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Addressing a Moslem gathering on December 2, 1964, President Sukarno said: "I am not a dictator, I am a common man who is not free from making mistakes, and I lead the Indonesian people and state on the basis of a people's democracy." The statement is a remarkably accurate reflection of the political situation in Indonesia at the end of last year. What had started in July 1959 as a personal regime, based on a delicate balancing of political forces and labeled "guided democracy" for public consumption, is being transformed slowly but steadily into a political system shaped by the Communist Party of Indonesia. Under relentless pressure from able Communist leaders, who prove to be equally adept in generating political ideas and in countering those of their enemies, President Sukarno's government became in 1964 a mere form of transition toward a Communist state: internationally it abandoned non-alignment in favor of a new Peking-Djakarta axis, while domestically the myth of national solidarity gave way to open repression of even those enemies of the Communist Party who expressed devotion to President Sukarno personally.

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Whereas the banning of the Masjumi Party and of the Indonesian Socialist Party in August 1960 and the arrest of many of their leaders in January 1961 lent themselves to ambiguous interpretations, as they were equally hostile to the Communist Party and to President Sukarno himself, the banning of the Murba Party on January 6, 1965, and the temporary detention of its leaders cannot be misinterpreted. It marks the victory -- though temporary perhaps -- of the Communist Party and of its allies in the succession struggle activated in the last months of 1964 by mounting evidence that the 63 year-old President's health is deteriorating.

With all powers of the state nominally concentrated in the hands of a man who has been given lifetime tenure, Indonesia lacks today both traditional rules and formal arrangements for the replacement of President Sukarno, the first and only chief executive since the proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945. There is no precedent to provide guidelines in the future succession crisis. Since the resignation of M. Hatta from the position of vice-president in December 1956, the constitutional line of succession has been left vacant. The Provisional People's Representative Assembly, appointed by President Sukarno under the improvised rules of his "guided democracy," is unlikely to have the capability of avoiding a deadlock if it were called upon to elect freely a new president.

So badly divided between conflicting ideologies and interests before 1959 as to be unable to agree on a constitution, the Indonesian body politic is now experiencing the maneuvers of those who hope to take over from Sukarno. This results in bizarrely Byzantine debates on the "true meaning" of the President's teachings, although the verbal
torrents hide a deadly serious power struggle. Sukarno being today the only visible source of legitimacy, the contenders are striving to appear to public opinion and to the masses as his most deserving heirs. The real contest remains that between the Communist Party and the Army, but for peculiarly Indonesian reasons, neither side has deemed it appropriate to express its will to power openly. This has allowed ambitious individuals devoid of broad political following to jockey for future positions.

The President has tried without much success to stop the ensuing polemics. On July 12, 1964, he issued instructions prohibiting debates concerning the future of political parties, agrarian affairs, and the moral basis of national education. The presidential decision accepted proposals adopted the same day by the Supreme Advisory Council, led by Sartono. Then Attorney General Kadarusman instructed all his subordinates to supervise the proper execution of the instructions and to take firm action against violators.

It is a meaningful measure of the benign absence of totalitarian terror in President Sukarno's Indonesia that these measures did not stop all polemics. New issues were promptly found for the ongoing power struggle.

The most important debate in the first half of 1964 concerned the future of political parties. The officer corps and the Murba Party, with whom the Army has always had ideological affinities, had advocated in the past the abolition of parties, identified with political forms claimed to be alien and unsuitable for Indonesia, such as parliamentary government. At the beginning of his campaign for the establishment of an authoritarian regime, in October 1956, President Sukarno himself had advocated the
suppression of parties. This was successfully resisted by the well-established mass parties which had shown substantial electoral following in 1955.

Sukarno had to settle, in 1959, for an authoritarian regime which accepted the existence and cooperation of ten legal parties. As the Communist Party outgrew its rivals and established itself as a formidable political force in terms of numbers, organization, initiative, and imagination, its enemies became increasingly tempted to contain its growth by abolishing all parties and thus obliterating their distinct identities, absorbing their members in one national-revolutionary movement. The formula was particularly tempting to Murba leaders. Exponents of a nationalist brand of Communism, which anticipated Titoism in Indonesia (mis-labeled Trotskyite by the Communist Party), the Murba leaders had never succeeded in building up mass support. But as well known protagonists in the struggle for independence and disciples of a famous nationalist ideologue, the late Tan Malaka, they remained influential among the political elites and could hope to play a major role in a one-party system led by the President.

