

The Lessons of the September 30 Affair

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Perspective on Indonesia

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"Indonesia stands today with one foot in national-democratic stage and one foot in the socialist stage ... in order to consummate the revolution, there is only one road for the working class—*rebulkan kekvasaan politik!* Seize political power!"

Bung Karno, May 1, 1965

He is dead now, but his mad rhetoric still echoes in the mind for those who were there. Speech after speech, Sukarno's cadence set the rhythm for our work and our lives in that long summer of 1965. We battened down the Embassy hatches and waited, straining to fathom his purpose and predict his next move. One after another, faster and faster, the PKI's enemies were over-run; the domino theory was being tested before our eyes. "All of history," Emerson once wrote, "stands in the long shadow of one man." So too did Indonesia by September 30 of that year ... until the last domino refused to fall.

In retrospect, it is easy now to say that our initial interpretation of the "September 30 Movement"—the so-called PKI coup attempt of October 1, 1965—was correct. We knew from the start that it was not a coup in the classic sense. Our first reaction was that Sukarno was behind it all. We knew that he believed that he stood on the stage of history, that he wanted his Indonesian revolution to become "the greatest of all revolutions, even a summing-up of all revolutions," an act which he called "entry into the Socialist stage"—the juncture at which collaboration with the bourgeois nationalists is abruptly terminated, the latter are removed from the stage in disgrace, and the drama moves inexorably toward its finale: the full-fledged Communist state.

Yet, when it happened, it came as a surprise. We expected something to break; Djakarta was unbearably tense, poised on the edge of crisis; but no one knew what form the next crisis would take. No one thought that Sukarno would go for the jugular—the Army—quite so soon. There was still plenty of time, plenty of other targets. Civilian anti-Communist elements had been isolated but not liquidated. We suspected that Sukarno and the PKI would link "entry into the socialist stage" with announcement of a Communist-dominated "Nasakom Cabinet" and the removal of *civilian* bourgeois nationalists—the once-powerful Third Deputy Premier Chairul Saleh, the political gadfly Adam Malik, the leaders of the banned right-wing of the Nationalist Party, perhaps the fanatical Moslem students from the former Masjumi affiliate, the HMI. All had been under severe propaganda attack for some time and were rumored for imminent arrest. They were logically the next dominoes in the line.

Nobody hurries in Djakarta, especially to a showdown, but Sukarno chose this moment to break the rules of the game. Impelled by his

ideological timetable, he must have believed that conditions were right for a dramatic move of historical consequence: a violent purge of the Army General Staff in preparation for establishment of a "People's Army" based on an armed worker/peasant militia and controlled by a political commissar system under the PKI. He had pressed for both throughout the year, but the Army had objected, and on September 1 he warned Army Commander Yani publicly that "the revolution was about to leave him behind." Had the move succeeded, a "Nasakom Cabinet" would have followed, then the arrest of other "counterrevolutionaries," eventually the seizure of land and capital by the state and the collectivization of agriculture, all hallmarks of the "socialist stage" in Communist revolutionary theory.

Instead, *insha'allah*, everything went awry, as is often the case on Java, and the Movement failed. Sukarno and the PKI, not the bourgeois nationalists, left the stage in disgrace and the latter in control. From the confusion of those exciting days have emerged many myths, in particular a set of generalizations about the origins and outcome of the event, which gained credence within some U.S. Government circles and especially "outside the wall" of classification. Simply stated, these generalizations were that (1) Communist China instigated the "PKI coup attempt" in an effort to "make an end-run" around the U.S. "forward-line" in South Vietnam, but (2) our decision to commit American troops in that country, signifying our readiness to block the southward extension of Chinese Communist power, stiffened the backbones of the Indonesian officer corps, and (3) bought sufficient time for them to crush their own Communist threat in a "massacre" which took the lives of some 350,000 or more party members at no cost to the United States.

These generalizations were based on inadequate data—all data was inadequate in the early days of the affair. They make Asian politics sound like American football, and are suspect on that account alone. Yet they seemed logical in geo-political terms, especially at a time when Washington sought justification for the American stance in South Vietnam, and the Indonesians sought propaganda ammunition against Peking and the PKI. In Djakarta, however, we were particularly struck by the uniquely indigenous character of the events which led to the purge attempt and by the minimal influence on its outcome that could be ascribed to non-Indonesian factors. The geo-political generalizations about the incident, which I summarized above, clashed in our minds with a point that we felt was its strongest feature—that it was, from start to finish, a peculiarly and exclusively Indonesian phenomenon.

