



“Guided Democracy” and Genocide in Indonesia: The Limits of the “United Front” in A Postbellum Era

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Abstract

This work reviews the mass killings in Indonesia in 1965 and 1966, the actors that took part in them, the political and social conditions that preceded these events, and other relevant details for their study. An arguably niche subject in mainstream academia, these atrocities can be considered as a major linchpin during the Cold War, that would shape both counter-insurgency policies directed against socialists and anti-revisionism campaigns meant to protect socialism. In this study, and opposite to the prevailing academic canon, ideology is considered as a primary factor in understanding the motivations and decisions of each actor in their respective position before and during these events: a materialist analysis, conducted through a literature review of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, is employed for this purpose; as well, elements of game theory are didactically used in order to illustrate the nature of each actor’s position during periods of alliance and conflict regarding each other. Finally, the possibility that the development and ramifications of the Indonesian genocide influenced harsher policies in socialist states, such as the “Brezhnev doctrine” or the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, is also explored.

Introduction

The Indonesian mass killings of 1965-66 constitute a perhaps overlooked aspect of the Cold War theater in Asia, being often seen as a background event to similar conflicts occurring throughout said region and the world – for example, decades before in Korea and decades after in the American continent. However, a particular aspect of interest in this subject is the specific form of social order that existed during the period of time that preceded these atrocities: a tripartite, atypical ideology known as “*nasakom*” – standing for the bahasa terms for nationalism, religion, and communism. In turn, this heterogeneous doctrine was an attempt to bring order to the instability generated during the period of Indonesian independence, the era known as “*Bersiap*”.

In other regions of the world, similar syncretic ideologies – consisting of apparently opposed and perhaps even antithetic elements – have also been adopted: for example, the “theology of liberation” in Latin America, that also sought to use the widespread religious affinity in the population as a fertile ground for communism and anti-imperialism, or in the thought of revolutionaries such as Sultan-Galiev, who sought to unify revolutionary Bolshevism and Islam. In this regard, while “*nasakom*” is not an atypical phenomenon in itself, it does consist of an interesting subject to study when taking into account the catastrophic collapse of its balance.

Furthermore, and as it will later be touched upon, there is a strong argument to be made that the Indonesian massacres served as a policy template that would be then propagated into similar situations across the world. This means that relations between these events in Indonesia and the subsequent ones in Chile, Nicaragua, and elsewhere might be related more tightly than what is traditionally accepted in western academia. Due to the nature of studying decisions, conflicts, and their resolution, a loose approach will be kept using elements of game theory to engage with certain arguments.

To begin with, we must introduce the concepts of game theory that shall be used in this work. It is to be noted, rather than follow a strict, analytical arrangement using the relevant mathematical terms, what shall be carried out is a pedagogic simplification of the scenarios to be studied. In other words, rather than use formulas to denote the game balance, it will be attempted to rephrase these abstract concepts into easily understandable words as often as possible, dispensing entirely from employing traditional mathematical visualizations. Therefore, there exist some key concepts for which a definition and a paraphrases will be given:

First, “game”, and consequently, “game theory”, which the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) defines as “*the study of the ways in which interacting choices of economic agents produce outcomes with respect to the preferences (or utilities) of those agents, where the outcomes in question might have been intended by none of the agents.*”^① Overall, this means any situation that implies a strategic confrontation between players – not necessarily a violent one nor an attack, as cooperation is also a form of strategy sometimes – can be considered as a “game.”

Second, “player”, which the SEP recursively defines as “*agents involved in games*”; or, in other words, anyone who is active inside a “game.”

Third, “cooperative” and “non-cooperative” games, meaning those that involve coalitions of players and those that do not. Coalition, of course, meaning players cooperating with one another in order to win the game or assert their interests.

^① Ross, D. (2023). Game Theory. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-theory/>

Fourth, and derived from the former, “zero-sum game”, in which “every gain in expected utility by one player represents a precisely symmetrical loss by the other”; or in other words – opposite to a cooperative game – in order for one player to win the other must lose.

And fifth, “equilibrium”, being “a *stable state, one in which all the causal forces internal to the system balance each other out and so leave it ‘at rest’ until and unless it is perturbed by the intervention of some exogenous (that is, ‘external’) force*”. Therefore, if one is familiar with the colloquial usage of this word, an equal meaning will suffice in this paper.

Again, it must be stressed that the usage of game theory in this work is only for illustrative purposes: no actual “trees” or mathematical formulas are employed, both as to make its reading more accessible and due to the fact this analysis is not strictly a “game theory” one. Then, it would be better to understand the few elements of said discipline in these pages as an accessory to the main body of work: the actual narrative and arguments, written in prose.

Section 1 – Bersiap and Guided Democracy

“People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: “How strange! But never mind-it’s Nazism, it will pass!” And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.”

– Césaire, A., (1950), *Discourse on colonialism*, Monthly Review Press.

Indonesia, like many other countries in East Asia, shared a relatively common past: first, it was invaded and colonized by European powers, then occupied during the height of Japanese imperialism; and following the defeat of the Empire of Japan, experienced a sudden power vacuum.^① The imperialist exploitation of these territories created expected resentment in the people, which then originated different nationalist and anti-imperialist movements, including communist ones. However, even if there were previous insurrections and attempts at breaking free from the imperialist hold – for example, the *Nghê-Tĩnh Soviets* in Indochina – it was only until the Japanese imperialists had first crippled the colonial apparatus, and then were defeated themselves, when the conditions became sufficient for the near-simultaneous emergence of several revolutions. Thus, a specter came to haunt the anachronistic colonies: nationalist and communist insurrections broke out closely following one another, with the Indochina Wars, the Malayan Emergency, the Korean War – and the uprisings in Seju and Gwanju – as well as the militarization of the communist party in the now-occupied Japan, to name a few.

