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The 'Gestapu' events of 1965 in Indonesia

New evidence from Russian and German archives

Introduction

One of the unsolved riddles of Indonesian history in the twentieth century is the so-called Gestapu¹ affair and its aftermath. For the murder of six army generals on the night of 30 September 1965 the Indonesian communists and President Soekarno were widely held responsible.² Indonesian leftists – real and alleged – were persecuted; hundreds of thousands were killed. The long-term consequences affected Indonesian domestic as well as foreign policy: the changeover in government resulted in 30 years of rule by Soeharto; the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) and leftist organizations were banned; relations with China were severed, those with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were reduced; and ties with Washington and the Western world intensified.

An important part of the background of the affair, however, remains unresolved (Cribb and Brown 1995:98). The process of reappraisal in Indonesia is still under way. Maybe because of that, or perhaps due to its exposed position as a state institution, the Departemen Luar Negeri (Deplu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) long had on its Internet site not even a hint of the foreign entanglements occasioned by this affair.³ That there might be more behind it, though, was demonstrated by recent discussions on US involvement. In 1990 there was a sharp controversy about the extent to which the CIA in

¹ Gestapu is the acronym for Gerakan September Tiga puluh, the Indonesian expression for September 30 Movement.

² See Vickers 2005:171 for an assessment of the Gestapu under Soeharto's New Order regime.

³ <http://www.deplu.go.id/2003> (accessed 21-1-2005). Until at least January 2005, under the heading 'The communist abortive coup', the Indonesian communists were blamed for the murder of the generals.

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1965 had helped to identify PKI members, who were thereafter imprisoned and executed by the Indonesian armed forces (Kadane 1990; Martens 1990).⁴ Eleven years later, the publishing of the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volume on the period in question still caused problems for the same reason: controversy over US involvement in the persecution of Indonesian communists.⁵ A recent article even suggests that Western propaganda had encouraged the anti-communist riots (Easter 2005). On the other hand, CIA staff on the spot had blamed the socialist bloc for the killing of the generals (FRUS 2001: No. 178, p. 376), regarding it as part of a coup d'état against the military inspired by Soekarno and the PKI. It was typical of East-West animosity that the US and the USSR blamed each other for any heightening of tensions on a global scale, especially in Third World countries.

In order to shed light on the events, it is necessary to examine contemporary documents. Indonesian government documents on this topic remain inaccessible for the moment, while the PKI archive exists only in fragmented form due to the events described here.⁶ As to material from abroad, Western sources have become accessible, although with some limitations. Documents from European socialist countries were off-limits until about 1990. Only after the end of the USSR did it become possible to assess the events on the basis of sources from the global communist network, chiefly from Soviet and East German files, whereas the Chinese archives remain closed. After the collapse of the USSR, Soviet material from state and party organizations is now partly open to researchers.⁷ These documents have not yet been thoroughly examined to analyse the events of 1965 in Indonesia.⁸ Additional sources can be found in the files of the former Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

⁴ See the article by Kadane 1990, and the reply by Martens 1990.

⁵ Apparently, the CIA tried to stop the publication of documents of FRUS 1964-1968, Vol. 26 in July 2001. See Haubold 2001. While not in their printed version, the FRUS had information about these incidents on their website until at least March 2006: 'CIA stalling state department history', preface to the FRUS edition, in: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB52/docIII.pdf> (accessed 20-3-2006). The site was not freely accessible any more, though, when I checked it in May 2007.

⁶ See the material in: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG, International Institute for Social History), Amsterdam, PKI Collection; IISG, Indonesian Exiles of the Left.

⁷ Of special importance are the Archiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP, Archive of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation) and the Archive of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the post-Stalin period (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Russian State Archive for Contemporary History).

⁸ Before 1991, the Soviet documents were classified, and since then, interest in the topic by researchers of Soviet policy has waned. See for a discussion during the first decade following the events, Lev 1966a; Shaplen 1969; Anderson and McVey 1971; Van der Kroef 1972. For more recent assessments, see Cribb 1990, 2003. Singh (1994:222-36) uses only published material. The first attempt to include Soviet archival documents is Johansen (1999). I would like to thank the author for providing me with a copy of the manuscript. Johansen concludes that a Soviet entanglement in the incidents is highly unlikely. For a further discussion of the topic, see also Boden 2006a:327-37.

(SED, Socialist Unity Party of East Germany), which was also in contact with the PKI.⁹ This material, reviewed here, should help to elucidate the course of events as well as the role of foreign actors in this affair, especially socialist actors.

To provide the necessary background for the interpretation of the documents, this article first sketches the Indonesian domestic and international context of the events. It briefly characterizes the Republic of Indonesia's situation in the mid-1960s, the constellation of domestic power and influential foreign relations. The main part of the article is dedicated to a comparison between official Soviet reactions to the Gestapu events, and pre-Gestapu unofficial discussions of Indonesian politicians and diplomats with their Soviet and East German counterparts.

