

New *Mandala*

Academics across the globe show solidarity for SOAS Indonesian politics expert, his work and academic freedom.

As Indonesian academics, foreign academics who work on Indonesia, and colleagues in the Department of Politics and International Relations, SOAS, University of London, we write in support of academic freedom for our profession. It is important that we be able to research and analyze a broad range of social, political, and economic issues in an environment that is open, transparent, free, and supportive of debate and discussion.

Dr Michael Buehler's article on *New Mandala* has generated sharp responses from the Indonesian government and the Indonesian media. The article raises questions about the possible role of lobbyists in President Widodo's recent state visit to the US.

The article is based on a publicly available (open source) document on a US Justice Department website that describes lobbying services to be performed by a private contractor to assist with certain aspects of President Widodo's visit. The contractor claimed in the document to be acting on behalf of the executive branch of the Indonesian government.

Buehler's article raised questions about the source of funding for this lobbyist. Such questions are related to basic issues of transparency, flows of funds, and how certain private actors try to gain access to official policymaking. In countries where transparency and accountability are major problems, it is necessary and responsible to raise questions about matters like this and search for reasonable answers supported by evidence

For the media as well as for scholars, it is very important that they be able to do their work effectively. This supports transparency, accountability, democracy, and the rule of law. And it is important that responses focus on facts, substance, and the message, and not on the messenger.

Various Indonesian commentators, including academics at major Indonesian universities, have made accusations against Professor Buehler and his character. He has been called a foreign agent, an agent of the Freeport McMoran mining company, and so on. As colleagues of Professor Buehler, we know him to be a serious, independent scholar who is dedicated to research and learning.

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19	Professor Richard Doner	Political Science Department, Emory University
20	Professor Richard Robison	Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University
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22	Professor Paul Hutchcroft	Professor of Political and Social Change, Australian National University
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24	Professor Teri Caraway	Political Science Department, University of Minnesota
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33	Professor Jan Pierskalla	Political Science Department, Ohio State University
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