In Indonesia, after the Japanese empire surrendered, Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta soon declared independence from the Netherlands, and the newly birthed pro-independent forces quickly expanded into the rest of the country, prospering in the absence of Dutch or western occupiers and in the face of inert Japanese invaders awaiting repatriation – who, in certain cases,

^① See Opper, M. (2019). *People’s Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. University of Michigan Press; Ricklefs, M. C. (1981). *The Destruction of the Colonial State, 1942-50*. In *A history of modern Indonesia*. Macmillan; and Vickers, A. (2013). *The Revolution*. In *A history of modern Indonesia* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

even collaborated with them.^① Much like in Indochina with the Việt Minh, when the first western forces landed in Indonesian territory, much of the country had already been radicalized by revolutionary sentiment or was already occupied and administered by *ad hoc* pro-independence governments and militias.^② This initial period of time, where the revolutionaries expanded into the country and smashed – figuratively and literally – the remnants of Dutch and Japanese imperialism, was called by the former as the “*Bersiap*” – from the bahasa word for “prepare yourself.” Undoubtedly, for Dutch interests of regaining colonial sovereignty over Indonesia, it was a time of chaos.

However, from the perspective of Indonesians themselves, the “*Bersiap*” can be considered to have started at the onset of a war of independence, first revealed in skirmishes with the pro-colonial western occupiers and then with a punitive expedition sent by the Dutch.^③ The western forces that arrived in the wake of the Japanese surrender rushed to occupy territories that were to be handed to the previous colonizers; then, on the proper arrival of the former masters, *politionele acties* – or “police actions” – were undertaken.^④ As it had happened in Malaya during their own anti-imperialist struggle against the British, the revolutionaries – regardless of ideology or efficiency – were “bandits” and “criminals,” while the invading Dutch were righteous policemen who would bring order to the savagery.^⑤ Yet, to their white surprise, the Indonesian republicans were far more organized and motivated than what could be expected from common highwaymen, and much like how the French invaders found themselves trapped in figurative quicksand when fighting the Việt Minh, despite the firepower and brutality of the “police actions” and the “pacification” they implied, the Dutch failed to destroy the newborn independent state. Ultimately, in the face of rising costs – unsustainable for an “empire” that until recently had been a hinterland territory of the German Reich – coupled with international pressure and receding support from imperialist-sympathizing nations, Indonesia gained its independence in 1949, reestablishing itself as a unitary republic in 1950.^⑥

A stark contrast to the Việt Minh was the relative instability of the Indonesian revolutionary forces. The former consisted of a “united front” that grouped heterogeneous anti-imperialist factions in a coalition led by the Indochinese Communist Party, therefore subduing factional interests into the larger strategy sought by the communists. The latter, however, emerged as a majority-grassroots movement, with many Indonesians taking up arms against the Dutch and their western allies for the simple desire of obtaining freedom and autonomy; yet, the question of *what* was to happen after successfully defeating Dutch imperialism was left unsaid. This led to the republican government facing insurrections in the years leading up to the cession of independence, mostly represented by four factions as described below:

1. The *comprador* bourgeoisie and their military allies, who opposed substantial change from the *status quo ante* and desired the preservation of their class interests in the face of radical reforms. Factions in this group were responsible for the 1950 *coup* attempt, by a pro-Dutch federalist militia, and by the secessionist movement in Maluku, also in the same year.

^① *Ibid.*

^② *Ibid.*

^③ *Ibid.*

^④ *Ibid.*

^⑤ *Ibid.*

^⑥ See Ricklefs, M.C., *Independent Indonesia*, in *Op. Cit.*; and Vickers, A., *Living in the atomic age*, in *Op. Cit.*

2. The Islamists, who sought to consecrate their religious principles into the political and social structure of the new state. Radical factions in this group were responsible for the Darul Islam rebellion, that sought to establish an Islamic state in 1949.^①

3. The communists and socialists, represented mostly by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and the Socialist Party of Indonesia – though the latter waned in importance and relevance in comparison to the former. The communists sought to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Indonesia, while the socialists aimed to create a socialist government. Members of this factions were responsible for the Madiun rebellion in 1948 and the insurrection in Sumatra in 1958, respectively.^②

4. The Indonesian government itself consisted of a final faction, one that can be called the “republicans”. As can be intuitively stated, the chief interest of the “republicans” was the perpetuation of the Indonesian state in the face of rebellions and other political threats. This group can be said to have been better represented by Soekarno and Hatta themselves, alongside their supporters in the government.^③

While the Indonesian state – the republicans – held the most nominal power, as literal rulers of the country, the other three factions held considerable sway over them, both as possible supporters of the cabinet and as catalysts of insurrections against it. After a period of ineffective governance fashioned in imitation of the western “democracies”, Soekarno decided to adopt a more linear rule than involved concentration of authority into his person – in 1957, this political period known as “Guided Democracy” began.^④ In order to quell disputes for power, and as a form of political mortar to unify the different and mutually mistrusting factions, the ideology of “*nasakom*” was adopted as guiding principle for the state.^⑤

In this way, the main interests of these four factions can be seen more succinctly in the following chart:

	<i>Establish a Dictatorship of the Proletariat</i>	<i>Establish an Islamic state</i>	<i>Preserve status quo ante</i>	<i>Establish factional unity</i>	<i>Return to Dutch administration</i>	<i>Avoid returning to Dutch administration</i>
Bourgeoisie	Opposed	Neutral	Priority	Neutral	Important	Neutral
Islamists	Opposed	Priority	Opposed	Neutral	Opposed	Important
Communists	Priority	Opposed	Opposed	Neutral	Opposed	Important
Republicans	Neutral	Opposed	Opposed	Important	Opposed	Priority

^① *Ibid.* Also see Ricklefs, M. C. The Destruction of the Colonial State, 1942-50., in *Op. Cit.*

^② *Ibid.*

^③ After all, as it will be seen later, a primary aim of Soekarno was the concentration of power into his person and immediate circle, effectively representing then the Indonesian government in the sense explained above.