The setting: Indonesia's domestic and international position

As far as is known, the events of 1965 were related to a struggle for influence between the major Indonesian power elites: the president, the armed forces, and the PKI.¹⁰ The years 1962-1963 were decisive in this context: this was when President Soekarno moved closer to the PKI and restructured the army elite, dismissing anti-communist generals like Abdul Haris Nasution (Feith 1964:969). Nasution, as former chief of staff of the army, and his followers continued their opposition to the PKI as well as to Soekarno's socialist line in foreign relations. A first serious clash between armed forces and communists had already taken place in 1948. It had begun as an intra-military struggle of anti-communists against communists and ended in a persecution of the latter with thousands of casualties.¹¹ After this so-called Madiun affair, the army and the navy took a strong anti-communist stand. In terms of manpower, the armed forces profited from Soekarno's military campaigns in West New Guinea and against Malaysia during the 1960s; in 1965 between 300,000 and 400,000 Indonesians were under arms.¹² The communists for their part had

⁹ The documents are kept in the Bundesarchiv (GFA, German Federal Archives), in the collection of Stiftung Archiv Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (SAPMO, Foundation for the Archives of the Parties and Mass-Organizations of the German Democratic Republic (GDR))-Bundesarchiv (BArch, German Federal Archives), and have, to my knowledge, not yet been used to study the Gestapu events.

¹⁰ See Cribb and Brown 1995:97-106; Vickers 2005:156-60. The religious parties were also an important factor but were generally not associated with the events of 1965. For the triangle, see especially Feith 1964; McVey 1965b.

¹¹ See for the so-called Madiun affair Kreutzer 1984; Kahin 1970:282-303, who was present in Indonesia at that time; see also Swift 1989; McVey 1962:70. For the number of casualties, see Brackman 1963:99; Poeze 2007, see the chapter on diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. I thank the author for providing me with a copy of this chapter before publication.

¹² The figures range from 330,000 (Penders and Sundhaussen 1985:160) to 400,000 (Brackman

gained from Soekarno's leaning to the left, his acceptance of Soviet aid, and his growing understanding with China.¹³ In 1965 the PKI claimed 3.5 million members and as many as 20 million followers in its mass organizations.¹⁴

The president himself (Hering 2002; Dahm 1969) owed his strong position in the early 1960s to support and toleration by two of the major groupings of power, whereas the religious parties turned away from him. He had also managed, with the help of the armed forces, to push through his programme of Guided Democracy.¹⁵ The programme was inspired by Soekarno's visits to Eastern Europe and the People's Republic of China in 1956. It included the transfer of more power to the president's office and away from the elected parliament. When Soekarno proclaimed Guided Democracy in 1957, he was faced with uprisings, most notably in the region of Padang in Central Sumatra, and was the victim of an assassination attempt. The unrest escalated into a rebellion in early 1958, supported by covert US intervention. These actions were not admitted officially, but US politicians publicly justified the rebellion as a legitimate defence against the growth of communism in Indonesia.¹⁶ However, Soekarno prevailed with the help of the Indonesian armed forces. When he had overcome this crisis he intensified his cooperation with the PKI as well as relations with the Soviet Union and China. During the following period the question was not so much whether Soekarno would choose a capitalist or a socialist road to development, but which kind of socialism he would introduce.

In foreign policy, following independence Indonesia had initially received military support from the West. Moreover, the archipelago's economy was dominated by Western enterprises such as Standard-Vacuum, Texas Oil, and Royal Dutch Shell. When Indonesia became one of the driving forces of the non-aligned movement (Jansen 1966; Soerjono 1964), however, relations with the West cooled. In 1955 Indonesia hosted the Bandung conference, assembling all those former colonies that hoped to remain neutral in the Cold War conflict. In this new function, Soekarno tested his chances of receiving support from both blocs. On his trip to the US, to Western and Eastern Europe, and to China in 1956, he did not succeed in getting credit in America, whereas Khrushchev

1963:285). See for the role of the Indonesian armed forces Sundhaussen 1982; Nöbel 1975; for the way they saw themselves as an important factor of state power see Britton 1973:83-4; McVey 1971a:131-2. See for the beginnings of the army Kahin 1970:140-1.

¹³ See for the early times of the PKI: Aidit 1956:4-17; Petrus Blumberger 1931:106-28, 351-9; Kahin 1970:70-87; McVey 1965a. Sukma 1999 examines mainly Indonesian-Chinese relations since 1967.

¹⁴ 'Aidit's expositions to comrade Hager from 10 August 1963', in SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 667, no pagination, first page. Varying figures from 1.5 to 2.5 million in: Pauker 1969:276.

¹⁵ Feith 1967:325-31; Lev 1966b; Tan 1967; Bunnell 1966. For a Soviet assessment, see Drugov and Reznikov 1969. For aspects of foreign policy, see Leifer 1983:54-74.

¹⁶ See for the 1958 events (and foreign intervention) Kosut 1967:64-75; Roadnight 2002:139-63; Kahin and Kahin 1995; Dahm 1971:184-6.

generously granted \$100 million, one of the largest grants of Soviet foreign aid to a non-communist country at that time. During the following years, Soekarno and the armed forces received political and – more important – generous material support from the USSR for their most prestigious (and costly) projects, especially for the West Irian and the Crush Malaysia campaigns. During the 1960s, Soekarno became more and more oriented towards China.

Soekarno's predilection for socialist models seemed to suit the interests of the PKI, who had contacts with socialist countries through the communist network. The situation was severely complicated, though, by the Sino-Soviet rift starting in the late 1950s. The 'socialist world system' broke apart because of disagreement between Moscow and Beijing in matters of ideology, and above all because of rivalry over leadership of the communist movement (Lüthi 2004; Westad 2000). The resulting polycentrism caused serious questions of loyalty in communist parties, and in several cases like India, even resulted in a split. The PKI leadership under Aidit, Lukman and Njoto have been trying for years to mediate between the rivals.¹⁷ When the split became obvious, they first took a position of positive neutrality towards Beijing before fully siding with the Chinese in 1963 (Van Dijk 1972; Ray 1964). Still, they maintained relations with Moscow as well.

