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Introduction

In the morning of 1 October 1965, around 7:30 AM, I was playing chess with my father, Siauw Giok Tjhan, chairman of Baperki, a Chinese mass organisation. I was a 9 year old boy at the time and a keen chess player.

The chess game was abruptly ended with the arrival of Sunito, a leader of Partindo, a Nationalist Party whose political influence within the Guided Democracy period was on the rise. Sunito shook my father’s hands and congratulated him for his membership in the so called Dewan Revolusi – the Revolutionary Council.

Siauw appeared surprised and was totally unaware of what Sunito talked about. As soon as Sunito left, he turned the radio on and listened to the RRI’s radio broadcasts, which conveyed news about the Gerakan 30 September and the formation of the Dewan Revolusi which was to take over the control of government. He learned from these repeated broadcasts that without being consulted he was appointed a member of the Revolutionary Council. He was the only Chinese in the Council that was to have 45 members.

Unable to get any meaningful information from his phone contacts, he quickly left home around nine pm and did not return until very late at night. When he returned home, he informed my mother and all of us, the children, that by around nine PM, the G30S had been well and truly crushed by General Suharto, and that the political situation in Indonesia would dramatically change. The Revolutionary Council did not even have a chance to meet.

Siauw was close to a large number of political and military leaders. He was particularly close to Nyoto, one of the PKI’s Politburo members. Together with close political associates, Siauw spent the whole day gathering information and attempting to analyse the situation. He told us that it was unclear to him who actually master-minded the movement and how much the PKI leaders and Sukarno were involved in it. It was obviously difficult to get clear answers from anyone in Jakarta. Leaders of the PKI who had direct involvement in the movement like Aidit and leaders of the movement were already on the run – outside Jakarta from 2 October.
As events unfolded over the next few days, he began to realise the severity of the situation and how damaging Suharto’s military group would be to the PKI, Sukarno and the left wing parties and organisations. By the second week in October 1965, he was heard telling his close political associates that the Red Drive being confronted would be much more damaging than the previous Red Drives and that it would take more than ten years for the PKI and other parties to recover. As we all know, his prediction was way out.

By then, it was apparent that Suharto as head of the Kopkamtib - Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order – had initiated the largest ever mass killings and mass persecution against members of the PKI and left wing parties in Indonesian history. His military operation was backed by the anti PKI right wing parties and organisations. Support from the USA, UK and their allies, including Australia for the purging activities was apparent.

The mass killings and purging took place almost without resistance. Members of the PKI and its mass organisations were not ready for the dramatic political changes. More than one million people were brutally murdered nation-wide and more than 100,000 people were jailed; most were to spend their lives in jail for the next twelve years.

**Political background**

The described situation confirms a number of things. Most important of all, the movement was badly planned. The composition of the Revolutionary Council did not include Sukarno. This was fatal. Had Sukarno’s name been involved, better still, if Sukarno was appointed the Head of it, G30S could not have been described as a coup; it would have been much more difficult for Suharto to crush it in such a short period of time.

Secondly, the leaders of the movement failed to recognise Suharto’s own military plans. It is now clear that Suharto was informed of the planned movement by Latief, one of the G30S leaders on at least two separate occasions prior to 30 September 1965.

Thirdly, most, if not all, the six generals kidnapped and subsequently killed could be described as loyal to Sukarno. They were, however, the generals who Suharto disliked for a number reasons.

Last but not least, members of the PKI and its affiliated organisations were not in any way prepared for changes that could harm the organisations should the planned movement fail. This was a testament that the PKI and its affiliated organisations were not involved in the movement as the Suharto regime publicly declared and maintained for thirty-five years.
How such an important movement was so badly planned was the topic of numerous and lengthy debates. It does give rise to speculations that the main instigator of the movement, namely Syam, one of Aidit’s most trusted advisers was a double agent and that Suharto, who had association with Syam was the real master mind of the movement. This assertion requires more research and investigation.

It was even more puzzling why Aidit, presumably supported by some of the politburo members, took this path, knowing that the political atmosphere in the country was favourable to the PKI’s development and growth.

After 1963, Sukarno had welcomed the rapid shift to the left and had publicly shown that he favoured the alliance with the People’s Republic of China, North Korea, North Vietnam and the Soviet Union over relations with the West. His dependence on the aids from China and the Soviet Union and the rejection of the IMF solution pushed Sukarno further to the left.