^④ *Ibid.* See also Ricklefs, M.C., Guided Democracy 1957-65, in *Op. Cit.*; and Vickers, A., From the old order to the new, in *Op. Cit.*

^⑤ *Ibid.*

Therefore, as we can see, each player has a very limited basis to integrate an alliance. For most players, save for the *comprador*, the desire of remaining independent from the colonial order is a powerful motivator. However, regarding the kind of order that would ideally follow said independence, it is easily observable that all of these players share completely opposed, non-cooperative views regarding each other's aims.

Yet another question is the form of resolving said dilemma. First, we must consult another chart:

	<i>Uses parliamentarianism</i>	<i>Uses violent struggle</i>	<i>Uses diplomacy with the Netherlands</i>	<i>Has a professional army</i>
Bourgeoisie	Yes	Yes	Neutral	Has supporters
Islamists	Yes	Yes	No	Has supporters
Communists	Yes	Yes	No	Has supporters
Republicans	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Then, we can see that although all sides are willing to resort to violence, only the Republicans can be considered to have a standing army, while the rest of these parties have – more or less – the same footing in the scenario. However, we can also see that all parties use parliamentarianism, while most players reject appeasement to the Dutch and other imperialist forces.

Now let's analyze a final chart, regarding the early "Guided Democracy" period:

	<i>Supports "nasakom"</i>	<i>Supports Soekarno</i>	<i>Actively opposes Soekarno</i>	<i>Has a large base of popular support</i>
Bourgeoisie	No	Neutral, leaning to no	Neutral, leaning to yes	No
Islamists	Neutral, leaning to yes	Yes	Neutral	Yes
Communists	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Republicans	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Here, we can also see that even if certain players do not uniformly conform to cooperation, as their actions are limited – basically being opposing or supporting the cabinet's actions – none of them are able to feasibly threaten the state's power yet; and equally, each party thus benefits more from cooperation – or at very least, *inaction* – in order to assert their interests. Therefore this can be called a cooperative game, or alternatively – considering the permanent opposition of the *comprador* faction – a situation of *equilibrium*.

Section 2 – New Order

“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

– Marx, K., (1852)

Whether or not the tenuous balance of the “Guided Democracy” could have maintained stability long-term, and whether or not the unorthodox “*nasakom*” would have worked as a mortar in uniting radically opposite factions, by 1960 Soekarno had effectively consolidated a unitary state with most powers concentrated on his personal retinue.^① Closely following that, the PKI had amassed a large number of militants, holding considerable influence over the government;^② in fact, the increasingly close ties of Soekarno with the People’s Republic of China and the careful analysis of their victory in the war against Japanese imperialism and national liberation, had led him to conceive a plan of creating a parallel armed force – imitating the success of the originally irregular People’s Liberation Army – which was to be called the “Fifth Force.”^③ Needless to say, in order to militarize the peasantry and proletariat into a paramilitary significant enough to challenge the *comprador* bourgeoisie and their reactionary allies the support of the PKI was all but critical.

However, if one understands that the 1960 balance was stable – not a certainty in the future, but at least in the present – it must be strange to question what possible reason was there to carry out such a blatant destabilization against the interests of the *comprador* and the rest of the factions. In other words, once having built a proverbial house of cards, it could be seen as unreasonable attempting to add another floor to the already precarious structure – the “Fifth Force” – or enlarging one particular floor – the PKI. If this game consisted of a “closed” scenario, meaning no additional players or motives were to be introduced, then balance-threatening actions could certainly be considered as self-sabotage by a faction most interested in stability and national unity. Yet, that wasn’t the case in this era.

In 1965, the Indonesian state obtained a secret memorandum, afterwards known as the “Gilchrist document”, after the surname of the British ambassador who penned it. In it, plans for a collusion between British and American conspirators to overthrow Soekarno were detailed.^④ While the Americans decried said document as a forgery, their intelligence agencies were in fact working against the republicans: from funding and arming separatist movements in Sumatra and other regions to planning the assassination of key cabinet members including Soekarno,^⑤ it was clear that the chief goal of the imperialist bloc was to destroy the existing alliance between the PKI and the republicans, at any and all costs necessary. The U.S. had lobbied for Indonesian independence just a few years ago: now, with the Cold War fully entrenched in, returning to the Dutch or neo-colonial order was preferable to a communist-aligned Indonesia.

^① *Ibid.*

^② *Ibid.*

^③ *Ibid.*

^④ *Ibid.* To be noted that although the purported text of the document is available in several sources, I cannot corroborate it since not only do I not speak bahasa, but there doesn’t seem to be an original available. However, see also Central Intelligence Agency. (1964). FIRST ADD JANARTA SUBANDRIO X X X AGENT. In *CIA Reading Room* (CIA-RDP75-00149R000700410017-5). Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP75-00149R000700410017-5.pdf>

^⑤ United States President’s Commission on CIA Activities within the United States. (1975). Summary of Facts: Investigation of CIA Involvement in Plans to Assassinate Foreign Leaders. In *National Security Archive*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/21512-document-19>

A certain method had been perfected in Korea: while the north of the country was unwaveringly aligned with the then Sino-Soviet camp, communist insurrections in the south were crushed with the utmost brutality at the behest of a *comprador* government – that of dictator Syngman Rhee, serving as a viceroy for American imperialism.^① Before, the heartlands of the Japanese Empire had been occupied and a military dictatorship put into place: under the MacArthur regime, anti-communism took preference over anti-fascism, manufacturing a local *comprador* “nationalist” party that was to act out the American interests, and thoroughly destroying any possibility for a legitimate electoral victory of the communists.^②

Years after the tragic events in Indonesia, Chile would be suddenly shocked by the assassination of general René Schneider, a legalist who opposed the politicization of the army. After his death, future dictator Augusto Pinochet – anti-communist general who had opposed Schneider’s dogmatism – started a *coup* against the social-democrat government of Salvador Allende, immediately reversing all reforms in order to surrender the Chilean market to the economic interests of the imperialist bloc, and ordering a wave of violent anti-communist purges.^③ Many decades after, in 1991, some elements in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would attempt to wrestle power away from Gorbachev, seeing in the improvised military *coup* the only way to prevent the complete annihilation of the Soviet order. After their failure, the Soviet Union dissolved a few months later.