As for Soekarno, he publicly announced his political preferences when he proclaimed an international Jakarta–Beijing–Pyongyang axis in 1964 (Mackie 2002; Sukma 1995). Whether his openly siding with China and her ally North Korea was just an extreme variant or a complete break with Hatta's ideal of an independent and active foreign policy (*bebas-aktif*) remains controversial (Sukma 1995:310). In any case the president did not formally abandon it, nor did he give up the idea of the New Emerging Forces (NEFO), meaning the solidarity of the nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America as well the socialist countries and the 'progressive forces' in capitalist countries.¹⁸

Thus, despite the vivid and varied Soviet-Indonesian relations, Soekarno finally sided with Moscow's socialist opponents. Up to that time, bilateral relations had seen frequent reciprocal visits from the mid-1950s until the early 1960s of the heads of state and of all kinds of delegations: political, trade, military, cultural, social and even religious (McLane 1973:83-90). Apart from that, Jakarta had received generous Soviet support for the above-mentioned military ventures and for prestigious projects like the Senayan sports complex. Soviet observers in Indonesia mostly blamed the Chinese for the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Jakarta, especially for the anti-Soviet propaganda and the infiltration of Soviet political and cultural

¹⁷ See for instance Aidit's speech before members of the Indonesian armed forces in 1963, in SAPMO-BArch DY/30/IV A 2/20, 668, no pagination.

¹⁸ All other forces were called the OLDEFO or Old Established Forces. See Modelski 1963.

organizations in the archipelago.¹⁹ The Soviet observers were hoping to win back the PKI to Moscow because, as they argued, the USSR had more to offer in terms of aid than China, which was itself a developing country.²⁰

If the contact with Beijing was the main problem in Soviet relations with Soekarno and the PKI, the armed forces had strong anti-communist traditions. These remained influential, even though Soekarno replaced the strictly anti-communist A.H. Nasution as chief of staff of the army by the more moderate Achmad Yani in June 1963. Despite ideological differences, for strictly pragmatic reasons the army accepted military support from Moscow on a large scale. To this end, army general Nasution himself had visited the Soviet Union several times. In June 1961 he went as a member of a government delegation together with Soekarno.²¹ Most of the Soviet assistance to Jakarta was used to finance Indonesia's West Irian and Crush Malaysia campaigns, although the latter was not wholeheartedly supported by Khrushchev. The Soviets were won over by arguments that the campaigns were part and parcel of the continuing Indonesian revolution in the domestic sphere, and of Indonesia's anti-imperialist struggle in foreign policy. Until 1965, Indonesia used 90 percent of their Soviet aid for military purposes against 10 percent that was invested in civil ventures (Boden 2006b:479). This was more than any of Moscow's other non-communist beneficiaries received to this end.

Given this international constellation, it is hard to speculate what Moscow might have regarded as the best option in the event of an internal Indonesian crisis: siding with Soekarno and the PKI as the USSR's 'natural partner', or siding with the armed forces who received Soviet material and who opposed the leaning of the president and the communists to China, which at that time was already Moscow's rival.

The events and their aftermath

One of the decisive factors that speeded up Indonesia's internal struggle for power was the lasting illness of President Soekarno, which raised questions about a possible successor. According to a rumour, a group of army generals, the so-called Council of Generals, had planned a coup d'état for 5 October 1965. This rumour is said to have provoked an attack on the generals, which might have been intended as a kidnapping but actually culminated in murder (Cribb and Brown 1995:98). On the morning of 1 October, in a radio broadcast,

¹⁹ See the report by the *Pravda* correspondents M.G. Domogatskii and L.V. Pochivalov, on their trip to Southeast Asia, 11-4-1963, in RGANI, fond (dossier, fonds; hereafter f.) 5, opis (finding aid, hereafter op.) 55, delo (file; hereafter d.) 116, ll. 106-42, here list (page; hereafter l.) 106.

²⁰ The adviser of the Soviet embassy in Indonesia, 3-4-1965, in RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 116, l. 168.

²¹ See for example the article in *Pravda*, 13-6-1961. For details, see Boden 2006b.

a group called the 'September 30 Movement' under Colonel Untung claimed responsibility for the attack on the generals.²² They stated: 'The Council of Generals is a subversive movement sponsored by the CIA [...]. [T]he Council of Generals had even planned to carry out a counter-revolutionary coup [...]. It was to prevent such a counter-revolutionary coup that Lieutenant Colonel Untung launched the September 30 Movement which has proved a great success.' (*Selected documents* 1966:134.) In the afternoon of the same day, a 'revolutionary committee' was presented, composed of 45 members, who were meant to take over government tasks.²³ However, the Movement was too weak to resist the (counter-)attack of the military under General Soeharto and broke down within two days (Cribb and Brown 1995:101).

