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President Sukarno and the Islamic State
INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

President Sukarno of Indonesia is one of those rare, almost magical orators who can move crowds to tears, fury, or surpassing hope with a blending of voice, words and gestures. He is the symbol through which literally millions of Indonesians have identified themselves with the concept of nationhood since the first days of the Indonesian Republic. In a very real sense, he is the living expression of Indonesia's unity. But on January 27, President Sukarno delivered a speech at Amuntai, Kalimantan (Borneo) which split vocal public opinion in two. There is clearly no unity of opinion when even such a figure as President Sukarno speaks against the idea of an Islamic State.

Indonesia is not at present an Islamic State, despite the fact that perhaps eighty-five percent of her population is Moslem. The temporary constitution describes Indonesia as a state based on five principles (sanskrit: Pantjasila), one of which is a belief in God. Complete freedom of thought, belief, and religion are clearly stipulated as the rights of all citizens.

As the time for the general elections and Constituent Assembly draws near,¹ there is a widespread fear that the Islamic parties will win enough seats to force through some form of Islamic State. It is a fear expressed in such non-Islamic regions as Hindu Bali or Christian north Sulawesi, by leftwing or liberal groups, and not least of all by Moslem nationalists who want the Pantjasila State to be preserved and fear the great potential power of the Masjumi party.

On his tour through Kalimantan, Sukarno stepped before the mass rally at Amuntai and saw one of the many posters: "We want clarification, National State or Islamic State?" He answered that Indonesia is now a national state, and that if Indonesia became a state based only on Islam, many non-Islamic regions would secede from the republic. Sukarno's answer was noted by the Antara news agency correspondent and was soon a topic for hot debate throughout Indonesia.

The immediate reaction of Moslems groups and notables ranged from "regret" to "shock." Isa Anshary, the very articulate Masjumi chairman for West Java, called the speech undemocratic and unconstitutional. An Islamic students' group charged that Bung Karno was actually sowing the seeds of separatism himself.² A conservative Moslem party (Nahdatul Ulama) requested that, "if the news of Papa's visit is true," he should not, as Head of the State, mix in political conflicts and party disputes, "especially between Islamic and non-Islamic groups."

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1. It is possible that elections will be held this year. The election law is almost through Parliament.
 2. "Bung" is a familiar form of address from revolutionary days; it means, roughly, "comrade".

The reaction of the non-Islamic press was quieter, perhaps an indication of unwillingness to fight Islamic groups openly on a religious issue. Merdeka asked its readers not to pay too much attention to the speech, "because as an orator, the President cannot always think over the results of what he says." Merdeka went on to emphasize that President Sukarno's role as leader of Indonesian state is different from the role of any other national leader, whether it be the President of France or the Queen of the Netherlands. The editor felt that it is very difficult to describe the President's position with "cold words", implying that the position cannot be strictly measured or, it would seem, strictly limited.

The Djakarta socialist paper Pedoman criticized the President not because of any love for Islam in politics, but rather because of its deep and continuing concern about Sukarno's "special position" in the Indonesian state. But the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) walks a lonely road; disturbed by the emotional nationalism of Sukarno and the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI), enraged at the aims and tactics of the communists, the PSI finds itself most often standing with the Masjumi, a conservative party which it must eventually fight on any number of issues.

Less than three weeks after the Amuntai speech, Sajuti Melik, known as "the President's own correspondent", published a fifty page pamphlet which supported President Sukarno with reverence and detail. He argued that Sukarno was not just predicting a future situation with his speech, but speaking from evidence already available. Since 1945, according to Sajuti Melik, the President has received any number of statements from non-Islamic areas claiming that they would support secession if an Islamic State were created.

Sajuti Melik then went on to give his own description of Sukarno's role in the Indonesian state. "...there is no leader as skillful as Bung Karno is consolidating the people or whipping up their spirit...His function is as a skillful propagandist...for the State and the government." This nearly coincides with the President's own view of his office; Sukarno is so convinced of the importance of his function as liaison between the state and the people, that he has often threatened to resign if he were denied the right to go directly to the people.

In private conversations, I have found my own friends divided on the issue of Amuntai and the Islamic State. The stricter Moslems considered the speech a deliberate attack on Islam and an obvious defeat for the President. Others attacked the speech as another excursion by President Sukarno into politics on behalf of the PNI. One student from Sulawesi claimed that Sukarno was undoubtedly right, that much of east Indonesia would secede from an Islamic State and that his area would be the first to go. The strongest support I heard for the Amuntai speech came from a member of a religious minority which would have no chance of withdrawing from an Islamic state; to his mind, the triumph of Islam would engulf his people in a wave of unwanted proselyting and even actual religious suppression.

It struck me that a key element was missing from these conversations. No one seemed to have a clear idea of the nature of an Islamic

State.

What is an Islamic State?

A westerner studying Islamic history is impressed—and not a little frustrated—to find no formal or hierarchical church structure. The classical, "golden" period of the Damascus and Bagdad caliphates lasted from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. Especially in the first three centuries a concept of temporal rule was implemented that was quite different from anything we see in European history, whether in the Holy Roman Empire or in later Catholic kingdoms. In the west, the cry "for God and King" may be taken to symbolize the joining of church and throne in a close union of separate organizations, the position of one being recognized and sanctioned by the principles, doctrine or power of the other.