In Indonesia, the “Gestapu” movement – or the 30 September Movement – was a small conspiracy that aimed to wrestle power away from the army, carrying out the assassination of a few officers and attempting to occupy key cities such as Jakarta.^④ Ostensibly a communist-leaning, anti-reactionary movement, the *coup* was marred by logistics and strategic issues: a few days after it began, most mutinied battalions had surrendered or been defeated, and the leaders were arrested or in exile.^⑤ Appraisals of the reasons behind it are varied: one position is that the KPI colluded with their supporters in the army to launch a preemptive strike against the *comprador* faction;^⑥ a different one, with scholarly nuances, are that either the PKI was wholly uninvolved and the conspiracy consisted of an internal conflict in the army,^⑦ or that it was in fact a false flag operation

^① See Gowans, S. (2018). One Country—Two States. In *Patriots, Traitors and Empires*. Baraka Books; also see Research Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. (1981). Chapter 1. In *History of the Just Fatherland Liberation War of the Korean People*. Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang.

^② See Kapur, N. (2018). The Waning of the Opposition Parties. In *Japan at the Crossroads*. Harvard University Press. Of course, to be noted that the “Reverse Course” (逆コース) – mentioned only in passing by the author – had a much more vital role in militarizing the JCP than Stalin’s imaginary decrees did; and also, that the Japanese tradition of anti-imperialist resistance extends beyond that: despite its own imperialist past and present as an American military outpost, movements such as the Sanrizuka resistance organizations, or the close ties between Japanese activists and the DPRK, are significant events concealed by the much more publicized acts of the pro-American government.

^③ See Verdugo, P. (2017). Chapter IV and IX. In *Allende*. Catalonia

^④ See Ricklefs, M. C., Independent Indonesia, in *Op. Cit.*; also see Vickers, A., From the old order to the new, in *Op. Cit.*

^⑤ *Ibid.*

^⑥ See Supardjo, M. (1966). *Some Factors That Influenced the Defeat of “the September 30th Movement” as Viewed from a Military Perspective* (J. Roosa, Trans.). University of Wisconsin Press.

^⑦ See Anderson, B., & McVey, R. (1969). A preliminary analysis of the October 1, 1965 coup in Indonesia. In *Cornell Modern Indonesia Project*. Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.

masterminded by the agents of the imperialist intelligence agencies in Indonesia.^① The justification for the costs and risks such an action implied, in the latter scenario, can only be understood in light of the brutality that followed.

Future dictator Soeharto, general at the time, found himself warned of the *coup* in advance.^② Conveniently commanding the KOSTRAD strategic reserves of the army, he moved to deploy them against the conspirators, quickly defeating them and grasping power over the now-neutered Soekarno cabinet. Within days, hordes of soldiers and militias loyal to Soeharto's anti-communist delusions ravaged the country, killing hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of suspected communists as retaliation.^③ The massacres were carried out with the logistics that only a professional army can provide, while the imperialist bloc – most notably the United States – sent as much aid and intelligence as needed.^④

On the other hand, the act of killing itself was often left for fanatics and criminals to handle. As Vincent Brevins writes, “Up to a million Indonesians, maybe more, were killed as part of Washington's global anticommunist crusade. The US government expended significant resources over years engineering the conditions for a violent clash, and then, when the violence broke out, assisted and guided its longtime partners to carry out the mass murder of civilians as a means of achieving US geopolitical goals.”^⑤ Imperialist state media such as *The New York Times* wrote about the killings as “A Gleam of Light in Asia.”^⑥ Within a year, the PKI had been effectively exterminated off the face of Indonesia. Within years, western-trained technocrats under Soeharto had completely surrender the Indonesian market to the whims of the imperialist bloc.^⑦

Thus the “Guided Democracy” had come to an end, and the arrangement of “*nasakom*” erased in a literal sea of blood. Soeharto defined his dictatorship as a “New Order,” and reassumed the principles of “*pancasila*” as a state ideology: monotheism, humanism, nationalism, democracy, and social justice.^⑧ Then, again, what any of those concepts truly meant was always up to state-interpretation.

The collapse of the “Guided Democracy,” when seen as a game, can be easily explained by the inclusion of another player into the balance. We have seen before that the four main factions were held by a tenuous commitment, which didn't consist of a priority for any of them.

^① See Scott, P. D. (1985). The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-1967. *Pacific Affairs*, 58(2).

^② Friend, T. (2003). Mass murder. In *Indonesian destinies*. Harvard University Press.

^③ *Ibid.* See also Ricklefs, M. C., Creating the New Order, 1965–75, in *Op. Cit.*; and Vickers, A., From the old order to the new, in *Op. Cit.*

^④ *Ibid.* See also Brevins, V. (2020). Extermination. In *The Jakarta Method*. Public Affairs; Foreign Service of the United States of America. (1965). US Embassy in Jakarta, Telegram 971 to Secretary of State, Secret. In *National Security Archive*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/15700-document-04-us-embassy-jakarta-telegram-971>; and Simpson, B. (2015). The United States and the 1965–1966 Mass Murders in Indonesia. *Monthly Review*. <https://monthlyreview.org/2015/12/01/the-united-states-and-the-1965-1966-mass-murders-in-indonesia/>

^⑤ *Op. Cit.*

^⑥ *Ibid.*

^⑦ Brevins, V., Around the world, in *Op. Cit.*

^⑧ See Ricklefs, M. C., The Destruction of the Colonial State, 1942–50, in *Op. Cit.*; and Vickers, A., Living in the Atomic Age, in *Op. Cit.* “*Pancasila*” was first formulated by Soekarno as a part of his syncretism efforts to create a nationalist ideology, but it was Soeharto who embraced the less radical principles as a counterweight to the “*nasakom*” later favored by the former.

