

The Military Coup of October 1st, 1965, in Djakarta

A report and personal account

ERNST UTRECHT

Summary

Contrary to the present military regime's version, the abortive coup of Oct. 1, 1965 was not masterminded by the PKI; the coup was an internal army affair, reflecting serious tension between corrupt members of the Army's Central High Command and the lower ranking officers and ordinary ranks.

Genesis

On 12 April 1965, during the Third Session of the Provisional People's Congress (MPRS) in Bandung, I had a talk with Njoto, Deputy Chairman of the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia), in the lobby of well-known "Hotel Homann". Njoto informed me of plans which were set up by discontented lower ranking Javanese officers of the Indonesian Army to overthrow the Army's leadership. The officers accused their generals of corruption and of neglecting the interests of the impoverished lower ranks of the military. They had made plans to get rid of the generals by the end of the year. But according to the PKI leadership a take-over of the military leadership would be premature for the political parties. Not one among Indonesia's political parties would be prepared to cope with the consequences of such a coup. It would be better to postpone any actions against the military elite in Djakarta till 1967 or 1968.

Njoto asked me to take up the matter with the leaders of the PNI (Nationalist Party of Indonesia), my own political party¹. But before I could get in touch with the Central Board of the PNI, I met a number of lower ranking officers of "Brawidjaja" Army Division in East Java. They told me that, indeed, by the end of 1964 in the Madiun area a number of discontented military, ranking from sergeant to major, had discussed the possibilities of dethroning the corrupt generals in Djakarta. The commander of "Brawidjaja" Division, the late General Basuki Rachmat², who was known as highly loyal to President Sukarno, seemed to sympathize with the discontented officers. But he warned them not to take actions without consulting their local superior officers.

Also among the military of the Central Java "Diponegoro" Division there were many officers and non-commissioned officers who wished to replace the corrupt generals

¹ The author represented the PNI in the Provisional People's Congress (MPRS), the DPA (Supreme Advisory Council), and the Lembaga Pembinaan Hukum Nasional (Council for Reconstruction of National Law).

² Basuki Rachmat, who after the military take-over of 11 March 1966 became Minister of Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy, died rather suddenly in January 1969.

in Djakarta by "honest military leaders who would pay more attention to the poverty in which the lower ranking soldiers live". Since 1958 the military elite has consisted of two groups, the so-called "field-officers" and the "military managers" who are placed in the management of most of the state-owned enterprises and also control a number of sections of the national economy. Because the first group occupies the key positions in the military leadership, the second group has to provide the first with money, usually derived from corruption, in order to maintain their lucrative position. By the way, it is this relationship between "field-officers" and "managers" that makes it impossible for any Indonesian government to deal effectively with the phenomenon of corruption.

But although in December 1964 or January 1965 the discontented military in East and Central Java had met in Madiun, in early 1965 there were still not outlined plans for actions against the military leadership. It must have been in February or March 1965 that the discontented soldiers decided that Djakarta had to be place of action and not Surabaya or Semarang. In their opinion it would be easier to get control over the rest of Indonesian territory when the revolt would take place in Indonesia's capital.

In Djakarta the revolt was prepared by Colonel Latief, a former member of "Diponegoro" Division who had been one of General Suharto's officers entrusted with intelligence affairs during the West Irian campaign. Latief must have informed Suharto of the widely spread discontent among the soldiers. It is my analysis that he has even informed Suharto of the plans to overthrow the Army's central leadership in Djakarta. I have arrived at this conclusion after discussions I had on the matter with co-prisoners during my detention after the Coup. In a article on "Suharto and the Untung Coup — The Missing Link"³, W. F. Wertheim refers to Latief's meeting with Suharto in the night before the Coup in one of Djakarta's hospitals where the latter attended to his sick son: "There remains one question: why did Suharto and Brackman release this rather compromising story? I can find only one plausible explanation. Maybe the visit of Latief to the hospital, and his meeting with Suharto in the night of September 30, had become known (Latief may have spoken to some co-prisoners); rumours may have circulated in certain quarters. There may have been some reason to provide an explanation which sounds rather harmless. In any case there would be sufficient reason to ask General Suharto some searching questions. While he is in power, no military tribunal in Indonesia will dare to interrogate him on these questions. But through his contact with Colonel Latief a few hours before the coup occurred he has, no doubt become **terlibat** (involved) in it — and this a hundred time more than all those thousands of small peasants who are being innocently held prisoners for many years as being **terlibat**, and who, when they are released do not find work or land any more. According to the norms applied by his own regime he would certainly belong to the "B category" of political prisoners, and his exile to the island of Buru would be much more justified than that of the present inmates of the concentration camps".

