

Preface

After a long process that culminated in the first half of 2018, this memoir was finally completed, just in time to be published for my seventy-fifth birthday. In many ways, efforts for this memoir began long before its actual writing, when I was Minister of State for Administrative Reform. It was during this period that I instructed a group of young people at the ministry to conduct interviews of their colleagues and seniors, with the view to collecting material for an autobiography. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown to me, those I charged with the task were half-hearted in their efforts, and the few interviews they made were never handed in to me.

Around the early part of 2000, my journalist friend Dwi (Donny) Iswandono—who was a sports reporter when I was President of the Indonesian Association of Lawn Tennis (PELTI)—and his colleague Iput Bambang Putranto came to talk me into reviving the idea of a memoir. We also discussed the issue of the forest fires that had ravaged Sumatra and Kalimantan in 1997, the horrors of which were still fresh in our minds.

In turn, I suggested to both Donny and Iput that they begin collecting information and data on the forest fires, which then became a book titled *Kemelut Politik di Balik Asap: Refleksi atas Bencana Nasional Kebakaran Hutan 1997–1998* (Political Crisis behind the Haze: A Reflection on the National Disaster of the Forest Fires of 1997–1998). Alas, this book is not discussed in depth in this memoir, which only covers the period between 1948 and 1988.

Early in 2000, my brother Mochtar Kusuma-Atmadja and I discussed whether we both needed to write our own respective autobiographies for posterity. At the time, Mochtar did not feel the urgency to do so. He felt he had been sufficiently productive in writing about foreign

policy, legal reform, the environment and new initiatives in the cultural sphere. Mochtar believed his works should speak for themselves as part of his legacy. In fact, he tended to believe that any text on his life might end up becoming a string of self-justifications, not to mention being an egocentric exercise.

My own views on the matter were similar to Mochtar's, even though I could not claim to match his prolific writing or his track record of public service in general. But, over time, Mochtar gradually came to the conclusion that a memoir might not be such a bad idea after all, especially when its creation was supported by one's family members, colleagues and friends.

In the same light, this memoir was also the product of long deliberation, initiated long ago, pushed along with sporadic efforts, all of which culminated in the first half of 2018, when I became convinced that this memoir could be a meaningful endeavour. The project received support from my close friends, family members and even people who only knew me from afar. In the end, I decided to write this memoir, assisted by a team comprising Donny Iswandono, Iput Bambang Putranto and Apolonius Lase.

The memoir's title is *Steering a Middle Course*, and it is the first book in a series. The next book will undergo preparation—and let us hope that it will be completed—soon enough.

This memoir begins with snapshots of events that occurred in 1948, when I first became aware of my surroundings, and ends at the time I quit as Secretary General of the Golkar Party and was about to start my tenure as Minister of State for Administrative Reform.

This memoir was the product of my own penmanship—so to speak—a book of four chapters, with the help of the many people I have mentioned.

Chapter 1 covers events in my childhood up to the year 1963, when I came home from my overseas studies and continued my secondary school education. The initial text for Chapter 1 was finalized in 2006, and parts of it were used in the writing of my brother Prof. Mochtar Kusuma-Atmadja's biography, which was written by Nina Pane. Readers will discover parts in this memoir that are similar to, even identical to, the earlier sections of Mochtar's biography. Indeed, I gave Nina Pane my permission to use my account of what our family life was like when she was writing my brother's biography. In case any reader would like

to make a further study of my family's history, Nina Pane's biography of Mochtar, titled *Rekam Jejak Kebangsaan* (A Record in Nationhood) provides a more comprehensive account.

Chapter 2 narrates my life as a young adult. It opens with me as a university student at ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) at a time marked by political tension and economic meltdown, which came to a head with the end of the Guided Democracy era and the rise of the New Order. It was also during this period that my activist friends and I in Bandung were recruited by the military to become members of parliament for Golkar.

Chapter 3 is an account of what I experienced as a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) amid consolidation efforts within Golkar towards a system of membership based on individual active volition, and the repositioning of mass organizations under Golkar. The chapter also discusses initiatives to maximize the role of the DPR through the Golkar Fraction at a time when restrictions were widespread in the country.

Chapter 4 is a record of my time as Secretary General of Golkar, under the chairmanship of Sudharmono. The chapter contains accounts that many will find interesting on the New Order's preparations for the country's political maturation through the structural transformation of Golkar. It also features events and details hitherto unknown to the public about figures with whom I interacted frequently, particularly Sudharmono, Benny Moerdani and Moerdiono.

My account was naturally based on my recollection of events, which, as I discovered during the course of writing, had the capacity for greater scope and clarity as the text developed. Of course, exact recall within the right context requires crosschecking with the available literature and, beyond that, assistance from many people, to whom I am indebted. These include in particular my contemporaries during my days of student activism, as a DPR member, and my time in Golkar. They also include colleagues who worked in the press in the 1990s and many others who helped me in various ways during the writing of this memoir.

Indeed, help came to me in the most variegated ways. The most meaningful assistance given to me during this project came in the form of the personal interviews sat for me by several people, such as my senior Rahman Tolleng in the early 2000s. Interviews with both Jusuf

Wanandi and my cousin Hartini Sofiati proved indispensable, too. However, other forms of help were also invaluable. There were instances in which I was given a document, a photo or even had my memory jogged about a seemingly insignificant event that later proved to be significant. A telephone conversation or an ordinary chitchat was often very meaningful. I could not possibly rank those who contributed to the writing of this memoir, so I will instead name them in alphabetical order. I hope I did not leave anyone out:

Agung Nugroho
Agus Sukanda
Aidy Halimanjaya
Akbar Tandjung
Albert Hasibuan
Anak Agung Oka Mahendra
Arief Witjaksono
Bruno Kaka Wawo
Diandri Kusuma Agus
Djoko Sudyatmiko
Erna Witoelar
Fred Hehuwat
Hangga Yudha Widya Putra
Hartini Sofiati
Heri Ahmadi
Ipong Witono
Jakob Tobing
Jusuf Suroso
Jusuf Wanandi
Lannya Kandar
Marzuki Darusman
Mughtar Abbas
Nina Pane
Padmono S.K.
Rahman Tolleng
Rahmat Witoelar
Rhesa Noviar
Rum Aly
Sudarko Prawirojudo

Sugeng Setiadi
Toriq Hadad
Wahyu Mulyana
Wimar Witoelar
Yoyon Suharyono
Veronika Wiyarsi

Last but not least are my own children: Rezal Ashari, Krisnan Kusmara (Nino), Devyandra and Kendisan.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the members of my writing team, who had the unenviable task of being my constant companions in the journey. It is never easy, as I found out, to write about oneself, a process which necessitates a support team consisting of patient, thorough and conscientious people. I would also like to thank my publisher Kompas and Tempo's Centre for Data and Analysis.

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Sarwono Kusumaatmadja