

**Forum:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** Addressing the Indonesian Genocide

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## Introduction

Not long after the end of more than 300 years of Dutch colonization, Indonesia underwent a period of political turmoil that resulted in General Suharto holding *de facto* control over the country. With strong support from western nations for his fight against communism, Suharto accused the Communist faction within Indonesia for committing a military coup and savagely mutilating the body of generals, and used that as a justification to slaughter between 500,000 to 1 million innocent individuals. Most assassinated people were civilians who were unjustly targeted for something as simple as their political beliefs, for being ethnically Chinese, or belonging to a certain labor union. Targeted individuals were killed in the most inhumane ways possible—decapitation, strangling, drowning; while others considered as “lucky” ended up in brutal concentration camps for more than a decade.

Even worse, however, was the fact that General Suharto held full-fledged support from western, democratic nations who also wanted a communist defeat as a result of the “Red Scare”. The United States, for example, supplied General Suharto and his fellow perpetrator with weapons, communicative devices, and even the names of alleged communists—all of which significantly helped facilitate the Indonesian Genocide. During the over 30 years when Suharto ruled Indonesia, the government ran on the basis of corruption; the country was unified by fanatical anticommunism, propaganda, and fear. Regrettably, even today, the Indonesian government still rejects the pleadings from human rights groups to apologize and continues to perpetuate a false history within the educational system instead of portraying what had truly taken place. History is something that is written by the victors, and the Indonesian Genocide is a story about what happens when the evil is victorious.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Genocide**

Genocide is a term coined first coined in 1944 used to describe mass violence against members of an ethnic, national, religious, or racial group, with the deliberate intention to eliminate the group in whole or in part. In the case of the Indonesian Genocide, the targeted group was “the communists”. Furthermore, regardless of their true political affiliation, ethnically Chinese individuals were also targeted as they were assumed to be communist after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

### **Dictatorship**

A form of government where either one individual, or a small group possesses absolute control over the whole nation without effective constitutional limitations. Dictatorships oftentimes employ terror, violence, oppression to control their nation. Propaganda is also a common tactic implemented to sustain public support. During the Indonesian Genocide, the government led by Suharto was effectively a dictatorship.

### **Communism**

A political and economic system where the means of production is a part of public ownership. Since there are no individual owners in a communist system, profits obtained are always shared between workers. Due to the lack of detail and the vague outlines of this system, the way communism should operate is still heavily disputed between followers.

### **The Red Scare**

During the Cold War, the intense political and economic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union incited an intense concern in the United States of the spread of communism. Though the effects of the Red Scare began to ease in the 1950s, it was due to it that the United States engaged in efforts to prevent the spread of communism outside of its own nation. During the Indonesian Genocide, the United States supported the mass killings of communists.

### **Propaganda**

The dissemination of information, regardless if it is true or not, to influence public opinion. Throughout the Indonesian Genocide, intensive propaganda was used to persuade the public that the Communists were inherently evil in order to provide justification for the mass killings committed.

## **Truth-finding and Reconciliation**

Truth-finding and reconciliation is an important part of a process for many countries after experiencing political turmoil with the aim to reveal past wrongdoing by the government and resolve any left-over conflict. It is important to note that the Indonesian government never engaged in any kind of truth-finding and reconciliation process for the Indonesian Genocide, and resisted external efforts to do so as well.

## **Background**

### **Sukarno Takes Power**

Subsequent to Indonesia's independence from the Dutch, Sukarno became its first president. The new country faced several internal conflicts: religious clashes between Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity; ethnic conflicts between Chinese and Indonesians; and political conflicts between the military and the government. Despite the fact that the military was split up between Japanese-trained troops and former guerrilla fighters of the anticolonial war, the Indonesian people had been brought together by the charismatic, nationalist Sukarno under *Nasakom*, a union of the ideological principles of communism, nationalism, and Islam.

### **Foreign intervention**

As a result of the ideological clashes of capitalism and communism between the US and the USSR during the Cold War, the US was horrified by the rise of Sukarno's communist regime in Indonesia. To combat communism, in 1958, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed armed regional rebellions against Sukarno by providing technological and military support.

### **Sukarno's increasingly authoritarian government**

On July 5, 1959, Sukarno issued an order restoring the 1945 Constitution, which granted the president broad powers. In March 1960, he established a new Parliament in which he assigned around half of the members. Infuriated by the institutional changes Sukarno implemented, the military arrested and imprisoned members of the radical Islamist and socialist parties. However, the president only admitted more members of the PKI to the government to counterbalance the power of the military. In 1963, the parliament, which consisted of individuals all selected by him, appointed him president for life. As a dictator, he developed a personality cult. Students were required to study his writing and speeches, and all mass media in the country was allowed to report only on his ideology and actions.

