

PRRI/Permesta at "50 Years Indonesia-America Relations"

By: Dr. Barbara S. Harvey

I. Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to take part in your seminar on PRRI/Permesta, specifically to provide an American perspective on that rebellion. My own research on the Permesta rebellion was essentially on the internal dynamics of Permesta, and I see here a number of the people who were kind enough to let me interview them back in 1971/72 when I did my research. I am very pleased that Professor Leirissa has worked on PRRI/ Permesta and has carried further a number of the ideas that were included in my book, and made "beberapa koreksi juga." I think that is the nature of academic research: that when you start something you try to make it as accurate as possible, but there is always more information or more insights, and so other scholars can build on the work that you have done.

I have used as my sources today to talk about the American perspective on the PRRI/Permesta rebellion two books that have come out fairly recently. One is Paul Gardner's book, *Shared Hopes, Separate Fears: A History of 50 Years of United States-Indonesia Relations*, which was published under the auspices of the United States-Indonesia Society, (USINDO), whose Executive Director, Eddy Tumengkol, is here with us this morning. The other book is one done by my own professor at Cornell University, George Kahin, together with his wife, Audrey, which has the very catchy title of *Subversion as Foreign Policy*.

In addition, I have had time to glance a bit at the official record of U.S. foreign relations: *Foreign Relations of the United States*. There is a volume covering Southeast Asia from 1955 to 1957, and there is one whole volume, Volume 17, just on Indonesia, covering 1958 to 1960. So for those who are interested in doing more in depth research-on the official American record of this period, those sources are available. At the

time I did my own research there was very little available on the U.S. role. The 'Freedom of Information Act' had not yet been passed, so there was no access to official documents. I relied in addition to interviews on the memoirs of two ambassadors who were involved: Howard Jones, whose book *The Impossible Dream*, talked a good bit about this period; and John Allison, whose book was entitled *Ambassador From the Prairie* (Allison was Ambassador Jones' immediate predecessor).

In talking about the American perspective, I would like to look basically at four different things. First is the context, by which I mean what the situation was in the 1950s that affected the way the American Government looked at what was happening in Indonesia. Second, I'll run through some official U.S. policy statements, who were some of the bureaucratic players, of what were some of the personal relationships and perceptions, and the impact of events in Indonesia on U.S. policy, and how that policy subsequently changed. Dr. Retno has asked if I could say something about economic factors, so I will touch briefly on those, both internal in Indonesia and then on U.S. investments in Indonesia and whether or to what extent that played any role in U.S. policy. Finally I would like to end up with some comments on the effect of U.S. intervention within Indonesia, and here I should emphasize that I'm speaking not as a representative of the U.S. government, although I'm still employed by the Department of State, but basically as someone whose scholarly work has been devoted to this sort of study of Indonesia.

II. The Context

It is very important to recognize that during the 1950's the United States was very much a country where opposition to the spread of Communism was an overriding objective. In the 1930s and 1940s concern about the spread of Communism had been suppressed because of the fight against Nazism in Europe. That was seen as a greater threat. There was an alliance with Russia during the war, but at the end of the Second World War events in Europe, particularly the fall of a democratic government in Czechoslovakia, meant that concern about Communism again became very important on the international scene. Events in China obviously were also important. I think one can see in looking at American attitudes towards Indonesia during the Indonesian national

revolution that there was concern about the influence of leftist elements. It was after the Madiun rebellion was put down by the Republic that the United States Government became convinced that the Indonesian revolution was not a communist revolution. And that's when you began to get more pressure on the Dutch, threats to withdraw Marshall plan aid from the Dutch, and so forth. So this theme of concern about Communism in Asia, in Indonesia, is one that was a continuing thread. I should also say that obviously the long American involvement in Vietnam in particular, but also in Cambodia, has this theme of concern about the expansion of Communism.

I think it is also important to recognize that within the United States itself in the 1950s there was very strong anti-Communism. That was the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy—who had a list of communists in the State Department that he never produced—which helped to terrorize people in the Department of State. Questions were raised about who lost China, so there was a great fear among policy makers of being accused of being soft on Communism, of not being concerned enough about the threat of Communism.

At the same time, it seems to me, during this period there was considerable confidence in the ability of the United States to shape political outcomes in other countries. One can see this both in the American intervention in Iran to depose Mossadeqh and also American intervention in Guatemala when a leftist government under Arbenz seemed likely to come into power. (I was a student actually in Washington during the time of the Arbenz regime, and one of his people happened to be a student also at *George Washington University*, and I remember the time there was a lot of concern about what was happening in Guatemala.) At the time it seemed that American intervention had succeeded: Mossadeqh was ousted, Arbenz was put aside. Looking back after 20 or 30 years it seems that those were not such successful interventions in as much as what happened later may have had its roots in that period. But in the 1950s there was concern about the spread of Communism, and there was confidence in the ability of the United States to do something about it.

