

[McGregor on Schaefer and Wardaya, '1965: Indonesia and the World, Indonesia Dan Dunia'](#)

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International Complicity in the 1965 Indonesian Anti-Communist Pogroms

The book *1965: Indonesia and the World* edited by Bernd Schaefer and Baskara T. Wardaya makes an important contribution to scholarly understandings of the anti-communist violence in Indonesia by bringing together scholars with a range of linguistic skills to examine international complicity for this violence. Although the editors agree that Indonesians were most responsible for the violence, they argue that foreign governments were complicit and should share some of the responsibility for encouraging or standing by as the violence unfolded.

There are still relatively few detailed scholarly studies of the 1965 violence although this is beginning to change due to the new possibilities for doing oral history on this topic since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Most studies have taken either a local or national approach to understanding the violence in terms of the role of the military and/or a variety of anti-communist coalitions.[1] Bradley Simpson's *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and US-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (2008) and Wardaya's *Indonesia Melawan Amerika: Konflik Perang Dingin 1953-1963* (2008), drawing on recently declassified U.S. documents, opened up the field of 1965 studies to broader analysis focusing on the larger Cold War contest, Western fears concerning Sukarno, and Indonesia's strategic importance to the United States. The volume under review considers a broader range of international stakeholders and examines how they positioned themselves in relation to both the Sukarno regime and the onset of military directed violence.

In his foreword to the book, Franz Xaver Augustin, director of the Goethe Institute that hosted the conference from which the book originated, notes that the rationale for the book was to reflect on "the involvement and, in the widest sense, the responsibility of international politics for what happened in Indonesia in 1965/66" and to "contribute to the establishment of a *culture of memory*" (p. xiii, emphasis in original). International complicity is important to recall given repeated critiques about Indonesia's human rights record that ignore foreign complicity. At the same time, this work is important as a form of commemoration of a larger chapter in Cold War history that is often forgotten both within and outside of Indonesia.

1965 is a bilingual English-Indonesian volume consisting of nine core chapters, three of which include

brief commentaries. Schaefer explains that the book aims to place the violence in a larger Cold War context not to exculpate Indonesian actors but to reveal “stunning international complicity and compliance” (p. 5). This context includes the crucially important Sino-Soviet split of 1961 and Sukarno and the Indonesia Communist Party’s (PKI) decision to side not with the Soviet Union but with China, which foregrounded a position of international isolation by 1965. In this context and on the question of how we construe international complicity, Schaefer usefully asks: “would the Indonesian army and its Western supporters have dared to launch such deadly attacks on the PKI had the latter been pro-Soviet and supported by Moscow?” (p. 5). Schaefer believes that the scale of violence is in part explained by external pressures and the new regime’s desire to prove its commitment to anti-communism in return for aid and investment.

Drawing on his detailed research into the Sukarno presidency and American foreign policy toward Indonesia, Wardaya’s chapter sets out the domestic context for the struggle between the PKI and the army and rising unease among Western leaders regarding Sukarno’s increasingly assertive foreign policy. Wardaya emphasizes the persistence of New Order narratives about the violence as a story of good versus evil even in the post-New Order period. He believes that it is very important for Indonesians to understand this history in terms of the human tragedy because of the dramatic transformations that took place in this period which continue to have an impact on contemporary Indonesia, such as the shift toward elite politics, military domination, and increasing foreign ownership of the economy. In this sense, Wardaya laments the poor historical knowledge of many Indonesians, including a lack of awareness about the struggles that previous generations engaged in after independence to attain greater economic independence and a lack of awareness about the mass-scale violence of 1965-66 and its broader effects. Coming from an Indonesian who has taught history in a local university and researched this history, this is a powerful statement.