Half a decade has passed since the September 30 Movement collapsed, bringing down with it Sukarno's bloated edifice of words. Personal and institutional memories are growing dimmer. The time may thus be appropriate for a new, "inside the wall" look at the three generalizations produced in the public mind by its dramatic and arcane circumstances, in order to raise serious doubts about their validity before they come to conceal the real value of the Indonesian experience—the lessons of the September 30 affair.

Communist China

"... damned clever, these Chinese."

—Unknown

In her study *The Coup that Backfired*, Mrs. Helen Hunter went a long way toward dispelling the myth of Chinese Communist involvement in the purge attempt. She concluded that while Peking had probably learned of the Sukarno/PKI plan, as indeed it must have through agent penetration of the Palace and the PKI, the Chinese did not instigate the plot or participate in carrying it out. The same conclusion is implicit in an earlier article in *Studies in Intelligence* on the September 30 Movement by John T. Pizzicaro.

Like us, the Chinese knew something important was imminent. But I doubt whether they could truly have comprehended the nature of the plot and its implications. By mid-September, too many actors had become involved in the drama, each interpreting the script in light of his own self-interest. I doubt whether Sukarno, let alone the Chinese, knew the Generals were to be liquidated, or the Revolutionary Council named as the "source of all state power." Even Sudisman, fifth-ranking leader of the PKI, subsequently stated under interrogation that the latter statement "was not part of the plan." Sukarno was unaware of the involvement of Colonel Untung from his own Palace Guards' Regiment, because he had dealt only with PKI Chairman Aidit, Air Force Commander Omar Dhani, and Army General Supardjo who was in charge of tactical operations for the Movement. The PKI's "Special Bureau" chief Sjam Kamaruzaman, who planned the details, was actually proceeding under the incredible assumption that "if necessary, the President would be set aside."

Thus the participants did not have a unified concept of the affair, and the lines of authority among them were blurred from the outset. It is no wonder that General Supardjo told Army interrogators afterwards that when he returned to Djakarta from his post in West Borneo on September 28, everything was in chaos and "there was no clear chain of command." Whatever Sukarno's original instructions—probably couched in typical Javanese ambiguity—the thing had gotten badly out of hand, and had assumed an internal dynamic which no single participant, let alone a foreign observer, could understand or control.

A more fundamental brand of skepticism on the myth of Chinese involvement would arise if relations between the Chinese leaders, Sukarno, and the PKI were examined. The Chinese had little real leverage over Sukarno, or Aidit and the party. The two leaders were not the obscure protagonists of a minority faction in some little-known, unimportant country. Both were prominent figures on the international scene, aware of their power. They were vain, hyper-sensitive, paranoid chauvinists to whom foreign leaders had long catered, not dictated. The PKI in turn was the largest Communist party outside the Communist World. A good measure of Indonesian hyper-nationalism and mistrust of foreign powers laced all its activities and plans.

Sukarno was no "dupe of the Communists," Chinese or any other. He had towered over Indonesian political life for more than a generation, and claimed his own niche in the Marxist pantheon. In his speeches, he listed himself after Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin—but not Mao, who was still alive—as a prophet and "great leader of the revolution." He asserted that with his formulation of "Marhaenism" in 1926, he had discovered the theorem that revolution in a colonial country had to base itself on a broad national front including the peasantry, not on the industrial proletariat alone. Sukarno claimed to have made this discovery *before* Mao had reached the same conclusion. Both Sukarno and Aidit believed they were still breaking new ideological ground in "adapting Marxism to Indonesian conditions," and the party formally stated that "the teachings of Bung Karno are identical with the program of the PKI."

Their approach must have seemed to be paying off from Peking's point of view, and there was no reason for the Chinese to exert pressure on them for greater speed. The Indonesian revolutionary situation and Indonesian foreign policy were moving in a direction and at a pace which coincided with Chinese desires. At two junctures, Aidit even warned his colleagues that things were going too fast—a warning that later returned

to haunt him when he failed to heed it himself.

In Indonesia, the "party of the Chinese" was Partindo, not the PKI. A tiny clot of left-wing extremists, the Partindo leaders drew their influence from their rapport with Sukarno and their interrelationship with the leaders of a powerful association of Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent called "Baperki." Both organizations followed the PKI line—Partindo in fact was often out in front—and had friendly relations with the Chinese Communist Embassy. The latter also influenced a number of alien ethnic Chinese businessmen's associations, which parroted the Sukarno/PKI slogans. Yet among all the participants in the September 30 affair no ethnic Chinese name appears, and the leaders of Partindo and Baperki were as confused as we were on the morning of October 1, 1965.

