
SUKARNO'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS AND CHINA: DOCUMENTS FROM THE CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY ARCHIVES

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On October 16, 1964, at the Lop Nor test facility in the northwestern province of Xinjiang, the People's Republic of China (PRC) detonated its first nuclear weapon. Incidentally, one day later, in Bandung, a United States-supplied 250 kWt TRIGA-Mark II research reactor produced Indonesia's first successful nuclear reaction.¹ Although Indonesia's development of nuclear technology started with civilian uses in mind, the nation's leaders seemed to be emboldened by China's historic feat of obtaining a nuclear arsenal. In November 1964, Brigadier General Hartono, the chief of army logistics, announced that Indonesia would produce its own atomic bomb as early as October 5, 1965, as a "surprise" for its Armed Forces Day celebration.² On July 24, 1965, at a meeting of the 36th Muhammadiyah Congress in Bandung, Indonesian President Sukarno announced: "God willing, Indonesia will shortly produce its own nuclear bomb."³

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¹ G. A. Siwabessy, *Upuleru: Memoar Dr. G. A. Siwabessy* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1979), 81.

² Robert M. Cornejo, "When Sukarno Sought the Bomb: Indonesian Nuclear Aspirations in the Mid-1960s," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Summer 2000: 33.

³ Sukarno, "Amanat PJM President Sukarno pada Kongres Muhammadiyah di Bandung, 24 Djuli 1965," in *Sukarno: Selected Speeches 1958–1966*, ed. Angus McIntyre (Melbourne: LaTrobe University, Bundoora Campus, 1993), 11.

This pro-bomb rhetoric triggered a series of chain reactions worldwide, ranging from dismissal of the project as a bluff to fear of Indonesia's possible abuse of nuclear technology. Most observers, foreign and local, decided that Indonesia did not possess the indigenous capacity required to produce nuclear weapons and would thus rely on foreign support. Such help was most likely to come from China, in light of its geographic proximity and the increasingly close Sino-Indonesian relations. A US State Department report claimed that Hartono "later admitted privately" that an Indonesian atomic bomb would be "sheer fantasy," because the country's nuclear weapons program existed only "on paper." The document concluded: "If such a program were developed in Indonesia, it would have to be built, financed, and operated by a third country."⁴ After witnessing Sukarno's speech in July 1965, renowned Indonesian journalist Rosihan Anwar commented in his diary: "Has Indonesia already achieved the high level of technological capability to make an atomic bomb? Or has Indonesia received assistance from the PRC, who has just detonated a nuclear bomb? Was the making of the atomic bomb secretly discussed between Subandrio, Zhou Enlai, and Chen Yi during their repeated meetings in recent months?"⁵ In the United States, *The Washington Post* reasoned that "the most inviting speculative notion" would be for China to give Sukarno an atomic device, but "maintain control over it."⁶

Ahmad Nordin, the chief spokesman of Malaysia's External Affairs Ministry, said: "If and when we hear of an atomic explosion that Indonesia has boasted she will carry out in the near future, we should not be surprised if it was actually an atomic device exploded by Communist China on behalf of Indonesia."⁷ Some international media offered bolder speculations. In Singapore, unverified sources for *The Straits Times* claimed that "in 1964 a number of Indonesian scientists left for a prolonged course of study at Harbin and other Chinese nuclear centres," and in July 1965, "on no less than three occasions, Peking's ambassador in Jakarta was quoted as saying that China will give Indonesia all the help she wants in the manufacture of the bomb."⁸ *The Sunday Times* in London inferred from "the announced arrival in Indonesia of Chinese scientific and technical teams" that "China may be preparing an undersea nuclear explosion off the coast of West Irian (Dutch New Guinea)."⁹

As rumors spread and tensions escalated, instead of a nuclear detonation, it was a political storm, the September Thirtieth Movement (Gerakan 30 September, hereafter sometimes referred to as "the Movement" or G30S), which erupted in Indonesia. In the

⁴ US Department of State, "An assessment of factors operating in the following eight countries to advance or inhibit decisions to seek acquisition of nuclear weapons: India; Israel; Japan; Sweden; West Germany; Indonesia; Egypt; South Africa," December 12, 1964, U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <http://tinyurl.com/tinyurl/5oKJq8>, accessed January 19, 2018.

⁵ H. Rosihan Anwar, *Sukarno, Tentara, PKI: Setiga Kekuasaan sebelum Prahara Politik 1961-1965* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2006), 358. Subandrio was Indonesia's foreign minister and first deputy prime minister at the time. Zhou Enlai was China's premier and Chen Yi was its foreign minister and vice premier.