Certain signs were said to point to an involvement of Soekarno and the PKI. These purported signs include the fact that the army officers had been opposing Soekarno's policies and his close cooperation with the PKI. This, such ran the argument, would have been a strong motive for the killing of the generals. This became the official version for the duration of Soeharto's presidency and all the way up to 1998 (Cribb and Brown 1995:100). A strong argument in favour of Soekarno's involvement was the fact that Untung, the leader of the Movement, belonged to the president's security guard. An alleged sign of PKI involvement was the list of names which Untung introduced as the 'revolutionary committee' of the September 30 Movement. The list included the names of four members of the PKI and affiliated organizations (out of 45 committee members).²⁴ Later, on 5 October, the PKI dissociated themselves from the committee, stating that its alleged participants had been included without their knowledge as far as PKI members were concerned.²⁵ Furthermore, in the light of the communist uprisings in 1926 and 1948, the incidents of 1965 seemingly fitted into a certain pattern.

The breakdown of the putsch gave way to a wave of violence against communists and leftists in general, which affected all regions and all social strata. The excesses lasted until March 1966, with occasional assaults and official executions taking place until 1969. The violence was fostered by the armed forces (Cribb and Brown 1995:105), who also held military tribunals and carried out executions. The number of people killed is estimated at several hundreds of thousands, on up to one million (Cribb and Brown 1995:106). As a consequence, the PKI was wiped out and communism prohibited; leftists like the famous writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer were imprisoned in camps.

²² 'Initial statement of colonel Untung', in *Selected documents* 1966:134-5.

²³ 'Decree No. 1 on the establishment of the Indonesian Revolution Council', in *Selected documents* 1966:136-7.

²⁴ The list of names is given in *Selected documents* 1966:140-2.

²⁵ 'Statement of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the P.K.I. (October 5)', in *Selected documents* 1966:188-9.

Official Soviet reactions

In order to understand the background of the events from the point of view of communists in other countries, it is important to look at their official reactions to the incidents. During the critical period from the murder of the generals until the execution of PKI leaders Sudisman, Njono and Wirjomartono in October 1968, there were enough public statements from Soviet state and party officials in the media to fill two volumes (*V zashchitu* 1967-69). These volumes comprise texts from the two major Soviet dailies *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, as well as from Soviet international weekly magazines like *New Times* (Russian edition: *Novoe Vremya*; German edition: *Neue Zeit*).

The official Soviet version of the Gestapu incidents with regard to the PKI was very cautious. It ran as follows: 'In Jakarta, military units under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Untung from President Soekarno's security guard have committed an attempted revolt.' (U. 1965:15). Moscow here followed the PKI's version that the murder of the generals was part of an internal power struggle within the armed forces and had nothing to do with a communist putsch (*V zashchitu* 1967-69, I:32-8).

However, there are signs that the USSR exercised restraint. It is striking, for instance, that the official reactions began only on 12 October, twelve days after the generals' murder.²⁶ This suggests that Moscow adopted a wait-and-see policy rather than encourage a purported communist coup d'état. Therefore, in their first public reaction, the Soviet leadership, namely Brezhnev, Mikoyan and Kosygin,²⁷ appealed to Soekarno to restore order and continue the path of the Indonesian revolution:

We are sending you and all the friendly people of Indonesia our sincere wishes of great success to achieve the healthy purposes of the Indonesian revolution and in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, in the defence of peace and security.²⁸

However restrained Moscow was about a possible PKI involvement, they staunchly held the imperialists responsible for the events. Brezhnev blamed the incident on an all-embracing aggressive imperialist policy in Asia:

²⁶ Brackman 1969:150-1 mentions a Soviet radio broadcast on 3 October 1965. In the files of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CPSU, however, there are no corresponding documents.

²⁷ After the fall of Khrushchev, Brezhnev became First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in October 1964 and changed to the title of secretary-general in April 1966. Kosygin was chairman of the Council of Ministers since 1964, Mikoyan held the post of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. These were the three most influential posts in the Soviet Union, both in theory and in practice.

²⁸ Letter to Soekarno 10-10-1965, printed in *Pravda* 12-10-1965, here quoted from: *V zashchitu* 1967-69, I:9-10.

The aggressive policy of imperialism increases the danger of war in the whole world. We see that the situation in Asia is becoming tense. [...] The imperialist forces try to use the situation which has now emerged in Indonesia for their own interests. [...] all real friends of Indonesia could only with concern watch the campaign that has been developing during the last days and which is directed against the leftist organizations, among them the communist party. The Soviet people highly appreciate the Indonesian people's friendship, their struggle against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and attach great importance to the all-round development of the cooperation between the USSR and Indonesia. We are convinced that the unity and the joining together of all healthy, progressive forces answers the key interests of the Indonesian people, and we hope that neither the domestic nor the foreign reactionary forces are given the opportunity to destroy this unity and avert Indonesia from her chosen path and divert her from solving her tasks, which derive from the Indonesian revolution.²⁹

These were the essentials of the official Soviet position concerning the incidents of 1965 in the period immediately following the murders. Brezhnev alluded to a possible influence of foreign powers, but did not specify which ones he had in mind. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of the Indonesian revolution. What had once begun as a national struggle against the Dutch and the Japanese occupation, had led to the revolution of 17 August 1945. Brezhnev did not explain if he meant to transfer the term 'revolution' to a socialist sphere as a further struggle within the country.

