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INDONESIAN POLITICS IN THE 1980S: PRESSURE AND COUNTERPRESSURE.(U)
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INDONESIAN POLITICS IN THE 1980s: PRESSURE AND COUNTERPRESSURE

10 Prof. Donald Emmerson, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Indonesia's regime is neither democratic nor totalitarian but authoritarian. It will remain so through this decade. The country's experiment with democracy, in the 1950s, came too late, lasted too short a time, and accompanied too much civil strife to warrant optimism that it will be reinstated. Meanwhile, the archipelago's physical, cultural, and economic diversity will continue to rule out totalitarian control. (11 Apr 82

President Suharto will turn sixty this June. His predecessor, Sukarno, lived to be sixty-nine. The actuarial odds alone favor a changing of the guard sometime in the 1980s. Whatever happens, Indonesia will most likely continue to be ruled by military men. The generals will not voluntarily restore full civilian rule, and their civilian opponents will not be strong enough to force them to.

Should an intramilitary coup bring to power officers committed to disengaging the armed forces from government--which seems unlikely--the military will probably retain a caretaker role. Should a Muslim or a student "revolution" persuade the military to retire from politics--again, unlikely--the resulting interlude will probably not last long. The governing roles played by officers will at times be more overt and direct, at times more covert and indirect. But the countercoup of 1965 did not merely rearrange the players. It rewrote the game.

That game is not political democracy but economic growth, and civilian organizations--parties, unions, businesses--will continue to require military approval to play. If hints of Indonesia's near future are to be found in the recent history of economically dynamic but politically authoritarian states elsewhere in the Third World, pessimists should expect not Iran's theocracy but South Korea's instability-within-military-limits. Rather than anticipate a rapid, Nigerian-style shift to civilian democracy, optimists should look for something more like the technocratic abertura (opening) now cautiously in progress under strictly military auspices in Brazil.

Barring the unforeseen, Golkar (the government's Golongan Karya, or Functional Groups) will win the 1982 election, and in 1983 the People's Consultative Assembly will reelect Suharto to a fourth five-year term. Beyond that, forecasting meets fantasy. But it does seem plausible that sometime in the mid-late 1980s, a more or less progovernment coalition operating under direct or indirect military control--Golkar, or a revised version of it--will ratify the transfer of power from Suharto to his successor.

How will the transfer be arranged? Despite rising opposition, Suharto's position in early 1981 seemed strong enough to suggest a

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face-saving exit, negotiated between generals, that would enable him and his family to avoid prosecution for corruption. In years to come, Suharto's priorities seem likely to shift more and more toward preparing an honorable niche for himself in Indonesian history. If a showdown occurs, it may well take place unobtrusively, with a few influential generals arguing for an orderly succession to someone whom Suharto will have chosen or been persuaded to accept, someone who will have promised to protect Suharto's reputation and assets.

How voluntarily Suharto cedes power under these or similar circumstances will depend on how many powerful officers support him, on the extent of the opposition to him among Muslims, students, and other groups, and on whether he knows how long he can put off transferring power before it has to be wrenched from him. If he is unexpectedly incapacitated, if a massive shock to the economy suddenly delegitimizes his alliance of domestic technocrats with Western and Japanese capital in the eyes of urban counterelites, or if history repeats itself in the form of an intramilitary conspiracy of the sort that allowed Suharto to destroy the left and neutralize Sukarno in the 1960s, the transition could be anything but benign.

Rather than trying to guess what will happen when, it may be more useful to ask along what lines. What cracks in the body politic, between which factions, groups, strata, institutions, or categories, are deep enough to become rifts in the regime?

