

# The Last Moments of Indonesia as We Know It. Forest Fires, Collapsing Economy

By [Andre Vltchek](#)

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*Student protests, West Papua independence struggle, monstrous forest fires, an earthquake and a collapsing economy – the increasingly religiously fundamentalist Indonesia is suddenly facing too many disasters. It cannot cope with any of them.*

Nothing seems to be going well for Indonesia, these days. People in West Papua are rebelling; an earthquake has devastated several communities in Ambon. The economy is slowing down, and is expected to grow only below 5%, while the population is skyrocketing, out of control.

Students are rebelling, protesting against a proposed law that could make sex outside marriage illegal and punishable by prison terms. Another piece of legislation will turn the recently re-elected President Joko Widodo (known by his nickname – Jokowi) into a demi-god, making it illegal to criticize him. People are also rebelling against the changes which Jokowi announced – curbing labor rights and “opening up” the economy for, virtually, unbridled foreign “investment”.

Some people have already lost their lives, in Papua, in Sulawesi, and elsewhere.

Man-made forest fires, the most vicious in the world, are now continuously ruining millions of lives, sending toxic smoke all over the entire Southeast Asia, as far as Thailand. Flames are also quickly finishing up all that is left of the Indonesian native forests.

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Things were not supposed to be so bad for the Indonesian President Jokowi.

Just recently, he bragged that he was not afraid of anything, and has nothing to lose, as he cannot run for a third term. He proclaimed that he will do precisely what he always wanted to do: to lift restrictions on foreign investment, to give multi-nationals ‘tax holidays’, and to reform labor laws.

Basically, Jokowi has decided to implement brutal Thatcherite-style capitalism. Of course, Indonesia has already suffered from turbo-capitalism since the US-sponsored military coup in 1965, but for decades, the regime consisted of a sort of medley of extreme capitalism, cronyism and cheap, aggressive nationalism.

Jokowi met with the US President Donald Trump, pouring embarrassing and servile compliments at him, asking him “on behalf of millions of the Indonesia people” to come and visit his country.

Donald Trump promised to “do business with Indonesia”.

What kind of business would it be, everyone can imagine. One can only recall his “investment:” in Bali, a golf course resort in Tanah Lot, which ruined thousands of local lives.

But Jokowi and the Indonesian elites are ruling with an iron fist, and with absolute control over the mass media. No left-wing dissent is allowed.

Before the latest elections, the former military general Prabowo was once again unleashed as an opposition candidate. Prabowo, backed by the Islamist hard-liners, was nothing else other than a bogeyman. His presence fooled many poor and the middle class into voting for Jokowi, who appeared to at least be a little bit more reasonable. This way, Indonesians put their own neck into a loop. From the moment Jokowi got elected, the regime could proclaim, cynically: “You see, you voted for this President yourself, twice”.

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After the elections, things began moving extremely fast.

Jokowi ‘decided’ to move the nation’s capital, from Jakarta to the devastated island of Borneo (known in Indonesia as Kalimantan).

That was, just in case that the island brutally plundered by the elites and foreign companies, would one day dare to dream about gaining its independence. According to one of my contacts in Kalimantan (a local celebrated writer J. J. Kusni), the president and his entourage already have big investments on the island.

Abandoning Jakarta, a megapolis with an urban area of around 30 million people, is a tremendously cynical move. The over-populated city is sinking. It is hell on earth consisting of brutal slums (where the majority of people live), dotted with skyscrapers, luxury hotels and malls. The city is governed by a corrupt clique, with hardly any green areas, and basically nothing public. Its air quality is the worst in the world.

Instead of improving the lives of the people, the government is planning to grab billions of dollars, flee and build some utopian paradise in the middle of the far-away jungle.

Of course, the paradises have never materialized in Indonesia. Money will disappear into private pockets, and what will be constructed in Borneo will be, like everywhere, an ensemble of sub-standard buildings.

The people in Jakarta do not understand. The propaganda is too colorful and convincing. People living in Kalimantan (Borneo Island) are too debilitated, while some have been outrightly bought. There is hardly anything left of their island. No one there is ready to fight for anything.

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And Kalimantan, like Sumatra, is burning.

As written by Maria C. Lo Bue, from the United Nations University:

“Indonesia is currently in the throes of an environmental emergency. Thousands of hectares of forest are burning across the vast country, causing toxic smoke to be released into the atmosphere. This has led to eerie apocalyptic scenes of deep red skies, deserted streets and people with their faces covered with masks...”

“Carbon-rich peatland forests on the island of Sumatra and Kalimantan have been extensively cleared to create new plantations, often to produce palm oil...”

“So far, more than 35.000 fires have been detected in 2019...”

What follows is a litany, but all that is written in the report is an under-statement.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) has reached not just ‘hazardous’, but disastrous levels; up to 2,000 in Central Kalimantan (just for comparison, over 100 is already considered “unhealthy”).

When I was filming in Central Kalimantan, recently, the government did close to nothing to combat the fires. It was actually promoting palm oil, even threatening countries that were criticizing plantations, with retaliatory sanctions.

“Pray for rains,” was the suggestion from Jokowi’s government, as long as money is being made; even if human lives are lost, entire species eradicated, and tropical forests ruined. All this means absolutely nothing – zero. Indonesia and its government have reached point of no return. All shame, compassion and considerations for this planet and the people have been lost!