Then, taking into account another player – or rather, outcome – the precarious equilibrium is easily destroyed, as seen below:

	<i>Support Soekarno</i>	<i>Support the PKI</i>	<i>Actively seek to end the “Guided Democracy”</i>	<i>Have the support of the military</i>
Bourgeoisie	No	No	Yes	Yes
Islamists	Neutral, leaning to no	No	Neutral, leaning to yes	Neutral, leaning to no
Communists	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral, leaning to yes
Republicans	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral, leaning to no
Imperialists (mainly U.S.)	No	No	Yes	Yes

Therefore, we can see the possible results of taking military action as follows:

	<i>Open to form anti-“Guided Democracy” alliance</i>	<i>Open to form pro-Soekarno alliance</i>	<i>Military superiority</i>	<i>Militia (civilian armed forces) superiority</i>	<i>Imperialist support and funding</i>
Bourgeoisie	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Islamists	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Communists	No	Yes	Neutral, leaning to no	Neutral, leaning to yes (unarmed)	No
Republicans	No	Yes	Neutral, leaning to no	No	No
Imperialists	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Now it is necessary to remember the charts seen in the previous section. Considering all players – including the newest addition, the imperialists – accept the use of violence as a viable tactic, the question then turns rather simple, being, whether or not to initiate a conflict. See:

	<i>Level of confidence of winning a military engagement</i>	<i>Desire to initiate a military engagement</i>	<i>Desire to maintain the status quo</i>
Bourgeoisie	High	High	Low
Islamists	Neutral, leaning to high	Neutral	Low
Communists	Low (demilitarized party)	Neutral	Neutral, leaning to high
Republicans	Neutral, leaning to low	Low	High
Imperialists	High	High	Low

Then, having read the previous charts, the decision to initiate the 30 September Movement – by whoever party was responsible – can be seen as entirely expected, as is the brutal *coup* and response that followed. The allied anti-Soekarno players had all the incentives necessary to break the equilibrium, perhaps turning this scenario into a debatable “cooperative game” – of cooperation against Soekarno and the KPI, that is – of sorts.

Section 3 – Holy Alliance

“We have no compassion and we ask no compassion from you. When our turn comes, we shall not make excuses for the terror. But the royal terrorists, the terrorists by the grace of God and the law, are in practice brutal, disdainful, and mean, in theory cowardly, secretive, and deceitful, and in both respects disreputable.”

– Marx, K., (1849).

As Vincent Brevins writes, the transcendence of the mass killings in Indonesia are, first and foremost, that they were made a template for subsequent anti-communist genocides, ethnicides, and politicides.^① Still, Brevins does not perform a completely historical countdown of anti-communism in Asia: from the anti-Comintern pact to the United Nations Command in Korea, and from the invasion of Arkhangelsk to the Indochina Wars, anti-communism was a priority in policy for most of the imperialist bloc – whose leadership was later monopolized by the United States.^② The argument that only genuine, *realpolitik* concerns over “great power” held by the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China was behind the Cold War is severely weakened when one takes into account the decades, and perhaps centuries, before. The fledgling USSR was immediately attacked by the forces of reaction: the Whites, representing the old feudal order, with support from Czechoslovak mercenaries and Allied invaders in the north. Then, in Korea, the UNC unleashed a mob of capitalist states, collared by the U.S., against the until-then internal conflict in the peninsula – of course, as “internal” to the Americans as the Haitian Revolution was to France. A century before, during the revolutions of 1848, the “holy alliance” to which Marx referred to, sought to extinguish in blood the flame of revolt throughout Europe. Then, of course, the Paris Commune and the *Semaine sanglante*, the European revolutions of 1917, the Indochina Wars, the Malayan Emergency, and a myriad conflicts throughout the world, all influenced by or directly supporting communism.

That “*war is a continuation of policy by other means*” can certainly be applied to these events, with the clarification that war is the continuation of a failed domestic counter-insurgency (COIN) response. In the Malayan Emergency, for example, the British brutality in shattering the Communist Party of Malaya’s efforts to achieve independence, alongside many other factors, translated into the effective defeat of the CPM as a meaningful rival for the control of the Malayan territory, even if asymmetrical resistance would continue for decades after.^③ In Indochina, the heroic victory of the Việt Minh in their defense against French imperialism meant that, years after, the imperialist bloc would necessarily be forced to engage in conventional warfare – as well as asymmetrical warfare – in order to reap their desire of crushing communism in Vietnam, and the

^① Brevins, V., Around the world, in *Op. Cit.*

^② See Johnson, C. A. (2000). Blowback. In *Blowback*. Henry Holt & Co. From a different perspective, other terms have been proposed to describe this structure: Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy studied the “monopoly capital”, while recently Michael Hudson studied the “superimperialism” existing in the current era.

^③ Oppen, M., The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960, in *Op. Cit.*

adjacent states.^① As for Korea, midway between these two conflicts, it was one of the last engagements that represented the full force of the “holy alliance”, involving more participants than the single opponents in Malaya or the comparatively small coalition in Vietnam.^② The failure of an effective COIN response in Indochina, and the tragic victory of the British COIN in Malaya, were directly responsible for the form and intensity of the conflicts that followed – conventional and asymmetrical war, respectively. The arguable victory of the barbaric COIN campaign of dictator Syngman Rhee in the southern territory of Korea, led to the eradication of resistance and communist insurgents in those areas, yet also was a direct cause of the military intervention by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea;^③ in other words, it failed to prevent conventional warfare, even if it was relatively effective at crushing a domestic conflict.