Some ways of dividing the polity to estimate future change seem unsatisfactory. One of these is to distinguish a repressive elite from a prospectively revolutionary mass. That dichotomy is crude and naive. Repression is not always self-defeating, especially not in the short run. Revolutions are rare, and mass-based ones rarer still. In Indonesia, elite and mass are certainly worlds apart, but those worlds are inhabited by more or less middle-class, urbanized, educated, and politically conscious people. Some of these people have suffered, or been offended by, enough officially sponsored or tolerated injustices to oppose Suharto's government (at least covertly), while others have benefited enough from economic opportunities to support it (at least overtly). These intermediate groups--middle-to-lower-middle-status students, teachers, lawyers, journalists, entrepreneurs, and religionists, among others--are available to be coopted or antagonized by an elite that offers chances for economic betterment on the one hand, but is more or less coercive, corrupt, and indebted to foreigners on the other.

The Shah of Iran was overthrown by a combination of such "in-between" groups, drawn from the mosque, the campus, and the bazaar. Observers of Indonesia who worry about that example would do well to watch this "semiperiphery" as it grows, differentiates and, possibly, disaffects.

CORRECTED COPY FOR PROF. EMERSON'S PAPER

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At the core of the regime, within the elite, what fault lines of future conflict are there, and where should they be drawn?

Not between civilians and officers. Differences among civilians and among military men are often greater than they are between these two categories. There is no distinctively "civilian" political consciousness in Indonesia. Nor is "the military" a single, homogeneous actor. The army has arrogated economic and political along with security and defense roles, and has inserted officers up and down the ranks of civil administration. (This combination of responsibilities has precedents in the popular, not professional, recruitment of soldiers to wage guerrilla, not conventional, war against the Dutch in 1945-49.) In government circles, military men have been civilianized, and civilians militarized, up to a point.

Because the circulation of officers at the top seems in the near term so much more likely than a major civilian uprising from the middle or lower down, a sketching of lines of prospective tension within the military seems appropriate. (As for the technocrats and other civilians at the top, they are too implicated in and dependent upon army rule to initiate major political change.) Where, then, are the structural faults inside the armed forces?

In the 1950s and 60s, differences between political parties, ethnoregional groups, armed services, and army divisions structured intramilitary conflict. These antagonisms are less evident today.

The armed forces are less penetrable by parties now that these have been either restructured and restricted or disallowed, and the "favorite-son" regionalism of the 1950s has been overcome. As of January 1980, none of the 16 territorial commands off Java was headed by a native son. This was accomplished, however, not by assigning ethnically outer-island officers to outer islands other than their own, let alone to commands on Java, but by excluding outer-islanders entirely: In 1980, 14 of the 16 territorial commands were run by Javanese, while Sundanese headed the remaining three. 1/

The military's centralized, integrated hierarchy favors the Department of Defense and Security (Hankam), the army, and, above all, Suharto himself, to the point that officers in the navy and air force lack the room their predecessors had under the Old Order to maneuver and become heterodox.

As for divisional identities, the political significance of these too appears to have declined, as overarching commands in the regions and specialized staffs at the center have taken hold. Meanwhile, the thinning of the ranks of the "1945 generation" has naturally reduced the number of men able to use for political ends divisional comradeships forged during the revolution.

Nor is intergenerational cleavage terribly useful as a guide to future change. Despite its heterogeneity, the "generation of '45" at least shared the making of the Indonesian nation-state. The bloody purge of 1965-66 was too brief and internecine to offer its prosecutors a shared consciousness of private friendship, political experience, or public mission. 2/ Nor is it clear that East Timor's occupation and pacification have yet created a network of politically operational disillusionment among officers with experience in that theater.

As for generations of classmates, it is hard to identify potentially political (as opposed to merely academic or fraternal) cohorts among graduates of the service schools up to 1966 or, since then, of the unified armed forces academy. Indonesia's armed forces today have no visible equivalent to the Thai royal military academy's seventh class, whose graduates staged the unsuccessful coup of 1 April 1981 in Bangkok.

Along what lines, then, will the Indonesian military fracture, if it does? Most probably along lines drawn at the center (including Bandung), between army officers who head rival factions, which have arisen partly as personal followings and partly through common experiences in particular organizations or assignments, and who hold incompatible opinions about policy.

