

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Daud Beureueh's Rebellion is now going into its fifth week. Through the tight veil of government censorship, Djakarta newspapers are beginning to piece together a story of a coordinated revolt that has failed in its initial phase. But it is a makeshift and unsatisfactory story, full of gaps and annoying contradictions.

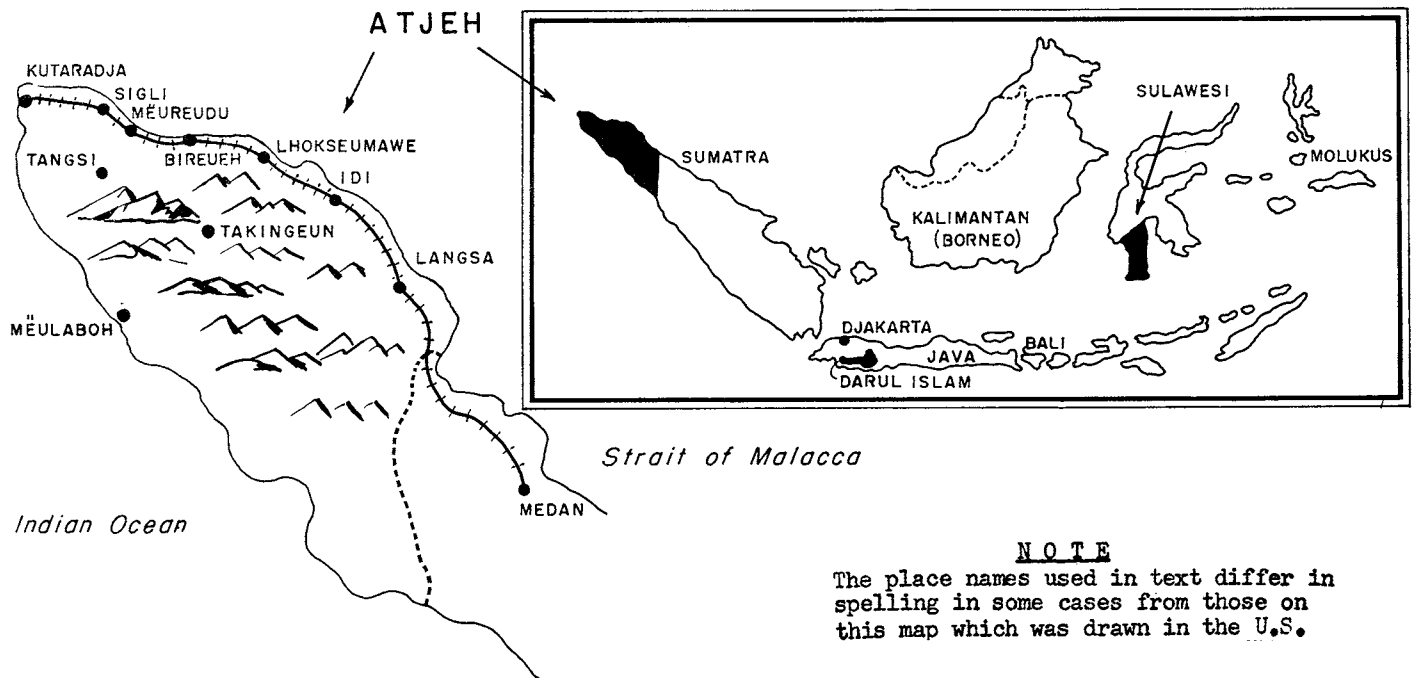
Government spokesmen have claimed that "the situation in Atjeh is under control." There is no reason to doubt that police and army units are now occupying the principal towns of Atjeh and that communications have been more or less restored in that fanatically Moslem area at the northwestern tip of Sumatra. Still, it is premature to conclude that the black-uniformed followers of "the lion of Atjeh" have been effectively scattered or that they will indeed be defeated.

The government's pose of optimism and staunchness was shaken two weeks ago by a press statement of Colonel Simbolon, military commander for the province of North Sumatra. Simbolon acknowledged the situation to be "most serious", then went on to say that the Atjeh problem could not be solved by military means alone. It was a most disturbing statement, for Simbolon is a calm and reasonable person.

On the basis of Simbolon's declaration, we can hazard the opinion that the situation in Atjeh is more serious than the government cares to admit.

