

(96) file copy

[Redacted]

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 February 1985

Indonesia's Soeharto: Losing the Magic? [Redacted]

25X1

Summary

Since September 1984, social unrest coupled with a spate of terrorist-style bombings and arson have created a tense atmosphere in Indonesia. Fear that the country faces a period of turmoil has begun to fuel concern among much of the populace who adhere to traditional beliefs in spirits and mysticism that President Soeharto is losing his mandate to rule. The US Embassy [Redacted] report that rumors are rife on the central island of Java that 1985 will be decisive for Soeharto's New Order. [Redacted]

25X1

Popular anxieties by themselves pose no threat to the government, but we believe the conjunction of social turbulence and the speculations of Indonesian mystics has political significance. Should unrest and antigovernment opposition persist, doubts about Soeharto's "mandate of heaven" could become widespread and erode confidence in his leadership. This would complicate Soeharto's prospects for coping with a weak economy and eventually effecting a succession he finds acceptable. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 14 February, 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

EA M

85-10031

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

25X1

[Redacted]

25X1

Mysticism's Role

Belief in traditional mysticism, spiritualism, and parapsychology exert a strong influence among the Indonesian populace. Not only peasants, but also educated businessmen, academics, military officers, and high level government officials--including cabinet members--believe in the mystical. To varying degrees, mysticism also plays an integral role in perceptions and decisionmaking among Indonesia's predominantly nominal Muslims. According to US Embassy reporting, even Indonesians who disdain such notions acknowledge that these beliefs have significant sway on many of their countrymen, particularly the Javanese. [redacted]

Such beliefs--which predate the comparatively recent arrival of Islam in about the fifteenth century and Christianity in the seventeenth century--are regarded as an important component of the eclectic religious style of most Javanese--Muslim and Christian alike. Characteristics of the belief system include:

- o Belief that ancestral spirits actively influence events in the temporal world and control the ascendance of a "chosen one" to reign. Tradition holds that natural disasters and civil disorder reflect a ruler's loss of favor with these spirits and thus portend a change in leadership. Mysticism thus surfaces particularly during times of social stress.
- o Cultural traditions that maintain that society faces recurrent patterns of severe tests or "transformations," accompanied by domestic disorder--one such pattern being a 20-year cycle. The last such major upheaval followed the attempted Communist coup in 1965, which set the stage for Soeharto's coming to power and contributed to his self-perception as a national savior.¹
- o Various sacred artifacts--such as ceremonial daggers (kris) and wayang puppets--which are revered for having magical properties that empower or protect the owner. Similarly, certain locales--such as particular caves, graves of monarchs, ancestors, and mystics, and mountain tops--are considered sites for meditation to acquire mystical insight and powers. Several such objects and locations are associated with the monarch's divine mandate to rule, including one "magical" kris now

1. Prior to 1965, similar upheavals occurred in 1926 when the Communist Party attempted to instigate an uprising, and in 1945 when Indonesians launched their war of independence against the Dutch, thus strengthening the notion among believers of a 20-year cycle of major upheavals. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

belonging to Soeharto, several caves, and the ancient sultans' palaces in Solo and Jogjakarta in Central Java. [redacted]

25X1

In addition, Soeharto, although a nominal Muslim, reportedly spent his late adolescence as apprentice to a prominent local mystic (dukun), learning techniques of soothsaying and prophecy. Information regarding Soeharto's decisionmaking process is limited, although evidence suggests that mystical considerations do not predominate his generally pragmatic decisionmaking. We do know that Soeharto routinely consults with several dukuns, including his longtime personal spiritual adviser and mystic, Sujogo Humardhani, according to the US Embassy and other observers. [redacted]

The Regime: Fraying at the Edges?

25X1

Recent social unrest and terrorist-style incidents on the central island of Java have fueled popular anxiety that Indonesia is in for a period of turmoil associated with the 20-year cycle (See inset). Following the 12 September riot in Jakarta, in which security forces fired on and killed a number of demonstrators, there was a rash of bomb threats, fires, and radical Islamic pamphleteering. Coordinated bombing attacks on several Chinese business establishments on 4 October introduced a new phase of violence. [redacted]

25X1

According to the US Embassy, rumors are now rife in Central and East Java that 1985 will be decisive for the Soeharto regime. A number of sources indicate growing anxiety among Javanese parliamentarians who subscribe to spiritualism that recent incidents of rioting, bombings, and arson indicate that Soeharto has lost his supernatural mandate to govern (in Indonesian, called the "wahyu"). Spiritualists also predict that these and other incidents of an unsepecified nature--forecast for mid-1985--will erode Soeharto's esteem among the public. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