Such rivalries need not threaten the president. Up to a point, tension between factions allows Suharto to maintain a balance, preserving stability while keeping his options open. The president will be in greatest danger if and when he becomes so closely identified with one group against others that the latter are motivated to turn against him. (In this sense, one could speculate that when Sukarno went to Halim on 1 October 1965, he sealed his fate. Similarly, observers of Thai politics may someday see in the king's trip to Korat on 1 April 1981 the beginning of the end of the monarchy.)

The problem is that such distinctions are easier to assert than confirm. Differences do exist between power-holders in, say, Hankam vs. army headquarters, or between Sutopo Juwono's National Defense Institute and Ali Murtopo's Center for Strategic and International Studies. The "staff generals" in Hankam differ from the "line generals" with responsibility for troops, and these officers differ from the "intelligence generals" who mount special operations, who differ in turn from the "palace generals" in civil administration. But what difference do these differences make?

Defense and Security Minister Mohammad Jusuf's reputation for rectitude and his concern for the rank-and-file are hard not to interpret as a comment on the munificent lifestyles and elite-corps mentalities of some of his army colleagues. 3/ When Jusuf stresses the impartiality of the armed forces, it is easy to wonder whether he means to criticize the inclination of some officers, including Suharto, to intervene on behalf of Golkar. But who really knows?

Certainly Jusuf's style appeals to Muslim leaders, and he is probably popular among soldiers too. But his being Buginese rather than Javanese severely narrows his political future. And his allegiance to Suharto may be steadfast. By keeping lines open to the rank-and-file and to partly disaffected groups, Jusuf may be consciously helping to stabilize and prolong Suharto's rule. As for ^{ex}Army Chief of Staff Widodo, because he keeps a lower profile, his motives are even more obscure. 4/

In his dramatically populist farewell speech as commander of the East Java/Brawijaya division, Widjojo Sujono defended the human dignity of the pedicab drivers of Surabaya, who were being excluded from the city's new cars-only zone. Now that he has replaced Yoga Sugama as Head of Staff of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib), what do these earlier sentiments mean, if anything? That Sujono could someday challenge Suharto on behalf of the "little people" (wong cilik)? Or has the president, aware of the potency of the charge that the New Order has forgotten or trampled the poor, become more secure by coopting through promotion a man who might have made that critique?

In February 1981, the president appointed a new supreme court chief justice, minister of justice, and attorney general. All three men graduated from the military law academy. So did State Secretary Sudharmono (and Golkar General Chairman Amir Murtono). What, if anything, does this mean? How loyal to the president is Yogie S. Memet, who simultaneously heads the army's paracommandos and its West Java/Siliwangi division? What faction, if any, benefited from the removal of Piet Harjono as head of the national oil company (Pertamina) in April 1981, and should one infer from his replacement a shift away from the "pro-Western" position usually ascribed to the "Berkeley mafia"? The questions become presumptuous and arcane.

At best, lack of access must limit this kind of inquiry to informed speculation. At worst, when circumstantial evidence runs out, gossip takes over. As yet, the game to name the heir apparent has no winners. Witness the booming of General Suroso's stock and its subsequent bust when he was moved upstairs to coordinate public welfare.

Quite apart from the paucity of evidence, one should not become fixated on cockpit politics. In the microscopic view (as, perhaps, with "Kremlinology" in Soviet studies), larger and longer-term contexts are, if not out of sight, out of focus. The search for faction and instability may reduce the searcher's ability to appreciate any degree of institutionalization and durability in the status quo.

The New Order is not so secure that it can be counted on to survive Suharto, regardless. Under pressure from his opponents, the president could adopt

the strategy of his predecessor, Sukarno, who implicated himself so directly in a particular balance of forces that when it collapsed his authority followed. The lack of routine decentralization and coordination in Suharto's government has prompted wags to interpret the official acronym for "coordination, integration, synchronization, and simplification"--"KISS"--to mean ke-istana sendiri-sendiri: The president's subordinates come to him separately with policy questions which he then decides.