The PKI in contrast had virtually no ethnic Chinese on its personnel roster. Not more than a dozen Chinese names could be found among some 2,000 PKI biographic information cards at the American Embassy. The average PKI member often shared the same ingrained suspicion and animosity toward the Chinese as his non-Communist countrymen. The fundamental theme of Aidit's policy, and the main tool with which he had succeeded in rebuilding the party after the disastrous Moscow-induced Madiun revolt of 1948, was his effort to ensure that the PKI operated as a purely indigenous Indonesian institution. Recruiting efforts focused on ethnic Indonesians. Aidit and Sukarno were only too aware of the potential propaganda backlash that awaited any clearcut identification of the party with the Chinese, either domestically or abroad, in the Indonesian public mind. Aidit could scarcely have favored growing Chinese influence within his party, which might have aggravated factionalism and weakened the PKI before its adversaries. It might even have endangered his own position, since by "taking the parliamentary road" for thirteen years, Aidit had clearly been "following the Moscow line" in terms of the Sino-Soviet split.

For all these reasons, while the PKI made the fraternal and adulatory noises toward Peking and the Chinese revolution that one would expect from an Asian party, its leaders scarcely missed a suitable opportunity to express their independence of any Chinese influence.

It is out of the question for Sukarno or Aidit to have offered any outside power "a piece of the action" or requested help in the September 30 affair.

Vietnam

"Victory has a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan."

—John F. Kennedy

The tendency to blame everything bad that happens in the world on Peking or Moscow is matched by the tendency to credit ourselves for all the good things. Both tendencies have clearly been at work in some interpretations of the September 30 affair and its outcome. Some people believe that the Indonesian Army would have been inclined to compromise with Sukarno and the PKI if its leaders were not aware that US forces had tied down the Chinese in South Vietnam by bombing the north and sending in the Marines. In fact, the Army *did* compromise with Sukarno for almost two years, though not with the PKI.

What options would have been available to the Chinese if the US presence was absent from South Vietnam? They could not have launched an invasion of Java since they lacked transportation and logistical support. They could have mounted an air strike on Djakarta, refueling at Hanoi, but the outcome would have been disastrous. The main victims would have been the predominantly urban ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. As it was, Peking's constant vituperation of the "right-wing forces," and its incitement of the Indonesian Chinese to rebel against them only aggravated the latter's troubles and reinforced Army propaganda that the PKI had been a Chinese tool. Whether the US stood firm in Vietnam or not, there was nothing that Peking could do—except take it on the chin in Indonesia as we had during the Sukarno years.

It has been argued, however, that while in objective terms the Chinese were clearly powerless to affect the situation by physical means, in psychological terms China was viewed as a potential threat after the purge attempt because of its great size and historical meddling in the area. Thus, the US barrier in Vietnam was said to be a meaningful integer in Indonesian calculations.

I would question whether many Indonesians were troubled by China's size. They believe Indonesia is the most important country in the world, and boast that the last time China invaded Java—in the thirteenth century—it was repulsed. In addition, I suspect that the whole effort to

impute to Indonesian decision-makers any profound or strategic thoughts during those days of crisis is a great mistake.

Perhaps it would be useful in this connection to discuss in detail the turning-point in the events of October 1 itself—the juncture at which the keynote was sounded for the campaign against Sukarno and the eradication of the PKI—to determine whether thoughts of Vietnam or China were on anybody's mind.

The moment of decision came shortly after noon at Kostrad Headquarters on Djakarta's main square, where Suharto had assumed temporary command of the Army under standing contingency procedures. The two airborne "Raider" battalions that had deployed on the square earlier in the day in support of the purge attempt still surrounded Suharto and controlled key installations. Suharto was negotiating with their executive officers to get them to withdraw, and at the same time trying to size up the situation and find some reliable troops for himself. So far he had collected two platoons, plus ambiguous expressions of support from duty officers in the Navy and the national police.

Suharto was hurt and enraged at the clear probability that his close friend and patron, Army Commander Yani, had been murdered. Nasution, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff and its leading "strategic thinker," was in a nearby room. Best described later by a western diplomat as "a simple, ambitious coward," Nasution was paralyzed with shock and grief from the attack on his home. Far from being an asset, to Suharto, Nasution had retreated at the crucial moment, as he had so many times before in crises when Sukarno was involved.