John Roosa’s chapter picks apart the 1966 report of President Sukarno’s Fact Finding Commission (FFC), the first official narration of the 1965-66 violence, which effectively laid the blame for the violence on the Communists. Here he condenses many of the arguments of his classic work, *Pretext for Mass Murder* (2006), carefully outlining the gradual rise of the Indonesian army and the processes that facilitated the army’s rise, such as the 1957 declaration of martial law, military business ownership, and American support for the military. Roosa usefully describes the Indonesian army as operating by 1965 as “a state within a state” (p. 26) and importantly complicates Herbert Feith’s depiction of a triangular power struggle in Indonesia between the PKI, the army, and Sukarno’s acknowledgment that there were also pro-PKI officers and soldiers.[2] Rebutting the claims of the FFC regarding the spontaneity of the violence, Roosa points to the systematic process by which people were rounded up and detained and only later executed and the army’s behind the scenes incitement of civilian organizations to rally against the PKI. Concerning the military’s role in the violence, there is still much to learn and without full access to military records it has been difficult to prove what exact roles Suharto and local commanders played. Jess Melvin’s forthcoming thesis “The Mechanics of Mass Murder: How the Indonesian Military Initiated and Implemented the Indonesian Genocide: The Case of Aceh” begins to do this work based on analysis of a rare find of military orders and chronologies relating to the military campaign against the PKI in Aceh in the provincial archives.[3]

Simpson’s chapter draws on his important book *Economists with Guns* in which he lays out the case for the complicity of the U.S. government in both prepping the army to repress the PKI at any chance

and directly supporting the army's actions after September 30th. Simpson's most significant contribution is the evidence he lays out for what have long been generalized assertions about American or Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) complicity in the 1965 violence. Furthermore, he makes explicit the economic incentives behind the violence and foreign support. Using communiqués between the American embassy in Jakarta and the State Department, Simpson traces the direct encouragement and covert complicity of the U.S. government in the violence and its prioritization of American economic interests above that of the mass-scale loss of human life.

There is a tension between some of the essays as to where to start the story of the 1965 violence and which actors to focus on. Roosa insists on the need to rebut the standard view, which charts the rise of a supposedly antagonistic PKI and positions the killings as a response to the actions of the September 30th Movement. He argues instead that we must pay attention to the rise and movements of the anti-communist sections of the army in the same period. Yosef Djakababa, by contrast, calls for the need to acknowledge how "local tensions" prior to September 30th contributed to the violence and the fears that anti-communists held about "their own survival if communists had won" (p. 64). These contrasting views highlight a sticking point in scholarship on 1965. How can we reconstruct a more balanced view of the PKI prior to 1965 and of the motivations and actions of the military and anti-communist militias without going to the extremes of accepting the New Order tendency to blame the PKI, erasing the military from sight or seeing anti-communists as merely puppets of the military? As historians we need to carefully assess the history of the PKI, and of the army and other groups that participated in the violence.

Jovan Čavoški's chapter draws on newly declassified documents from Yugoslav, Chinese, and Soviet archives. Although there is some previous work on Soviet and Chinese relationships with Indonesia, his coverage of Yugoslavia is particularly novel.[4] Čavoški explains that Yugoslavia was a close ally of Indonesia within the nonaligned movement with Sukarno and Josip Broz Tito meeting at least nine times for talks between 1956 and 1964 and Indonesian study tours to evaluate "the country's brand of socialism" as a possible "middle road" (pp. 66, 69). This complicates our understanding of Cold War rivalries and how they affected Indonesia. Čavoški also draws our attention to the influence of alternative socialist models from Eastern Europe on Indonesia, a topic on which there is very limited research.[5]

Čavoški furthers our understanding of why Sukarno chose to increasingly side with China and what the consequences of this were in terms of Indonesia's extreme isolation by the time of the September 30th Movement. It would be very interesting to know more about how these alliances played out not just in terms of Sukarno's relationships with foreign leaders, but also in terms of the PKI and the army and the violence after September 30th. There are hints throughout the chapter at the PKI's closeness to China, but not much elaboration on how this may have affected the persecution of the PKI post September 30th. In her response to this chapter, Natalia Soebagjo raises even more questions about the Chinese response to the September 30th Movement, which scholars are not yet able to answer with available archives. The reason that this is so important is clearly Indonesia's closeness to China at this point, but also the fact that several key Indonesian leaders were in China at the time celebrating October 1st, leading to speculation that the People's Republic of China was involved.