⁶ Howard Simons, "Sukarno Bomb Strut Seen Idle: Unless He Is Counting on Getting Atomic Device from Peking," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 1965: B8.

⁷ "A-Bomb for Sukarno? Peking Nuclear Weapons Promise Alleged," *South China Sunday Post*, August 8, 1965: 23.

⁸ "Soekarno's Bomb," *The Straits Times*, August 1, 1965: 8.

⁹ Richard Hughes, "China May Set Off Undersea A-bomb," *The Sunday Times* (London), September 12, 1965: 2.

early morning hours of October 1, 1965, army units from the presidential palace guard abducted and later killed six senior anticommunist generals. On the next day, the head of the Army Strategic Reserve, Major General Suharto, launched an effective counterattack. Because the leader of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), D. N. Aidit, was a major participant in the Movement, Suharto started a nationwide purge of alleged communists and communist sympathizers while ousting Sukarno and establishing his own power base. The Suharto regime also made repeated, although unfounded, allegations of Chinese intervention in Indonesia's domestic affairs.¹⁰ Sino-Indonesian diplomatic relations were suspended in 1967, and Suharto reoriented his country toward the United States. At the same time, the Suharto regime accepted international monitoring over the nation's atomic materials and equipment and thereby dispelled international concerns.¹¹

Due to the dearth of direct evidence from China, studies on the exact nature and extent of exchanges of nuclear materials and technology between China and Indonesia have been limited.¹² In this essay, I translate and contextualize three sets of documents from the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter referred to as "CFMA") that record discussions on nuclear issues with Indonesia. These materials, originally in Chinese unless otherwise noted, were obtained during an unusual window of opportunity. Between June 2006 and November 2008, the CFMA in Beijing declassified thousands of documents dated from 1949–65, containing a wealth of information related to Indonesia. However, this collection was reclassified in 2013. In other words, the documents presented here are no longer accessible to the public.

Together, the three sets of documents—labeled below as "Document Selection" 1, 2, and 3—demonstrate the changing contours of Indonesian political elites' perceptions of nuclear weapons, which were in tandem with a shift in the nation's foreign policy. Initially viewed as a device of destruction that perpetuated the whites' subjugation of people of color in the post-colonial area, the atomic bomb later became a symbol of power and prestige in the eyes of Sukarno when he isolated Indonesia from the international community by launching aggressive foreign policies and vigorous domestic campaigns. The first translated document, "The Indonesian Government's Attitude toward Our Proposal for a Summit of all Countries of the World on the Complete Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," below, reveals how Indonesian policymakers' positions on nuclear nonproliferation differed from that of Beijing's. In early 1965, with the radicalization of Indonesian diplomacy, these disagreements were sidelined by Sukarno's eager pursuit of an atomic bomb. Following discussions between policymakers of the two countries, an Indonesian Atomic Energy Group visited China in late September 1965 to explore possibilities for collaboration. The second set of

¹⁰ Taomo Zhou, "China and the Thirtieth of September Movement," *Indonesia* 98 (October 2014): 29–58.

¹¹ "Indonesians Accept Nuclear Controls," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1965.

¹² For the Cold War generation of scholarship, see: Jay Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1976), 104–8; Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 105; Sheldon W. Simon, *The Broken Triangle: Peking, Djakarta, and the PKI* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 69; David Mazingo, *Chinese Policy towards Indonesia, 1949–1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 211–12; and J. A. C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute, 1963–1966* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974), 287–88. Among more recent work, Cornejo's 2000 article offers a comprehensive examination of Indonesia's nuclear aspirations based on Indonesian and US archival materials.

documents is a detailed account of the visiting group's day-to-day activities in Beijing by their hosts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The final piece, "Minutes of Chairman Mao Zedong and Chairman Liu Shaoqi's Meeting with the Indonesian Delegation," gives us insights into a meeting that took place a few hours before the outbreak of the September Thirtieth Movement. When talking to an Indonesian governmental delegation invited by the PRC to attend its sixteenth national day celebrations, Mao Zedong encouraged Indonesia to develop its own nuclear bomb. The Indonesian guests requested further Chinese assistance for that purpose.

