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Indonesian Coup

Was a Red Bobble

Ex-Ambassador Believes That PKI Launched Coup Because It Felt Its Time Was Running Out

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT By Howard P. Jones

Chancellor of the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii, Jones was United States Ambassador to Indonesia from February, 1958, to last June. The Washington Post invited him to comment on developments at Djakarta because of his long experience there.

HONOLULU—Although the situation in Indonesia is still fluid and remains somewhat unclear, partly because communications with the outside world have not yet been completely restored, the picture that is beginning to emerge may be summarized as follows:

- An attempted coup d'etat was launched against President Sukarno and his government by a left-wing element led by Lt. Col. Untung, a relatively unknown battalion commander in the palace guard.

- The coup came within an inch of succeeding through the assassination of six of the top military command. It might well have succeeded had not Defense Minister Nasution and a number of other senior generals also marked for assassination acted fast in a dramatic counter-coup.

- The anticommunists, led by Gen. Nasution, are apparently in control as of this writing.

- President Sukarno is safe in his palace at Bogor, 40 miles from Djakarta. He has made one public appearance and two radio broadcasts urging his people to be calm and to cooperate in the restoration of order.

- The six top army generals assassinated, most of them anticommunists, were given heroes' funerals and Sukarno publicly condemned their slayers although he did not fix the blame on the Communists.

- The Indonesian cabinet denounced the killings, urged the need for an orderly atmosphere but did not condemn the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). It is noteworthy that the country's No. 2 and No. 3 Communists were at the meeting.

- Two days later, anticommunist demonstrators burned down the Communist headquarters in Djakarta. As they passed the American Embassy, a few of them yelled, "Long live America."

A Typical Explanation

THE FOREGOING summary leaves more questions unanswered than answered. The first unknown quantity is the circumstances that led up to the attempted coup.

Col. Untung attempted to explain his move in the first hours when it appeared that it might succeed. He accused Indonesian military leaders, who he said were working with the American CIA, of planning a coup against Sukarno Oct. 5, Armed Forces Day. It was essential for the left wing to get there first, was the gist of his story—typical Communist propaganda.

The alleged CIA plotting against Sukarno had been the theme of the Communist chorus for nearly a year before his resignation as Ambassador June 30. It was this baseless accusation that led to the threats against Bill Palmer, representative of the American motion picture industry in Indonesia, who was one of the best friends the country had.

The Communist press hounded him out of the country, dinning into the people's ears the charge that Palmer was the leader of the CIA in Indonesia and was involved in a conspiracy against the government. There was not one iota of truth in this or in the accusa-

tion that the CIA was working against Sukarno.

An American ambassador in a country is the representative of the President of the United States. Every agency of the United States Government within that country reports to him. This has been true for years, so I speak with authority on this point.

A Race for Succession

IF THE REASON given by Untung for the timing of the coup was specious, this leaves unanswered the question as to why the left-wing group chose that particular moment to attempt a coup. The real story may never be known, but it might not be too far-fetched to reason as follows:

President Sukarno was 64 on June 6. At various times in recent years, he has been reported in ill health. It was no secret in Djakarta that the race for succession was on.

The PKI leaders were known to be fearful of the moment when Sukarno would step off the stage. At that point, a struggle for power between the PKI and the Indonesian military appeared inevitable, with the military having the bigger muscles.

Some six months ago Aidit, the Communist boss in Indonesia, called for arming of the peasants and workers to resist the British-Malaysian military forces defending Malaysia against Indonesian threats. Aidit, of course, was preparing for the moment when he would have to fight for the power he seeks.

There have been recent reports that Sukarno was ailing again, although I have no idea how accurate they may be. Newspaper correspondents said he was his usual ebullient self in his public

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