At this point, an emissary from Sukarno arrived. It was one of his adjutants, Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Bambang Widjanarko, who accompanied Sukarno when he drove out to join the anti-Army forces at Halim Air Force Base that morning. Widjanarko announced that he brought an order from the "great leader of the revolution" and was taken to Suharto. He told the Kostrad commander that Sukarno ordered him to turn over temporary command of the Army to MajorGeneral Pranoto Reksosamudra. Pranoto was believed to be a PKI sympathizer, and Suharto knew him well. He had replaced Suharto in 1959 as Central Java Army Commander after an incident involving Suharto's family which had tarnished the latter's reputation.

Sukarno's choice of Pranoto to replace Suharto was a clear mistake. His use of a junior officer from an anti-Army service to carry the word made it, a major blunder. The final touch came when Widjanarko belligerently demanded, according to those present, that Suharto "release" several key Generals and allow them to proceed to Halim for consultation with Sukarno. Suharto was already aware that several top Generals had been killed and others were missing. He went into a rage.

Speaking Javanese, he ordered Widjanarko to inform Sukarno that he was retaining temporary command of the Army until Yani's fate was known, that "no more Generals would go to Halim," and that *Sukarno himself should leave the Air Base as soon as possible because he was preparing to attack it.*

The impact and implications of that final clause may be difficult to sense for those who did not endure the long years of deference and propaganda adulation paid to Sukarno by all sectors of the population, including the Army. In effect, Suharto had challenged the power of a latter-day Javanese god-king. But the impact was not lost on Sukarno, who complied, probably unnerved by this singular act of defiance from a hitherto complacent, apolitical, obedient soldier. A test of wills had occurred, and Suharto had won. The news spread rapidly among the political and military elite, and Suharto was able to establish himself as the leader of the anti-PKI forces while the leftists remained in disarray "with no clear chain of command," as Supardjo subsequently noted. The Rubicon in contemporary Indonesian history had been crossed, and thereafter the tide of events moved irrevocably against Sukarno and the PKI.

What had provoked Suharto to throw down the gauntlet? He acted in rage, fear, and desperation. He felt keenly humiliated that Sukarno had sent a junior officer to order him about like a servant. He was incensed at the thought of surrendering his command for a second time to a hated subordinate, and feared that Pranoto's appointment meant his own name was on the PKI's liquidation list. He acted in the belief that he was serving the best interests of the Army, of his military comrades, and of Indonesia itself in standing up to Sukarno whatever the latter's power. All these motivations are reasonable to impute to a tense, puzzled, parochial but able field officer who felt that he alone had to hold the situation together in a crisis endangering the foundations of the state and his own future.

But he certainly did not act from a strategic or geo-political vision of the implications of the U.S. presence in South Vietnam in terms of the Chinese colossus to the north. It was a tactical situation; Yani was dead, Nasution had copped out, Suharto was senior officer present and commanding, and only he could take charge. That he did so without thought of the consequences explains much about him and his later success. Suharto merits our gratitude, not claims of a share in his victory because of our stance in Vietnam, for that moment alone.

The Massacre of the PKI

"We feared the great Communist chiefs: they had magic powers which prevented them from dying. No matter how much we beat them they did not die. We had to inscribe the letters 'PKI' on their skulls to prevent their hair from growing out again after we had scalped them. Some would not die even when we forced bamboo sticks into their eyes and mouths, or after we put out their eyes. Especially in the case of the great chiefs, we would put a live cat into their bellies; only then would they suffocate. 'rhe cat, symbol of the tiger, caused them to lose their magic powers, and they died."

-quoted by Philippe Gavi, in an article entitled "Indonesia Days of Slaughter," in the Italian-language weekly theoretical organ of the Italian Communist Party, *Rinascita* (Rebirth), No. i, Rome, February 16, 1968, pp. 15 18.

Foreign estimates of the number of PKI members and sympathizers killed as a direct result of the reaction to the purge attempt have ranged from 350,000 at the low end to 1.5 million at the high. The Indonesian Government has never issued an official announcement on the subject. In a recent article in the British publication *Government and Opposition* entitled "Indonesia's Search for a Political Format," Donald Hindley quotes the low-end figure in his text but adds the latter in a footnote. Hindley is guessing, for no one really knows. His citation of both figures, an ostensible effort to attain scholarly balance, actually begs the question whether very many were killed at all. Like the "Cornell group" dissected by John T. Pizzicaro in his recent *Studies in Intelligence* article, Hindley is forced by the ideological compulsions of the academic "new left" to maintain the polemical attack on the New Order regime, although he personally considers it, as he once told me, "the best government Indonesia has had."