With the growing repression and finally the mass killings, Soviet commentaries and appeals to stop sounded increasingly helpless: 'What for and according to what right are tens of thousands of people being killed?' asked *Pravda*. The explanation: 'Rightist political circles are trying to eliminate the communist party and at the same time "eradicate" the ideology of communism in Indonesia'. (*Pravda*, 16-2-1966, in: *V zashchitu* 1967-69, I:42) Concerning the massacres, Moscow always publicly supported the Indonesian comrades against the persecution and the PKI leadership against the death sentences. They stressed that the communists had been falsely accused of the murders in order to create a pretext to wipe out the PKI: 'The ultra-reactionary forces in Indonesia used the attempted putsch to attack the communist party. They accused the whole party of treason, and created an atmosphere of anarchy and mass terror throughout the whole country which is directed not only against the communists but also against all other progressively thinking people.' (Antonow 1966.) In addition to that, Mikoyan (1966:4) described the anti-communist persecution as 'white terror', alluding to the Russian civil war of 1917-1922. He stated: '[...] tens and hundreds of thousands of communists and members of other progressive organizations [...] became the victims of a

²⁹ 'From the speech of comrade L.I. Brezhnev in Kiev on 23 October 1965', printed in *Pravda* 24-10-1965, in: *V zashchitu* 1967-69, I:11-2.

bitter class struggle by reactionary forces'. He thus interpreted the Indonesian situation in socialist terms, as a struggle between the progressive communists and 'reactionary forces', which he again did not name explicitly.

The Soviets were convinced that Indonesian development as an independent country was inextricably linked with socialism and that the destruction of communism was tantamount to the destruction of the Indonesian revolution (*V zashchitu* 1967-69, I:43). This is why the Soviet leadership wrote fervent appeals to prevent the executions of the PKI elite who had survived the mass killings (*V zashchitu* 1967-69, II:17-21). But despite Moscow's efforts, Sudisman, Njono and Wirjomartono were executed in October 1968.

In summary, one can say that in their public statements the Soviets held Untung and his group of officers responsible for the murder of the generals. They also blamed unnamed Indonesian 'reactionary forces' as well as foreign imperialists for the consequences, possibly also for the murder of the generals. According to Moscow's version, these had been staged as an excuse to hold military tribunals against the communists. From these official statements it does not become clear to what extent Soviet politicians and diplomats might have known of the plans beforehand and how the events were judged internally. This is where the archival documents are more promising.

Behind the scenes

The Soviet files show that Moscow's contacts with the PKI had been intensive right up to autumn 1965. During the first half of 1965 the Soviet ambassador frequently held conversations with Indonesian state and party officials.³⁰ Although relations with the PKI were strained due to the Sino-Soviet split, Aidit tried to make a fresh start with the new Soviet leadership under Brezhnev. He even welcomed the change because he had strongly disliked Khrushchev, not only for the way he conveyed de-stalinization to socialist comrades on a global scale, but also for his coarse manners.³¹ As far as Soviet relations with Indonesia were concerned, Aidit recommended 'to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries to hold Indonesia firmly in their hands and not to let her go under any circumstances'.³² This means that at least part of the PKI leadership was very interested in good relations with the whole socialist world, not just with Beijing.

³⁰ AVP, f. 091, op. 21, papka (dossier; hereafter pap.) 33, d. 3.

³¹ Discussions of the Soviet ambassador Mikhailov with Aidit, 2-3-1965, in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, l. 86.

³² Discussions of the Soviet ambassador Mikhailov with Aidit, 8-1-1965, in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, l. 17.

It is interesting to see that Aidit spoke very openly about the PKI's perspectives with regard to the immediate future. Concerning the possible power vacuum after Soekarno, he discussed a possible succession with Soviet ambassador Mikhailov:

According to the statement of D.N. Aidit, there arises the question who will come after Soekarno. For the Communist Party neither Nasution nor Chairul Saleh are acceptable. They [the PKI] support Subandrio. For the PKI, Ali Sastroamidjojo is not suited either, because he will strengthen the position of the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Party), and this is bad for the PKI. D.N. Aidit said that [...] Nasution could be sent abroad, for instance as ambassador to Paris; A. Yani could stay in office as a counterbalance to Nasution.³³

This statement suggests that if the PKI had a part in the incidents of 30 September, they had changed their plans when they attacked Nasution and Yani. On the other hand, Aidit's statement might be interpreted as indicating the PKI was not involved, because they had different plans in case of a takeover of power. Subandrio might have been an interesting candidate for the USSR because he had been the first Indonesian ambassador to Moscow (1954-1956) and had displayed some socialist inclinations at that time. Moreover, he became a PNI member in 1958 and thus seemed to be acceptable to the nationalists as well.

Only three months before the tragic events, another PKI member gave an impression of his party's view of the situation in Indonesia in a discussion with a foreign comrade. In talks with the GDR's ambassador, Zain Nasution (not to be confused with General Abdul Haris Nasution) alluded to 'a process of a gathering of the reactionary forces'.³⁴ He did not specify which forces he had in mind. As to their strength, he estimated that even though they were not strong enough to carry out a coup d'état, 'they could cause a lot of trouble'. Again, he did not go into details as to what implications he saw for the PKI. Referring to the alleged power vacuum resulting from Soekarno's illness, he said:

At present, there was no decisive development of the country to the left to be expected. If Soekarno should at some time not be at the head any more, there would begin a rapid development to the left. In answer to my [Hertzfeld's] question if that meant that Soekarno was the main obstacle for a decisive leftist development, Nasution said that this was true to a certain extent.