The events in Indonesia in the mid 1950s heightened American fears of Indonesia going communist. This is something that all people of my generation here are certainly aware of—that in the 1955 elections the *Communist Party*, the PKI, came in as the fourth strongest party. This sur-

prised virtually everybody. *The Socialist Party* had a minuscule vote in the election, which also surprised everybody. Members of the socialist party, who were very articulate intellectuals, were many of the people with whom foreign diplomats exchanged ideas and views, and these diplomats (and scholars) were influenced by the really impressive intellectual and political members of that party. In 1957 the *Communist Party* made an even stronger showing in the regional elections in Java. And this aroused concern in Washington, just as it did among many people in Indonesia, members of the 'Masjumi' party, members of some of the other political parties. Also in October 1956 President Sukarno began talking about his 'Konsepsi,' which was then proclaimed in February 1957. This was his idea of "Guided Democracy," which included the idea that the Communist Party should have representatives in the cabinet. And that was very worrying to policy makers in Washington, and again, I think, to many people here in Indonesia, that the communists would now be given sort of legitimacy by being included in the cabinet. At the same time President Sukarno said, "Well, this is the fourth largest party, they have a right to be represented as well." So this was a very tense sort of situation and again it affected American attitudes. The resignation of vice president Hatta in December 1956 was also a worrisome sign. Hatta was seen as a pragmatic administrator, as a man who would be able to do something about the economic conditions in Indonesia which had become quite difficult during the 1950s as the prices of basic commodities had fallen and the Government seemed to be unable to pay for minimal government services.

Now I would like to say a word about American attitudes towards neutralism. In 1955 Indonesia hosted the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, which was a very important event in what came to be called the "third world." The theme of the Conference was that third world countries should not take sides between the communist powers and the west. Capitalism and Communism were both flawed systems, and the third world should either look for a different way or, at least, play off these two sides against each other. The Secretary of States of the United States, at that time, John Foster Dulles, considered neutralism immoral. His statement is out in the public record. He felt that people should recognize that Communism was evil and that those who failed to make that recognition therefore were immoral. So the neutralist strain in Indonesian for-

eign policy also contributed to attitudes among American policy makers toward what was happening in Indonesia. Sort of a subtheme is the attitude of and toward the Dutch. The Dutch were old friends and allies of the United States. They were constantly putting pressure on the United States not to support Indonesia's claim to West Irian during this period. This comes out quite clearly in the documents in the official record. At the same time the official records show that virtually all of the American Ambassadors who were stationed in Indonesia at that time believed that the resolution of the Irian problem was an essential factor, a key factor, for Indonesia's future political development; that as long as it was not resolved there would be reasons for the communists to gain strength domestically, but also it would detract attention from the need to focus on internal economic needs.

III. U.S. policy toward Indonesia at the time of the PRRI/Permesta rebellion.

The first statement of policy, actually occurred in October 1953, long before the start of the regional movement, when John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State, in briefing U.S. Ambassador Hugh Cumming prior to Ambassador Cumming's coming to Jakarta, said "as between a territorially united Indonesia which is leaning and progressing toward communism and a break-up of that country into racial and geographic units, I would prefer the latter as furnishing a fulcrum which the United States could work later to help them eliminate communism in one place or another and then in the end, if they so wish, arrive back again at a united Indonesia."¹

In Ambassador Allison's book, he says that when he was briefed in early 1957, essentially after some of the regional councils had been formed, Dulles' instructions were even more to the point: "Don't let Sukarno get tied up with the Communists. Don't let him use force against the Dutch. Don't encourage his extremism.... Above all do what you can to make sure that Sumatra doesn't fall to the Communists."²

¹ Interview of former Ambassador Hugh S. Cumming by Philip Crowl, June 22, 1967; Princeton Oral History Project.

² Allison, *Ambassador From the Prairie*, p. 301.

During 1957, as the regional movement was developing within Indonesia, an Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Committee on Indonesia was established in Washington to discuss what U.S. policy should be. Quite interestingly, and this comes out in Paul Gardner's book, many of the deliberations of this committee were not communicated to the Ambassador, who essentially was not being brought in on what some of these policy decisions were. The Ambassador was given the advice, however, and here again I'm quoting, "...to employ all feasible means to strengthen and encourage the determination and cohesion of the anti-Communist forces in the outer islands, particularly Sumatra and Sulawesi ... so that they would be able to affect favorably the situation in Java and provide a rallying point if the Communists should succeed in taking over Java.... [And to] utilize whatever leverage was available or might be built up by the anti-Communist forces in the outer islands to stimulate into action the non- and anti-Communist forces in Java."³ So there was very clearly a sense in Washington that the leaders in the regions who were demanding more autonomy or who were criticizing central government policy, and were increasingly becoming antagonistic to Communism—that they were something that could be used as a way to stem the tide of Communism in Java.