Suharto, who did not belong to the so-called "Nasution clique" of generals⁴ — and

³ Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 56–57.

⁴ Some of the generals who were regarded as belonging to the "Nasution clique": A. Jani, S. Parman, Harjono M. T., Suprpto, D. I. Pandjaitan (all in the central army leadership), Supardi (till 1961 Commander of "Udayana" Division in the Lesser Sunda Islands), Surach-

that was why Colonel Latief had come to him — seemed unconvinced that Latief's plan would be successful. As commander of KOSTRAD (Army's Strategic Reserve Command) he would have known that quite a number of special-trained troops would remain loyal to Nasution and his supporters⁵. But Suharto had also a dislike for Nasution since the latter had removed him as Commander of "Diponegoro" Division on grounds of malversations⁶. So he must have decided not to inform the Army's Central High Command of Latief's plans, also not to participate in the preparations, but only to "wait and see".

And at that time there were also other discontented military who tried to develop plans to overthrow the army leadership. For instance, Colonel Muktijo's efforts to kill General Jani, Commander of the Army⁷. In the beginning of September 1965 this officer told the Commander of the Military Police, Brigadier General Sudirgo, that Jani had to be removed from his post by kidnapping or even killing him. Muktijo argued that Jani was already deeply involved in Sukarno's attempt to make Indonesia, with the support of the People's Republic of China, a communist country. Muktijo assured Sudirgo that Nasution had promised to support the plan.

Quite upset by this information, Sudirgo told Jani about Muktijo's intentions. The Commander of the Army angrily went to Nasution's office and asked his Minister of Defence whether it was true that he would back Muktijo's plan. Nasution denied that he had agreed with Muktijo's plan and ordered Muktijo's house arrest. Afterwards Muktijo was declared "mad" by an army doctor!

In August 1965 a number of the PKI's special agents — among them Sjam and Pono — who had received special orders from the party's leadership to gather information inside the Army, reported to the Politburo that the discontented military had definitely planned to topple the military leadership before 5 October 1965, the Armed Forces' 20th Birthday. In his turn Chairman D. N. Aidit told the members of the Politburo and the agents that President Sukarno was seriously ill and probably

man (till 1962 Commander of "Brawidjaja" Division), Surjosumpeno (Commander of "Diponegoro" Division), Sutjipto (Head of Fifth Section of KOTI — Supreme Operational Command), Sunarjo (Head of Central Information Service of the Army), Sukendro (Minister for Special Affairs). But it was a public secret that after Jani had become Commander of the Army, relations between him and Nasution were deteriorating. There was also a growing conflict between Nasution and Sukendro.

⁵ The special troops of the Indonesian Army, like the Army Para's Commando troupe (RPKAD), the airborne units and certain units of the cavalry, are better paid, provided with better housing and other facilities in order to win their loyalty!

⁶ In 1957–58 it was reported to General Nasution, at that time Commander of the Army, that Colonel Suharto, Commander of "Diponegoro" Division, was involved in illegal barter trade and frauds committed by his junior officers. After Suharto was sent to SESKOAD (Army Staff and Command School) at Bandung, Nasution ordered his successor, Colonel Pranoto Reksosamudro, to produce the proofs of Suharto's involvement in corruption, etc. Pranoto's report showed that the accusations were partly correct. Nasution did not use the report to bring Suharto to trial — he could not do that for the sake of the Army's prestige — but frequently referred to it in order to keep Suharto under control. In 1962 he tried to block Suharto's way to his leadership of the West Irian campaign. It was Sukarno who rehabilitated Suharto! Suharto has never forgiven Pranoto for sending the report to Nasution. This fact has contributed much to Suharto's refusal to Sukarno's decision made at Halim Airbase to appoint Pranoto as care-taker of the Army's Central High Command.

⁷ I have already mentioned the Muktijo case in my article "Ruth McVey en de ommezwaai van Suharto" in **Vrij Nederland** of 18 July 1970.

going to die. He also said that Deputy Chief of BPI (Central Intelligence Agency) Police General Sutarto had told him that on 5 October 1965 a so-called Dewan Djenderal (Council of Generals) would oust Sukarno and take over all state-power.