Hindley's upper-range figure of 1.5 million was probably acquired from Miss Ruth McVey, the "PEI's biographer." Ruth was not in Indonesia at the time of the purge attempt, and had access only to journalistic sources in the months that followed. Yet by the spring of 1966, she had surfaced the figure of 1.5 million Communist dead at a New York meeting of the "Youth against War and Fascism" organization. This astonishing performance by an otherwise able and objective scholar clearly demonstrates how emotions have fogged the whole issue. How could the characteristically disorganized Indonesians possibly construct an efficient murder apparatus on this vast scale in a few months, and systematically exterminate almost one-third the number of people that the Nazi regime killed in ten years?

Following the purge attempt, Djakarta seethed with rumors and stories of bloodshed and terror. The Embassy was aware that this issue would loom large for some time and from the beginning we attempted to develop hard intelligence to put the subject in perspective. A preliminary look at the data showed, however, that even after the palpable boasts had been detected and discarded, what remained was spotty and inconsistent. No firm information on alleged killing; of Communists ever emerged from almost two-thirds of Indonesia's provinces. In addition, areas where one might have expected massacres of epic proportions—diehard anti-Communist West Java, for instance—were remarkably unstained with Communist blood. Yet in areas where the PKI had never won more than a modicum of popular support: in Atjeh, or the Madurese regions of East Java, the death tolls boggled the mind. One heard interminable lurid reports of mass killings in Bali, some 50,000 deaths or more, where the PKI had never succeeded in cracking the tightly-knit Balinese social structure or challenging the political domination of the Nationalist Party. Yet in the traditional PKI stronghold of Madiun, the seat of the 1948 rebellion which should have been the first target for liquidation teams, and where there were plenty of Moslems to do the job . . . all was calm. Not one PKI death was ever reported from Madiun to my knowledge. A curious pattern, and one that did not readily hang together.

It was thus not an easy task to determine an overall death-toll. Part of the problem derived from the local cultural imperative which we called "deliberate misleading of the outsider," but the Javanese call "*étok-étok*." To a Westerner, a thing is either true or false, an event either happened or it did not. This emphasis on objective reality seems dogmatic to a

Javanese, who is more sensitive to the demands made on truth by the social context and his own socio-political status. Javanese seek to avoid potential conflict and embarrassment, and govern their behavior and remarks accordingly. The result is that they believe it is better to tell an outsider what they think he wishes to hear rather than risk the unpredictable consequences of telling the truth. This generalization does not pertain to all social situations, but is the cultural model for what Javanese believe social intercourse should be.

In reviewing the documentary evidence of the so-called massacre, I felt it was obvious that considerable *étok-étok* was involved. The same was true as I inquired among my contacts in the military and elsewhere, seeking a viable nation-wide estimate of Communist deaths to report to the Department. I found an abundance of exciting, self-serving tales, told with averted eyes, as though the ghost of I. N. Aidit were lurking in the background. Rather than acting like members of a "conspiracy of silence," most people were "protesting too much" of their ruthless anti-Communist zeal. But they could not produce hard data, lists, names and places, photographs, or any indication that some Indonesian government bureau had been tasked with tracking down and collating the stories in a systematic and objective manner. It was true that Sukarno had directed several of his Ministerial flunkies to survey Java in November, 1965 to obtain information for use in his effort to stymie the anti-Communist bandwagon. But their estimate of 87,000 stemmed directly from political considerations, and had to be rejected on those grounds.

Finally, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army's Supreme Operations Command's "Social-Political Affairs Section" passed me some figures which he swore were accurate compilations from field reporting. The totals were 50,000 dead on Java; 6,000 dead on Bali; 3,000 in North Sumatra. I was skeptical of his methods but accepted his estimates, *faute de mieux*, and combining them with my own data produced a nation-wide total of 105,000 Communist dead. Admittedly a large figure, it was still a far cry from the claims of 350,000 to 1.5 million victims being bandied about, and at least had partially resulted from a systematic effort.

While the death toll appeared lower than generally believed, the net impact on PKI cohesion and capabilities remained the same. The climate of fear and suspicion that arose in the villages as a result of the widespread rumors of mass killing effectively impaired PKI courier communications, obstructed party meetings, and thus paralyzed lateral

coordination and control. Concurrently, the Army seized the central PKI publications apparatus and captured a majority of the Central Committee membership within a few months, thus blocking dissemination of instructions from the top. The PKI's two strongest features apart from identification with Sukarno, its organization and communications, were thus nullified, and its destruction as a cohesive political force was assured.