Despite China's superficial flamboyant gestures, an in-depth reading of the documents shows a cautious and speculative side of the country. From late 1964 to September 1965, Beijing was glad to see Sukarno's change of attitude toward the atomic bomb and fueled his nuclear ambitions. By creating the prospect of Chinese assistance, Beijing gained the political leverage to incentivize Sukarno to continue his ultra-leftist foreign policy of contesting both superpowers—the US and Soviet Union—simultaneously. But China was far from ready to offer substantial support for a strategic nuclear program in Indonesia. The Indonesian Atomic Energy Group's tour in Beijing was restricted to research sites. Mao, like all the other Chinese leaders who had engaged in talks with Indonesia about the atomic bomb, emphasized the nascent status of China's nuclear weapons program and the need for Third World countries to prioritize the development of agriculture and industry. Nevertheless, Sukarno might have interpreted these mixed signals as a comparatively solid commitment. G30S, however, put an end to Sukarno's political life as well as his nuclear aspirations. The nation's fixation on the atomic bomb in 1964 and 1965 proved to be a momentary deviation from its long path toward development of nuclear technology for peaceful uses.

Although no nuclear materials or technology were transferred from China to Indonesia, the two countries' interactions surrounding the world's most deadly weapon gives us a glimpse into how three important forces that drove post-WWII international history—the nuclear revolution, the Cold War, and decolonization—intersected with one other in the 1960s. Despite their ideological and strategic rivalry, Moscow and Washington shared the common goal of stemming nuclear proliferation, particularly in the Third World.¹³ The two superpowers were concerned that China's test could cause a nuclear domino-effect among newly independent states, which were either unsettled or encouraged by China's success. Even more dangerous, radically revolutionary countries, such as Sukarno's Indonesia or Castro's Cuba, might seek a nuclear "Third Way" to adjust the military and economic imbalance between the "darker nations" and the so-called First and Second worlds. The United States and Soviet Union believed that whereas the major powers fully comprehended the responsibilities of nuclear ownership, Third World nations might not recognize the deadly logic of mutual vulnerability and deterrence. By the mid-1960s, besides Indonesia, several other newly independent countries were considering or were actually developing nuclear weapons programs. Speculation arose that, within Latin America, Brazil, Argentina, and perhaps Mexico were motivated to develop atomic weapons.¹⁴ In South Asia, China's atomic explosion

¹³ Francis J. Gavin, "Nuclear Proliferation and Non-proliferation during the Cold War," in *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume 2, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 395–416.

¹⁴ Gavin, "Nuclear Proliferation and Non-proliferation during the Cold War," in Leffler and Arne, *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 403–4.

brought pivotal changes to India's nuclear policy, which had previously been directed toward socioeconomic development under Nehru.¹⁵ While India contemplated building its own nuclear weapon, Pakistan, which shared a cordial relationship with both China and Indonesia in 1964, vowed that it, too, "should have to eat grass and get one, or build one of our own."¹⁶ In this context, the brief but precariously dangerous episode between China and Indonesia reflects that atomic energy, a power full of both promise and peril, enabled the formerly colonized nations to destabilize the Cold War international order in unpredictable and previously unimaginable ways.

DOCUMENT SELECTION 1

Divergence between Indonesian and Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons

China and Indonesia embarked on nuclear programs for completely different purposes. In the case of China, a nationalist ideology that closely associated international status with strong military power, as well as perceptions of repeated threats from the United States, drove China's communist leadership to seek a nuclear arsenal beginning with its rise to power in 1949.¹⁷

In the early 1960s, the tension between China and the United States escalated while Beijing became estranged from its former ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Chinese leadership channeled a tremendous amount of resources to the building of a nuclear bomb, hoping to improve its strategic position in relation to both superpowers and to enhance the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) claim to legitimacy at home in the wake of its social and economic campaign known as the Great Leap Forward (1958–62). At the beginning, the Chinese strategic nuclear program received Soviet assistance, which decreased and ultimately ended due to a widening chasm between Beijing and Moscow. In the end, China managed to build the nuclear bomb through self-reliance.

Whereas China was motivated by the security and prestige brought by nuclear weapons, Indonesia's decision to start a nuclear program was triggered by concerns over health hazards from radioactive fallout. After a series of US nuclear tests conducted in the Pacific Ocean in the early 1950s, news came to Indonesia about fish dying on certain beaches in Japan and people falling ill after consuming possibly polluted seafood. As a result, Sukarno felt the need to intervene because Indonesia bordered the Pacific Ocean.¹⁸ In 1954, the government set up the Committee for Research on Radio Activity (Panitia untuk Penyelidikan Radio-aktivitet) under the nation's health department.¹⁹ Dr. Gerrit Augustinus Siwabessy, a medical radiologist by training, was appointed as the committee's head. After examining samples including seawater, plants, and residents'

¹⁵ George Perkovic, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Feroz H. Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistan Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1–10.