According to the documents in the cases against a number of persons accused of being involved in the Coup, during the meeting between the members of the Politburo and the agents, Aidit is supposed to have ordered the latter to organize an armed revolt against the generals in order to seize state-power before the generals could do so. This "fact" would form "the evidence" — which the Army is still trying to produce — that the PKI had taken the initiative in organizing the Coup or that, at least, the Coup was communist-inspired. It is obvious that most of the trials were held in a desperate effort to find certain "facts" which could give proof of Sukarno's and the communists' involvement in the abortive military coup of 1 October 1965. One cannot rely upon most of the documents produced in these fraudulent trials. For instance, Sjam's defense counsel was deprived of any of the facilities which are guaranteed to defendants by the laws of procedure generally adopted in law-suits for the Indonesian courts and tribunals. The witnesses gave manipulated statements. And the most striking fact is that during and after the Coup the communists did not go into organized action. It is obvious that the Coup had taken the greater part of the party's cadres and millions of members unaware. So it clearly cannot be maintained that Aidit had ordered his agents to organize a revolt of the lower ranks of the Army against their generals and at the same time failed to transform the party into a mass support to the rebels' operations⁸.

But still Aidit has to be blamed for a big mistake. It seems that, after hearing the news that the generals had planned to take over state-power, the party's Politburo was rather panic-stricken. Now they could only hope that the discontented soldiers would be able to prevent the Dewan Djenderal's coming to power. But they were also fully aware of the possibility that Latief's coup would be unsuccessful and that then any involvement by the party would mean its destruction. For that reason the party was not given any orders to participate. Hence, with the exception of a handful of cadres in Djakarta, the more than two million members of the PKI knew nothing about the preparations for the so-called "Movement of 30 September 1965". But, on the other hand, Aidit wanted to be sure that, in case the Coup were successful, the party could exert some influence on the policy which the new military leaders would adopt⁹. He provided the plotters with the names of persons to be appointed as members of the so-called Dewan Revolusi (Revolutionary Council). Sukarno was left out of the list because Aidit hoped to use him as a "neutral" arbiter in case the Coup would fail. Party cadres in Indonesia's main cities, like Djakarta, Bandung,

⁸ How unprepared the PKI was in Central Java is clearly demonstrated by the documents in the cases against Wirjomartono and Utomo Ramelan. See Mahkamah Militer Luar Biasa, **Perkara Wirjomartono alias Sujono alias Sumarsono alias Umar**, 1966, and Mahkamah Militer Luar Biasa di Surakarta, **Perkara Utomo Ramelan dalam Peristiwa 30 September**, 1967.

⁹ According to some PKI cadres, whom I met in East Java in 1968 (three years after the Coup), Aidit had often argued that even the so-called "progressive military" could not be regarded as "comrades". Therefore he considered it necessary to give the plotters the impression that they were "morally backed" by the party, be it that the party did not participate actively in the preparations for the Coup and in the Coup itself.

Tjirebon, Jogjakarta, Surakarta, Surabaya, Malang, Medan, Palembang, Macassar, Bandjarmasin, were ordered to listen to the radio and to wait for instructions. But these strongly disciplined cadres were not told what was going to happen in Djakarta on 30 September 1965¹⁰. Only some individual members of the party, like trade-union leader Njono and the agents, were ordered to advise the discontented military on political issues and to see to it that the party's interests would be safeguarded. It is clear that Aidit has gambled dangerously by basing the party's attitude as to Latief's plans on too uncertain prospects. Actually, he left the party's fate in the hands of an ill-organized group of plotters who had no ties with the party¹¹.

The massacre

The Coup failed and the consequences were disastrous for all Indonesia's socialist forces. Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1959–1966) had two main purposes. It was set up to strengthen the nation's unity by forcing the political parties to co-operate more closely in national reconstruction plans and nation building. The parties were to operate harmoniously within the boundaries of NASAKOM¹². The populist¹³ leader Sukarno tried "to domesticate the communists"¹⁴. He also became the big obstacle for the Moslems who wanted to create a Moslem state. The second purpose of Guided Democracy, which has never been achieved, was to change gradually the country's economic, social and political structure. Sukarno tried to introduce some forms of socialism. His main effort became the implementation of the 1960–1962 land reform regulations¹⁵.

The established political forces such as the orthodox religious leaders, the rising class of Moslems traders and small entrepreneurs, the bigger landowners and the

¹⁰ Information by the above mentioned cadres.

¹¹ The **PKI's Self-Criticism** of September 1966. Njoto and two other members of the Politburo urged to refrain entirely from any dealings with the plotters and to keep faith in Sukarno's ability to cope with the consequences of a possible take-over of state-power by the generals. But the rest of the members of the Politburo shared Aidit's views that, in the interest of the party, the preparations for the Coup had to be closely watched (Information by one of my co-prisoners who had met Njoto four days after the Coup).

¹² NASAKOM, an involuntary coalition of the nationalist, religious and communist political organizations, is formed from the letters of **N**asionalisme, **A**gama and **K**omunisme, that is, nationalism, religion and communism.