Other influential public figures such as B. M. Diah, ambassador to London and owner of the daily Merdeka, joined in the campaign for a one-party system, obviously inspired by concern with the growth of the Communist Party. Throughout June 1964 polemics raged between Berita Indonesia, Karyawan, Merdeka, and other like-minded newspapers on one side and the Communist organ, Harian Rakjat, and its allies on the other side. The proponents of the one-party system, alluding particularly to debates which had taken place at the time of the adoption of the 1945 Constitution, claimed
that the idea had been originated by Sukarno. The Communists reached back to earlier writings of Sukarno, dating back to 1933, to prove with some semantic juggling that he favored the existence of more than one party.

In a speech in Surabaya commemorating, on May 23, 1964, the Communist Party's 44th anniversary, its Chairman, D. N. Aidit, warned the anti-Communist forces to "calm down and think twice," pointing out that if they were unable to smash the Party in 1948 when it had no more than 10,000 members, they would be even less successful now that "the Indonesian Communist Party has a lot of experience, has a total membership of more than 2.5 million, and its cadres have been trained in the theory and practice of the revolutionary struggle." On June 5, the Chairman of the Nationalist Party, Ali Sastroamidjojo, stated in Semarang that together with the other progressive-revolutionary forces, his party opposed the one-party system and demanded that the voices urging the dissolution of parties be crushed.

The bitter polemic was temporarily halted when First Deputy Premier, Dr. Subandrio, stated on July 6 in Bandung that President Sukarno still valued the existence of political parties, viewing them as a necessary condition for the completion of the revolution. Simultaneously the First National Conference of the Communist Party meeting on July 3-5 adopted a resolution, released on July 18, accusing those who had launched "the wicked campaign to simplify the political party system" of wanting to undermine the National Front for the benefit of Great Britain, the United States, and Malaysia. Thus ended the debate about the one-party system.
At the time of these events First Deputy Premier Dr. Subandrio and the Communist Party appeared to have mutually compatible interests. Subandrio was obviously maneuvering to establish himself as Sukarno's successor. But he lacked a political base of his own. He had been a member of the Indonesian Socialist Party. Then he had accepted ambassadorial appointments to London and Moscow from the Nationalist Party. Finally, he became Sukarno's Foreign Minister in 1957. He never achieved an influential position in the Nationalist Party, but he did gain the President's confidence as the principal strategist of "confrontation," in the dispute over West New Guinea, and then against Malaysia.

Disliked and distrusted in military and political circles, Dr. Subandrio needed political support for the fulfillment of his presidential aspirations. The Communists did not yet feel strong enough to openly promote their Chairman, Aidit, as Sukarno's successor. They had therefore reasons to come to an understanding with a non-Communist but flexible personality such as Dr. Subandrio.

Meanwhile, the range of choices available to the anti-Communists was narrowing. The sudden death in November 1963 of First Minister Djuanda had altered the balance of forces. In the cabinet reshuffle that took place at that time, the Defense Minister, General A. H. Nasution, was demoted to a position below the top echelon of the government. Dr. Subandrio had proved himself able to outmaneuver General Nasution.

To further curtail Nasution's political authority, the Communist Party initiated in early 1964 a campaign urging the President to assume direct control of the body
supervising the loyalty of state officials, which the General chaired. On May 12 Sukarno abolished the "Committee for the Retooling of the Government Apparatus" (PARAN) and replaced it with the "Supreme Command for the Retooling of the Apparatus of the Revolution" (KOTRAR) under his own leadership. Dr. Subandrio was appointed Deputy Commander of KOTRAR, and Army Commander Lieutenant General A. Jani became its Chief of Staff. General Nasution was left out. In welcoming the decision, Aidit stated that it "demonstrated again the unity between Bung Karno and the People."

Politically that event marked the end of Nasution's dominant role in the system of "guided democracy" which he had helped establish in the summer of 1959. According to Djakarta rumors, only the intervention of the other leaders of the Army prevented the complete expulsion of Nasution when the cabinet was again reshuffled by Sukarno on August 27, 1964.