In this short letter, I want to sketch the first events of Daud Beureueh's Rebellion--so far as they are known to the general public--and indicate my reasons for assigning these events a crucial place in current Indonesian history. I strongly suspect that Indonesia is now faced with her most serious internal threat since the 1948 Communist revolt at Madiun.

On the night of September 20, simultaneous attacks were launched against the police and army posts at Idi, Langsa, Meulaboh, Perak, Peureula, Alur Gading, and Lho Seumawe by bands of



black-uniformed rebels. All attacks were repulsed, according to government reports, and the rebels were forced to retreat without capturing the weapons they were seeking. The next morning, jumbled reports reached Medan that the long-expected explosion in Atjeh had finally taken place. Many district officers had suddenly left their posts (presumably to join the revolt), and rebel circulars had announced the creation of an Islamic State in Atjeh.

Crowds of refugees began to flood into Medan: non-Atjehese officials, the families of the former Atjehese nobility, and Chinese merchants. The composition of the refugee group reveals much about the nature of the rebellion.

Several days later, the governor of North Sumatra announced that the rebellion was being led by Teungku Daud Beureueh (see BRC-19), former military governor of Atjeh and leading member of the powerful All-Atjeh Federation of Ulama (PUSA). In Kutaradja and other large towns in Atjeh, the police and army had already begun the wholesale arrest of PUSA members and their friends. By October 14, an estimated 1500 persons had been detained. One of the detainees was claimed to be a courier from the Darul Islam movement in West Java who had been carrying the appointment of Daud Beureueh as Darul Islam Commander for Atjeh.

For the first three weeks of the rebellion, government communiques sounded much the same from day to day: bands of from 50 to 500 rebels, "armed with knives, spears, and several carbines"

were defeated again and again by government forces in the area of Kutaradja, Sigli, Bireun, or Meulaboh. Police and army losses were claimed to be negligible, while "hundreds and hundreds" of rebels were killed or wounded. The principal towns of Atjeh were in government hands, and daily patrols were mopping-up rebel strongholds in the villages.

Then on October-11, the police and Mobile Brigade post at Meureudu was stormed by a band armed with rifles, machine guns, and mortars. After thirteen hours, the government forces retreated to Bireun, leaving weapons, a jeep, and a truck in rebel hands. It was the first victory reported for Daud Beureueh's forces.

The battle of Meureudu indicates that the rebels may be more strongly armed than originally supposed, while the use of mortars gives substance to the claim that considerable quantities of old Japanese arms have somehow fallen into their hands.

The last week has seen a lull in the fighting in Atjeh. Peace and order have been virtually restored in the extreme northern and southern districts, and only minor action has been reported in the Meulaboh region on the west coast. It is by no means certain that the restoration of peace in these areas represents an important government victory.

The withdrawal of Moslem bands from the peripheral areas of Atjeh can be seen as a second stage in the strategy of rebellion. Several items from government communiques substantiate this proposition. One announcement admitted that the mountain town of Takengon had been abandoned as the seat of government for Central Atjeh. Another announced the withdrawal of the rebel forces around Idi "to the mountains." Still another noted that several truckloads of Atjehese mutineers from the regular army have fled into the same rugged country.

Thus, there is good reason to believe that the scattered rebel forces--estimated at 10,000 by one observer--have begun to withdraw to the nearly impenetrable mountain area centering on Takengon.

Events of the coming week will tell us whether the rebellion has been given a crushing blow-- as government reports indicate-- or whether a second phase in the fighting is about to begin.

Daud Beureueh's Rebellion has not caught the government by surprise. Rumours of discontent and underground preparations for rebellion have been circulating for months. The September 16 issue of Abadi, a Djakarta daily, carried a story headed, "What's going on in Atjeh?", which described emergency measures being taken by police and army units to combat a growing feeling of panic among the people of Atjeh. Farmers were said to be laying in large stores of dried fish and salt in expectation of a long struggle.

After the rebellion finally broke out, a high official claimed that the government was already in possession of complete information about "Daud Beureueh's secret movement" during the tenure of the Wilopo cabinet.

It is something of a mystery that the government failed to take strong measures on the basis of this complete information, but I won't discuss that mystery here. The fact is that the revolt in Atjeh was planned and coordinated well in advance.