Nevertheless, Suharto is more than a neopatrimonial prince dispensing favors and flats. He has not only built a government, but around it a regime, whose structures are more solid than a purely personalistic or Javanese-cultural conception of power in the New Order would allow.

Without altering its partly appointive formation and largely rubber-stamp performance, the People's Representative Council (DPR) became in the 1970s a recourse for ordinary persons aggrieved in one way or another by the authorities. In April 1981, to deflect present criticism or signal future change (or both), Suharto said he would be willing to have the next People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Indonesia's highest constitutional body, consider civilianizing itself. (One-third of the seats in the MPR are now reserved for the armed forces.) If this is done, one reason may be to lend the force of constitutional law, and thus render as permanent as possible, the armed forces' share of seats in the DPR, which now stands at slightly more than a fifth of that body.

Officials' attitudes toward labor in Indonesia still tend to run from unsympathetic to peremptory. Yet the government has encouraged private firms to regularize worker-management relationships in collective labor agreements, and to allow unionization by the basically top-down reformist All-Indonesia Labor Federation (FBSI). Although they have not taken root in the social categories they are meant to represent, but have been used instead to coopt and manage dissent, Indonesia's so-called "mass organizations" do correct the impression that the New Order is without an organized apparatus beyond the military. 5/

Golkar, on the other hand, still seems to be a vehicle that is assembled for election campaigns and dismantled for storage afterwards. Just as Suharto's relative inattention to nationalism and Islam as political resources may be reconsidered by his successor, one can imagine a future government trying to mobilize popular support on a more organized, ongoing basis than at present.

Summarizing these impressions, I would argue that Indonesia's current leadership is more vulnerable than the stereotype of an elite at the apex of a solid pyramid would allow, yet more stable than the factional model of struggle in a cockpit would suggest.

Elite politics in Suharto's New Order are becoming an exercise in pressure and counterpressure by groups and leaders who increasingly take the regime, as opposed to the man, for granted. Obviously, an incumbent is easier to replace than the structures that define his role. But when the opposition uses those structures to pressure an incumbent, even if the pressure is only moral, the regime as a potentially self-correcting set of institutions and rules gains a little legitimacy. Nor must that gain be entirely canceled if the incumbent chooses to direct nonconstitutional counterpressure against his opponents. The more vindictive the incumbent appears, the more his methods may divert blame to him from the structures atop which he sits.

In 1980, the retired officers and Islamic and student leaders who signed the "petition of fifty" illustrated this point. They criticized Suharto personally for misusing state ideology and the armed forces for private and political interests. But they addressed their appeal to the DPR. In the eyes of aware observers, by denying the fifty their right to travel abroad, Suharto may have appeared as petty as the signatories had tried to appear parliamentary.

In the history of the New Order, public opposition to Suharto specifically is fairly new. During the Jakarta riots of 1974, while several of Suharto's advisers were abused in effigy, Suharto himself was not. Reports of scandals involving Mrs. Suharto's business dealings have circulated privately for years, but in an Indonesian context, where the wives of officials often earn (and are thought to spend) more than their husbands, such gossip has elicited less animosity toward the president than amused sympathy for a head of state who cannot control his own wife.

In this light, and considering the indirection and generality of the language of "acceptable opposition" in Indonesia, it is striking how willing major critics in 1980 were to target the man: A retired general called the president a hypocrite and backed up the charge with details of wrongdoing by Suharto to obtain land for a cattle ranch and vacation retreat in West Java. In a dispute over claims to the fruits of corruption in the national oil company, the widow of a senior Pertamina official quoted a high-ranking intelligence officer as having told her that he had accepted, on Suharto's behalf, commissions of five and seven percent on arms deals with Israel and West Germany, respectively.

