

Florian Tömmel, Till: *Bonn, Jakarta und der Kalte Krieg. Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland gegenüber Indonesien von 1952 bis 1973*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2018. ISBN: 978-3-11-056249-1; 366 S.

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For doctoral students with an interest in German foreign relations, the „Hallstein Doctrine“ serves as an ideal framing device. After all, the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic spent more than two decades trying to outwit one another in a battle for diplomatic recognition – a contest that played out everywhere in the world where Cold War allegiances had not been defined irrevocably. In practice, this usually involved disparate locations in Asia, Africa, or Latin America; by now there is a reasonably tall stack of books devoted to case studies ranging from India to Zanzibar to Finland.<sup>1</sup> Even so, *terra incognita* still abounds: entire regions, including East and Southeast Asia, have received relatively little attention from historians of East and West Germany. Thus it is extremely fortunate that Till Florian Tömmel has produced the first archivally researched monograph on German relations with one of the world’s largest and most populous nations, Indonesia.

Tömmel’s dissertation operates within tight parameters. It opens when West Germany and Indonesia established diplomatic relations in 1952, and wraps up when the East Germans finally opened a parallel embassy in Jakarta in 1973. This is not a comparative study, however: the emphasis is squarely on Bonn and not East Berlin. Nor does the author attempt to read into the Indonesian side, pleading language barriers and restricted archival access. This is a study of West German policy toward Indonesia. To be sure, the author does „triangulate“ using British and East German sources in order to present an outside view of West German (and Indonesian) behavior.

Despite these constraints, Tömmel’s book succeeds magnificently in illuminating a wide array of significant themes – including decolonization, non-alignment, authoritarian

charisma, and genocide. Admittedly, the events depicted appear at one remove; we are watching West Germans watch Indonesia, so to speak. Yet Tömmel is a perceptive reader of diplomatic sources. He devotes an entire section to examining the Orientalizing tropes used by Bonn’s ambassadors: the Indonesians were often described in dispatches as a gentle, child-like people; President Sukarno, by contrast, registered as an „irresponsible, unserious, unconstructive, and fanatical.“ (p. 82) Such observational biases only heighten the fascination of Tömmel’s account. As Sukarno’s government hurtles impulsively from one priority to the next, a narrative unfolds that shows German diplomats puzzled, apprehensive, defensive, and sometimes deeply alarmed.

Although the book does not claim to offer a definitive view of Indonesian policy, Tömmel does, nevertheless, present a clear delineation of Sukarno’s main initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s. Relations with Bonn were promising at first; in Indonesia, as elsewhere, West Germans enjoyed an undeservedly good reputation simply for having fought two wars against the leading imperial powers, France and Britain. In 1956, Sukarno – who spoke fluent German – proved to be a popular guest as he toured through the Federal Republic for nine days. Yet soon thereafter, the Indonesian leader built out his authoritarian power and embarked on a program of expansion that pitted him against the Dutch colonial administration in New Guinea. To Sukarno, the western half of the island formed a constituent part of the Indonesian archipelago. Emboldened by the 1956 Suez Crisis, Indonesian authorities began seizing Dutch assets and expelling Dutch citizens; and in an act of pettiness that embarrassed (but enriched) West Germans, the Indonesians moved their principal tobacco exchange from Amsterdam to Bre-

<sup>1</sup> Amit Das Gupta, Handel, Hilfe, Hallstein-Doktrin. Die deutsche Südasienspolitik unter Adenauer und Erhard 1949-1966, Husum 2004; Johannes H. Voigt, Die Indienpolitik der DDR. Von den Anfängen bis zur Anerkennung (1952-1972), Cologne 2008; Ulf Engel / Hans-Georg Schleicher, Die beiden Deutschen Staaten in Afrika. Zwischen Konkurrenz und Koexistenz 1949-1990, Hamburg 1998; Dörte Putensen, Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West. Finnland, der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage (1947-1973), Berlin 2000.

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men.

Sukarno's growing reliance on Soviet military equipment provided an opening for envoys from the GDR, and in October 1960 an East German consulate-general set up shop in Jakarta. This touched off a scramble for influence with all the classic trappings of the Hallstein Doctrine: East Germans worked incessantly to „upgrade“ the status of their consulate while the West Germans badgered the Jakarta government to strictly observe the distinction between consular and diplomatic representations. Large promises of West German development aid followed – including 100 million marks in capital aid and a like amount in loan guarantees. Sukarno's highest priority was to finance a quixotic and inefficient steel plant at Lampong, on the island of Sumatra; German economic and financial experts tried unsuccessfully to squelch the project. Tömmel recounts the subsequent bureaucratic tussles in Bonn with a judicious eye for detail, drawing on all the appropriate ministerial files in Koblenz without overtaxing the reader.