Militarily, Sukarno enjoyed widespread support from the Air Force, the Navy and a significant part of the Army. Furthermore, the formation of the militia-like Fifth force consisting members of the PKI and its affiliated organisations, supported by the Air Force, was underway.

In the last phase of Guided Democracy, no political leaders could openly declare that they were anti-communism. Communist-phobia was ridiculed. Political organisations were forced to accept the Nasakom which integrated communism in the world of politics. Some nationalist and left wing organisations encouraged their members and leaders to either join the PKI or to demonstratively provide public supports.

The PKI was definitely on the rise and its political influence was much more widespread than ever before. Leaders of the PKI and its affiliated organizations had no hesitation to boast of their growing memberships. Prior to September 1965, The PKI was the first political party that provided the list of its members to various authorities, including the military ones as a show of force in the Nasakom political configuration.

Baperki as a mass organisation got caught in this stream. It was established in 1954 to deal with Indonesian citizenship for the Chinese and to fight racism against the Chinese. Siauw Giok Tjhan was the founding member and chairman of the Chinese dominated mass organisation. Although Siauw was never a PKI member, he was a Marxist. He clearly supported the idea of establishing Indonesia as a socialist state. The PKI, the left wing nationalist organisations and Sukarno supported Baperki’s political platforms.
In exchange of this support, Baperki, like many similar organisations in the left wing camp, supported the PKI and Sukarno. Many of its leaders, members, and students – by then Baperki had thousands of university students and tens of thousands high school students – joined the PKI and/or its affiliated youth and student organisations. Baperki was therefore very much in the left-wing camp.

Having been a target of the previous two Red Drives - in 1948 and 1951- Siauw was much more cautious than his fellow politicians. He was concerned that Baperki got swallowed by the PKI and that it would lose its political identity. He was also mindful of the fact that the Chinese communities Baperki intended to represent were not homogeneously in favour of communism. He tried hard to reverse the streams from within the organisation that pushed Baperki to becoming a close ally of the PKI. Siauw refused to blindly follow the PKI’s moves. For example, he strongly objected PKI’s demand to treat Murba as Baperki’s enemy. Siauw remained close to leaders of Murba and maintained one of them, Adam Malik, as one of Baperki’s senior advisers.

Meanwhile, the People’s Republic of China’s presence became more prominent as Indonesia relied on its financial aids. This was responded well by the PKI leaders, who made it obvious that they supported China in its conflict with the Soviet Union. This situation angered the Russians to the extent that some Russian leaders warned the PKI that they were capable of restructuring the PKI’s leadership. There were indeed discussions involving Murba leaders and senior leaders of the Soviet Union on the possibility of replacing Aidit as Chairman of the PKI.

But the Chinese influence in Indonesia and that of the PKI was seemingly too strong to be affected by the Russians.

Going back to the question of why Aidit felt compelled to initiate a movement that was so badly structured and planned in what can be considered a favourable political environment for the PKI.

The issue of the existence of the General Council and the likelihood of the right wing generals to topple Sukarno was one possible reason for Aidit’s decision to move to eliminate the said generals. And the action was to be taken before the 5th October – the Armed Forces day.

One other theory related to the fact that Nyoto, one of his important comrades was a clear favourite of Sukarno and that his romantic relationship with a Russian lady, gave rise to speculation that the Russians might manoeuvre Nyoto to a position that would disadvantage his political position.
There is another theory suggesting that there existed a pressure from Chairman Mao, who was said to have reservations on Aidit’s ability to lead one of the largest communist parties in the world. Aidit met Mao in Beijing sometime in July 1965 and the content of that meeting was revealed by the translator. Aidit was reportedly questioned by Mao on his class background, his revolutionary experience and his long term goals in Indonesia. This meeting angered and embarrassed Aidit to the extent that he was perhaps compelled to take a dramatic action to propel himself to a position of absolute power on 1st October 1965, the date Chairman Mao declared the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

No one was able to verify what the actual drivers were as Aidit was secretly executed by the Army on 22 November 1965. But the consequences of his revolutionary experiment were disastrous to the left wing forces in the country. Indonesia experienced the worst crimes against humanity in its history, carried out by Suharto’s military regime. Todate, 48 years later, there are no left wing political parties and it is still a crime to teach Marxism in Indonesia.