So far, COIN policy and anti-communist directives had followed the previous examples. What made the Indonesian mass killings stand out wasn’t the act of killing in itself; at least, it didn’t make them radically different from events such as the Bodo League massacre, carried out by the forces of dictator Syngman Rhee with similar American support. In Indonesia, however, not only was the number of deaths greater and far more widespread throughout the territory, but two additional factors made these atrocities stand out: first, it was effected on one of the largest, *demilitarized* communist parties in the world;^④ and second, said party constituted one of three sociopolitical pillars in the state structure.^⑤ That is to say, while the previous COINs consisted of suppressing insurrections, in Indonesia the KPI had *already* become institutionalized, lacking an armed wing as the CPM, the Workers’ Party of Korea, or the Indochinese Communist Party, but *already* holding influence inside the armed forces and the Indonesian society at large.^⑥ Rather than comparing the mass killings with the massacres carried out in other anti-communist purges, this is more aptly seen as a method to implode a country from within – to *coup* governments in a veritable *blitzkrieg*. Metaphorically speaking, the Indonesian situation was as if a western country such as Canada or the United States found any of the major political parties – democrats and republicans, liberals and conservatives – suddenly and swiftly exterminated by the rest of political contenders, not only purging ministers, generals, and other political personalities, but also a large part of their militants – and general population – as well. Very few events in Asia, and in contemporary world history for that matter, can be considered as comparable or even similar.

In that regard, the politicide of the KPI and the Soeharto *coup* changed the balance of the geopolitical game between communists and other factions completely: unless one player strikes first and strikes hard, complete annihilation is risked. In other words, for ruling communist parties, the Indonesian mass killings were seen as a cautionary tale to harden their stance on capitalist and reactionary elements within their countries;^⑦ as for the imperialist bloc and the *comprador* states under their suzerainty, it was seen as an example of successful anti-communist policy, to be emulated in South America, Asia, and elsewhere, as Brevins already noted.^⑧

① Waite, J. (2012). Global implications. In *The end of the first Indochina War*. Routledge.

② The United Nations Command consisted of 16 countries at the time of the Korean War, while the American coalition in Vietnam is usually accepted to have consisted of 10 countries at most.

③ Gowans, S., *Op. Cit*; Research Institute of History, *Op. Cit*.

④ Ricklefs, M. C., Independent Indonesia, in *Op. Cit*; Vickers, A., Living in the Atomic Age, in *Op. Cit*.

⑤ *Ibid*.

⑥ *Ibid*.

⑦ Brevins, V., Around the world, in *Op. Cit*.

⑧ *Ibid*.

While it can't be seen as the single factor behind the hardening of anti-revisionism in many communist countries, Brevins sees in the horror story of the KPI one of the principal reasons that motivated Chairman Mao Zedong and the CPC to initiate the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution;^① after all, if one of the biggest communist parties in the world – and a vital pillar of the Indonesian state – could be so brutally and absolutely obliterated, revisionist elements within the CPC could very well attempt to do the same. The close ties between Indonesia and the PRC can be seen as an argument in favor of this reasoning; still, a few years after the mass killings died down, the Warsaw Pact intervened in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, seeing in the market reforms attempted by Alexander Dubček a tangible threat to the stability of the member countries.^② Therefore, in this aspect, the “Brezhnev Doctrine” and the GPCR – as well as the aforementioned hardened stance against revisionism, in general – can be seen as influenced by, and responding to, what Brevins calls “*the Jakarta method*”.

Seen in a more abstract form, one can visualize the mechanics of this game as follows, having now only two players – or rather, two players with two possible categories:

1. Communist Party (in power, not in power)
2. Pro-imperialist party (in power, not in power)

Of course, factors such as the strength of either party, whether or not they are armed or have the military support of other states, and such, are left out of this simple game. This is because the primary motivation in this specific scenario is whether or not to *attack*, considering it is a “zero-sum” game: a game with a clearly defined victor and loser, who are causally interrelated – for one to win, the other must lose. Therefore, see the below chart:

	<i>Open to cooperation with opposition</i>	<i>Open to tolerate opposition</i>	<i>Open to use of force to quell opposition</i>	<i>Actively seeks to suppress opposition</i>
Reds, in power	Neutral, leaning to no	No	Yes	Yes
Reds, not in power	Neutral, leaning to yes	Neutral, leaning to yes	Yes	Yes
Blues, in power	No	No	Yes	Yes
Blues, not in power	Neutral, leaning to no	No	Yes	Yes

Evidently, this chart is not entirely illustrative: the particularities of a form of government determines many of these factors, meaning these stances might vary considerably between a social-democrat administration to a one-party state. However, it does serve to illustrate a basic point overall: the desire to actively neutralize the opposition and the acceptance of using force to achieve that, render internal – inside a country – dynamics between *reds* and *blues* extremely antagonistic

^① *Ibid.*

^② See *Polish-Soviet Talks in Moscow*. (1967). Wilson Center. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/polish-soviet-talks-moscow>; also very enlightening regarding the role of the GPCR in preventing “Prague Spring” scenarios – at least from the Chinese perspective.

and prone to conflict. It would be prudent to revisit some earlier charts integrating these new players:

	<i>Desire to maintain status quo</i>	<i>Desire to avoid armed conflict</i>	<i>Desire to consolidate power peacefully</i>	<i>Desire to purge the opposition</i>	<i>Desire to institutionalize ideology in the government</i>
Reds, in power	High	High	Neutral	High	High
Reds, not in power	Low	Low	Neutral	Neutral	High
Blues, in power	High	Low	Neutral	High	High
Blues, not in power	Low	Low	Neutral	High	High

Of course, it must be clarified that the ideology to be institutionalized by the *blues* is capitalism: protection over private property, weakening the interests of the proletariat in favor of the bourgeoisie, etc. Therefore, we can understand that given the acceptance of armed conflict and suppression of dissent on both sides, conflict – even if power is consolidated peacefully – is all but unavoidable. However, an addenda would consist in clarifying that, even when the *reds* aren't too red, such tension still is present: center-”left” administrations such as the López Obrador cabinet in Mexico, or the social-democrat government of Lula in Brazil, still gather considerable opposition from the *blues* and their allied factions in state institutions; that neither have yet collapsed into open violence, however, can be seen due to the fact they're not *red* enough to justify such a response.