The more the president is singled out for criticism, the greater the incentive for a few men in the high ranks of the active military to think of preserving the regime by easing out its creator-turned-liability. Conversely, Suharto must remind his opponents of his indispensability. In addition to placing the fifty petitioners under "country arrest," Suharto denied the retired officers among them access to state credit and contracts. The "business generals" among these officers were reminded, in effect, that without Suharto's help they could not expect to

maintain the standard of living to which he had helped them become accustomed. He that giveth, taketh away.

One should not, of course, exaggerate the durability of the regime. One could write the political history of the New Order as a succession of collapsing alliances and facades: In the late 1960s, the student movement that helped bring Suharto to power fell apart, its leaders coopted into Golkar or diverted into private life. New Order officers who advocated unacceptably radical departures from Old Order political practice became the first of a still-continuing series of prominent military figures to be shifted to less sensitive positions, retired from active duty, or otherwise neutralized. Generals Edhie, Idris, and Dharsono were followed in the 1970s by Nasution, Sumitro, and Sutowo, among others.

In the last ten years, the regime's corruption and its indebtedness to suspect groups--wealthy, profit-seeking, un-Muslim Westerners, Japanese, and local Chinese--have galvanized student and Islamic opposition. Had the government not mollified Muslim leaders in December 1973, by compromising on marriage legislation considered threatening to Islam, the combination of angry students, street mobs, and maneuvering generals that torched parts of Jakarta on the occasion of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka's visit the following month could have triggered a coup.

More recent events seem to confirm the regime's vulnerability. The scale of anti-Chinese violence in Ujungpandang in April 1980 was dwarfed by a series of riots against Chinese property the following November, beginning in Solo but quickly spreading to Semarang and as many as a dozen other towns in Central and East Java. Even discounting rumors of semiofficial complicity in starting these disturbances, and ignoring the possibility that in rioters' eyes the Chinese may have been surrogates for the authorities, the contagious effect of an interracial traffic accident in Solo and the delay in reestablishing order could not but raise doubts about the government's ability to keep the peace. Far from dampening speculation about the riots' wider implications, Admiral Sudomo (head of Kopkamtib) fueled it by claiming that a "political movement," whose composition, location, and ideology he declined to name, had tried to use the occasion "to ignite a revolution." 6/

In early 1981, new instances of ostensibly political violence refocused attention on the government's prospects and tactics. In January and February, between 27 and 40 people in several subdistricts of Jember district in East Java were killed. Known to the local population as thieves or "black magicians," the victims were murdered, seriatim over a period of weeks, by angry crowds of neighbors--according to official accounts.

As in the attacks on Chinese property to the west the previous November, the killings in Jember were contagious, spreading from

one point to another through demonstration effects that the authorities appeared unable to prevent. In contrast, for all the damage they did in Jakarta, the riots of January 1974 were limited to that city. Violence by chain reaction has an obvious antecedent in the bloody juggernaut against suspected leftists in 1965-66, which accompanied a change of regime.

The events in Jember have been politicized, if they were not political to begin with. Two members of parliament from the Islamic opposition Development Unity Party (PPP) broke the story in terms that promoted speculation that the victims included Muslim teachers who might have been PPP supporters, and that the authorities, wishing to intimidate Muslims in East Java before the 1982 election, might have tolerated (or, conceivably, instigated) the killings. In reply, Sudomo accused the PPP of trying to distort for partisan advantage a criminal case unrelated to politics. 7/

Then, on 11 March 1981, the fifteenth anniversary of Sukarno's surrender of emergency powers to Suharto, an armed group attacked a police station on the outskirts of Bandung. Three policemen were shot dead and four detainees were freed. The attackers and the prisoners escaped but were soon captured. Not long after, on 28 March, five persons hijacked a Garuda Airlines DC-9. Three days later, on the tarmac in Bangkok, Indonesian paracommandos rescued all the hostages on board save the captain, who died from wounds suffered during the storming of the jet.