Before Djuanda's death and Nasution's demotion, it had been usually assumed that an early succession crisis would lead to the establishment of a Djuanda-Nasution-Ruslan Abdulgani triumvirate. They were expected to devote their efforts to internal development rather than to external adventure.

Indonesian political life had been torn for years between Sukarno's romanticism, abetted by those who, like Subandrio, courted his favor, and the realism of those who were primarily concerned with the deteriorating economy and with the threat of a Communist take-over. In the second half of 1964 the latter became interested in the political future of Third Deputy Premier, Coordinator Minister for Development, and Chairman of the Provisional
People's Consultative Council, Chaerul Saleh. As Chairman of the "Generation of '45," with a well established reputation as a prominent youth leader and guerrilla fighter during the struggle for independence, Chaerul Saleh had been viewed for several years as a possible candidate for the presidency. In the fall of 1964 he emerged as Subandrio's only major rival. Although Saleh had always denied affiliation with any political party, he was considered close to the Murba leaders with whom his name had been linked at the time of the proclamation of independence. Saleh was also known to have the courage to speak up against the Communist Party leaders and to be more acceptable to the Army than Subandrio. This is why the political events which started in September 1964 were interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as aiming at enhancing the presidential chances of Chaerul Saleh over those of Dr. Subandrio.

The anti-Communist forces in Indonesia were deeply disturbed by President Sukarno's August 17, 1964, Independence Day speech. Entitled "A Year of Dangerous Living," this speech endorsed the position taken by the Communist Party on most issues debated during the preceding months. On September 1 a "Body for the Promotion of Sukarnoism" (BPS) was formed under the leadership of Trade Minister and Murba leader Adam Malik, B. M. Diah, and the director of the Murba newspaper Berita Indonesia, Sumantoro. Its purpose was to direct the efforts of mass media, newspapers, radio, and TV in the ideological debate which had caught the imagination of the Indonesian political elites. Claiming to be concerned with the "teachings of Sukarno," the movement was obviously trying to mobilize public opinion against the Communist Party. Newspapers affiliated with
the Communist Party and with the left wing of the Nationalist Party, such as Harian Rakjat, Bintang Timur, and Suluh Indonesia, were not invited to join.

To counter this maneuver, Chairman Aidit proposed on September 27 a code of ethics for political parties. He suggested an ideological division of labor "in the spirit of Nasakom" (cooperation between nationalist, religious, and Communist groups advocated by Sukarno): interpretation of religious matters should be left to the religious group, of nationalism to the nationalist group, and of Marxism to the Communist group. But anti-Communist propaganda, which had almost vanished in the preceding three years, continued. Well-coordinated steps to oppose further extension of Communist political influence were noticeable all over the country.

President Sukarno was abroad during that period. He had left Djakarta on September 17 for a kidney stone operation in Vienna, followed by a three-day visit to Moscow, participation in the second "summit" conference of non-aligned states in Cairo, and visits to Shanghai, Pyongyang, and Tokyo. As Acting President, Dr. Subandrio found it necessary to consult political leaders in late October "to discuss the problems of national unity in the face of subversive and counterrevolutionary activities."

Meanwhile, wild rumors concerning the President's health were spreading in Djakarta, reinforced by the much-listened-to Kuala Lumpur Radio. On October 30 Sukarno found it necessary to announce in Tokyo that he had no intention to resign.

The same day Chaerul Saleh, as Chairman of the Executive Board of the National Front, called a halt to the debate
on ideology that had raged during the preceding twelve days, following a possibly apocryphal statement attributed to Aidit by the newspaper Revolusioneer. The Communist leader was under strong attack for having allegedly said on October 16 that "the people of Indonesia would no longer need Pantja Sila once they attained a socialist society." (Embodying the national ideology, the Pantja Sila makes "Belief in One God" a pillar of the state.)

Sukarno returned from abroad on November 5 and repeated in a public speech five days later that he would remain at his post as long as the 104 million Indonesians wanted him. Meanwhile, Merdeka announced on November 9 that forty newspapers had joined the "Body for the Promotion of Sukarnoism," which would start its campaign to disseminate the teachings of the President with a series of articles by ex-Communist Sujuti Melik -- "to which Sukarno had given his blessings."