Conclusions

“The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries. (...) Every Communist must grasp the truth, “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” ”

– Mao, Z., (1938).

To say that the Indonesian case revealed vital lessons for socialist and communist movements worldwide would be an understatement. Still, as it was said before, just a few years after the mass killings ended – for the most part – the “*Jakarta method*” would then be applied to Chile. The “United Front” of “Unidad Popular,” conformed of various social-democratic and communist parties, was first besieged by the legislative representatives of the *comprador* bourgeoisie, pelted with filibustering and *lawfare*; then, discreetly, the reactionary faction of the military prodded the cabinet, with failed *putschs* such as the infamous “Tanquetazo” – after the Spanish word for tank, “tanque”. Finally, once it was gauged that the bloodletting had weakened the government enough, the “holy alliance” and its mercenaries finally moved in for the kill, with the ignominious *coup* in 1973 that led to the Pinochet dictatorship.

As Brevins noted, this was far from being an individual anomaly in Latin America. The Bolivian “United Front”, “Alianza de la Izquierda Nacional”, saw the elected president Juan José Torres *couped* by dictator Hugo Banzer, also a general and a graduate of the infamous “School of

the Americas”.^① Fleeing to Argentina, where a military junta led by dictator Jorge Videla had ousted the remnants of the Peronist government, he was soon kidnapped and assassinated.^② In Brazil, a violent takeover was avoided: elected president João Goulart found himself surrounded by a uniformly disloyal military, and upon the beginning of the 1964 *coup* he instead fled to Uruguay, where he would later die of a heart attack – it would be later alleged that he was also assassinated.^③ By then, the Uruguayan military – granted extraordinary powers by the centrist liberal government in order to combat communist insurrections – had already dissolved the other powers, installing another military junta. The coordinated cooperation between the dictatorships, in order to carry out political assassinations and purges, would become known as “Operación Condor”. Suffice to say, this consisted of a sanctioned and planned policy by the imperialist bloc, directly mapped out by the United States of America.^④

A diplomatic memorandum sent to the Secretary of State – then Henry Kissinger – read: “*It is encouraging to note that the Argentine military are aware of the problem (referring to carrying out political executions) and are already focusing on ways to avoid letting human rights issues become an irritant in US-Argentine relationships.*”^⑤ Another one said, “*When he had seen the (secretary of state) Kissinger in Santiago, the latter had said he hoped the Argentine (government) could get the terrorist problem under control as quickly as possible. Guzzetti said that he had reported this to president Videla and to the cabinet, and that their impression had been that USG’s overriding concern was not human rights but rather that Goa ‘get over it quickly’.*”^⑥

Therefore, there must be two initial assessments in order to understand the intricacies of these scenarios. First, and rather controversially – for some – it must be stated that this is strictly a zero-sum game; that is, that there is no *real* possibility of cooperation between the players – anti-imperialism-communism (*red*) and imperialism-capitalism (*blue*).

At once, this assertion brings an evident objection: the PRC did, in fact, cooperate with American imperialism, and the very same Secretary of State that brought the “*Jakarta method*” to Latin America was one of the strongest proponents for such an alliance. Yet, two responses can be said to this: first and foremost, the nature of the game between the USSR, the PRC, and the US, is considerably different from the one discussed earlier – an internal, *tête-à-tête* affair that nonetheless did involve external players and choices. In different, more concrete words, the diplomacy between states *in equilibrium* is not equal to the scenarios that we have touched upon so far, as they are characterized by the *absence of equilibrium*, and therefore involve a question of whether or not to strike first, so to speak. A second response, perhaps a more relevant one, would be to question the permanence of said alliance. As it is well known, at the peak of the Sino-American cooperation, US intelligence agencies operated surveillance stations in Chinese soil,

^① Baptista Gumucio, M. (1994). VIII. Restauración y Populismo, and IX. Bánzer: Siete años en palacio. In *Breve historia contemporánea de Bolivia*. Fondo de Cultura Económica.

^② *Ibid.*

^③ Dirección de Comunicación Institucional. (2014). Operación Cóndor: incluyen en la investigación la muerte del ex presidente brasileño Joao Goulart. *Ministerio Público Fiscal*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20230922040058/https://www.fiscales.gob.ar/lesa-humanidad/operacion-condor-incluyen-en-la-investigacion-la-muerte-del-ex-presidente-brasileno-joao-goulart/>

^④ See Brevins, V., Jakarta is coming, in *Op. Cit.*

^⑤ U.S. Embassy in Argentina. (1976). Military Take Cognizance of Human Rights Issue. National Security Archives. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB185/index.htm>

^⑥ U.S. Embassy in Argentina. (1976). *Other aspects of September 17 conversation with Foreign Minister*. National Security Archives. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB73/index3.htm>

allegedly in order to watch over the Soviet Union.^① Decades later, the threat of “communist China” is one of the most repeated talking points in western state media. In my opinion, imperialism *necessarily* and tautologically opposes communism, and regardless of the actual characteristics of the Chinese economic system – that nonetheless remains communist *enough* to elicit fear in the capitalist bloc – the only possible destiny of the PRC after the collapse of the USSR was to either unconditionally submit to the unipolar, imperialist order, or to eventually replace the Soviet Union as their designated “evil empire” – the adversary in turn in a perpetual, low-intensity war.

For the purposes of this analysis, we can establish that *red* and *blue* were engaged in a non-cooperative, zero-sum game in the countries so far referred to – a sensible argument that can be easily backed with the historical outcome of said conflicts. Then, we can continue to the second assessment: the only available actions amount to either “doing nothing” or to “striking first”. By this, actions such as seeking conciliation with the opponents, ceding to their demands, or vying to maintain the *status quo*, are considered as “doing nothing”; opposite to this, actions that involve initiating confrontation – in a political, legal, or armed conflict – are regarded as “striking first”.

