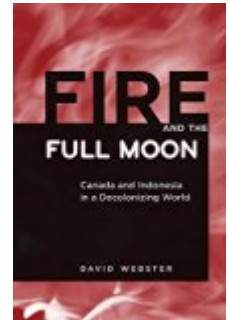


David Webster. *Fire and the Full Moon: Canada and Indonesia in a Decolonizing World.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010. 272 pp. \$35.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7748-1684-7.



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Fire and the Full Moon by David Webster analyzes Canadian-Indonesian foreign relations from 1945 to 1999 within the larger context of decolonization. In doing so, the book moves away from past narratives that focused on the nature and limits of American influence during the Cold War. Although Indonesian history will be foreign to many, the book communicates its arguments with commendable clarity and provides sufficient background information without drowning the reader in unfamiliar detail.

According to Webster, Canadian relations with Indonesia have waxed and waned over time due to each other's differing "mental maps" and resulting policies. Until the late 1960s, the two countries' different pasts deterred understanding and close relations. Indonesia's colonial past was like *fire*; it gained its independence from the Dutch via revolution and its diplomatic culture continued to be confrontational, assuming that Indonesia would be "a nation struggling always for justice and greatness" (p. 10). Canada's colonial past was like the *full moon*, for it "shied away

from such challenges, valuing instead incremental, non-violent, co-operative change based on its own slow and peaceful procession to independence within the Empire-Commonwealth" (p. 10). These different diplomatic cultures generated different expectations. For example, whereas Canadian politicians (remembering Canada's successful branch-plant economy) believed Indonesia should encourage foreign investment, President Sukarno believed it would result in indirect empire and continued loss of sovereignty. By the late 1960s and 1970s under President Suharto, Indonesia became more pro-West; Canada, now more amenable to nationalist movements, and desiring a "third option" for Canada's international trade, was also interested in closer relations. Thereafter, Canadian-Indonesian relations warmed and remained so until Indonesia's actions in East Timor eventually led to a limited pullback in the late 1990s.

But readers should understand that this book is far more ambitious than a study of bilateral relations. Webster utilizes the example of Indonesia

to engage in more general Canadian international relations historiographic debates. The book examines Canadian diplomatic behavior during the decolonization that followed in the decades after the Second World War. As such, British, Australian, commonwealth, American, and third world, as well as other Southeast Asian regional actors are incorporated whenever appropriate. Webster also uses the Indonesian example to argue that Canadian diplomacy was firmly based in Canadian *interests* and that some interests (such as Canadian-Indonesian relations) were often sacrificed to satisfy others. *Alliances* were often most important to Canadian interests, and therefore Canada's Atlantic relations often trumped Pacific concerns. Thus, during Indonesia's struggle for independence following the Second World War, Canadian diplomats, such as General Andrew McNaughton, struggled to find a middle ground between the Netherlands and the United States (rather than Indonesia), and thereby helped prevent a colonial conflict (that was of little interest to Canada) from compromising the negotiations for the North Atlantic Treaty (which was fundamental to Canadian interests). Similarly, Canada eventually sided with Malaysia during its confrontations with Indonesia, in part, because of Malaysia's commonwealth membership. Under the prime minister, John G. Diefenbaker, even Canada's Colombo Plan aid was funneled into serving Canadian interests, such as increasing foreign demand for Canadian wheat exports. This book will therefore attract an audience far larger than those interested in Canadian-Indonesian relations.

Given his stance concerning interest versus value foreign policy, it is not surprising that Webster also challenges the myth that Canada was uniquely adept at solving global problems in an unbiased manner. Indonesian diplomats understood that Canada's alliances often resulted in Western biases that were sometimes contrary to Indonesian goals. Indeed, during the West New Guinea dispute, Indonesia invited Canada to serve as a mediator and the Diefenbaker government

refused to get involved since it would complicate Canada's relations with Europe and the decolonizing world. Instead, the United States eventually brokered a peace. Canada did not take, and in fact rejected, an "honest broker" role. But rather than merely challenge this Canadian myth, Webster explains how the myth persisted despite Canada's contrary actions. For instance, he shows how the now forgotten work of McNaughton at the United Nations Security Council to resolve the Indonesian struggle for independence fostered this myth among Canadian diplomats. Indeed, some Canadians believed that Canada was the "midwife" of Indonesian independence (p. 44). Webster points out that although this self-image of "conciliators and self-professed friends to decolonizing states" persisted, Canadian-Indonesian relations were hampered with nationalistic countries, such as Indonesia, because Canadian diplomats considered the antagonism that often characterized their diplomatic political culture immature and detrimental to global stability and Canadian interests (p. 43).

Webster also challenges the myth that Canadian foreign policy was "more sensitive to local conditions, better able to listen, [and] less military minded" than the United States', and that Canadians, therefore, "did not try to reinvent the world in our own image" (p. 3). Webster's willingness to go beyond the diplomatic records, and to examine other aspects of Canadian-Indonesian relations makes this section particularly interesting. The University of McGill played a central role in Canada's non-state relations with Indonesia. First, under the United Nation's Technical Assistance Administration, Canadian intellectuals, such as economics professor Benjamin Higgins, taught Indonesian students about the benefits of a free-market system. Second, McGill's Institute for Islamic Studies taught that Islam had to embrace modernity and create a state where Islam had its place without prejudicing the freedom of worship. These students later became influential Indonesian civil servants, and brought their country

more into line with Western preferences. Because the lectures of individuals, such as Higgins, so closely resembled Ottawa's goals, Webster describes these individuals as "semi-state" or "unofficial diplomats" (p. 100). Clearly Canada did intervene in the affairs of other states. Moreover, Webster's willingness to blur state and non-state categories is useful because it allows for a more complete understanding of Canada's international interaction and influence. A study strictly delineated by diplomatic records would miss these important aspects of Canadian influence.

The book has no notable faults, but it does have one small limitation. Having discussed events as recent as the 1990s while engaging in extensive "mythbusting," and noting that "Canada and Indonesia's new democracy now face a new relationship, but it too will be informed by the past," Webster avoids discussing how this past informs present-day relations (p. 11). Given the past, what is the future of Canadian-Indonesian relations? What is the future of Canada's relations with the Pacific Rim given the history described herein? Should the interest-based strategy that Webster argues characterized Canadian foreign policy be continued? Such questions did not, however, drive Webster's research, and their absence does not reduce the value of this quality study.

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