While the President kept silent, the two camps continued to exchange verbal blows. For instance, on November 24, while Aidit was arguing in Djakarta that Sukarno's teachings could not be studied in an anti-Communist context because the President opposed "Communist-phobia," Lieutenant General Jani and Adam Malik addressed the work conference of the anti-Communist Federation of Trade Unions, SOKSI, extolling the virtues of "Sukarnoism."

Army endorsement of "Sukarnoism" was further revealed on December 1 when Colonel Djuhartono, the Assistant Secretary General of the National Front, addressed a mass meeting organized to popularize "the techniques of Sukarnoism." He criticized "those Indonesians who affirm that Marxism is the only ideology capable of solving Indonesia's
political, economic, and social problems," and argued that "Marxism is less good than Sukarnoism which accepts the people's faith in God."

In striking contrast with these endorsements, Dr. Subandrio, following a KOTRAR meeting, warned on December 3 against making "Sukarnoism" a tool of dissension and admonished that "one should not fall into the trap of imperialists." On December 6, Berita Minggu claimed that the President had postponed for several months the session of the Provisional People's Representative Assembly, scheduled to begin on December 3, in order to avoid an ideological clash on the issue of "Sukarnoism." On December 8, Aidit repeated his proposal for the adoption of a code of ethics for political parties, while the executive board of the Nationalist Party urged the President the following day to halt the activities of the Sukarnoist movement. Indonesia's political stability was in jeopardy.

On December 12, President Sukarno summoned to Bogor the representatives of all ten legal political parties to discuss the issues raised by "Sukarnoism." This led to a joint statement in which the ten parties pledged: "We are unanimously determined to foster and maintain the revolutionary and progressive national unity with Nasakom as its core." Once again the President had succeeded in convincing all legal political parties to cooperate with the Communist Party. The parties also promised, in line with Aidit's September proposals, to abstain from interpreting each other's doctrines.

Then, unexpectedly, on December 17, Sukarno ordered the dissolution of the "Body for the Promotion of Sukarnoism" because "it had created symptoms of friction among the
progressive and revolutionary national forces." Aidit greeted Sukarno's decision as a "New Year's present."

The balance of political forces had obviously not favored the anti-Communist camp. No major public figure rose to the defense of the BPS at the Bogor Conference. After the dissolution decree, even Berita Indonesia tried to make the best of it, writing editorially on December 18 that it received the President's decision "with joy" because "the BPS' task to rouse the hearts of the general public had been successful, and the task [to propagate Sukarnoism] will now be continued by KOTRAR."

In broader perspective the episode may have been the last in a long series of Army-supported attempts to stem the Communist tide. Like the "National Front for the Liberation of West Irian," created in 1958, and the "Democratic League" of 1960, the BPS had been annihilated by Sukarno. Only the future can tell whether this defeat has increased the willingness of the Army to accept Dr. Subandrio as Sukarno's successor.

To consolidate the victory of the pro-Communist faction, the President ordered the arrest on January 5, 1965, of a number of Murba leaders, including former ambassador to Peking, Sukarni. The next day a Presidential decision originating from the Supreme Operational Command (KOTTI) prohibited the Murba Party and its affiliated bodies "temporarily" from engaging in any activities. The National Front Central Executive Committee then suspended the Murba, also "temporarily," from membership. Harian Rakjat, the organ of the Communist Party, greeted the decision on January 8 with the statement: "President Sukarno's decree is a triumph of reason, of national unity, and of the
revolution." The newspaper also asserted that the Murba had "plotted to overthrow the leadership of President Sukarno."

On January 11, 1965, Suluh Indonesia predicted that the President will reshuffle his cabinet in the near future. It also published a statement by Adam Malik denying rumors that he would resign. The same day, according to the Indonesian news agency Antara, Chaerul Saleh told the press that he had summoned U.S. Ambassador Howard P. Jones to correct statements circulated by the Associated Press connecting him with the Murba Party, the BPS, and anti-Communism. He added that "he was convinced of and closely adhered to the teachings of progressive national unity based on Nasakom, for which Communist-phobia was taboo" and that "the United States should not harbor the faintest hope that they could persuade Indonesian patriots to align themselves with American imperialist policy." Defeated by his rival, Chaerul Saleh was obviously trying to protect his equities in the regime.

It would be idle to minimize the victory scored by the Communist Party. While it is still conceivable that a military junta could step in and change the course of events after the death of President Sukarno, the probability that Indonesia will become a Communist state has been increased by the political events of 1964.