Of course, this can be seen as a ludicrous truism: clearly, if the *reds* had thrown the first punch, so to speak, the *blues* wouldn’t have taken them by surprise. But there is a final, third assessment to make regarding that dilemma, as it begets a question: *could* the *reds* have struck first? In Malaya and Indochina, their communist parties were already militarized – that is, mobilized and armed into a fighting force. In Chile and Indonesia, and other countries, the parties – not always communist ones – were not militarized, but held nominally important positions in the government.

Therein we can intuit the validity of the epigraph by Chairman Mao Zedong, as he recognized the principle that western “civilization” consecrated into their mode of production: *vae victis*, and “might makes right”. In untold disputes and conflicts, whether they consisted of civil wars or peasant revolts – of an *18 Brumaire* or a burkinabé coup, in Rome or in Gwanju – victory ultimately lies with the most militarily capable party. It must be acknowledged that, despite what is argued in capitalist propaganda, the *blues* do in fact have militarized parties: the entirety of a capitalist state serves, almost exclusively, to protect capital and its interests. Ferdinand Lassalle, somewhat ideologically opposed to Marx, famously described the fiction of legality under capitalism: “*We now know the essence of both constitutions of the land, its real constitution – the actual relations of force existing in the country – and its written constitution which in contradistinction to the first may be called a scrap of paper.*”^② Therefore, if the *reds* contest a claim to power without an equally militarized party, they are simply left at the behest of the machinery of the state: Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, and many other cases, prove beyond a doubt the very tangible limits of both social-democracy and parliamentarianism.

However, there is still something unsaid left to acknowledge. That is, by the very nature of communist and socialist movements – that they rely on the powerless to resist against the powerful – such militarization has clearly defined limitations, in terms of both strategy and personnel or materiel. It is rather difficult – although not impossible – for the *reds* to match, at the beginning of these scenarios, the same equipment and force projection capabilities that the *blues* have. On one

^① The creation of surveillance stations in Xinjiang by the CIA was named “Project Chestnut”: it is to be noted many of the details regarding their activities there remain classified even today. See *CIA SIGINT and Secrecy*. (2015). National Security Archive. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/cyber-vault-intelligence/2015-03-20/cia-and-signals-intelligence>

^② Lassalle, F. (1862). *On the Essence of Constitutions*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/fi/vol03/no01/lassalle.htm>

hand, revolutionary history has lionized the heroic struggles of the people of Cuba, Korea, the PRC, Nicaragua, the USSR, Indochina and its successor states, as well as many other regions that have stood against all odds facing imperialism and capitalism. The Cuban and Chinese revolutionaries, to name but a few, succeeded in liberating their countries against vastly superior adversaries, transforming a relatively under-powered asymmetrical warfare militia into a veritable army. As it is common knowledge, the People's Liberation Army, whose origins lie almost 100 years ago as a small-weapons force founded during the Nanchang Uprising, today is one of the most powerful armies in the entire world.

Yet, on the other hand, revolutionary history has an ever higher number of martyrs. In Malaya, for example, the CPM fought arduously against British imperialism, yet was ultimately defeated. Similar tactics to those employed in the Cuban Revolution failed to bring victory in Congo and Bolivia – the latter of which would result in the execution of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Whether or not a militarized party would have ensured a *red* victory in the aforementioned conflicts, or simply led to a Korean scenario – the *ultima ratio* of the “holy alliance” via invasion and occupation – are unknowable and unanswerable questions. Considering that the imperialist hordes didn't spare any expenses in pacifying “their backyard” in Latin America, a wave of meaningful *red* victories would have been questionable, to say the least.

Regardless, something important to keep in mind is that beyond *realpolitik*, communist movements fight for very concrete aims, which necessarily imply using certain methods – “taking the hardest path,” so to speak. Therefore, although defeat is all too common, and even political or military victory doesn't ensure the permanence of a path towards communism – as tragically exemplified by the Soviet bloc and other former socialist countries – no reason exists that can justify abandoning said pursuit – for someone who espouses said ideology, that is. As an illustrative epilogue, it is prudent to recall the remembrance Vladimir Lenin made of the Paris Commune, considered by many as the first modern communist revolution:

“(...) In spite of these unfavourable conditions, in spite of its brief existence, the Commune managed to promulgate a few measures which sufficiently characterise its real significance and aims (...) as a truly democratic, proletarian government (...)

All these measures showed clearly enough that the Commune was a deadly menace to the old world founded on the enslavement and exploitation of the people. That was why bourgeois society could not feel at ease so long as the Red Flag of the proletariat waved over the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. And when the organised forces of the government finally succeeded in gaining the upper hand over the poorly organised forces of the revolution, the Bonapartist generals, who had been beaten by the Germans and who showed courage only in fighting their defeated countrymen (...) organised such a slaughter as Paris had never known. (...) In all, Paris lost about 100,000 of its best people (...)

The bourgeoisie were satisfied. “Now we have finished with socialism for a long time,” said their leader, the blood thirsty dwarf, Thiers, after he and his generals had drowned the proletariat of Paris in blood. But these bourgeois crows croaked in vain. Less than six years after the suppression of the Commune, when many of its champions were still pining in prison or in exile, a new working-class movement arose in France. A new socialist generation (...) picked up the flag which had fallen from the hands of the fighters in the cause of the Commune and bore it boldly and confidently forward. (...)

The memory of the fighters of the Commune is honoured not only by the workers of France but by the proletariat of the whole world. For the Commune fought, not for some local or narrow

national aim, but for the emancipation of all toiling humanity, of all the downtrodden and oppressed. (...) The epic of its life and death, the sight of a workers' government which seized the capital of the world and held it for over two months, the spectacle of the heroic struggle of the proletariat and the torments it underwent after its defeat—all this raised the spirit of millions of workers, aroused their hopes and enlisted their sympathy for the cause of socialism. (...) That is why the cause of the Commune is not dead. It lives to the present day in every one of us.

The cause of the Commune is the cause of the social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the toilers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense it is immortal.”

– Lenin, V., (1911)

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