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In the meantime, Jokowi is preparing his scarred country for more plunder.

As reported by *Bloomberg*:

“Indonesian President Joko Widodo said he’ll introduce sweeping changes to labor rules by the end of the year and open up more sectors of the economy to foreign investment...”

What follows is an account by *Bloomberg*, which does everything possible to suggest, but not to define the fact that Indonesian workers will lose countless benefits and will be easy to fire, precisely what is demanded by the multi-national corporations. It reads like this:

“Businesses have long complained that generous severance packages, a complex minimum wage system and restrictions on hiring and firing workers make it difficult for them to expand operations...”

Jokowi sees the present labor laws that are protecting workers as “handcuffs”. No one, not even the pro-Western brutal right-wing dictator Suharto was known for using such inflammatory and treasonous language.

Instead of educating people, instead of providing them with better health, job security and

housing, Jokowi is cutting their benefits.

Of course, he is hailed by Western mass media outlets, multi-nationals and individuals like Trump.

Bloomberg 'explains':

“Relative to the size of its economy and population, Indonesia attracts little foreign direct investment. In a recent World Bank document presented to Jokowi, none of the 33 Chinese companies that announced plans to set up or expand production abroad between June and August chose Indonesia. They preferred locations such as Vietnam and Cambodia.”

But why? Because of “labor laws”? Nonsense! Socialist Vietnam has much stronger legislation, protecting workers, than Indonesia. But it has an excellent and educated workforce. Many Vietnamese technicians and engineers were schooled in the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland. Even relatively rich Malaysia used to employ Vietnamese workers in the Proton automobile plants.

Furthermore, Indonesia murdered countless people belonging to the Chinese minority, after the 1965 coup. Chinese culture, even language, were banned for decades (until President Abdurrahman Wahid came to power). Pogroms against the Chinese minority were many and brutal. Racism in Indonesia is rampant.

China is also well aware of the “special relationship” between Indonesia and the West, particularly the United States. More precisely, the servility of Indonesian elites towards its former colonial masters, and the neo-colonialist clique in Washington.

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For decades, the Indonesia elites have been getting away with murder, both metaphorically and concretely.

But something got broken. This administration, the most appalling since Suharto's reign, has clearly crossed the line.

West Papuans have already lost around 500,000 people since the beginning of occupation. They will not back down. They are fighting. The occupants from Java and elsewhere are fleeing. Western mass media tries to be silent, but cannot, anymore. What has been happening in West Papua is genocide.

The destruction of the environment all over the archipelago is so horrific that it has no 'competition' anywhere in the world. But while Brazil is constantly in the spotlight, Indonesia with much a worse record is not.

The Indonesian people live and die in misery. Grotesque statistics are totally spiteful to the enormous plight of the nation. Many more than half live in misery. Tens of millions are unaccounted for by corrupt local statisticians.

Air and water are heavily poisoned. Almost all public property has been stolen, by the “elites”, a long time ago.

And so, now, people are dying, dying terrible deaths. Fighting for independence in West Papua, poisoned by smoke in Kalimantan, killed by armed forces during the protests. They also die from earthquakes, because their dwellings are miserable, and because rescue crews are terribly trained and endlessly lazy.

And, people have had enough. They had enough of this regime, and the administration. They had enough of the savage capitalism; of this life.

The problem is that most of Indonesians have no idea what they want. Socialism, Communism, even words like “class” have been banned here, for decades, according to the leading historian Asvi Warman Adam. What kind of society? But they know that ‘not this’, not this one. Enough!

The streets are turning into battlegrounds. Papua is rising. Workers are outraged by the changes proposed by the government. What is left of the native nature and species is being robbed, converted into oil plantations, poisoned, killed. Jakarta, Bandung and other major cities are clogged with cars, garbage and pollution.

It cannot go on like this. The elites, who have robbed everything, know it. They have golden parachutes – condominiums and villas in Australia, California, Gulf, Singapore and Hong Kong. As the country continues further collapsing, they will be laughing on the way to the airport.

Uprisings are erupting all over the archipelago. It is dangerous.

Uprising and revolutions are very important in places where the workers and peasants are educated; where they know what they want.

In Indonesia, it is all about anger, envy, and frustration. The last time this happened, Chinese women were dragged out from cars, and brutally gang raped. Churches went up in flames.

Indonesia, isolated from the world by a brutal regime, for decades, is far from ready for a constructive, progressive revolution.

The entire archipelago is tense. It is ready to explode. It is exploding. But the blast will not convert Indonesia into a new China or Vietnam. No socialist, no communist leaders are at the frontline of the rebellion. Regressive forces may try to kidnap this rebellion. This may be the most dangerous moment for the country, since the 1965 coup.

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*Andre Vltchek is philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He's a creator of [Vltchek's World in Word and Images](#), and a writer that penned a number of books, including [China and Ecological Civilization](#). He writes especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook."](#)*

*Andre Vltchek is a frequent contributor to Global Research*

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### About the author:

Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His latest books are: "Exposing Lies Of The Empire" and "Fighting Against Western Imperialism". Discussion with Noam Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return is his critically acclaimed political novel. Oceania - a book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book about Indonesia: "Indonesia - The Archipelago of Fear". Andre is making films for teleSUR and Press TV. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and the Middle East. He can be reached through his website or his Twitter.

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