In early Islam, such a marriage was theoretically impossible to conceive, for the apparatus of temporal rule was merely one expression of the life of the religious community as a whole. The function of caliphate was the full implementation of the law set down in the Koran and the Sunnah. Theoretically, the caliphate was not the ally or the supporter of the religion of the Prophet; it was the instrument. In a real sense, then, it was the government which provided the Islamic religion with its hierarchy and organization, though in theory and, evidently, to a large degree in practice, it was the unorganized body of religious scholars (Ulama) who interpreted Islamic law.

The historic Islamic State is thus a theocratic state in which the government is empowered and obligated to implement the law of the religious community.

The degree to which this concept was actually carried out in the Islamic middle east is the concern of historians. More pertinent at present is the modern Islamic interpretation of this concept and its implementation. As in other Islamic countries since the turn of the century, Indonesian Islamic scholars have been profoundly influenced by two things: the challenge of western scientific thought and the immense stimulation of nationalism. The most articulate are "modernist" in their thinking, in that they reach back past the centuries of Islamic theology directly to the Koran and Sunnah. Like the early European Protestants, they found what they had to find: a reformulation of their religious beliefs which would allow a synthesis with modern learning and a solution to modern problems. In this process of "rediscovery" and modernization, the concept of the Islamic State has been greatly altered.

Two Indonesian Moslems have recently written articles on the Islamic State which are generally typical of modern modern opinion on the subject. Their definitions of the Islamic State include the following provisions:

1. T.M. Usman el Muhammady, "Negara Islam", Abadi, March 4, 1953, p.3.
Mohammad Saleh Suaidy, "Betulkah R.I. Berdasar Islam Bisa Menjebakkan Pemisahan Daerah?", Abadi, February 12, 1953, p.3.

1. Islamic law as state law. Mohammad Saleh quotes the Koran to show that any government which does not base its laws on Islam is in conflict with Islam. It is clear that this does not just refer to religious law; Usman el Muhammady speaks of "...the Law of Allah and His Prophet which concerns every type of intention or desire toward God, nature, or life." Mohammad Saleh goes on to limit this field somewhat in a complicated negative provision, "...the implementation of Islamic law for those who are not Moslems covers only those fields which are not concerned with theology or religious ceremony, as well as inheritance; thus it only includes ethics, social, economic and political life; in this field of temporal problems, only those subjects on which there is not already an express prohibition or positive provision in their own respective religions are covered." From this swarm of "only's" emerges a picture of Islamic law with an immense jurisdictional field.

2. The Islamic State as a Democratic State. In bypassing the greater part of Islamic history to concentrate on the life and sayings of the Prophet, modern Islamic scholars are also bypassing the history of the hereditary despotisms of Damascus and Bagdad to view the little known, greatly idealized story of Islam in its very first years. Many of them draw the conclusion from their observations that a key principle of Islamic rule is musjawarat, an Arabic word used in Indonesian to mean approximately, "discussion aimed at the settlement of problem." They draw quotes from the Koran and Sunnah to show the importance of discussion and consultation in the political decisions of that period, then arrive at the further conclusion that this principle implies modern parliamentary democracy. Hamka goes so far as to say, "The voice of the people is the voice of God."

Thus the demand for an Islamic state in Indonesia is almost invariably a demand for a democratic state. The terms "theo-democracy" and "Islamic democracy" are used.

It is significant of the great influence of western liberalism in Indonesian Moslem thinking that universal suffrage is generally accepted. An Egyptian Senator recently visited Indonesia and advanced the conservative Moslem notion that suffrage should be limited to males. As he delivered his humorous, cynical and generally condescending speech, he probably did not realize that most of his polite Indonesian audience was in hearty disagreement with him. One writer points out that it is a mistaken notion of many Indonesian intellectuals that the Islamic State in Indonesia will take the form of the states of Arabia, Egypt, Jordan or Iraq.

3. Human Rights in the Islamic State. It seems to be the impression of Moslem writers on the Islamic State that their opponents are principally concerned with the limitations on religious freedom in a state based on Islamic law. They answer that all Indonesians would be free to worship as they please, a claim which has very good historical foundations in the generally tolerant policies of the Caliphs.

4. Education in the Islamic State. El Muhammady's article claims, "basically, an Islam State means recognition of the Being and Omnipotence of God and his laws, a recognition which is to be planted in the soul and spirit (of the people) through instruction and education." Modern Islam in Indonesia is extremely "education minded." Mohammad Natsir claims that the essence of Islam is education,

then supports his statement by showing that the very first command of God in the Koran is "Read!"

A clue to the position of education in an Indonesian Islamic State may be taken from the work of the Ministry of Religion, already a functioning part of the Indonesian government. Through the ministry's Religious Education Institute, compulsory religious education is carried out in the state school system and great efforts are being made to expand and control the many thousands of private religious schools through government subsidies, assistance, and direction. The Ministry of Religion thus has control over an extensive religious educational system and influence in the public schools.