2. Typical of Soeharto's use of mystical symbols was his choice of 11 March 1966 for the transfer of power from Sukarno to himself and the use of the Indonesian acronym (Supersemar) for the date. In a clear reference to Javanese mythology, Soeharto sought to draw a parallel between the victory of the bumbling dwarf, Semar, over his more worldly superiors and Soeharto's own victory over the more flamboyant Sukarno. [redacted]

25X1

3. For assessments of recent social unrest and regime political tendencies, see DI Intelligence Assessments EA 84-10206 [redacted] December 1984, Indonesia: Implications of Recent Unrest, and EA 84-10143 [redacted] July 1984, Indonesia: Tightening the Screws--Soeharto's Growing Authoritarianism. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Chronology of Major Incidents

12 Sept	Tanjung Priok riot	Violent confrontation between Muslims and security forces. Extensive casualties.
4 Oct	Bombings of Chinese-owned bank and shop in Jakarta	Bank Central Asia owned by key Soeharto business associate.
4 Oct	Bombing of bank, Pontianak, West Kalimantan	Another branch of Bank Central Asia.
17 Oct	Bombing of Super Mie Factory, Jakarta	A Chinese-owned business.
22 Oct	Fire at Sarinah Department Store, southern Jakarta	Owner has ties to Soeharto's son. Unknown cause.
29 Oct	Fire at Chinatown restaurant and nightclub complex	Owned by associate of Soeharto's son. Cause undetermined.
29 Oct	Fire and explosions at Marine ammunition depot, Jakarta	Extensive damage. Probably accidental--previous fire occurred in July.
2 Nov	Department store and movie theatre fires, Jogjakarta	Possible bombing by competing Chinese businessmen.
5 Nov	Threat letters to US and Australian Embassies	First threat on US Embassy since spring.
5 Nov	Telephone threat to shopping, apartment complex, Jakarta	Residence of several US Embassy personnel.
8 Nov	Undetonated bomb discovered at Pertamina headquarters	Followed a telephone threat.
11 Nov	Fire destroys offices at Kartika Plaza Hotel, Jakarta	Origin unknown. Hotel controlled by group of generals.
13 Nov	Fire destroys government offices, Sarinah building.	Origin unknown. A major Jakarta department store complex.
14 Nov	Bomb hoax, American Express offices, Arthaloka Building	Followed telephone threat. A prominent Jakarta office building.
24 Dec	Christian Seminary bombed, Malang, East Java	Probably reflection of local religious frictions.
21 Jan	Nine bombs damage Borobudur Temple, Central Java	Most prominent and revered cultural landmark.
31 Jan	Fire destroys Sultan's Palace, Solo, Central Java	A cultural and spiritual landmark.

25X1

Reinforcing this apprehension is what appears to be a steadily growing disenchantment among some officials, younger parliamentarians, and businessmen who perceive that Soeharto has put his family's aggrandizement ahead of the good of the country.

[Redacted]

25X1

25X1

In addition, [Redacted] criminal gang activity is again on the rise in some cities and suggests that authorities may again resort to harsh countermeasures such as a resumption of the "mysterious killings" campaign. Although the public by most accounts generally favored the military's draconian 1983-84 anticrime campaign, under the present circumstances it could easily interpret a resurgence of violent crime, and ensuing punishment, as social deterioration--reflecting the government's inability to maintain control and its loss of divine favor.

25X1

The government has been unable to stop the incidents. Although serious rioting has not recurred, bombings have resumed following a lull in late November and most of December. Two bombs damaged a Christian seminary in Malang, East Java on Christmas Eve. A grenade attack on 20 January against a Jakarta police car killed one patrolman and wounded two. On 21 January, nine coordinated bombs damaged the ancient Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Central Java--the country's most revered historical and cultural treasure--in what was clearly intended as a symbolic attack on the regime. Although the government arrested several suspects following the October bombings in Jakarta, its failure to prevent additional incidents will fuel public concern about the government's ability to maintain control and to prevent for further bombings.

25X1

Is Soeharto's Mandate Waning?

25X1

In themselves apprehensions fueled by mysticism and antigovernment rumors pose no threat to Soeharto's continued control. Such increased criticism of the regime--and doubts about its spiritual credentials--have precedent, tending to recur midterm between the heightened political enthusiasm associated with elections. [Redacted] the current spate of rumors is more intense and personally focused on Soeharto than in the past. Their congruence with the series of bombings, growing opposition to some of the regime's policies, and the prospect of continued economic strains in our judgment could well heighten popular tensions. We cannot say, any better than any Indonesian, how far the cycle of terrorist incidents and

25X1

[Redacted]

25X1

spiritual doubting may go. If no further attacks occur, popular apprehensions would gradually ease. Should the current social unrest and terrorist incidents persist, however, along with worsening economic strains, escalating criticism of the regime and anxiety about the New Order's loss of spiritual backing could contribute to a significant erosion of confidence in Soeharto's leadership ability among both the populace and the elite. Such an atmosphere could further stimulate fringe groups of malcontents [redacted]