³³ Discussions of the Soviet ambassador Mikhailov with Aidit, 8-1-1965, in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 11-2. At this time, A.H. Nasution was Minister of the Armed Forces, Chairul Saleh was Third Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister in the Compartment of Development and Minister of Basic Industry and Mining; Subandrio held the posts of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations; Ali Sastroamidjojo was Deputy Chairman of the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly; Yani was Chief of Staff of the Army. This information is taken from Finch and Lev 1965:54-9.

³⁴ 'Memorandum about talks with the deputy head of the department for international relations of the Central Committee of the PKI, comrade Zain Nasution, 30 June 1965', confidential, 12-7-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Hertzfeld, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 667. The following quotations refer to this document unless stated otherwise.

Here again, it is uncertain whether the PKI's statement is evidence of a PKI initiative for the murder of the generals or not. Zain Nasution explained that the PKI felt the menace of the 'reactionary forces' and their possible inclination to a putsch. He also argued that Soekarno might stand in the way of a leftist development of Indonesia. This does at least not support the theory of a united action of Soekarno and the communists against the generals.

An examination of the further course of discussions faces the problem that, similar to the gap in the FRUS material, there are very few documents for the critical period between 23 June and 29 December 1965 in the declassified files of the Soviet foreign ministry.³⁵ The lack of Soviet material may be attributable to various reasons: either the relevant documents are kept in another archive (most likely the president's archive, which is generally inaccessible) or they have not yet been classified or even listed among the existing documents. Moreover, contacts with the PKI might indeed have been interrupted completely. But even in this case it is very likely that somewhere there exists some material on the internal assessment of the situation by Soviet diplomats or journalists. In the absence of Soviet material, the documents of the SED provide a substitute with some interesting material on the post-Gestapu period, because this party was coordinating its official statements concerning the massacres with the brother parties.³⁶ At that time the SED had connections with the PKI as well as good relations with the CPSU. Policy behind the scenes can thus be partly deduced from the German material.

One month after the Gestapu incident, the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, noted his version of the events and their background, with special reference to the role of the PKI. He stated that it was not certain whether a 'generals' plan' for a putsch had existed, but that a Czechoslovakian military expert had overheard a remark General Nasution made to a colleague in which he reminded him of a forthcoming meeting that dealt with the communists.³⁷ Kehr summarized the background situation as he understood it:

The armed forces realized that the balance between them and the PKI was shifting in favour of the communists. At the same time, the situation was such that the armed forces had become the main obstacle for the further development of the communist party and their carrying through of their policy. The PKI feared a new strike from the armed forces. The history of the anti-communist actions of the

³⁵ The paper edition of FRUS Vol. 26 contains no document of the critical time between 15-30 September 1965. See the transition from No. 141 to No. 142, pp. 299-300. See for the Soviet material: AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3. From the RGANI, there are no corresponding documents for the time in question. It is important to note that the quotation of one of Johansen's key documents is misleading (this refers to RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 218, ll. 1ff.).

³⁶ Session of the SED Politburo on 11 January 1966 in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/J IV 2/2, 1040, pp. 1-2.

³⁷ 'On the incidents connected with the movement of 30 September', Djakarta, 30-10-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 1051, 18 pp., here p. 6.

armed forces as well as the worsening of the domestic situation caused by the PKI's offensive and the other objects mentioned here, made it seem likely that the army thought the time had come to strike a new decisive blow against the communist movement in Indonesia for a change in Soekarno's policy.³⁸

Kehr's understanding of the situation demonstrates that internally, diplomats from socialist countries were ready to accept the version of an internal power struggle between communists and the armed forces as the reason behind the Gestapu events. The consul general became even more explicit when he suggested who might be the driving force behind the September 30 Movement. He took into consideration three possible actors:

- a. Sukarno himself, who according to one piece of information was absolutely convinced of the generals' planned putsch;
- b. officers of the armed forces like Omar Dani [sic, Dhani was Commander of the Air Force] and the head of the Air Force or circles of the lower and middle officer corps. Untung himself seems to have played only an executive role [...];
- c. the PKI, when taking into consideration that the whole attitude of the party displays clear violent and dogmatic traits.³⁹

This text reveals that the German diplomat, although a representative of a socialist state, dissociated himself from PKI policy on the whole, regardless of whether the party was involved in the Gestapu events. He even conceded that he was not sure whether the PKI leadership had been informed of Untung's actions (Ibid.:10). Nevertheless, Kehr sharply criticized the Indonesian comrades when he said: 'The PKI has seriously failed in connection with the incidents of 30 September [...].'⁴⁰

Kehr's harsh criticism of the PKI demonstrates how far the SED was from supporting the Indonesian comrades' policy. The consul wrote home openly that he thought it possible that the version according to which Soekarno and/or the PKI were involved in the murder of the generals could be true. He blamed the PKI for their failure to handle the situation appropriately. Even though the SED often enough expressed a dissenting opinion, on this topic Kehr's view very likely concurred with Moscow's position. Despite the Soviets' public support of the PKI, as seen in the official statements above, the PKI's siding with Beijing and the occurrences of anti-Soviet propaganda had naturally weakened Soviet-PKI relations.

³⁸ 'On the incidents connected with the movement of 30 September', Djakarta, 30-10-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 1051, 18 pp., here pp. 5-6.

³⁹ 'On the incidents connected with the movement of 30 September', Djakarta, 30-10-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 1051, 18 pp., here p. 8.

⁴⁰ 'On the incidents connected with the movement of 30 September', Djakarta, 30-10-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 1051, 18 pp., here p. 8.