My own opinion is that some unforeseen event or rumour forced the rebels to decide on action before their preparations were complete. This opinion is shared by the newspaper Abadi, which points out the generally accepted fact that Vice President Hatta succeeded in exacting a promise of patience and peace from Daud Beureueh in July. I am in no position to do more than guess on this matter, but I can provide some information on the leadership and aims of the movement, based on my July trip to Atjeh and conversations with Atjehnese in Medan and Djakarta.

The roots of the present disturbance can be seen in the Social Revolution which convulsed Atjeh shortly after the Japanese surrender. From November, 1945, to March, 1946, a more or less coordinated revolution removed the former Atjehnese nobility from power. Many petty lords and their families were slaughtered, some were imprisoned, and others succeeded in fleeing to Medan or Java. When the brief and bloody struggle was over, it was clear that a near monopoly of power had been won by the religious leaders (ulama) of PUSA.

Of all the events in Indonesia preceding the Dutch transfer of sovereignty in 1949, the Social Revolution in Atjeh comes nearest to fulfilling our usual definition of the word "revolution": leaders of one class supplanted leaders of another. Atjeh lived through the ensuing years of revolution in virtual isolation. Teungku Daud Beureueh held almost dictatorial power as military governor, and nearly all decisions effecting internal affairs were made by officials of Atjehnese blood, most of them members of PUSA. Atjehnese writers claim that the period was one of general prosperity and stability.

The period of PUSA dominance in Atjeh came to an end in 1950 when the federal United States of Indonesia was dissolved and state power given over to the Republic of Indonesia. With some misgivings, the autonomous Atjehnese government surrendered administrative control to the new central government. A period of reorganization began in which many officials and military officers left public life, either because they did not have the qualifications for service in the national army and civil service or because they resented the surrender of power to Djakarta.

Daud Beureueh himself was "kicked upstairs" as adviser to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Djakarta, but the former

strongman declined the honor and returned to his village near Sigli.

The leaders of the present revolt are apparently the former leaders of the Social Revolution. Daud Beureueh is acknowledged as rebel chief, and many famous names of the earlier period have been mentioned on the rebel side, among them Husin Al-Mudjahid and Husin Jusuf. Seven years ago, this leadership group won the almost undivided loyalty of the Atjehnese people. There is no reason to suppose that their popularity has greatly diminished.

Both economic and political factors have contributed to the growth of discontent in Atjeh during the 1951-53 reorganization period.

Last July, Daud Beureueh spoke to me at some length about the decline in economic prosperity in Atjeh since 1951. He compared the prewar rice surpluses in Atjeh with current deficits and attributed the marked decline in production to the disrepair of the irrigation systems in Atjeh's rich river valleys, particularly in the Sigli and Bireun areas. In his view, the central government must be blamed for its failure to repair and maintain the vital irrigation canals. When I suggested the desperate condition of state finances as a possible reason for this failure, he commented that other areas (particularly East Java) have received far more than their share of reconstruction appropriations. His proposal was for complete administrative autonomy and a measure of financial autonomy for Atjeh. He had no doubt that the ulama of Atjeh could solve the irrigation problem as they had solved similar problems in the past.

Another facet of the economic problem concerns leaders like Daud Beureueh more directly. During the revolutionary years, Atjehnese merchants carried on almost unrestricted barter trade with Singapore and Penang, and many of the religious leaders of PUSA benefited through their commercial connections. Daud Beureueh himself is a merchant, as well^{as} a religious and political leader. After 1951, strict government controls brought trade to a virtual standstill. The small ports of Idi, Lho Seumawe, and Sigli were closed, and a diminished stream of trade flowed through Medan, where government controls and red-tape ate heavily into profits. Last week, a government decree appeared which permits the resumption of direct barter trade with Singapore, but the action seems to have come several months too late: many of Atjeh's merchants are said to have participated in the preparation of the present rebellion.

Economic distress has contributed much to the general flaring of political tempers in Indonesia in the past year. Hatred of the extreme leftwing has been an important factor in the growth of an articulate Moslem political consciousness. Spurred on by

what they believe to be an anti-Islamic attitude on the part of the government--particularly the PNI-dominated Ministry of Information-- Moslem publicists have begun to press their claim for an Islamic State in earnest. Nowhere does this claim find more response than in Atjeh.