In early 1958 just before the proclamation of the PRRI, Secretary Dulles

summarized the policy as:

1) We should not make any deal with Sukarno or the present government.

2) We should let it be known that, if a reconstituted government without

Communist support or influence came into power, it would get our backing.

3) Meanwhile, we should build up a position of strength in the outer islands and should be ready with assistance we might want to render at a later date on short notice.⁴

³ Allison, *Ambassador from the Prarie*, P. 313.

⁴ Quoted in Paul Gardner, *Shared Hopes, Separate Fears*, p. 144.

Immediately after the initial ultimatum prior to the proclamation of the PRRI, Secretary Dulles in a press conference on the eleventh of February 1958 said: "I think there has been a growing feeling among the Muslims, particularly in the islands other than Java—a feeling of concern at growing Communist influence in the government in Java and the feeling that the economic resources of these outer islands, like Sumatra, are being exploited contrary to the best interest of the entire Indonesian people. That unrest had made itself manifest."⁵ More explicitly, about a month later, in a statement before an open hearing of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Dulles again said "we should be very happy to see the non-Communist elements who are really in the majority there... exert a greater influence in the affairs of Indonesia than has been the case in the past where President Sukarno has moved toward the so-called guided democracy theory which is a nice-sounding name for what I fear would end up to be Communist despotism." And when asked about the rebel's chances of success, Dulles said, "I think there is a fair chance that out of this will come a curtailment of the trend toward Communism."⁶ So clearly not only was there concern about the growth of Communism, but there was a looking to the regional leaders as a way of stemming the advance of communist influence.

Turning now to the bureaucratic players, the key player was Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. His brother, Allen Dulles, was the head of *Central Intelligence Agency*, and it seems quite clear from much of the record that John Foster Dulles paid a lot more attention to the recommendations of his brother than he did to his State Department professionals. There was also a contrast between the reporting from the Embassy and from the *Central Intelligence Agency*. Here, I should say, as a State Department person I obviously represent some institutional bias, but I do think that the reporting from the Embassy people was more accurate on the overall situation in Indonesia. I would also like to mention the role of the Assistant Army Attache, George Benson, who many of you know. George Benson not only knew some of the people in the

⁵ Gardner, p. 149.

⁶ Gardner, pp. 149-150.

regional rebellion, but he knew Yani and he knew Nasution and he knew that they too were strong anti-Communists. Benson as well as the Ambassador was being kept out of the loop about a lot of what was going on during that period. In fact some years ago I was at a dinner party where the man who was working on declassifying the documents and who had served here during that period, Ed Ingraham, and George were both present. Ed looked toward George and said, "They weren't telling you anything, were they?" George laughed and said, "No, that's right." They knew that he was friendly with Yani and Nasution and he was deliberately kept out of the loop.

I think this whole question of bureaucratic players and attitudes also illustrates a comment that one often hears in the U.S. and that is: "where you stand depends on where you sit." Where you stand, what your position is on something, depends on what where you are at that time. When Cumming, for instance, was Ambassador to Indonesia he seemed to have a more nuanced understanding of the situation in Indonesia. When he returned to Washington he moved very much closer to the Dulles' view and a much more hard-line position on Indonesia. His successor, John Allison, as I have mentioned, was not kept informed and he was removed in January 1958. I would say that's one of the reasons for reform after that in which now ambassadors are supposed to be told everything that every member of their mission is doing, or is supposed to be able to know that. Allison was succeeded by Howard Jones, who had served as AID director here in Indonesia before, and so Jones came with considerable knowledge and understanding of Indonesia. He had also been working in Washington just before coming out and so he had a good sense of the bureaucracies in Washington and this perhaps also helped make his recommendations a little more acceptable when they got back to Washington.

Now to turn to personal relationships and perceptions. I've mentioned the fact that George Benson knew Yani and Nasution and that affected the way he looked at the situation. It seems to me that the quality of the rebellious colonels, such as Simbolon and Ventje Sumual (who is here today), were such that they appealed to many of the Americans. They were decisive, they were intelligent, they seemed to have a clear idea of what to do, and for activists within the Central Intelligence Agency these were the sorts of people they had been looking for, with

whom they could work. Certainly the Defense Attache in Washington, Colonel Alex Kawilarang (who is also here) was a man whom one could not help but respect and admire for his professionalism and his integrity. The politicians who supported the rebels, particularly the PRRI, Masjumi, and the Socialist Party, the PSI were impressive intellectuals. They were the politicians who were most accessible to Americans. They spoke English. You could communicate with them and understand the same sorts of context.