Drawing on Soviet and East German archives, Ragna Boden analyzes these governments'

relationships with the Indonesian government and their responses to the September 30th Movement and the ensuing violence. Together Čavoški's and Boden's chapters help illustrate how President Sukarno's influence within the Asia-Africa alliance drove increased attention from China and Russia to Indonesia in the post-1955 period. Boden demonstrates just how much of a blow the Sino-Soviet split and Indonesia's choice to follow China had on Indonesian relations with Moscow, noting that "the Soviets probably preferred the elimination of the PKI to its previous state of pro-Chinese positioning and increasing anti-Soviet orientation" (p. 90). Building on the theme of the significance of economics to the Cold War, Boden explains how large-scale Soviet aid to Indonesia constrained the Soviet response to the military takeover and the repression of the PKI, given the hope that the debts would be repaid. The Soviets were also hopeful that pro-Soviet elements in the army might gain the upper hand particularly in the context of the loss of many pro-Soviet leaders in such countries as Algeria, Ghana, and Mali over the years 1965-68. Although they were not enamored with the direction the PKI had taken due to its tilt to the Chinese Communist Party, the Soviets did publically criticize attacks on the PKI once massacres began.

The analyses of Čavoški and Boden on how Chinese and Soviet foreign personnel in Indonesia fared during the violence opens up new perspectives concerning the scale and intensity of this repression. The Soviet embassy was left untouched as were the consulates in Medan and Banjarmasin, yet the latter was "protected by the Indonesian military," meaning that it was monitored in case those targeted sought shelter there. This observation alludes to tightening security and surveillance as the army attempted to arrest members of the PKI and affiliated organizations. Yet, due to fractured relations, Boden notes that "Soviet diplomatic consulates were not safe havens for Indonesian communists" (p. 92). International isolation thus also contributed to the narrowed options for members of the party on the ground in Indonesia.

Schaefer's chapter canvasses the rivalry between diplomatic representatives from East and West Germany in Indonesia who he notes shared negative views about "Sukarno's prestige foreign policy" (p. 100). Further elaborating on the impact of the Sino-Soviet split, he explains that only communist parties who toed the Chinese line in Europe (Albania, Romania, and Holland) were invited to the forty-fifth anniversary celebrations for the PKI in 1965. The Soviets were invited to speak, but this was followed by a direct Chinese rebuttal. This reveals the extent to which the PKI leadership antagonized the Soviet Union and pro-Soviet communist governments.

West German representatives "enthusiastically welcomed" the violence against the PKI whereas East Germans responded with "fatalism" (p. 101). Mirroring patterns followed by the United States, Australia, and Britain, the West Germans completely accepted army-fed information and passed this on to journalists. Schaefer reveals that the West German embassy also collected information on the violence throughout the provinces. It would be fascinating to read the contents of these reports and to see how they correspond with military-supplied information. The East German journalist Fett, by contrast, was receiving information from "communists, leftists and sympathizers," including details of the killings and of some resistance. Yet Schaefer notes that the journalist did not publish many of these accounts due to the belief that by engaging in resistance and planning a revolution the remaining PKI leadership had demonstrated it was a "delusional 'ultra-leftist force'" (p. 107). This comment alludes to the underground movement that operated in the wake of the violence and sought to regroup by means of forming a base in south Blitar.[6] Schaefer could have gone further to assess the accounts that Fett received, and again the details of these accounts may prove valuable sources

for further analysis as rare firsthand accounts of how those targeted experienced the unfolding violence. It would be wonderful if these sources could be translated and shared among researchers.

Throughout this volume there are some stunningly cold quotes from government representatives about the violence that highlight the extent to which communist lives were completely devalued during the Cold War. In 1967, for example, Schaefer notes, the West German ambassador gave a speech in which he expressed relief that “the hundreds of thousands of killed communists provide sufficient guarantee that the current government will do everything to avoid moving the state ever again on a communist course” (p. 112). If the United States viewed the end of Sukarno and the PKI as a victory in terms of the region of Southeast Asia and the ongoing war in Vietnam, non-communist powers in Europe viewed the repression as a sign of hope for non-communist Europe.