Even though the concept of an Islamic State is still largely undefined in Indonesia, it has nevertheless become a significant rallying point for Moslem groups. An important step toward the definition of the term was the Medan Ulama Conference (April 11-15), of which Daud Beureueh was chairman. It now seems that the speaking tour he made through Atjeh after the conclusion of that conference was an equally important step in the preparation for rebellion.

The formation of the present Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet was a blow to the Moslem political community, though it certainly came as no surprise. Right or wrong, the leaders of PUSA (all of them Masjumi Party members) sense a strong Communist influence in this strange coalition cabinet, perhaps because of the presence of erratic, leftish Iwa Kusumasumantri as Minister of Defence.

The Ali cabinet also mirrors the political outlook of President Sukarno, who has been considered an enemy by most Moslem political groups since his Amuntai speech against the idea of an Islamic State. The situation has thus arisen in which the Masjumi's moderate leadership--particularly Mohammad Natsir--is hard pressed to pacify the extreme and fanatic elements in the party. The criticisms I heard Daud Beureueh make of the Ali cabinet have now taken the more dramatic form of rebellion, and the Masjumi Party has lost its most extreme branch.

The challenge of Daud Beureueh's Rebellion is all the more critical because its claims are meaningful. More important still, these demands for economic reconstruction, regional autonomy, and an Islamic State are being pressed by leaders of considerable stature and influence in Atjeh. It will indeed be remarkable if the government succeeds in restoring order quickly in an area where the conditions for organized rebellion are so obviously present.

The Ali cabinet is dedicated to the proposition that disorder in Indonesia can only be eliminated by force. The next few months will tell us whether force will be enough in Atjeh. The alternative--compromise and negotiation with the rebels-- does not seem feasible at present, and it is doubtful that the Ali cabinet could propose such a course and survive.

One of the government's principal tasks is to gain the support of Atjehnese who are not actively on the rebel side. Two civil service appointments have been made since September 21 which may do great injury to the government's prestige among these bystanders.

Shortly after the trouble started in Atjeh, Abdul Hakim

(Masjumi Party) was replaced as governor of North Sumatra by S. A. Amin, who has already recommended the utilization of "elements in Atjeh who are opposed to Daud Beureueh." This could only mean cooperation with the remnants of the Atjehnese nobility and minor religious leaders who took their side in the Social Revolution. Such a step may seem practical at the present time, but it might well result in a disastrous loss of face for the government, not only in Atjeh but in other strongly Moslem regions as well.

A second danger signal has been the appointment of a Javanese as Resident Coordinator (the highest regional government post) for Atjeh. The notice of his appointment was accompanied by a short statement that the many vacant official positions in Atjeh would be filled "to the greatest possible extent" by Atjehnese, but that the remaining posts would be filled by outsiders. This was the first official admission that really important numbers of Atjehnese civil servants have joined the rebellion; it also carries the disturbing implication that the number of loyal Atjehnese with the qualifications for civil office is very limited. It is a real dilemma, for the appointment of non-Atjehnese officials can only increase feelings of regional resentment.

There are now Moslem rebellions in West Java, South Sulawesi, and Atjeh. Of the three, the revolt in Atjeh seems the most critical because it so obviously represents a general regional sentiment. If Djakarta adopts a soft attitude, it will be encouraging similar actions in other outlying regions. Yet, if the government takes a completely uncompromising stand, it may find its own resources insufficient to quell the disorder.

Indonesia faces a monumental task in creating a nation out of her many islands and peoples. Many Indonesians look on to disorder in Atjeh as a lesson that this task can only be accomplished by granting really meaningful autonomy to the regions. But Djakarta has not yet demonstrated that the autonomy it promises is meaningful, or that it actually intends to allow regional control in matters of finance, civil service appointment, or trade regulation. Admittedly policy-making in this field is a thankless job, for real autonomy might prove a greater stimulus to regional disintegration than a policy of over-centralization.

I cannot be as pessimistic about the Atjehnese situation as the facts would seem to warrant. My talks with Daud Beureueh and the leaders of PUSA left me with the impression that these men think of themselves as Indonesians. They also think of themselves as Atjehnese and Moslems. I believe that in this combination of attitudes, a formula for the solution of the Atjeh problem can still be found. The question now is whether the present government intends to seek that formula. If peace is restored in Atjeh by the force of arms alone, it is unlikely to be a permanent and stable peace.

Sincerely yours,

Boyd R. Compton

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