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INDONESIAN ARMY PROBLEM

I. Current Situation

The highly factionalized Indonesian Army is split over basic issues of army policy: (a) the demobilization of poorly trained units of guerrilla origin in order to reduce army costs and to enhance its efficiency and (b) the retention of a western military mission to assist in army training.

Officials of the Defense Ministry and army headquarters who favored these policies and who resented aggressive efforts by the nationalist-leftist bloc in parliament to prevent their implementation attempted on 17 October 1952 to force the dissolution of parliament. The attempt was unsuccessful and these officials have now been largely purged.

General Simatupang, a member of this group and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, has thus far remained in office. On 4 April, however, the army commander in East Java reportedly delivered an ultimatum to the Defense Section of parliament, stating that unless the government takes "speedy action against those considered as leaders of the 17 October affair," army forces in East Java "will not be responsible for results." At a closed session of parliament on 11 April, the Prime Minister promised action.

The Netherlands has maintained a military training mission in Indonesia since the latter's independence. In March, under pressure from the nationalist-leftist parliamentary bloc, the government requested the mission's withdrawal at the end of the year.

II. Background

The Indonesian Army is composed of many factions including Japanese-trained units subsequently used against the Netherlands during the struggle for independence, Dutch-trained units which were used by the Dutch during the struggle and numerous guerrilla groups of various political and religious complexions who continue to give loyalty primarily to their immediate leaders rather than to the top army command.

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Various factions, particularly former guerrilla elements, have been disturbed by the policy of the Defense Ministry, which has been supported by army headquarters, to demobilize poorly trained and unreliable units. They also resent the presence of a Netherlands military training mission which has been in Indonesia since 1949. These factions received parliamentary support from the National Party (PNI) and extreme nationalist and leftist groups.

The present army dispute arose when Bambang Supeno, an officer who had retained a position of importance from revolutionary days, last July carried criticism of army policy directly to President Sukarno and the Defense Section of parliament. Although the Defense Minister, the Sultan of Jogjakarta, dismissed Supeno from his post, the parliamentary Defense Section, which is weighted with nationalist and leftist elements, seized upon the incident as an opening wedge whereby they might bring defense issues to a head.

Their criticism of defense policy centered upon three points: (a) demobilization thus far indicated that Dutch-trained units were being retained at the expense of men who had fought for Indonesian independence; (b) the Defense Ministry was unduly influenced by the Socialist Party; (c) instances of corruption in the Ministry could be cited. These charges led to a full scale parliamentary debate which culminated on 16 October 1952 in the passage of a motion, sponsored by the PNI and supported by the entire nationalist-Communist bloc, demanding reorganization of the Defense Ministry and departure of the Netherlands Military Mission.

Top defense officials countered the following day, 17 October, by requesting President Sukarno to dissolve Parliament. Sukarno refused but promised national general elections to replace the provisional appointed body which has functioned as parliament since 1949.

Meanwhile subordinate officers, who had a background of guerrilla service, in three of Indonesia's seven military commands pronounced the Djakarta development "a coup" and used it as an opportunity to seize command in their respective areas and to proclaim their primary allegiance to President Sukarno. Such action occurred in East Java, East Indonesia, and South Sumatra.

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The cabinet confirmed the new command in East Java and replaced the South Sumatra usurper with a retired officer of nationalist sympathies. Fearing separatist sentiment in East Indonesia and further aggravation of the military-political situation, the cabinet permitted Lt. Col. Warouw, the usurper in East Indonesia, to remain de facto commander. The Sultan (Defense Minister) claiming that cabinet action in the case of Warouw amounted to encouragement of insubordination and apparently aware that Warouw had a record of unreliability, resigned in early January.

Meanwhile the Army Chief of Staff, A. H. Nasution, a pro-western officer, had agreed to accept responsibility for the 17 October affair. He was dismissed in December. Several high-ranking officers who had supported the action resigned or were dismissed at the same time. The secretary-general of the Defense Ministry, Ali Budiardjo, a Socialist, was forced to resign in early April.

Nationalist elements are now clamoring for the dismissal of Gen. Simatupang, the highly competent Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Not content with mere dismissal, nationalist elements apparently want all participants in the 17 October affair to be court-martialled and sentenced.

Anti-Communist and pro-Western elements in the army and Defense Ministry, in their effort to prevent a reversal of their policies, appear to have played directly into the hands of the nationalists and Communists. The Sultan of Jogjakarta and Nasution -- both strongly anti-Communist -- have long been Communist targets and are now safely out of policy-making or even influential positions. Demobilization appears to have been left to the discretion of territorial commanders and is therefore likely to be stalemated in most areas. The Netherlands Military Mission has been asked to leave at the end of 1953 and no other western mission is scheduled to assist Indonesia although a tentative request has been made to Australia.

The Prime Minister's capitulation to the East Java commander by promising further army reorganization in order to "settle" the 17 October affair presages continued army interference in governmental affairs and increasing influence of the nationalist-Communist bloc upon government policy.

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