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The Army Takes Hold in Central Java

Summary

Accompanied by an Indonesian friend and the Djakarta correspondent for the New York Times, the writer recently visited Central Java for four days and spoke with several military officers, political party officials, students, educators and others. The Army has imposed an ironclad grip on the province, but with basic security established it is making an effort --at least in the Jokjakarta area--to tackle some of the more basic problems which make the area potentially so troublesome. There seems to be a surprising degree of familiarity with developments in Djakarta, but in general the province remains remote from the capital, concentrating on its own problems with the resources at hand.

Security

On the night of October 20 the city of Jokjakarta was surrounded by Army roadblocks at which all travelers were obliged to stop for an inspection of vehicle registration papers and personal identity cards, and to undergo a weapons search of the trunk. The military police commander in Jokjakarta later explained that these checkpoints were part of a security program designed partly to net fugitive PKI figures and partly to keep potential troublemakers in Central Java off balance. He explained that the roadblocks never stayed long in one place; those around Jokjakarta disappeared two days later.

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2

During a one-week trip to Central Java October 19-25, 1966, the writer found that in this and other ways the Army has extended iron-clad control over the entire political life of the province. There is a general ban in Jokjakarta and Solo on meetings of more than five people unless permission has been obtained in advance from the local military commander, according to students in both cities. Residents of the Jokjakarta military district have been instructed to keep their identity cards current, and surprise house-to-house searches are made by the military to find and identify those who have not complied. It also was confirmed by the Jokjakarta military police commander that one battalion of KOSTRAD troops and one and one-half battalions of RPKAD troops had recently arrived in his area, although he said that these moves were part of the normal rotation program.

Such security measures had resulted in the capture, just before the reporting officer's visit, of former PKI Central Committeeman Sakirman and lesser fry in Solo. Just after this visit was completed, it was announced in Antara that the hermitage of Mbah Suro, a mystic who disseminates communist and PNI propaganda in the guise of occult teachings, had been closed on order of the Central Java military commander, Maj. Gen. Surono. The spreading of Mbah Suro's teachings has been forbidden and the public now is prohibited from giving any assistance or facilities to any would-be pilgrims so that the spreading of propaganda will be prevented and so that the hermitage will not be used "as a secret meeting place for ... old order and Gestapu elements." The Jokjakarta district commander remarked that in his district it is true to say, as Gen. Sumitro reportedly has said of East Java, "There is no pro- and anti-Bung Karno problem here because I say there is not."

...And What Else?

It is apparent, however, that the Army in the Jokjakarta area is attempting to do much more than simply keep the lid on. Its direct control extends down to the village level, and its activities have broadened from affairs of basic security into the first stages of an attempt to direct the area's political life toward more positive channels than heretofore has been the case. This became apparent when the reporting officer visited the village of Gamping, west of Jokjakarta, with the Djakarta correspondent of the New York Times who was gathering material for an article on Central Java. The visit had been

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3

arranged by the district commander (Korem), and occupied the better part of two days during which the local officials and most of the population showed themselves quite willing to meet and speak with Western visitors.

Gamping is one of five villages encompassing some 30,000 people which are grouped under a "district assistant." As is the case elsewhere, this civilian official is assisted by a Lurah, or headman, in each of the five villages in his jurisdiction. This governmental structure is duplicated by a military hierarchy under a lieutenant who also has five village assistants and who reports directly to the Korem in Jokjakarta. In at least one of the neighboring villages to Gamping the Lurah himself was a former military officer, but in the other cases it appeared that the local military representatives, although nominally equal in rank to their civilian counterparts, would be distinctly more "equal" if there ever were a dispute between military and civilian approaches to a problem. In the case at hand it was the Army lieutenant, rather than the elderly district assistant, who did most of the talking, who seemed the more dynamic, and who apparently had established excellent relations with the people whom he in effect governed and among whom he lived.

Aside from routine issues of security and local government, the Army has two special programs in Gamping. One is the BIMAS agricultural program under which a local demonstration project run by students from the agricultural faculty of Jokjakarta's Gadjah Mada University had nearly doubled the local average rice yield. This project, unfortunately, has now been suspended due to a lack of fertilizer. The other program is an effort to spread the results of the Bandung Army Seminar and to encourage cooperation among disparate groups through a series of local seminars conducted by Army-sponsored teams in the villages. These teams were composed of eleven members each, drawn from the various political parties, youth groups, mass organizations, etc., as well as from the Army and the other armed forces. The teams are said to start out once a month on circuits of two or three weeks to predesignated villages, where they deliver speeches and engage in question-and-answer sessions with the local populace on such subjects as the meaning of the "new order," the Army's economic program, etc. These seminars apparently have been conducted for the past few months and thus predate the Bandung Army Seminar itself.