¹³ On populism: Peter Worsley, **The Third World**, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964. Except for the leaders of the PKI, some radicals among the Masjumi cadres, and extremely orthodox Moslem leaders assembled in the NU, all of Indonesia's political leaders, including Sukarno and the military elite, were, and still are, populists. As members of the bourgeoisie they reject the Marxist class struggle and hold to the concept of national unity. The only enemy of the people is imperialism. By unifying the people and defeating imperialism, they assume, economic conditions will improve automatically. And consequently, they believe, also the class differences will be minimized automatically. So, their conclusion is, there is no need for creating a class struggle, something what the communists always like to have! Social conflicts will only hamper the development of a society to a stage in which there will be more welfare for all its members, is their final statement.

¹⁴ Donald Hindley, **The Communist Party of Indonesia 1951–1963**, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

¹⁵ See E. Utrecht, "Land Reform in Indonesia", **Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies** (Australian National University), November 1969, pp. 71–88.

military elite, which since 1958 consists of "field-officers" and "military managers", vehemently opposed Sukarno's so-called "Indonesian socialism". The President was forced to waste too much time in his efforts to maintain the equilibrium between the leftist and the rightist organizations. The latter were often supported by the Army who considered the situation very favourable to the communists. So the military leadership looked for ways to get rid of the PKI and its supporters. The tense situation after the implementation of the land reform regulations had started¹⁶ was aggravated by the deterioration of the economic conditions caused by **Konfrontasi** (Confrontation with Malaysia)¹⁷. The outburst came after the attempted Coup. After the bodies of the kidnapped and murdered generals had been found in a camp where quite by chance communist youth were following a training course for guerilla-fighting against the Malaysians in North Kalimantan¹⁸, the military elite, taking this fact as evidence of the communists' involvement in the Coup, started a witchhunt for leftists. Fanatical Moslem youth groups, incited by their religious leaders, landlords who had opposed the land reform regulations and Moslem traders, joined the Army's Para Commando Troop (RPKAD) and some of the local army units. In Central and East Java, Bali, Lombok, South Sulawesi, North and South Sumatra the RPKAD, the local army units and the Moslem fanatics murdered about 500,000 innocent peasants, workers, youth, teachers, all of them accused of "being involved in the Coup"¹⁹. In fact, all sorts of old scores were settled in this way.

From the onset, the military leadership suspected, most correctly, that they might be held responsible for the massacre of communists, certainly by governments and organizations outside Indonesia. Since a few years they have therefore been giving the following explanation of the massacre: the communists were the true cause of the massacre; under the rule of Sukarno, who strongly favoured the communists, the PKI and its cover organizations had terrorized the people to such an extent that the people, after the scandalous murder of the generals had pounced upon the communists in great fury with a view to settling with them; the justified popular fury was even so great that the Army was no longer able to prevent the massacre of communists.

¹⁶ See Rex Alfred Mortimer, **The Ideology of the Communist Party of Indonesia Under Guided Democracy, 1959-65**, Ph. D. Thesis Monash University 1970.

¹⁷ See Jan M. Pluvier, **Confrontations: A Study in Indonesian Politics**, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1965. Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1970, pp. 45 ff.

¹⁸ The kidnapped generals were brought to Lubang Buaja at the proposal of Air Force Major Sujono, one of the plotters, who was in charge of the training camp. There has been no clear evidence so far that the generals were tortured before they were executed by the military (not the communists) who had kidnapped them (see the documents in the cases against a number of non-commissioned officers involved in the kidnapping of the generals). It seems that Aidit had not fully considered the consequences of Sujono's compromising proposal. Perhaps, he did not even know about this proposal. Why did the military kill Aidit before he could be brought to trial?

¹⁹ The number of victims killed without any form of trial in the anti-communist drive and massacre of unprecedented dimensions after the Coup will presumably always remain unknown. The estimates vary between 200,000 and one million, and Indonesians who have studied the killings intensively have arrived at the conclusion that the number is closer to the second figure than to the first. A member of the official committee of inquiry on the massacre revealed to the American reporter John Hughes that at least 700,000 people have been killed (see John Hughes, **Indonesian Upheaval**, New York, 1967).

But an extensive investigation into the backgrounds of the massacre demonstrates clearly that the massacres were committed by merely a small number of misled persons. They were misled by fanatical Moslem leaders, fanatically anti-communist military personnel, landowners and entrepreneurs.