Sukarno's policy of military confrontation against Malaysia, which aimed to split apart the newly formed state, placed West Germany before an acute dilemma – particularly after angry crowds burned down the British embassy in Jakarta. Bonn insisted that its ongoing efforts to please (if not appease) Sukarno served the overall purposes of the Western camp. President Heinrich Lübke visited Jakarta in late 1963 and forged a surprisingly cordial relationship with Sukarno; afterwards he backed the Auswärtiges Amt's desperate attempts to proffer German aid packages to stave off what seemed like an inevitable Indonesian decision to recognize the GDR. Even some of the more aggressive proponents of the Hallstein Doctrine, such as Alexander Böker, lamented how the „distortions“ produced by the Bonn-Berlin rivalry had placed the Federal Republic in an „unworthy“ position (p. 205). Meanwhile, Sukarno's increasing antagonism toward the international community, culminating in Indonesia's withdrawal from the United Nations, the IMF, and the World Bank, left Bonn's diplomats in a fatalistic mood.

From that standpoint, West German diplo-

mats were not overly sorry to see the Indonesian military cut down Sukarno's main political base, the Indonesian communist party. Tömmel suggests – after an exemplary review of the available historiography – that there likely was a fumbled putsch attempt by pro-communist officers on September 30, 1965. He confidently dismisses the theory that this was a „false flag“ operation by military hardliners. He also deftly disposes of the thesis that Bonn's own intelligence service was involved – though along the way we learn that the BND's man on the ground in Jakarta until 1964, Rudolf Oebser-Röder, had led a murderous SD-Einsatzkommando in Poland (pp. 233–238). In any event, following a counter-coup on October 1, the Indonesian army prodded local populations to eliminate the communist milieu entirely. Rampant slaughter followed, leading to the deaths of some half a million communists and sympathizers over the next six months. Bonn's embassy in Jakarta reported the scale of the atrocities quite accurately; yet the Auswärtiges Amt passed over these events in calculated silence. As Tömmel observes wryly, German officials knew enough to steer prospective visitors away from the killing zones. The Indonesian generals did not want outside witnesses (pp. 252f.). Neither the West Germans nor their Western allies saw much reason to speak out against the killings – or to urge the Indonesians to halt them.

It is unfortunate that Tömmel does not extend his study to 1975, allowing for a comparative look at German responses to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor – another case that is today considered a genocide. Small-scale human rights complaints did arise in West Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s, yet this activity focused on the plight of Indonesian political prisoners rather than holding the regime accountable for the 1965–66 murders. In general, Western diplomats found the early years of the „new order“ under President Suharto (1967–1998) quite benign compared with the erratic course of his predecessor. They welcomed Indonesia's leadership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, founded 1967) as a constructive alternative to Sukarno's confrontational policies. Tömmel highlights the central role

of German banker Hermann Josef Abs in the international refinancing of Indonesian debt – though it took until 1970 to wear down the resistance of Bonn’s own finance ministry. In subsequent years the Bonn-Jakarta relationship would become increasingly „multilateralized,“ with the European Community and ASEAN managing trade relationships on behalf of their members. By the time the GDR finally got to open its embassy in Jakarta in 1973, the Federal Republic had moved on to other geopolitical priorities.

Within a German history context, bilateral diplomatic studies such as Tömmel’s are not a complete rarity.<sup>2</sup> Yet the trend is toward thematic, comparative investigations of specific aspects of international cooperation or competition.<sup>3</sup> This reviewer has often expressed a preference for innovative, problem-oriented approaches to international history. Still, Tömmel’s study provides a reminder of how much can be gleaned from a straightforward, in-depth analysis of East or West German policy toward important world powers or regions, along the lines of classic works by Sven Olaf Berggötz and Alexander Troche.<sup>4</sup> As far as I am aware, there is still no archivally researched monograph on West German foreign and economic relations with Japan! Concerns about language may be a factor, since it is clearly most satisfying when historians can offer a clear reading of the „other side“ in a diplomatic relationship. But the substance of German foreign relations is too important for the field to wait until someone with optimal language preparation happens along. One can only hope that readers of Tömmel’s excellent book will be take inspiration.

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<sup>2</sup>For recent examples, see Tim Szatkowski, *Gaddafi's Libyen und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1969 bis 1982*, Munich 2013; Tim Szatkowski, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die Türkei 1978 bis 1983*, Berlin 2016; Georg Dufner, *Partner im Kalten Krieg. Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Chile*, Frankfurt 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Corinna R. Unger, *Entwicklungspfade in Indien. Eine internationale Geschichte 1947-1980*, Göttingen 2015; Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, New York 2015; Rüdiger Graf, *Öl und Souveränität. Petroknowledge und Energiepolitik in den USA und Westeuropa in den 1970er Jahren*, Berlin 2014.

<sup>4</sup>Sven Olaf Berggötz, *Nahostpolitik in der Ära Adenauer. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen, 1949-1963*, Düsseldorf 1998; Alexander Troche, „Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt.“ *Die Ostasienpolitik der Bundesrepublik in China, Taiwan und Süd-Vietnam, 1965-1966*, Düsseldorf 2001.