Two chapters in the volume survey the responses of the international press to the 1965 violence. Heinz Schütte analyzes reportage in four French newspapers representing different ideologies, noting that all of the papers based their reporting on international news agencies and relied on information from Chinese, Soviet, and Indonesian sources via the Malaysian-based Radio Jakarta. The explanation for why news from Radio Jakarta was coming out of Malaysia is not, however, provided and requires probing given the army’s central role in Sukarno’s campaign to crush the newly formed nation of Malaysia. In his examination of Australian mass media reporting on the killings, Richard Tanter similarly observes that the press often replicated aspects of Indonesian army propaganda. A further clue as to why this occurred is provided in a remarkably frank article that I found in *The Straits Times* from October 1965, which reported that there was Indonesian army censorship of media cables going out of Indonesia.[7] Tanter also raises questions about how much censoring was going on in newspapers and how closely newspaper owners were working with the intelligence community. Following Karim Najjarine and Drew Cottles’s work, Tanter notes that Radio Australia was monitored and instructed by the Australian Department of External Affairs as to how to report on the violence. In general these instructions encouraged the press to replicate the military’s position concerning the violence and to downplay military agency.[8] The intervention of governments into news reporting widens the net of complicity in the violence considerably.

The fact that most accounts provided to the media were army censored and then possibly censored again by anti-communist intelligence agents presents a methodological challenge when analyzing press accounts because of the already biased nature of all sources provided to the media. Schütte notes that there was very positive media reporting in 1966 in the liberal French paper *Le Monde* on the new President General Suharto depicting him as a selfless, ambitionless, and rational leader. Yet there was still some critique from the communist paper *L’Humanite*, which warned ominously that the rise of Suharto signaled “the liquidation of independence” (p. 122). Schütte points to overtones of orientalism in French reporting on the violence, but he could have gone further in his analysis of how seriously we can take these reports and how they correspond to current scholarly knowledge about the areas surveyed. He asks, for example, who the victims were in Bali. On this question we do have the detailed and careful work of Geoffrey Robinson (*The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* [1995]) as a reference point. Tanter importantly highlights the need for greater attention to language in descriptions of the violence and the overwhelming tendency in media accounts to obscure agency by means of use of the passive tense. Schütte’s and Tanter’s chapters signal the need for continuing wariness about accepting media reporting on 1965 at face value. Instead we need to triangulate this information with oral histories and alternative sources.

The final chapter in this collection is a personal account from Franz Magnis-Suseno of his experience of the violence as a German Jesuit trainee priest living in Yogyakarta. He openly admits that at the time of the violence he believed communism was “the greatest menace to humankind and specifically to religion and the Catholic Church” (p. 146). Although Magnis-Suseno does not touch on this, scholars have begun to document the role of the Catholic Church in supporting the violence especially in Eastern Indonesia.[9] Outside Indonesia the role of the church is not as well known as the role of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama, perhaps also due to orientalist assumptions about Islam and violence.[10] Magnis-Suseno recounts that he felt unable to do anything at the time the violence began, commenting that “no-body in Indonesian society would have understood such an appeal, and we ourselves were still worried about the possibility that Sukarno would restore the communists” (p. 148). His perspectives on this violence reveal the extent to which many people who lived through this period still frame events from within Cold War paradigms and the great “red scare.” It is sad to read that Magnis-Suseno is unable, even today, to see that of course there were some Indonesians who would have understood an appeal to stop the violence especially those who were being targeted. There were brave lone voices of protests from Indonesians, such as the student activist Soe Hok Gie, who had also initially supported the demise of Sukarno.[11] There were also of course people on the run from the military, such as Sudjinah and Sulami, two women from the Indonesian Women’s Movement (Gerwani), bravely printing brochures about the rise of the fascist military regime and distributing these to foreign embassies prior to their arrest and detention.[12] Yet these people, the victims of the violence, seem invisible to Magnis-Suseno.

In the context of this book’s theme of 1965 and the world, it is important to acknowledge the small global “communities of resistance” that formed among Indonesian exiles and communities of political activists abroad with links to the Indonesian Left.[13] The most famous of these is the London-based organization TAPOL founded in 1973, which ran a long campaign for the release of political prisoners.