25X1

We do not know how Soeharto interprets recent events. Thus far he has given no indication of stepping down from the presidency or designating a successor [redacted]

25X1
25X1
25X1

[redacted] Nevertheless, a severe escalation in unrest during the period leading up to the 1987 parliamentary elections could weaken Soeharto's mandate, thus complicating his prospects for coping with a weak economy and eventually effecting a succession he finds acceptable. [redacted]

25X1

A variety of occurrences in the months ahead could in our view increase concern among the elite about the regime's popular--and divine--support and cause problems for Soeharto:

- o Continuation--or an escalation--of bombings and fires or attacks on prominent facilities, especially those associated with the regime or its Chinese business partners. Of particular significance would be further attacks on national cultural landmarks--such as the Borobudur Temple--which are widely venerated. Even presumably accidental incidents--such as the fire which extensively damaged the Sultan's 17th century palace in Solo and several recent munitions depot explosions--add to public anxiety.
- o The regime's detractors could exploit Jakarta's active rumor mill to exaggerate public and official concerns about the regime's support. Recently, for example, several high level officials received bogus letters purportedly from a group of Army colonels warning Soeharto to halt dealings with his Chinese business partners or face unspecified consequences.
- o Escalating criticism by radical Muslim elements--through mosque speeches, pamphlets, and cassettes--denouncing the regime's campaign to impose the secular state ideology as anti-Islamic.
- o More open criticism by allies of the regime--including prominent government, parliamentary, religious, and business leaders--of Soeharto's policies and ties to Chinese businessmen.

- o A major natural disaster, such as a prolonged drought, which could cause substantial shortfalls in rice crops following favorable harvests in five of the last six years. Such an occurrence could exacerbate economic strains and be perceived as an omen of impending leadership change. Other ominous signs would include major earthquakes or volcanic eruptions on one of the central islands--not unusual events in Indonesia, which has more active volcanoes than any other country.

25X1

25X1

Typescript: Indonesia's Soeharto: Losing the Magic?

- Original--OEA/SEA/IB
 - 1--OEA/SEA/ITM
 - 1--CH/OEA/SEAD
 - 1--DC/OEA/SEAD
 - 1--PDB (7F30)
 - 1--C/NIC (7E62)
 - 1--NIO/EA (7E62)
 - 5--CPAS/IMC/CB (7G07)
 - 1--C/PES/DDI (7F24)
 - 1--DDI (7E44)
 - 1--DCI (7D60)
 - 1--DDCI (7D6011)
 - 1--C/DDO/IAD (3D00)
 - 1--C/DDO/EA (5D00)
 - 1--D/OEAA (4F18)
 - 1--Executive Director (7E12)
 - 1--CPAS/ILS (7G215)
 - 1--OEA/NEA (4G43)
 - 1--OEA/CH (4G32)
 - 1- [redacted] NIC/Analytical Group (7E47)
 - 1- [redacted] C/DO/PPS (3D01) 25X1
 - 1--OEA/Research Director (4G48)
 - 2--OCR/ISG
 - 1- [redacted] A/NIO Economic (7E48) 25X1

Outside:

- State:**
- 1--Honorable Paul Wolfowitz
 - 1--John Monjo
 - 1--Lt. General John T. Chain, Jr., USAF
 - 1--Joseph Winder
 - 1--Alphonse LaPorta
 - 1--Charles Morris

- INR:**
- 1--Alan Kitchens
 - 1--Morton Abramowitz
 - 1--Weaver Gim
 - 1--Paula Causey
 - 1--Corazon Foley

- Treasury:**
- 1--Douglas P. Mulholland
 - 1--Bill McFadden
 - 1--Bill Quinn

- Commerce:**
- 1--Byron Jackson
 - 1--Roger Severance

NSC:

1--Richard Childress
1--Gaston Sigur

DOD:

1--Richard Armitage
1--James Kelly
1--James R. Martin (ISA)
1--John Finney (ISA)
1--James Smith (JCS)

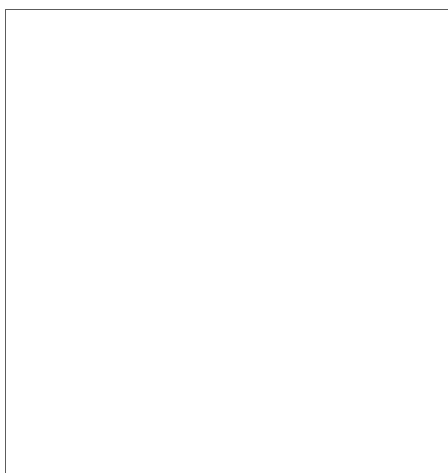
DIA:



25X1

IPAC:

1--Tim Wright



25X1