### **Conflicts between the Indonesian military and the PKI**

In spite of the impression of absolute control, Sukarno's rule was fragile. His two underlying pillars of support, the military and the communists, were in a profound conflict. By 1965, Indonesia had grown close to the Asian socialist countries (notably China), and Sukarno had become harshly anti-American. The country was at war with neighboring Malaysia, enraging Western nations. By then, tens of millions of people were in the PKI or its associated political organizations—apart from Soviet Union and China, the PKI was the largest communist party in the world. The military distanced itself from Sukarno as it resented the rapid expansion of communism and began to seek an alliance with conservative Islamist leaders. Sensing tension with the military, Sukarno revoked martial law in 1963 to restrain the Army's power. In April 1965, the conflict between the military and the PKI worsened when Sukarno answered to communist leader Aidit's appeal to arm the Indonesian peasants.

### September 30th Movement

On October 1, six high-ranking generals in Jakarta were kidnapped and killed by a group of young officers part of the Indonesian National Armed Forces. Seizing the state broadcast service, the movement proclaimed the formation of a new revolutionary government. While the PKI states that the movement was a result of internal conflicts within the military, the army leadership insisted that it was part of the PKI's plan to seize power. Nevertheless, the perpetrators, their aims, and involvement of international actors in the incident are still unknown.

### Response from the military

Suharto falsely reported that the generals were tortured and sexually mutilated by young communist women before their execution. Within several weeks, the military propaganda machine unfolded a massive conspiracy that all of PKI was complicit in the generals' actions. The Army claimed that the execution of the generals was only the first step in a planned communist coup that would involve murdering the party's enemies on a far wider scale. Party members were alleged to have been planning to murder their neighbors. Rubbish pits were propagandized as makeshift graves for the bodies of the victims of the PKI. Common household utensils were reinterpreted as tools for torture. On March 11, 1966, faced with the loss of popular support and absolute power of Suharto, Sukarno signed a decree known as the *Supersemar* that essentially ceded control of the country to the General. After gaining power, Suharto immediately expelled the government and military of Sukarno loyalists and started the impeachment process on Sukarno, justified by his affiliation with communism, economic negligence, and "moral degradation".

### The Mass Murder

The genocide began in Jakarta, spreading to Central and East Java and later to Bali, and smaller cases occurred in other islands. The Indonesian Army not only directed the killing by recruiting, arming, and training militia units, but also built up collective hatred by vilifying Communists. As a result, Indonesian civilians also took part in the killings. Estimates of the number of deaths range from 100,000 to 2 million people. The wide range of estimates is because records were not kept and there has been no serious attempt to reconstruct what had taken place after the event. The KOPKAMTIB (Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban - Operations Command to Restore Order and Security), a secret police operation of Suharto's regime, survey in 1966, unavailable to the public, is said to have estimated that a million people had been killed. The reliability of the report is doubted since motivations for both over and under reporting the killings were clear. Because of the tropical climate of Indonesia and secret disposal of many bodies, remains were not continually discovered in ensuing years.

### **Treatment of prisoners**

Most victims were detained in the vast network of prisons and concentration camps, subject to exceedingly inhumane conditions. Many did not survive the first period of detention, dying from malnutrition and beatings. As people revealed the names of undercover communists, mostly under torture, the numbers of imprisoned rose during 1966–68. Prisoners were tortured when they were first held captive and at times, long afterwards. During torture sessions the Army extracted confessions from prisoners as to their involvement in the Communist Party and the 30 September Movement. Most victims were not significant political figures, but the poor and lower-middle class including farmers, plantation laborers, factory workers, students, and teachers. targeted because they themselves or a friend or family member had joined the PKI or its affiliated organizations. A 1977 Amnesty International report approximated that "about one million PKI cadres and others identified or suspected of party involvement were detained".

### **International reaction**

At the height of the Cold War, the killings were seen as a victory over Communism for Western governments. Western media preferred Suharto, the "New Order", as opposed to the PKI's leftist "Old Order". Most reports reiterated the Indonesian army's propaganda, glossing over the army's responsibility for the organized genocide and emphasizing the role of civilian aggression instead.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **General Suharto**

Suharto was an army officer and political leader in Indonesia who joined the Dutch Colonial Army in 1942, and steadily moved up the ranks until he was appointed to head the army strategic command in 1963. As

one of the highest-ranking officers to escape the assassinations during the September 1965 military coup, Suharto seized power and control of the government, and remained a dictator of Indonesia for three decades (1967-1998). During his rule, Suharto directed the mass killings of communists, leftists, and ethnic Chinese, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent individuals. His authoritarian and corrupt regime fell in 1998 after Suharto resisted demands for economic reforms to address the Indonesian economic recession and was forced to resign his presidency on May 21st.

### **President Sukarno**

Sukarno was the first ever president of Indonesia after it gained independence from Dutch colonization, and his presidency lasted 16 years, from 1949 to 1965 when he was despised by a military coup. During Sukarno's rule, he established the 5-point *Pancasila*, the principles of independent Indonesia that is still in use today, abandoned Indonesia's original parliamentary system, and established a new guided democratic system that was controlled by himself. However, the escalating conflicts between the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) and the anti-communist military during the spring of 1965 lead to considerable amounts of instability within the government. Despite Sukarno's efforts to maintain his power, Suharto took advantage of the September 30th communist coup to gain power, and coerced Sukarno into signing *Supersemar*, which effectively handed governmental control to Suharto.