By April of 1966, conditions were settling down and the Army relaxed its restrictions on travel. At the first opportunity, another Embassy officer and I left on a trip through Java seeking first-hand intelligence information on a variety of subjects. Among other things, because of my conclusions mentioned above, I hoped to learn something about the alleged severe killing in East Java which had been described in news items filed by Mr. Stanley Karnow of the *St. Louis Post-Despatch*.

Karnow was an unusual correspondent among the many who came to Indonesia at that time. He actually visited the areas about which he wrote. He interviewed at length the Army Commander of the Kediri district of East Java, Colonel Willy Sudjono. The Colonel had filled his ears with gory details and astonishing death-tolls, including a remark that the Brantas River—which flows past Kediri town—had been "choked with 30,000 Communist bodies." From a previous trip to Kediri, I remembered the Brantas as a broad, placid stream, its bed raised above the level of the surrounding countryside by years of diking and overflow, somewhat in the manner of the Ilwang Ilo of China. It occurred to me that 30,000 bodies floating down the Brantas would have jammed the gates of the numerous irrigation dams that span the river, causing a severe flood in Kediri town.

In any event, I was anxious to learn just what had happened in Kediri, a fascinating area of marked importance in Javanese history and politics for centuries. It was the seat of an early Hindu-Buddhist kingdom whose legendary ruler produced a set of prophecies which became a central feature of the Javanese political mystique. Javanese believe that Kediri stands at the center of a peculiarly potent combination of necromantic and mystical geo-magnetic forces. The area in consequence has generated peasant-based millenarian movements for hundreds of years. Prince Diponegoro of Jogjakarta went to Kediri to meditate in a cave before he fomented a messianic revolt, against the Dutch in 1821. Sukarno always played up his early boyhood in Blitar, near Kediri, and had requested to be interred there. Before the 1965 purge attempt,

Kediri was a Sukarnoist/PKI stronghold, as one might expect where severe ethnic (Javanese vs. Madurese) and religious (reformist Moslem vs. animist) antagonisms intersected in a setting that contrasted large land-holdings with abysmal poverty. Here were all the contradictions which provided, for Sukarno and the PKI, the exploitable corridors of power.

In April, 1966, another Embassy officer and myself spent several days at the home of an American Baptist missionary doctor and his wife in Kediri. The Baptist mission and hospital were established in Kediri just after the war. They were readily accepted by the nominal Moslem Javanese of the area, who probably saw the Baptists as just another mystical sect drawn to Kediri by its potent ethereal forces. There were eight American families, and many "national preachers—local converts who helped spread the gospel—at the Baptist establishment. They enjoyed excellent relations with local officials and had made many friends in the villages of the area. Every morning, Javanese from all social classes lined up in front of the hospital for medical treatment. Obviously the Baptists were well-attuned to the local environment.

From several days' talks with the Baptist group and other local informants, an interesting picture of Colonel Willy Sudjono emerged. He had lost several relatives fighting on the Communist side at Madiun in 1948. He was also known as a staunch Sukarnoist and devout follower of the pro-Communist East Java mystical sect leader, mBah 5uro. Before the purge attempt, he had not obstructed the Communist advance. The missionaries remarked that during the August 17, 1965 National Day celebrations, PKI organizations marched down Kediri's main street for hours, some of them armed, while Willy Sudjono watched and smiled. Yet the missionaries did not believe he was a Communist himself. They had requested troops to protect the hospital against threatened PKI attacks on several occasions, and he had always complied. Sudjono's family came to the hospital for medical treatment and health exams, as did many of the local officials of the area. Obviously there was more to his story than Karnow had learned.

The missionaries and their local contacts had heard many stories of mass killing in the surrounding area, including the tale of "30,000 bodies choking the Brantas River." One night, according to a missionary wife, they heard the *gamelans* (traditional musical instruments) "pounding from darkness till dawn." They presumed that killing was underway, and that the music was intended to cover the sound of screams. They were

surprised that fanatical Moslems would choose to kill by *gamelan* music, a non-Moslem, Hindu-Javanese cultural manifestation. But the next morning, everything was calm. As the Baptists went through nearby villages, there was no sign of slaughter. In fact, although they preached and dispensed health care in the area throughout the period of the purge attempt and its aftermath, none ever saw a Communist body, in the Brantas or elsewhere. Whenever they asked village contacts about the subject, they were always told that "there were no PKI members in this village and no killing here, but many dead at the next village down the road." But at the next village, the answer was the same: "no PKI, no killing here."