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4

A Political Truce

The Army's efforts to keep the rival political parties and student groups from each other's throats have taken some novel turns in Jokjakarta city. After last June's serious outbreaks of violence between students in Jokjakarta, the Korem organized a sort of military police auxiliary composed of representatives from KAMI, GMNI, Ansor and the other student organizations now represented in the area. This "detachment" was issued uniforms, helmets, etc.--but no weapons--and given the responsibility for policing their own member organizations and preventing further violence. This tactic, along with the ban on meetings of more than five people, seems to have succeeded in establishing unusual tranquillity among Jokjakarta students: the headquarters of the various organizations and the campus of Gadjah Mada itself are quiet.

A similar approach was used to dampen the partisan passion of Jokja's politicians, and the military police commander remarked that this group had done its job so well that it will soon be disbanded. All through Central Java the degree of political polarization, judged by the number of party signs in the villages, seems to be considerably higher than in West Java. No village or town is without its prominently-marked branch and sub-branch headquarters for PNI, NU and former Masjumi-affiliated organizations--generally in that order of incidence. KAMI, KAPPI and Pantjasila Front signs are almost never seen. NU and Masjumi-oriented signs frequently can be seen in front of the same building, reflecting the scarcity of meeting space in many towns. In spite of the proximity of so many rival groups, however, the writer saw no sign anywhere of party activity: all headquarters looked almost deserted, although it is highly/likely that they would remain so without the stern Army control.

unLarger Issues

Neither the Army nor the population is reluctant to talk with foreigners about the greatest event of the past year--the sudden removal of the PKI from their midst. In Gamping it is said that Aidit and other leaders passed through the town late in October trying to rally support, and it is true that Gamping was a center of PKI strength in the area. The bulk of the inhabitants, however, are said to have rallied to the Army against the communists. In Kotagede, south of Jokjakarta, it is said that some 500 PKI members or sympathizers were rounded up

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5

but that the weapons they previously had possessed were not found. The prisons in Solo and Jokjakarta still hold large numbers of PKI prisoners; 400 remain from an original 1,200 in one prison on the grounds of the palace in Solo, and 90% of a group of 6,000 are still held in Jokja. Recent news accounts state that 2,000 are still under arrest in all of Central Java, and extra investigators have been detailed from Djakarta by the Attorney General to help determine which should be released. To judge by Gamping's experience, those who are released remain social pariahs for a few months, then gradually are accepted again as normal members of society.

It appears that the Army's clampdown has not prevented some change in political outlook from taking place in the province, although it is difficult to perceive any change when measured against the frenetic pace of Djakarta. Several individuals remarked that, where they previously admired President Sukarno personally, they now respect him as President only. The Subandrio trial then in progress was followed and discussed in every village, since the Department of Information has distributed radio receivers; one Muslim remarked that his (Santri) village had been "relieved" when the prosecutor demanded the death sentence. Some of the Muslims contacted, including the Jokjakarta military information officer, guardedly indicated their awareness that there were bigger issues at stake in the Subandrio trial and that "justice" might demand more trials. But in the more secularist abangan Javanese neighborhoods, Subandrio is damned as the evil advisor who misled the President, and the September 30 Affair was referred to offhandedly as "Gestok"-- Sukarno's term--rather than "Gestapu." Some Protestant Christian students were among those who said that they still admire Sukarno, but as the President rather than personally. All apparently agreed, however, that the Ampera cabinet is proceeding too slowly.

COMMENT: In Gamping the Army was, of course, showing off a village which is particularly prosperous and in which its presence has been particularly effective. A large part of this success must be credited to the resident lieutenant and his wife, who obviously enjoyed notable rapport with their neighbors. The Army here is attempting to put into effect a program of political "pacification" and social and economic development, which as yet is only outlined but far from implemented. The political parties have been suppressed, but the Santri Muslim and abangan sub-cultures which they represent are still as separate as before and will demand some sort of organized political expression, with or without Army control. The process of

CONFIDENTIAL

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6

educating the villages into participation in the Army's program has just begun, and the writer heard repeated pleas from all quarters, military and civilian, for American magazines and books. One of these pleas came from the Gamping leader of the PNI youth group, who classed himself and his friends as "admirers of American culture" in making his approach.

In summary, it can be said that in Gamping and Jokjakarta a group of particularly effective Army officers and their civilian allies have taken the first steps to work out the Army's new role as political arbiter, economic innovator and local educator. This role will largely determine the local shape of things and will be in a process of further refinement for several years to come.

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