

INTERVIEW

**Richard Tanter:**

**In 1965, a leftist  
Indonesia was a military  
and political threat**

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## INTERVIEW

**I**n Richard Tanter's view, Indonesia may not have changed much. Two weeks ago, he arrived from Australia to be a speaker in a panel discussion titled *Indonesia & The World 1959-1969* at the Goethe Institute in Jakarta. It was attended by political scientists from a number of countries, who came to discuss and debate the 1965 incidents from the perspectives of their respective countries.

Tanter was a bit surprised that the G30S (abbreviated reference to the September 30, 1965 movement) events still 'haunted' a few people. "It's very strange that an academic event should need police protection," commented Tanter, who is director of the Nautilus Institute in Australia. Attending the discussions were also scholars Bradley Simpson, John Roosa and Bernd Schafer, whose arrival triggered the protest of a group of people. The event itself also ran into problems when the police at first questioned its registration.

Reportedly, the event at the Goethe Institute was monitored by the intelligence apparatus. Does this indicate they are still acting as they did during the New Order? Tanter would not respond to this question, insisting he has not been studying the intelligence community of late.

The world of intelligence is not new to Tanter. His doctoral dissertation submitted to Monash University was on the Indonesian intelligence during the 1966-1989 period. Before that, he had written quite a bit about East Timor. In fact, it was because of his critical writings on East Timor that Tanter was once banned from entering Indonesia.

Today, Tanter is doing research on regional security and nuclear issues. He is interested in Indonesia's efforts to build a nuclear power generator at Muria, Central Java. He said Indonesia still faced basic problems with regards to a nuclear project, and that is information, transparency and regulation. According to Tanter, there is no detailed public information on this project.

On Thursday, last week, Tanter met with Tempo reporters Purwani Diyah Prabandari, Yandi M. Rofiyandi and photographer Jacky Rachmansyah for an interview, at his hotel in Kemang, South Jakarta. Excerpts:

**Students' theatrical rally against nuclear power generation in Jalan Pahlawan, Semarang, Central Java.**

*A reminder to the government of the dangers of a Chernobyl disaster.*



**What lessons were learnt from the *Indonesia & The World 1959-1969* panel discussion at the Goethe Institute?**

I think the event at Goethe Institute was extraordinary. It must not have been easy for the Institute and the German government to organize it. Goethe Institute director, Franz Xavier Augustin said we were here to speak on culture. But we can't discuss culture without including history. We cannot think of history without memory. I think this way is most constructive for Indonesians. It has been quite traumatic. Yet, here we are, having a scientific discussion, an exhibition and even an arts performance. This is an amazing achievement by Goethe.

**Some people reject this event because they think it promotes communism.**

I felt surprised that an academic event like this needed police protection. But the Islamic Youth Movement did protest in front of Goethe Institute. I admire the step taken by the Goethe Institute and the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung to initiate a dialog with the public [on this issue].

**The incident is reminiscent of the New Order, when the police and intelligence used to restrict public discussions on communism.**

I used to research the intelligence community during the New Order. I am not monitoring it today, so I cannot comment on that matter.

**Is it true the intelligence community has not changed, that it's still like the one under the New Order?**

I don't want to comment on that. Not that I'm scared. I studied the New Order intelligence for a long time. It's important to stress the difference between rumors and facts. I don't know exactly the conditions. Nowadays, I monitor Indonesia from a distance. The reason why I studied the 1966-1989 intelligence was that at the time it seemed important.

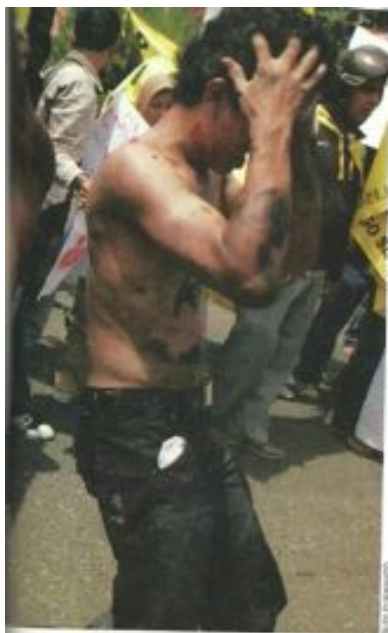
**At the Goethe Institute panel discussion you said that Australia did not react to the 1965 events.**

The Australian government supported the military which took over power and destroyed the political strength of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). A leftist Indonesia was seen as a military and political threat. Australia, like the United States and Britain, wanted Indonesia to be pro-West during the Cold War. Another reason was racism among the conservative politicians, the bureaucratic elite and the media in Australia. There was an interesting statement by Prime Minister Harold Holt in the *New York Times*. He said that with the killing of about 500,000 to 1 million communists, there would be a reorientation.

