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APPROVED FOR RELEASE - CIA
INFO □ DATE: 09-Oct-2009

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INDONESIA: Political Situation

[redacted] Top Indonesian military officials reportedly held an emergency meeting Wednesday to discuss the increasing political tension between the government and student activists, who for the first time are publicly calling for President Suharto's removal. The generals apparently are divided over whether the government should continue its moderate approach or order a crackdown. Harsher measures run the risk of sparking large-scale demonstrations and violence. This would probably not threaten Suharto's reelection in March, but heightened instability might eventually create fissures within the military sufficient to undermine his power.

[redacted] Although students thus far have heeded the military's warning not to take to the streets, their sharper and more personal attacks on Suharto have been well publicized. Students have criticized Suharto for his inaccessibility, refusal to share power with civilians, and tolerance of corruption. Students in Bandung recently made an unprecedented public call for Suharto's ouster, a demand that others in Jakarta are expected to repeat.

[redacted] Suharto has allowed the opposition a degree of freedom against the advice of some senior military officials. His moderate approach probably stems from a desire to obtain eventual consensus for his reelection and his belief that severe measures will only stiffen opposition. Prolonged student demonstrations in the streets could undercut the President's already declining prestige and encourage the beginning of a quiet but active search within the military for a successor. [redacted]

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