In the turbulent weeks of October, the Soviets seem to have lost contact with the PKI and obviously also with Soekarno. When the Soviet ambassador tried to talk to the president in November, he was put off by Subandrio.⁴¹ Thus, the armed forces remained the only power to which Moscow could turn for discussions of the situation. Consequently, Soviet diplomats contacted General Nasution, who had escaped the murderers. The new Soviet ambassador, Sytenko, explained in a talk with the general that the events of 30 September had come as a complete surprise to the USSR.⁴² He complained about the ban of the PKI and the persecution of communists, who had been executed without trial and whose houses were burnt down. Nasution replied that the PKI's involvement in the coup d'état was seen as a fact.⁴³ He made clear that in his opinion the persecution was just what those responsible for the murder of the generals deserved.⁴⁴ On the other hand, he explained with regard to the persecution by the military that the new leadership was different: 'We are not anti-communists, we just fight against communist organizations that intend to instigate a rebellion and to seize power. We discriminate different shades.'⁴⁵ This could be understood as a signal to Sytenko that the persecution was directed especially against the PKI and their affiliates, not against communists in general, and thus would not affect the Soviets.

Therefore it is understandable that Nasution was entrusted with the security of Soviet citizens in Indonesia.⁴⁶ But even the general could not prevent all attacks. When the Indonesian communists were persecuted, many institutions associated with them were also assaulted. At first, however, these aggressions did not concern the USSR. The East German consul general reported at the end of October: 'The Soviet specialists continue to work as usual and the SU embassy knows nothing about any discrimination against Soviet specialists'.⁴⁷ Later on, some incidents were reported, but they seem to have been confined to the searching of houses of Soviet citizens.⁴⁸ In three reported cases up to the end of 1965, the houses and personal belongings of

⁴¹ Draft of a letter of the Soviet ambassador, no date, in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 34, d. 14, ll. 80-81.

⁴² 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 226.

⁴³ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here ll. 220-1.

⁴⁴ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 226.

⁴⁵ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 220.

⁴⁶ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 218.

⁴⁷ 'On the incidents connected with the movement of 30 September', Djakarta, 30-10-1965, by the consul general of the GDR, Kehr, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20, 1051, 18 pp., here pp. 16-7.

⁴⁸ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with General Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 218.

Soviet specialists were searched, probably in order to find evidence about Indonesian communists.⁴⁹ Occurrences of this kind were presumably one reason why Soviet consulates did not provide their Indonesian comrades with refuge. It was argued that if PKI members were to seek asylum in the Soviet embassy, this would cause 'serious difficulties' for the embassy's work and would have a negative effect on Soviet-Indonesian relations.⁵⁰ Their restraint might be interpreted in two ways: either the Soviets were cautious because they were unsure to what extent the PKI was still leaning towards Beijing, or they were above all anxious not to give any reason for strikes at Soviet diplomats. The Soviet concern seems understandable, because some of the Soviet consulates in distant regions such as Banjarmasin in Kalimantan were indeed 'protected' by the Indonesian military of their own accord.⁵¹ These measures were justified as protection against anti-communist riots. It also seems likely that the military tried to monitor communist institutions and prevent them from helping PKI members.

A year after the Gestapu events, the Indonesian foreign minister Adam Malik promised that attacks on Soviet institutions would stop.⁵² He stressed that Indonesia wanted to continue friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Relations, however, were hindered by the massacres. Kosygin reportedly denounced the attacks in a discussion with Malik in harsh words:

During the political talks, especially Comrade Kosygin condemned the persecution and executions of the Indonesian communists in a very harsh manner and explained to the Minister of Foreign Affairs very plainly that through these incidents the progressive forces have been eliminated in a brutish way. Malik was told that the domestic anti-communism would consequently lead to the camp of imperialism in matters of foreign policy. On this occasion the Soviet comrades explained that they did not bring up this question in order to interfere in the domestic affairs of Indonesia, but that they posed this question in this harsh manner because they believe that they have a right to do this because the Soviet Union has been helping Indonesia during the last twenty years in every way to achieve the country's independence in the struggle against Dutch imperialism and with the liberation of West Irian. The Soviet Union has granted generous economic aid and political support for the Indonesian people at all times until recently.⁵³

⁴⁹ 'Discussion of Soviet ambassador Sytenko with general Nasution', 29-12-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 33, d. 3, ll. 215-28, here l. 218.

⁵⁰ Ponomarev and Gromyko to the Central Committee of the CPSU, 9-11-1965 in AVP, f. 091, op. 21, pap. 34, d. 14, l. 73.

⁵¹ 'Report on the events in Banjarmasin, from 10 to 22 February 1966', by the staff of the Soviet consulate, in AVP, f. 91, op. 19, pap. 25, d. 20, ll. 29-36.

⁵² From the embassy in Moscow: 'Information on the visit of the Minister of Foreign Relations, Malik, to the Soviet Union', Moscow, 26-10-1966, in SAPMO-BAch DY/30/IV A 2/20, 671, no pagination.

⁵³ From the embassy in Moscow: 'Information on the visit of the Minister of Foreign Relations, Malik, to the Soviet Union', Moscow, 26-10-1966, in SAPMO-BAch DY/30/IV A 2/20, 671, no pagination.