A press correspondent who spent a month on Bali searching for evidence of the mass killing for a feature story told me that he had gotten the same answer in village after village there. Moreover, he pointed out, neither he nor his colleagues had ever managed to photograph a Communist body. 'till this day, I myself have never seen even one photograph of a PKI corpse.

The missionaries' story was confirmed by other local informants, who believed that most of the Communist leaders had fled to Surabaya after the failure of the purge attempt, while the peasant masses who had supported the party because of its identification with Sukarno simply melted away. What killing had occurred, they said, had been on a minor, ceremonial scale.

Thus, there must have been considerable *étok-étok* in the story Willy Sudjono told Stan Karnow. He had done nothing to slow down the PKI in his jurisdiction before the purge attempt. As a known Sukarnophile and mBah Suro devotee, the onus was on him afterwards to demonstrate his loyalty to the Army. He must have welcomed the chance to proclaim to Djakarta through an American journalist that his severity toward the party after the event had known no bounds.

How many other local military commanders and district officials had been under the same pressures after the purge attempt? Virtually all of them were imbued with Sukarno's "Nasakom" sloganry, including the policy of collaborating with the PKI. What better way to display their newly-discovered anti-Communist colors, without committing themselves to Suharto or Sukarno while the Djakarta power struggle was unresolved, than by inflating the numbers of PKI killed in their jurisdictions? How many opportunistic politicians sought to erase years

of riding the PKI's coat-tails by proclaiming responsibility for a few unverifiable Communist deaths? The IP-KI Party leader Lucas Kustarjo, for instance, though a long-time Sukarnophile, boasted everywhere that he had told Sukarno personally that he killed "300 PKI leaders with his own hands."

Like the politicians and military leaders, the average village citizen had shrewd motivations for concocting massacre tales. If a villager told the authorities that his Communist neighbor had escaped, he risked guilt by association, or at least faced the prospect of a harangue on the importance of "heightening vigilance against the PKI." But if he told the authorities that his Communist neighbor had been killed by the "spontaneity of the masses," he would receive a pat on the back—perhaps even his neighbor's house or land. Who could check the story!?! The Army has never been able to keep track of its own personnel, let alone the civilians on over-populated Java.

As the reports of massacres moved up along the chain of command, they could easily have been embellished and magnified as successive layers of officialdom sought to display their own anti-Communist zeal. The natural tendency was to accept them at face value, especially among the Western correspondents who flocked to Djakarta in search of sensational copy for lurid feature articles to cable to the outside world. The result was the myth of the massacre. A good part of it must have been *étok-étok* by everyone concerned.

The Future

"We are independent now. Independence was not granted as a gift from our former colonisers. but we have won it the hard way at a great loss of lives on the part of all the Indonesian people for more than hundreds of years. We have a state philosophy and a Constitution which are not of foreign make but the products of our own inquiry into our own identity and our own history, formulated by Indonesian leaders and Indonesian philosophers. Our Armed Forces are not an inheritance, but have emerged from the midst of a fighting nation ... all these things are not just the legacy of the days prior to our independence. We have done them ourselves."
—President Suharto, on the eve of the 25th anniversary of Indonesian independence, on August 16, 1970.

No one will ever know the truth about the September 30 affair. By posing some questions about the myths that have evolved in the public mind in regard to the events that preceded and followed it, I hope at least to have signalled the danger of swallowing them whole. Whatever the popular misinterpretations of newsmen and scholars, "inside the wall" we should not be misled by the need to practice our own form of *étok-étok* to justify the policies of the past. Instead we should look to the real and valuable lessons which this watershed in contemporary Southeast Asian history has provided for the future.

To the strategic thinkers of the outside world, Southeast Asia, like the Balkans, has always looked like a power vacuum about to implode. Like the Javanese area of Kediri, one might almost say, Southeast Asia has loomed as a center of mystical forces, time and again attracting foreign powers to meddle in its murky affairs in the hope of gain—or occasionally in the hope of obtaining the gratitude of Southeast Asians themselves. But time and again the outsider has seen his efforts go unappreciated, his motives mistrusted, and his departure awaited with eager pride. Too often the reason has been the outsider's inability to see things through Southeast Asian eyes.