I hope that this volume will serve as a starting point for further detailed analyses of the global dimensions of the 1965 repression. The repression is connected to the histories of many countries due to the global pattern of army-led violence against leftists and communist parties across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, all of which were underpinned by economic motives. By examining the responses of some lesser powers, we might be able to draw new connections between the Indonesian repression and global patterns. The neighboring government of Malaysia, for example, responded to the Indonesian repression enthusiastically, given Indonesia’s confrontation with Malaysia and simultaneous efforts to crush the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In an address to the nation to celebrate the Hindu holiday of Deepvali, which commemorates the destruction of demons, in October 1965 Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman described Indonesia, which was perceived at the time to be still dominated by leftist influence, as “a wicked demon” that had “brought evil influence in to the region,” meaning communist and possibly also Chinese communist influence.[14] Malaysian press reports stressed the Chinese government’s complicity in the September 30th Movement due to domestic fears about the influence of the Chinese on the MCP. This raises the question of how Malaysian discourses contributed to international framings of the 1965 violence.

There remains much to learn about the international dimensions of the 1965 violence and foreign complicity in the repression as well as resistance to it. To write new histories of 1965, however, we are constrained by available sources and here I would join Boden in calling for greater access to

Indonesian documents concerning this period. Unfortunately all the files of the Indonesian foreign ministry at the Indonesian National Archives have been inaccessible for over a decade, many military records remain closed, and many records of the PKI were destroyed. For this reason document-based histories must also be supplemented with interviews and oral history to provide more balanced accounts of what remains a very sensitive past.

Notes

[1]. Some examples include Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990); Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor, eds., *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012); and John Roosa, Farid Hilmar, and Ayu Ratih, eds., *Tahun yang tak Pernah Berakhir: Pengalaman Korban 1965: Esai-esai Sejarah Lisan* (Jakarta: Elsam, 2004).

[2]. See Herbert Feith, "President Sukarno, the Army, and the Communists: The Triangle Changes," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 8 (August 1964): 969-980.

[3]. Jess Melvin, "The Mechanics of Mass Murder: How the Indonesian Military Initiated and Implemented the Indonesian Genocide: The Case of Aceh" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, forthcoming).

[4]. On Chinese links to Indonesia, see Hong Liu, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia 1949-1965* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011). On Soviet influence, see Larisa Efimova, with introduction by Ruth T. McVey, "Stalin and the New Program for the Communist Party of Indonesia," *Indonesia* 91 (2011): 131-164.

[5]. In their work on Indonesian exiles, including many students who had been studying in Eastern Europe at the time of the regime change and who were trapped abroad, Ana Dragojlovic and David Hill have begun to touch on these histories. My research on Indonesian women living in East Berlin at the headquarters of the Women's International Democratic Federation has also begun to examine these links. Ana Dragojlovic, "'Sukarno's Students': Reconfiguring Notions of Exile, Community and Remembering," *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2010): 53-82; David Hill, "Indonesia's Exiled Left as the Cold War Thaws," *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2010): 21-51; and Katharine McGregor, "Indonesian Women, the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Struggle for 'Women's Rights,' 1945-1965," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (July 2012): 193-208.

[6]. On the underground PKI and early efforts in Indonesia to resist the regime, see the memoir Sudjinah, *Terempas Gelombang Pasang* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utan Kayu, 2003); and the scholarly analysis Vanessa Hearman, "South Blitar and the PKI Bases: Refuge, Resistance and Repression," in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68*, ed. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 182-207.

[7]. "News Censorship in Jakarta," *Straits Times*, October 21, 1965, p. 1.

[8]. Karim Najjarine and Drew Cottle, "The Department of External Affairs, the ABC and Reporting of

the Indonesian Crisis 1965-1969," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49, no. 1 (March 2003): 48-60.

[9]. R. A. F. Paul Webb, "The Sickle and the Cross: Christian and Communist in Bali, Flores, Sumba and Timor, 1965-1967," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17 (1986): 94-112; and Steven Farram, "Revolution, Religion and Magic: The PKI in West Timor, 1924-1966," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 158, no. 1 (2002): 21-48.

[10]. For a critique of this view, see Katharine McGregor, "A Bridge and a Barrier: Islam, Reconciliation and the 1965 Killings in Indonesia," in *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace*, ed. Birgit Brauchler (London: Routledge), 214-233.

[11]. See John Maxwell, *Soe Hok Gie: Pergulatan Intelektual Muda Melawan Tirani* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 2001).

[12]. Sudjinah, *Terempas Gelombang Pasang*, 8-17.

[13]. This term is borrowed from Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 47.

[14]. "Indonesia a Wicked Demon: Tengku," *Straits Times*, October 24, 1965, p. 1.

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