**Wasn't the Australian parliament aware of those mass killings?**

There was little discussion about the killings after October 1965. The foreign minister once gave a short statement of

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concern in March 1966. The left-wing Labor Party member, J. F. Cairns once raised the issue. But the government did not pick it up and the right-wing group sneered at him.

**What was the Australian media's view on the 1965 events?**

The major media in Australia did report on the coup d'état and the political events in great detail. But there was very little information on the killings. At that time there were very few Australian journalists in Indonesia so that they could only rely on information from their embassy. The media wrote of killings, but it was unclear where and the details. They wrote about PKI members being killed but not about the perpetrators. Some reports even described the incidents as being very Indonesian in character, that the whole nation had gone amok.

**But how could the Australian people not know about this?**

The reason is simple. For one year after October 1, 1965 people in Australia did not have many sources of information. There were very few articles in the papers on the killings.

**You now observe regional security issues. What interests you about them?**

I work for the Nautilus Institute, which focuses on defense and security studies. When we established Nautilus in Melbourne six years ago, we determined that the most important issue at the regional level was climate change and security. One of our research topics today is on nuclear power in countries like Indonesia.

**What is Australia's attitude towards the**

**development of nuclear technology in Indonesia?**

Nuclear power can be a source of energy as well as weaponry. A small part of the Australian community, not the government, thinks that even if Indonesia developed nuclear technology for energy purposes, it could become a weapon. But that is a minority opinion.

**Where do you think nuclear development in Indonesia is heading?**

The development of nuclear technology in Indonesia is very unclear. When the subject is raised, people have little confidence on how nuclear technology is likely to develop until a contract is signed. We would like to make sure on the correct information on Indonesia's nuclear technology. I don't believe Indonesia plans to develop its technology to produce weapons. But if the direction is towards weaponry, Indonesia will surely get a lot of attention from the International Atomic Energy and the US.

**Are nuclear studies and research in Indonesia any good?**

We are concerned about the risk-management factor. There are some things that must seriously be addressed in Indonesia's development of nuclear technology. Remember Abdul Qadir Khan, the Pakistani 'father of nuclear science' who sold information on nuclear technology to the black market? This is one big worry, given that corruption is still a big problem.

**What do you see as the biggest problem about nuclear technology in Indonesia?**

Indonesian nuclear technology is being developed by the National Atomic Energy Agency (Batan). There is a big problem in Indonesia, and that is availability of information, transparency and the strength of regulations. There is no detailed public information, for instance on locations. The location of nuclear development at Muria, Central Java can be affected by volcanic and seismic activities. Muria is not a good place for nuclear technology.

**About regulations, don't we have the Nuclear Power Monitoring Board (Bapeten)?**

We cannot rely on Bapeten, particularly since they had a corruption case there a few years ago. They must be able to convince the public that there have been changes in Bapeten. The issue of safety has also become a concern since the Lapindo incident. Another problem is the financial risk. Donors are reluctant to get in if there is no credible information. One small example is the price based on information from Batan. For 10 years, the price has been US\$1,800 per kilowatt. Determining prices is very complex.

**The big question is whether Indonesia can overcome all these problems.**

In the past, many people opposed developing nuclear technology in Jepara. Then there was Banten. But people said Banten was too close to Jakarta and Krakatau. Now they're saying Bangka would be just right because over there the granite soil is solid. But to date, no studies have been done on Bangka.

**Even now the people are still divided on whether or not to develop a nuclear power generator.**

Yes. Some are saying that it's time to change to an alternative source of energy. Others say there other forms of clear energy besides the risk-laden nuclear energy. As mentioned earlier, nuclear technology development in Indonesia faces volcanic and seismic problems, safety regulations and funding. Another problem is the view that it is the only choice to meet energy needs.

**Batan once said it would be ready to start building in 2020.**

Batan has been saying that for some time. Six years back they said this was unlikely to happen because there was so much opposition. As for energy needs, a decentralization of energy sources, such as towards microhydro power, can be done.

**So, countries should avoid using nuclear power as a source of energy?**

This is because there is always a risk in using nuclear power, not to mention the problem of its waste, which is difficult to manage. People see nuclear power as the best solution given climate changes, but actually, it would really destroy the environment.

**Australia has huge reserves of uranium, which is the raw material for nuclear power.**

Yes, we export it to a number of countries. The Australian government has said that the exports of uranium must go through very tight regulations. I personally disagree on these exports, because they tend to end up as weapons. We don't know what happens to the uranium. A country owning uranium should be very responsible about it.

**In the regional context, how should ASEAN countries view the issue of developing nuclear technology?**

ASEAN must begin thinking on how to come up with a nuclear technology monitoring system in their respective countries, not just Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam which already have plans on nuclear technology. There must also be a code of ethics on developing nuclear technology; what is permissible and what is not. The safety factor of nuclear power is very important.