Human and interstate relations in Southeast Asia do not occur under ideal laboratory conditions, and the course of events is seldom predictable at a distance by analysis of national interest and balance of power alone. The "strategic planners" who prefer to "focus on the big picture in Asia" to produce sweeping, unverifiable geo-political theories run the risk of overlooking some quirk of human behavior that can easily upset their most sophisticated calculations and ideas. In Indonesia in 1965, the last domino refused to fall, and the tenets of the domino theory proved irrelevant to a major historical change. The course of events turned instead on the personality of one man, as the massive door of a vault pivots on its tiny jewelled bearing. Without the example of Suharto's courage in defying Sukarno, a thousand similar acts of decision would not have occurred elsewhere in the archipelago, and the whole "strategic situation" in Southeast Asia would not be the same. Suharto and his supporters were not concerned with the "big picture," or with conditions in other countries of Asia. They had enough to do with their own "little picture," and concentrated on the job to be done and the people involved. As a result, they won. The PKI was destroyed in the villages of Indonesia, Dot by the American "forward line" in Vietnam.

In Washington things tend to become unreal. Human beings are sometimes viewed as little more than names passing in the stream of paper, unrelated to their past and future. Far from the scene, we are often prone to see Asia impersonally as a cosmic chessboard, where the great powers can conduct their broader strategies without much regard for the pawns. But the pawns too are people, and the human factor is always the key, as it was on the morning of October 1, 1965 in Indonesia. To be truly viable, all strategic theories based on sophisticated geopolitical ideas must also take into account the prospect of those sudden, unexpected acts of human courage and decision which, precisely because they were not a part of preconceived plans, alter and illuminate political affairs.

The origins and outcome of the September 30 affair were the result of Indonesian actions alone. By the time the great powers realized what was underway, it was too late to help or hinder either side. Washington could only watch and wait, and hope that when the situation jelled, a new and more constructive relationship could be established with whatever regime survived. Then—but only then—could we offer to help, after the fever had broken and the patient was already on the road to recovery.

The Indonesians were acutely aware after the overthrow of Sukarno and the PKI that the road to recovery meant turning inward to repair the economic deterioration that had contributed significantly to Sukarno's success in orchestrating the Communist march toward power. Indonesia rejected Sukarno's mad schemes of leading the "third world" in a crusade of bluff and bluster against the "imperialist powers," and focussed its attention on its own sad internal plight. Suharto blocked a reversion to unproductive political infighting, and placed the stress of government policy on combatting inflation and preparing the base for economic development. The first battle was won and the development effort shows great promise for the future, although severe challenges remain.

In the wake of the September 30 affair and its aftermath, the lesson of the Indonesian experience began to make itself felt. It was at the heart of the American "low profile" approach to Indonesian efforts to bring their runaway inflation under control. Although advice from the International Monetary Fund and assistance from foreign donors were important, the essential decisions were made by Indonesian economists and implemented because of Suharto's resolve. American involvement was kept, to a minimum. The low-profile approach also led to our

"hands-off" attitude when the Indonesians were attempting to round up expatriate Sarawak Chinese dissidents in West Borneo in 1967, and to quell an embryonic PKI insurgency effort in East Java the following year. In the first case, Indonesians and Malaysians combined their efforts; in East Java, only a few weeks were needed for the Indonesians to handle the job themselves. In both cases, American involvement would have lent credence to Communist propaganda, and impaired indigenous resolve.

In the larger context, the Vietnamization idea and the "Guam Doctrine" can be seen as efforts to employ the lessons of the September 30 affair in structuring an appropriate American posture for the region as a whole.

Comparisons of what happened in South Vietnam and Indonesia after the critical year of 1965 make it clear that American power can only complement and augment indigenous resolve—the quality that the Indonesians call "national resiliency," which can be generated through local leadership and enhanced through regional cooperation, but not created or replaced by vast infusions of men and money from abroad. The human factor is always the key.

Very few now believe that the "soft states" of Southeast Asia can manage to survive as independent national entities without massive American help in view of the geo-political menace of Communist China to the north. Yet who among us would have believed—on that hot morning of October 1, 1965, as we drove toward the Embassy between the endless red banners and lurid anti-Western posters along both sides of the main highway into Djakarta, to face yet another day of systematic humiliation by the minions of Sukarno and the PKI that actions and events were already underway which would reverse the course of years of Indonesian history in a matter of days? The Indonesians looked into the abyss, recoiled, and learned their lessons well. Their task and ours is to use those lessons equally well in the future.

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