### **Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia; PKI)**

The Communist Party of Indonesia was founded originally on May 23rd, 1920 by Henk Sneevliet under the name of the Communist Union of the Indies (PKH), during which Indonesia was still under Dutch Colonization. The party's name was officially changed to PKI in late 1924, and over the years, became Indonesia's largest non-ruling communist party until it was completely eradicated with the Indonesian Genocide. The PKI had an alliance with Present Sukarno during his rule, but after his introduction of Guided Democracy in 1957, the alliance proved to be detrimental for the PKI as it provided little to no benefits for the party. As a result, on September 30th, 1965, a group of low-ranked officers from the PKI assassinated 6 army officers, which effectively allowed General Suharto justifiably rule. After the anti-communist Suharto seized control of Indonesia, he begun a genocide that eradicated almost all PKI members and an uncountable number of civilians as well.

### **United States of America (USA)**

The United States of America was the largest power that back Suharto's purges during the Indonesian Genocide. Newly declassified documents indicated that US authorities offered help to suppress media coverage during the genocide, received consistent updates regarding the executions from the Indonesian

government, and encouraged the Indonesian army's attacks on the PKI, all while they knew that most individuals killed were completely innocent. These actions were part of US's strategy during the Cold War, when communist parties and regimes were considered as "plagues" that would contaminate neighboring countries due to the "Domino Effect".

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 27, 1949	The Netherlands formally agrees to relinquish its claims to Indonesia
1958	CIA supports armed regional rebellions against Sukarno, halting operations after a pilot is arrested
1963	Sukarno's hand-picked parliament appoints him president for life
October 1, 1965	Six high-ranking generals in Jakarta are kidnapped and killed General Suharto accuses the Communists of responsibility for the attack as an alleged coup attempt
March 11, 1966	Sukarno signs a Presidential Order known as the <i>Supersemar</i> that effectively hands control of the country over to General Suharto.

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

United Nations has refrained from commenting on the genocide. Likewise, many governments across the world have not expressed their views on the mass genocide and in fact, assisted the Indonesian

Army during the massacres with foreign involvement. Thus, efforts to resolve the issue are limited to a regional to national scope.

A Fact-Finding team was ordered by Sukarno to investigate the killings in December 1965, but it completed its work before the genocide had ended. The nine-person fact-finding team travelled across Indonesia, under close surveillance from the military. The team's report did not challenge the view that the killings were expressions of popular anger, merely concluding that 78,500 people had been killed, much lower than recent estimates of the death toll.

The International People's Tribunal on 1965 Crimes Against Humanity in Indonesia was held in The Hague, Netherlands in November 2015, formed by Indonesian exiles and international researchers. The tribunal's findings "called the state of Indonesia directly responsible for the events and guilty of crimes against humanity blamed Suharto for spreading false propaganda and laying the grounds for the massacres and concluded that the massacres "intended to annihilate a section of the population and could be categorized as genocide". Without the legal authority to issue binding decisions, Indonesia rejected the tribunal's rulings.

Ultimately, there has been no concrete and authoritative efforts to resolve the issue. The genocide has only resurfaced as a topic in public discourse not long ago. Thus, it is crucial for the council to decide and act upon reliable measures for truth-finding and reconciliation within Indonesia.

## Possible Solutions

### **Recognizing the genocide as unlawful**

In this case, it is evident that Suharto and the Army leadership committed the heinous act of genocide with impunity. Taking into consideration the tensions arising from the Cold War, it is imperative that the international community reaches a consensus on the severity of the issue and holds the perpetrators responsible for the mass murder.

### **Prosecuting individuals who committed crimes against humanity**

Measures including setting up an international crimes against humanity tribunal or prosecuting individuals on the International Criminal Court should be meticulously evaluated due to international conflicts of interest and limited efficiency.

### **Eliminating foreign support towards Suharto's regime**



First, any and all forms of foreign aid should be eliminated from the Suharto regime. Active support for Suharto from foreign governments in the form of the provision of weapons, communication devices, and names of alleged PKI members should be investigated and penalized with the rule of law.

### **Carrying out truth-finding and reconciliation**

Next, an independent, international team of investigators should be commissioned to gather evidence on the event and facilitate the process of truth-finding and reconciliation, authorized and fully assisted by the Indonesian government. Reports should provide a well founded estimate of the number of victims as well as details on human rights abuses and crimes against humanity committed during the genocide.

### **Preventing escalation of conflict**

Both respecting the national sovereignty of Indonesia and maintaining international security and peace are crucial to any feasible, impactful solutions. Without escalating the conflict to exacerbate existing hostility under the context of the Cold War, measures must be multilateral, including representatives of PKI victims, Sukarno and Suharto government as well as governments across the world.

### **Justifying the inquiry in Indonesia**

Ultimately, delegates must interpret the UN Charter and hold true the concept of sovereignty, which must not be distorted to justify the genocide as an “internal affair” of Suharto’s regime.

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