Besides the killings, about 250,000 other innocent persons were arrested for the same false reason of "being involved in the Coup". Now about 100,000 of them and innocent people who have been arrested since are still kept in prisons and concentration camps²⁰. The present military authorities claim the main obstacle to the release of large numbers of prisoners is the resistance of their local communities. The authorities in charge of the administration of camps and prisons like to cite the example of 60 prisoners who voluntarily returned to jail after three days being released because of the abuse they suffered outside. Well-informed Indonesians, however, suspect that the story is apocryphal²¹. In fact, the military elite fears that, after being released, the prisoners will attempt to overthrow the present government. The problem of the political prisoners is in the first place a problem of political structure. Release of the prisoners would be a serious threat to the present status quo.

The military take-over of 11 March 1966

In January 1966 the military elite, supported by the anti-communist United Action Fronts (KAMI, KAPI, KAPPI, KASI, etc.)²², the other anticommunist fanatics and members of the PSI (Socialist Party of Indonesia) which has been banned in 1960, started to oust Sukarno as president. The President had made attempts to protect

²⁰ See Letter of 2 February 1971 by Amnesty International to President Suharto in **Information on Indonesia Quarterly**, Vol. I, No. 4, pp. 2-4; my open letter to Amnesty International in **Vrij Nederland** of 13 November 1971 (English translation in **Intercontinental Press** of 29 November 1971).

²¹ Last February the Ambon daily newspaper **Nasional** reported that on the island of Buru in the Moluccas, where about 10,000 persons are being innocently held prisoners since September 1969, a number of detainees had tried to escape. The Indonesian correspondent of the Dutch weekly **De Groene Amsterdammer** S. Jasa, who was in Ambon about that time, gave more details. According to his letter there was no real attempt to escape from the island. The guards heard rumours that quite a number of desperate prisoners were plotting against them. Later they "discovered" that about 60 prisoners "had made secret plans to escape from the island". But before these "plans" could be carried out the guards struck and, apparently without clear evidence, they transferred about 60 prisoners to a number of isolated barracks and started to torture them. In April 1972 I received the horrible news from Ambon that there are rumours saying that almost every day the military shoot one or two prisoners who are accused of having been involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the leadership of the guards in Buru. Till now these rumours have not been confirmed.

For the prison camps on Buru see Peter Schumacher's report in **The Guardian** of 5 January 1972 and Dom Moreas's lengthy article with excellent photographs in **The Asia Magazine** of 5 March 1972 — also published in **The Daily Telegraph Magazine** of 24 March 1972.

²² For the role of the students in the upheaval see Jacques Decornoy in **Le Monde** of 4 December 1967; Harsja W. Bachtar, "Indonesia", in Donald K. Emmerson (ed.), **Students and Politics in Developing Nations**, New York: Praeger, 1968, pp. 180-214; R. K. Paget, **Youth and the Wane of Soekarno's Government**, Ph. D. Thesis Cornell University 1970; Stephen A. Douglas, **Political Socialization and Student Activism in Indonesia**, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970.

the innocent communists and pro-communists and therefore he, too, was regarded as "being involved in the Coup". Furthermore the Moslem fanatics, who again were trying to establish a Moslem state, saw Sukarno as the main obstacle in their way.

In the first months after the Coup Sukarno still had many supporters, not least in the Armed Forces, which made the situation tense, particularly in Djakarta and Bandung. Deceived by false rumours that a civil war was imminent Sukarno ordered Suharto "to take every possible step to insure security, order and stability, and in particular the personal safety of the President/Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces/Great Leader of the Revolution/Mandatory of the MPRS (Provisional People's Congress) and see to it that the teachings of the Great Leader of the Revolution were applied correctly". Suharto took this "Command of 11 March 1966" as an unconditional transfer of power and used it for purposes other than those Sukarno had intended. Suharto frequently abused the confidence Sukarno put in him by successively banning the PKI by Presidential Decree No. 1/3/1966, by legalizing the suppression of the "left wing" that had taken place, by detaining Sukarno's closest companions (15 Ministers among them), by purging the government apparatus of elements either really or supposedly opposing the so-called "New Order" and by putting all those people in concentration camps. After that, he reorganized the MPRS in such a way that Sukarno could be "legally" dismissed and Suharto could be "legally" appointed Sukarno's successor. In short the "Command of 11 March 1966" was made use of to strengthen the position of the military elite and to do away with its opponents.

Indonesia is being governed now by the Army. Civilian officials only serve as technical advisors. Decisions are taken by the military. The actual taking over of state-power by the military on 11 March 1966 and the collapse of the PKI produced the end of the political equilibrium upon which Sukarno's authority had been based. The present Indonesian government is more totalitarian than Sukarno's regime ever was.