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China and the Sept. 30 movement

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A. Dahana (The Jakarta Post)

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For 50 years Indonesians have been debating at least three issues regarding what occurred before and after the so-called G30S affair or Sept. 30, 1965, coup attempt blamed on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). They revolve around questions of who was the mastermind, or dalang (literally puppet master), of the coup.

Several names have been mentioned: Dipo Nusantara Aidit, the then chairman of the PKI, president Sukarno, the CIA and more recently there have been allegations that Soeharto was the dalang of the coup.

There have even been calls to vindicate the PKI as an organization responsible for the coup, based on arguments that Aidit and his gang planned and executed it without the knowledge of his comrades outside of his clique.

The second issue concerns the alleged involvement of the People's Republic of China in the affair.

The more recent third issue is related to human rights violations against anyone linked to PKI that followed the attempted coup.

Dr. Taomo Zhou's paper, although only titled 'China and the 30th September Movement', discusses broader issues such as China's military aid to the planned establishment of Indonesia's fifth force, the potential transfer of nuclear materials and technology, Chinese medical aid to Sukarno and links between Chinese and Indonesian communist parties.

However, according to my reading, the most important part of the paper is the last issue, which is whether China had prior knowledge of the coup plan, and whether China was directly or indirectly involved in the planning and execution of the coup as accused by the New Order government.

Following the accounts of Dr. Zhou, a PhD graduate in history from Cornell University, we now know and realize that Chinese leaders knew about the coup plan, although they apparently did not know exactly when the coup would be launched. As early as August 1965, Aidit and his entourage visited Beijing and talked with Chinese leaders such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi among others.



possibility that the right wing in Indonesia, supposedly the Army, would seize power with support from the US and Kuomintang government in Taiwan. Quite surprisingly, Zhou was somewhat worried about the ability of the PKI to overcome a backlash, saying that the situation depended upon the relative power and strategies of the party.

In his conversation with Mao and other Chinese leaders, Aidit raised the issue of Sukarno's deteriorating health. Aidit said that if Sukarno died, 'it would be a question of who gains the upper hand'.

The conversation confirms the belief shared among western and Indonesian scholars that one of the motivating factors of the coup was Sukarno's health and, hence, who would strike first: the so-called 'rightist generals' or the PKI. Apparently, the PKI took the initiative and failed.

Many observers had the impression that for many reasons, the attempted coup would fail from the beginning. Aidit, not to mention the Chinese leaders, did not fully understand the Indonesian political landscape during the early and mid-1960s.

At that time, the Madiun Affair of September 1948 was still in the minds of Indonesian people, particularly among the Army elite who quashed the communist rebellion. The communists, according to generals, were not fully eliminated from the government and military apparatus because of the Dutch attack.

The Army was actually ready and waiting for revenge and the G30S offered sufficient justification for the cleansing of communism from Indonesia.

Aidit, Chinese leaders and probably Sukarno also did not realize that the Nasakomization (unity of nationalist, religious and communist forces) of Indonesian society had only taken place in Jakarta. Outside of the capital, conflicts between PKI members/sympathizers and religious groups and nationalists broke out almost every day and often bloodily. That is why, I believe, the cruel reprisal against PKI members and sympathizers occurred outside Jakarta.

The question is why China supported the coup? Similar to other world powers engaged in the Cold War at that time, China would have liked to see a pro-China communist or at least left-leaning government in Indonesia. Coincidentally, China's burden was heavier, because apart from facing the US, it was also involved in an inter-communist competition for influence with the Soviet Union. At that time, the Indonesian and Albanian communists

It can, therefore, be said that it was in China's interest to support PKI's attempts to get rid of the 'rightist generals' from the power structure. It is not a question of right or wrong, since all big powers were trying to influence the domestic politics of other countries.

Dr. Zhou argues that although the PKI was under the CCP's influence, China did not have much control over the PKI, let alone the development of Indonesian politics at that time. In a conversation on Aug. 5, 1965, Mao reminded Aidit that the Indonesian political situation was changing. That means Mao told Aidit to be careful. On the one hand, it shows that Aidit did not heed the advice, and on the other, it reveals the inability of Mao and the CCP to control the PKI.

In summary, I believe, Dr. Zhou's accounts have resolved the debates in Indonesia about whether China was linked to the Sept. 30 coup plan. Her arguments are strong and reliable since she used data from official files declassified just recently by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her accounts also uncover another mystery: that the mastermind behind the coup was none other than Aidit.

Nevertheless, we have to accept that accusations of China's knowledge and involvement in the coup have caused the freezing of Sino-Indonesian relations for more than 20 years.

The writer is professor of Chinese Studies, University of Indonesia, Depok, West Java.

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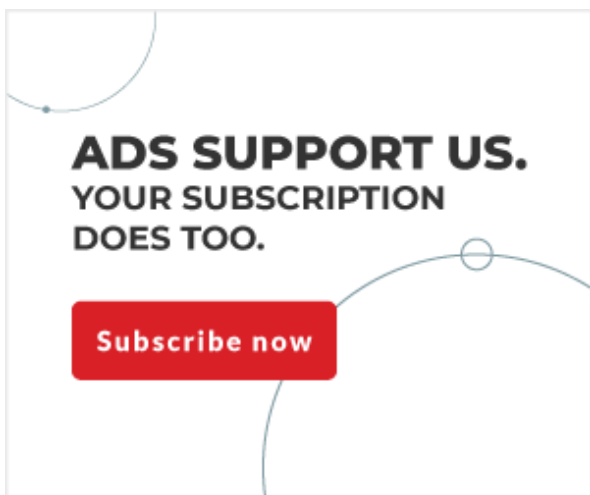
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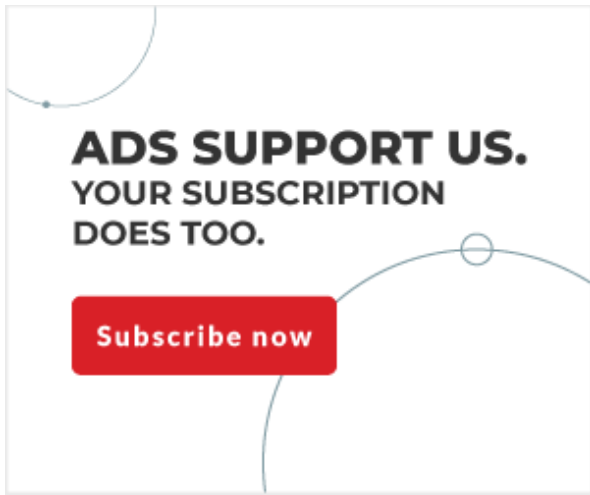
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