Exactly what motivated these assaults may never be generally or fully known. (All five hijackers are dead; one may have been killed after interrogation.) As they had in the case of Solo-Semarang and Jember, Indonesian authorities sought to curtail and control public knowledge of these attacks. Security officers blamed the police station raid and the hijacking on the so-called Komando Jihad, or Holy War Command, an apparently blanket label under which government spokesmen have placed Muslim extremists arrested in recent years. Other sources portray the two events as less closely related, less well organized, and due more to socioeconomic frustration of the sort that may have motivated the school dropouts who looted Solo and Semarang in 1980. 8/

Again, however, it would be a mistake to read into these signs of protest a cumulative growth of revolutionary opposition or the inexorable weakening of the regime. When government spokesmen talk of a Komando Jihad, they appeal to the tolerant majority of Indonesians, as if to say that the New Order, compared to an Islamic one, is at least a lesser evil. Real or not, the threat of an Islamic state still disturbs many Indonesians. In this sense, the hijackers played into the hands of the government not only physically, but politically too.

In 1981, bans on gambling and television commercials earned the regime credit among Muslims. So did the decision to allow Friday mosque sermons to be delivered without a permit. Suharto and his intimates know they can pressure Muslim activists up to a point; hundreds of the latter are in jail. But the government knows too that it cannot afford to alienate completely the nation's largest organized political force.

There are other signs of symbolic accommodation. In February 1981, Suharto inaugurated a large mosque in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. He has committed Rp. 26 billion in 1981-84 to complete Jakarta's huge Istiqlal mosque, planned to be the world's largest. Shadow-play performances, heretical from a Muslim standpoint, are no longer regularly held at the palace. Suharto is more careful than he used to be about beginning his speeches to Muslims, "Assalamualaikum ...". Partly as a result, though they do not like Suharto, Muslim leaders appear to dislike others more--especially the ministers of information and education and culture.

Meanwhile, the Governor of Central Java has announced a project to provide vocational training for 400 young school dropouts in the province's cities. ^{9/} Even if implemented, this palliative will not alter the demographic or economic conditions that were so conducive to violence in Solo and Semarang last November. But it does show that the authorities are capable of more than simple repression.

To conclude on my opening note, despite mounting challenges to his rule, Suharto will probably be reelected in 1983. Whoever replaces him thereafter, the regime will remain authoritarian, within limits that the politics of pressure and counterpressure will continue to test.

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Donald K. Emmerson
Madison, Wis.

April 1981

Notes

- 1/ See the invaluable "Current Data on the Indonesian Military Elite" compiled by the editors of Indonesia, April 1980, pp. 173-175.
- 2/ In the long run, if the left is revived, the loss of friends and relatives in 1965-66 could become a blood debt charged by some civilians against the army. Compare the current repercussions in El Salvador of that country's matanza (slaughter) in the 1930s.
- 3/ In March 1981, for example, Jusuf told soldiers in Solo that they would receive an extra thousand rupiahs of food money per day, then cautioned them not to use the increment to smoke or gamble or spend on women other than their wives.
- 4/ For more on these two men, see "Current Data," pp. 159-162.
- 5/ By 1981, of some 3,000 private firms in Indonesia, 1,356 had accepted the FBSI and signed a collective labor agreement; see Kompas, 13 February 1981. Indonesian workers in general remain by Western standards grossly underpaid and unprotected.
- 6/ As quoted by Guy Sacerdoti, "And Now, News of the Riots," Far Eastern Economic Review, 12 December 1980, p. 24.
- 7/ Compare "Rakyat di Daerah Jember Main Hakim Sendiri" and "Peristiwa Jember Dimanfaatkan untuk Mendiskreditkan Pemerintah," in Kompas, 20 and 28 February 1981, respectively.
- 8/ See Guy Sacerdoti, "The Extremists Exorcised," Far Eastern Economic Review, 10 April 1981, pp. 28-30.
- 9/ As reported in Kompas, 4 February 1981.

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