suharto president for seventh term (B. J. Habibie, vice-president)
- March Seventh Development Cabinet formed
- 12 May Four students shot dead at Trisakti University
- 13–15 May Violent riots in Jakarta

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18 May	Suharto's resignation called for; students occupy DPR/MPR
21 May	Suharto resigns; Habibie sworn in as president
November	MPR calls for investigation into Suharto's wealth
1999	
7 June	Elections for parliament and local assemblies
20 October	Abdurrahman Wahid elected president (Megawati, vice-president)
2000	
April	Suharto placed under city arrest
29 May	Suharto under house arrest
August	Charges of corruption laid against Suharto
28 September	Charges dismissed on grounds of ill health