So if the writers cited are to be believed, the constitution of an Indonesian Islamic State would acknowledge Islam as a national religion, the form of the state would be a democratic republic with universal suffrage, Islamic law would apply not only to religious activities of the Moslem community, but also to general economic, political and social life of the nation, and it could be assumed that the Ministry of Religion would play a greatly expanded role. Whether Shafi'i orthodoxy or modernism would be accepted as official doctrine is in doubt.

This sketchy picture of an Islamic State is drawn from the writings of scholars. If such a state comes to Indonesia, it will of course be fashioned largely by Moslem politicians and not their more learned friends. The Masjumi Party Struggle Program calls for an Islamic State, a presidential cabinet, and a two house parliament. A precise definition of the Islamic State is not given, and the question of Islamic law is avoided, perhaps an indication that Masjumi politicians are aware that the century old struggle between Islamic law and local customary law cannot be settled quickly or by legislation.

A type of compromise short of full implementation of Islamic law is suggested by the Basic Principles Committee report to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. According to this plan a board of five Islamic scholars would advise the Head of State on any laws "repugnant to the Koran and Sunnah". Final decision on these laws, however, would require a majority vote of the House of Representatives as well as of the Moslems sitting in the House.

A great obstacle in the way of the Islamic State at present is a large scale rebellion in west and central Java which bears the name Islamic Rule (Darul Islam). This fanatic movement has been condemned—very softly—by the Masjumi, but its influence continues strong among local religious leaders in west Java. It is said that the dividing line between local Masjumi organizations and Darul Islam in west Java is rather blurred, a source of embarrassment to the Masjumi and certainly a major deterrent to any vigorous public demand for an Islamic State. It is, however, evidence that an extreme form

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1. Lurking behind the demand for a democratic state are hints of an authoritarian—even totalitarian—political philosophy. Such hints, of course, can be found by scholars in almost any philosophy. In my research in North Sumatra, which begins next month, I hope to learn more about the particular problem.

of Islamic State has considerable appeal in the distressed, conservative countryside.

We can expect Indonesian Moslems to provide a clearer and more detailed description of the Islamic State as the Amuntai debate develops in the coming year. It is almost certain to be a major issue in the election campaign and work of the Constituent Assembly. While the Amuntai speech did much to disturb the political air in Indonesia, it also served to clarify and highlight two facts.

First, it seems that President Sukarno's popularity has decreased. His role remains immense, and the October 17 affair showed his continuing political power and ^{the} power of his friends. But the fact remains that much of the intellectual leadership and youth of Indonesia are tired of his speeches. He has now joined in open warfare with Islam. Though he himself is a Moslem and claims to be a defender of the faith, to many he is an enemy. Mohammad Saleh says,

Bung Karno beats his chest and says, 'I am a Moslem; if anyone attacks Islam, I shall defend Islam.' No! If a man doesn't want to carry out Islamic law in the state and through the state,...he is violating Islam, struggling against Islam, opposing Islam...

No one else on the political scene could possibly climb up and depose Sukarno from his special pinnacle, but that pinnacle has been perceptibly lowered.

The second fact highlighted by the Amuntai speech is the ideological crisis which Indonesia is now experiencing. The nationalist ideology, which centers on the Pantjasila and general antagonism to the west, has obviously reached a point of near bankruptcy. Its individual articles are still valid enough expressions of articulate public sentiment. But as an ideology, Pantjasila nationalism has failed to generate positive force and content. As espoused by President Sukarno or the PNI, it has been most effective as a negative doctrine of opposition. Like the San Min Chu I, it is a noble statement of principles which are neither systematized, defined, or clearly expressive of an organized group interest. The disintegration of Pantjasila nationalism—or at least its failure to develop or deepen—can be seen in the disillusionment of much of Indonesia's educated youth, in the lack of plan or coherence in the programs of nationalist parties, and not least of all in the apparent decline of Sukarno's popularity.

The ideological crisis is sharpened by the slow but steady emergence of Islam as an ideology, and recent successes of the Indonesian Communist Party after its devastating failure in the Madiun Revolt of 1948. The National Front program initiated in May, 1952, has brought the Communist Party to a key position in the complicated party struggle, and the development of young leaders like Aidit should be a matter of some concern to party enemies. The most conscious and powerful of these enemies are the Islamic groups which make up the Masjumi. Masjumi gains in organization have been very evident during the past half year, as has been the growth of a clearer and more system-

atic body of opinion on such issues as Communism, economic policy and foreign enterprises, and the development of political institutions. The extent of these gains cannot be adequately measured for some time, but they seem to be indications that the Masjumi Party—still inadequately organized and troubled by smothered internal conflicts—is struggling to answer the challenge of its predominant position in Indonesian politics.

It is the growing power of the Masjumi and the ever present threat of an Islamic State which has driven the nationalist parties into alliance with the Communists. Members of this alliance may heartily approve of the President's Amuntai speech, but for diverse reasons. Several aspects of this alliance will be described in my next letter.

Yours sincerely,

Boyd Compton
Boyd Compton

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