What were the roles of the foreign countries? The cold-war was at its full swing. Sukarno’s closeness to the Chinese and other communist nations in the region, the anti-Malaysia propaganda, his ambitious plans for CONEFO and the second Asia Africa Conferences would not have pleased the Western Bloc.

The US, who was keen to contain the Chinese influence from developing in Indonesia saw the presence of Sukarno and the PKI as major threats to their policies. The Soviet Union was equally concerned with the closeness of Sukarno and the PKI with the Chinese.

And the Chinese, in this context, found Sukarno to be an effective friend. Sukarno’s support for the Chinese in the international arenas was reciprocated by generous financial aids which were later waived by the Chinese. Premier Zhou En Lay indicated Chinese willingness to help arm the left wing Fifth Force that was to be formed.

However, there was no clear evidence that there were foreign involvements in the G30S movement. The CIA, KGB, MI6, the Australian Intelligence Organisation and the Chinese intelligence were all surprised by the events that took place on 1st October 1965. Local key players, namely Aidit, Syam, Suharto and Sukarno appeared to have taken actions on their own accords, and Suharto came out as the clear winner.

The Involvement of the US and its allies became apparent only after Suharto took over the control of military power on 2nd October. His ability to rapidly mobilise the right wing forces and the students to destroy the PKI and the left wing forces and the ultimate toppling of Sukarno was linked to such support.
Aftermath

The US' China containment policy was incorporated in the Red Drive that commenced on 2nd October 1965. The military regime adopted a strong anti-Chinese policy. The People’s Republic of China was accused of being involved in the G30S. Baperki was accused as the cukong of the PKI – the financier of the PKI. The Chinese communities, particularly the Chinese- speaking ones were accused for being communists and were only loyal to the PRC.

Along with the PKI and its affiliated organisations, Baperki was under attack. Although the official banning of Baperki did not take place until March 1966, many of its leaders and members were arrested and terrorised. In many parts of East Java, Central Java and Sumatra, in particular Aceh and Medan, many Baperki members were killed. In capital cities, most of the Baperki members arrested were not killed.

On 15 October 1965, the campuses of Baperki’s university in Jakarta, like many properties and buildings of the left wing organisations, were attacked and burnt down. All the buildings, including the headquarters of the PKI were attacked, looted and burnt without any resistance. However, the military-led attack on Baperki’s university buildings met with their students' fierce and heroic resistance, one that lasted for more than 30 minutes.

Siauw himself was arrested on 4 November 1965, at his home and was to spend the next 12 years as a political prisoner.

The implementation of the anti-Chinese policies continued. The military regime adopted the assimilation path endorsed by Baperki’s political foe, the LPKB. Name-changing from Chinese names to any non-Chinese sounding names was unofficially imposed to the great majority of the Chinese; the public celebrations of the Chinese new Year were banned; dragon and lion parades were banned; the use of Chinese characters was prohibited; thousands of Chinese traders from various parts of East Java and Aceh were forced to leave their homes; there were restrictions on university placements for the Chinese; and various discriminatory measures against the Chinese were introduced – ones that existed until recently.

The relationship with the Chinese government continued to decline. The embassy was attacked and looted in 1967. By October of that year, the diplomatic relationship was terminated.

Conclusion

What brought about the G30S movement still requires significant research. What roles Suharto played and the connection of Suharto with Syam, who appeared to
be the master mind of the badly planned movement is still unclear. It is also difficult to understand and verify Aidit’s motives in being involved in the G30S movement in 1965, knowing that the PKI’s position was politically strong in 1965.

Domestically, the clear winner was Suharto, supported by the military and the right wing forces. The PKI and the left wing forces including Sukarno and his followers were purged. More than a million people were brutally murdered and millions were persecuted in the country’s third Red Drive. The Chinese were targeted and for a good part of the first ten years of the New Order, they were badly discriminated against.

Some people claim that Baperki’s political stance was the reason for the anti-Chinese movements and measures. It is my contention that Baperki’s political stance was not relevant in the implementation of the United States’ China Containment policies which manifested in the government led anti-Chinese activities.

The West, in particular, the US, gained significant advantage of the situation. The Soviet Union lost an opportunity to build a meaningful presence in Indonesia. And the PRC lost an ally in South East Asia and the political influence it used to enjoy.