This statement left no doubt about Soviet loyalties lying with the PKI, at least in discussions with Indonesian officials. Operating on an understanding of the socialist world system as a global, homogeneous phenomenon, Kosygin defended the Indonesian comrades against the persecution. Similar to Sytenko in his talk with Nasution, he demanded a halt to the attacks. But he went a step further when he insisted that the USSR had a special right to put forward such a claim. He argued that Moscow had been assisting Indonesia for many years to defend her independence and that the Indonesian government had readily accepted Soviet aid. Now Kosygin required a concession with regard to the treatment of Indonesian communists.

The Soviets were not successful. They could prevent neither the mass killings nor the execution of the PKI leadership in 1968. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that despite the PKI's leaning towards China – instead of towards Moscow – Soviet diplomats and politicians lent the Indonesian communists their support both publicly and in internal discussions with the new leadership. But they did not go so far as to openly give the comrades asylum in their embassies. In this, they were very much concerned about their own security. Soviet citizens and institutions were mostly not attacked in anti-communist riots, probably due to specific orders from A.H. Nasution, and the Soviets were anxious to keep it this way.

The surviving PKI members, however, either went into exile to the USSR, China, Albania and other countries, or they stayed in Indonesia and tried to rebuild the PKI. As a consequence of the events, unity among PKI members and followers was destroyed.⁵⁴ It was replaced by different schools and thus followed earlier experiences of other Asian communist parties. The most influential groups in terms of publicity were the Maoist wing and the wing oriented towards the Soviet Union, led by Jusuf Adjirop and Tomas Sinuraja respectively.⁵⁵ These groups drew different conclusions from the Gestapu events and the persecution. They published their respective outlines for a future programme in the form of documents of 'self-criticism', which referred to the political course of the PKI under Aidit.⁵⁶ The main differences between them are whether they favoured armed struggle to get to power, or a more peaceful way back to legality. While the Maoist document from 1966 stressed the use of partisan tactics, the Moscow wing's paper, dating from 1967-1968, put forward the idea of a legal way to power. Both documents

⁵⁴ See on the unity and cohesiveness of the PKI under Aidit in general, Mortimer 1968:347.

⁵⁵ International Department 'Information material on the Communist Party of Indonesia' (probably 1971) in SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 1051, no pagination, here pp. 3-4.

⁵⁶ The Maoist document appeared in *Indonesian Tribune* 1-1 (1966) which was published in Albania, the pro-Soviet paper in *Party Life* (July-Sept. 1967), a journal based in New Delhi – according to Mortimer 1968:349 – and/or in *Tekad Rakjat* (April 1968) – according to Van Dijk 1972:59. McVey 1971b:36, note 24, gives slightly different data on the publication of the documents. In this paper I am following Van Dijk 1972:54-63.

criticized not only the 'reactionary forces' in Indonesia, meaning the Soeharto regime, but also the opposing part of the surviving PKI. The Maoist paper verbally attacked 'modern Khrushchevist revisionists', whereas the exiles oriented towards the USSR condemned the violent tactics of the pro-Beijing Indonesian communists (*Erklärung* 1970:275). Moscow's followers even identified a third wing of the PKI which had adopted a kind of middle course between the positions outlined above. It was labelled 'Marxist-Leninist', like the other Moscow wing of the PKI.⁵⁷ In 1969 those PKI members who lived in exile in the Soviet Union even founded a 'foreign committee' (CL PKI) in Moscow, headed by the above-mentioned Tomas Sinuraja.⁵⁸ Measures of this kind perpetuated the split within the surviving PKI and for a long time hindered a strengthening of Indonesia's exiled leftist forces.

Conclusion

Even though Cribb and Brown (1995:98) may be right in stating that 'We shall never know for certain what plans the PKI and Soekarno were making during these months [preceding October 1965]', Russian and German sources shed some light on the background of the events and the extent of Soviet involvement. They reveal that Aidit shared his ideas about a post-Soekarno Indonesia with the Soviet ambassador in early 1965. At this time he did not allude to any plans for any assassinations whatsoever. With regard to Soekarno, the PKI seems to have considered the president not leftist enough, even in 1965.

The documents in question also show the conflicting attitudes towards the PKI by the communist parties close to Moscow's line. The GDR diplomat Kehr, for instance, was convinced that PKI involvement in the Gestapu events was plausible and not even unlikely. He criticized not so much the party's possible involvement as such, but the PKI's handling of the whole situation, which he regarded as absolutely inadequate. This can be taken to mean that he was not necessarily against a coup d'état undertaken by the PKI, but against a violent coup with devastating consequences. Nevertheless, the SED as well as the CPSU staunchly supported the PKI in their public statements after Gestapu. At least in public, they demonstrated unanimous solidarity with the Indonesian comrades.

Concerning the question whether Moscow was involved in the incident, the archival material we have at the moment still makes direct involvement of the Soviet Union seem unlikely. The documents from Moscow and Berlin

⁵⁷ International Department 'Information material on the Communist Party of Indonesia' [probably 1971] in SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 1051, no pagination, here p. 4.

⁵⁸ International Department 'Information material on the Communist Party of Indonesia' [probably 1971] in SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 1051, no pagination, here pp. 3-4.

do not indicate any concrete Soviet influence on the incidents, neither before, during, nor after 30 September 1965. On the contrary, the documents reveal that the Soviets and their East German allies were unprepared, despite the information they got from the PKI in the first half of 1965, and that they had no plans for how to deal with the situation. While the question of foreign influence from China and the United States remains open to some extent, Moscow most likely had no active part in the coup d'état in Indonesia.

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