All trends point in the same direction. Since June 1964 the Communist Party claims 3 million members and its auxiliary, People's Youth, 2 million. In September 1964 the Federation of Trade Unions (SOBSI) claimed 3.5 million members and the Indonesian Farmers Front (BTI) 8.5 million. The Indonesian Women's Movement (GERWANI) and some smaller
front organizations for students and intellectuals would add at least another 2 million. Even if one takes into account multiple memberships and figures inflated for propaganda purposes, the Communist movement reaches today a significant percentage of Indonesia's 104 million people.

The economic situation is clearly playing into the hands of the Communists. In 1963 First Minister Djuanda had attempted a stabilization program recommended by the International Monetary Fund as a prerequisite for large-scale Western economic aid. The May 26, 1963, regulations issued in that context came under vehement Communist attack and were eventually withdrawn on April 17, 1964. But prices continued to increase, and by the end of the year, according to a December 10, 1964, editorial in the Indonesian Observer, the people were becoming "panicky." On Christmas Eve, Second Deputy Premier Dr. Leimena, in charge of the cabinet's Distribution Compartment, was prompted to assert that recent price increases were not exclusively caused by economic factors but also by "speculative and subversive factors."

But economic indicators spoke for themselves. By mid-November 1964 money in circulation exceeded Rp. 500 billion, twice the volume present on December 31, 1963. At the end of the year the black market rate quoted in Djakarta was Rp. 9000 as against an official rate of Rp. 45 for $1.00. At the end of October Indonesia's foreign debt amounted to over $1.5 billion, and the gold and foreign exchange account of the Bank of Indonesia showed a deficit approaching $300 million.

Helpless against inflationary pressures, the government has abandoned efforts to formulate a budget for 1965.
Foreign commercial credits are becoming unobtainable. The only recent governmental credits came from Communist China which, during Foreign Minister Chen Yi's surprise visit to Djakarta from November 27 to December 3, offered Indonesia a $50 million loan, of which $10 million was in cash.

Superficially it would seem that President Sukarno's decision on March 25, 1964, to tell the United States in the presence of Ambassador Howard P. Jones, "Go to hell with your aid," was a luxury his country could ill afford. In fact, the underlying motives may not have been at all romantic. In recent years the Communist Party had expressed great admiration for North Korea which had allegedly managed to "stand on its own feet."

In his August 17, 1964, address Sukarno explained that Kim Il Sung's Korea had completely solved her problem of food and clothing "enabling her both politically and culturally not to depend on anybody at all." He added: "Indonesia does not want to stay behind!"

The quest for economic autarky, even at the price of a lowered standard of living, may be regarded by the President and his closest advisers not simply as the unavoidable price of continued "confrontation" against Malaysia, but as a means to protect Indonesia in the future against the kinds of economic pressures experienced by Mao's China and Castro's Cuba.

1965 may well mark a turning point in Indonesia's short but turbulent history. Power will probably shift from the hands of the older generation of nationalist leaders symbolized by Sukarno into the hands of the generation of the Subandrios, Chaerul Salehs, Aidits, Nasutions, Janis. But there are no indications that these younger men will change the course set by Sukarno.
Indonesia will probably continue to harass Malaysia militarily and politically, while trying to avoid full-fledged war with Great Britain. She will certainly intensify her campaign against the Western presence in Southeast Asia and thus induce further deterioration of relations with the United States. She will try, desperately, to assert leadership among the new nations of Asia and Africa and, having failed to initiate an exodus from the United Nations, may even resume membership under some face-saving pretext. She will talk more and more in terms of a Peking-Hanoi-Pyongyang-PhnomPenh-Djakarta axis in Asia, while maintaining, temporarily at least, a posture that would not alienate her major source of military supplies, the Soviet Union.

With her national resources and attention focused on international assertion rather than on internal development, Indonesia may well experience again in 1965 the centrifugal pressures which exploded in 1958, if regional economic and social interests again lose faith in Djakarta politics. This could then become an interesting test of the Sukarno regime's fundamental premise that nation-builders should appeal to people's political emotions rather than to their economic interests. If this thesis proves wrong, Indonesia may not celebrate, in its present form, the twentieth anniversary of its August 17, 1945, Proclamation of Independence.