On personal perceptions, I've mentioned that John Foster Dulles considered neutralism to be immoral. There are also some indications that Dulles, who was himself a very moralistic person, a Presbyterian, a Calvinist, disapproved of Sukarno's (what we now call) "lifestyle." Dulles really thought Sukarno was a personally immoral person. This meant there was very little sympathy at that level of government.

I would like to mention not just the rhetorical support from the United States, but what was provided in terms of material support. We will have people here who can say more based on their own personal experience. It is clear, as Paul Gardner points out in his book, that "not everything is known." The Central Intelligence Agency's documents have not been declassified and released. There is indeed much that is not known. There are controversies among different people, some say so much was done and others say that's an exaggeration.

In Paul Gardner's book he mentions that the first time any money was given to the rebels was in October 1957, when money was delivered to Colonel Simbolon. It does seem clear that there was communications training so that it was possible to stay in touch, the Americans with the rebels, and the rebels with each other. Certainly weapons were provided. The weapons dropped at Pekanbaru, that were captured by ABRI, were provided by the United States. In one of my interviews, I was told that there were continued shipments to North Sulawesi throughout the rebellion. Again some of you who are here may be able to say whether in fact that was the case. The United States was also involved in supplying a rebel air force, planes and pilots. The most famous of the latter was Alan Pope, who was shot down over Ambon on the 18th of May 1958. Originally described by the American Government as an adventurer, he had been so foolish as to have his membership card in the Clark Field officer's club in his pocket when he was captured, and so the press

spokesman clearly had a very difficult time maintaining that he was a mere adventurer, or mercenary.

The impact of events such as the shooting down of Alan Pope really did cause a change in U.S. policy. The first thing was that the central government acted much more decisively than had been expected. Nobody thought that this Javanese-headed government would act like Bataks. They may have forgotten that General Nasution was a Batak. Not only were Padang and Manado bombed on February 21 and 22, the central government captured the arms at Pekanbaru, and then there was an invasion of Padang. One reason the central government moved so quickly was that they knew that there were contacts between the rebels and foreigners, the Americans in particular. So they knew that it was a dangerous situation. The fact that the rebels essentially faded away into the highlands in West Sumatra meant that there was no basis for granting belligerent status to the rebellion, which had clearly been something that the American policy makers had contemplated. However, the embarrassment at the shooting down of Alan Pope meant that they really felt that they had to change the policy.

IV. Economic Factors

On the economic side, did the U.S. want to be involved because of U.S. investments? U.S. investment was concentrated in plantations and in oil on Sumatra, and clearly the existence of American investments in Sumatra was of concern to the policy makers. But it seems to me that if you look at the record at the time of the outbreak of the rebellion, the question of sending American ships to evacuate Americans from Central Sumatra seemed to be more a pretext for involving the 7th Fleet than an attempt by the oil companies to protect their investment. Julius Tahija, a very senior official at *Caltex* at that time, in his very interesting biography, *Horizon Beyond*, states quite firmly that *Caltex* continued to pay its tax to the central government, although Hussein and the PRRI physically controlled the area of *Caltex* operations, and that *Caltex* refused to pay tax to the rebels. Although there was concern about the protection of U.S. investment, in my view economic interests were not as important as anti-Communism in U.S. policy.

V. The effect of U.S. intervention.

Did the U.S. promise of support push the dissident colonels away from political compromise to rebellion? There are differing views on this. The late Ambassador Soedjatmoko believed this to be the case. I hope this is something Colonel Sumual will address in his comments to us later.

It seems to me that the immediate effect of the American intervention was in fact to weaken the anti-Communist forces and to split the army. Also the role of the army in society increased because of the proclamation of martial law, which was proclaimed following the Permesta declaration in March 1957. The Masjumi and the PSI, the Socialist Party, were banned as a result of the involvement of many of their leaders in the rebellion. The foreign involvement aroused nationalism. It gave the PKI a popular issue, and to me it seems it helped to increase, rather than diminish, their influence. Further, more democratic representative institutions were weakened because there was an attempt to obtain political change through violence not through a democratic representative process. And because the regional people moved from a demand for autonomy to rebellion, it seems to me that it has tended to make future institution of local autonomy more difficult. It is a little bit like the Dutch sponsorship of a federal system of government that has made that unacceptable.

What are the lessons? For the United States first of all is that the U.S. is not very successful in intervening in political situations abroad. This is partly because as a really open society it is very difficult for us to keep anything secret. The fact that there was American support for the rebels very quickly became known.

Second, change must come from within a society itself. It is possible that foreign institutions or foreign governments can help through providing educational opportunities, or helping to strengthen democratic institutions, but direct political intervention is counter-productive, it is neither wise nor successful.