¹⁸ Siwabessy, *Upuleru*, 69.

¹⁹ G. A. Siwabessy, "Kata Sambutan Direktur Djenderal Badan Tenaga Atom Nasional Bapak Prof. G. A. Siwabessy," in *Sepuluh Tahun Tenaga Atom di Indonesia (December 5 1958–December 5, 1968)*, ed. Badan Tenaga Atom Nasional (Jakarta: Buku Laporan disusun oleh panitia peringatan dasawarsa BATAN, 1968), II.

hair in areas adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, such as Manado and Ambon, the committee concluded that Indonesia did not suffer from radioactive fallout.²⁰ Another important conclusion was that there should be an independent executive entity for atomic issues, as this technology would be important for Indonesia's economic development. In 1958, the Indonesian government established the Institute of Atomic Energy (Lembaga Tenaga Atom, or LTA).²¹ The LTA, whose humble first office was a shop house at Blok M in Jakarta, abandoned by a Chinese national, committed itself to the development of atomic energy for civilian use, such as agricultural research and medical services.²² In 1964, the LTA expanded into the Indonesian Nuclear Agency (Badan Tenaga Atom Nasional, or BATAN).²³

Lacking the infrastructure and expertise needed for the development of a nuclear program, Indonesia received foreign assistance in the 1950s and 1960s primarily from the United States, and secondarily from the USSR. Indonesia was a participant in the US's Atoms for Peace program, a nonproliferation initiative in which the Eisenhower administration supplied information and equipment to research institutions globally.²⁴ Under the auspices of this program, the United States provided Jakarta with \$491,000 in financial aid as well as enriched uranium for research purposes. The most prominent accomplishment of this American assistance was the 250 kWt Triga-Mark II research reactor, which, as mentioned at the beginning, achieved criticality for the first time in 1964.²⁵ The Soviets also offered nuclear cooperation with Indonesia in order to exert political influence vis-à-vis the United States. In November 1962, a small, Soviet-supplied sub-critical research reactor was completed and put to use at Gadjah Mada University. In 1964, Moscow signed a deal with Jakarta to provide a 2,000 kWt swimming-pool-type reactor.²⁶

In the latter half of 1964 and early 1965, Moscow delayed the delivery of the promised pool-type reactor while Washington debated allowing Indonesia to continue in the Atoms for Peace Program due to Indonesia's tilt toward China. During these few months, Indonesia started to deviate from its previous policy of carefully and opportunistically balancing itself between the two superpowers. Sukarno's increasing dissatisfaction with the bipolar structure of the Cold War echoed China's grievances against its exclusion from the international system, particularly the decision by the United Nations (UN) to recognize the Nationalist regime in exile in Taiwan as the sole legitimate representative of China. Moreover, the PKI, which used to follow the USSR

²⁰ Siwabessy, *Upuleru*, 69–70.

²¹ Siwabessy, "Kata Sambutan Direktur Djenderal," II.

²² Siwabessy, *Upuleru*, 71–72.

²³ Siwabessy, "Kata Sambutan Direktur Djenderal," II.

²⁴ Daniel Poneman, *Nuclear Power in the Developing World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 100.

²⁵ Matthew Fuhmann, *Atomic Assistance: How "Atoms for Peace" Programs Cause Nuclear Insecurity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 111.

²⁶ "The Bandits' Relations with Indonesia, 1965," October 1–December 31, 1965, *Academia Historica* (Taipei), 02000001910A. "Bandit" was the standard reference to the communist regime in Mainland China by the Chinese Nationalist regime in Taiwan. This is a piece of a Japanese intelligence report that was shared with the Chinese Nationalist regime in Taiwan and translated into Mandarin by the Taiwanese consulate in Osaka. The Chinese Nationalist Party (or Kuomintang of China) was the ruling party in Mainland China until 1949, when it lost the Chinese Civil War to the CCP and retreated to Taiwan to reestablish an authoritarian government in exile. See also US Department of State, "An assessment of factors [...] to advance or inhibit decisions to seek acquisition of nuclear weapons."

more closely, sided with Beijing after the Sino-Soviet split. High-level visits and cultural, educational, and economic exchanges between the two countries reached a climax between 1964 and 1965.²⁷

Yet the emerging bond between China and Indonesia was unstable, as the domestic and foreign policies of both countries entered an almost vertigo-like state. At the same time as Mao was steering his country toward the storms of the Cultural Revolution, Sukarno's public speeches were awash with metaphors of thunder and lightning, volcanic fire and lava, and burning and exploding.²⁸ Since Sukarno's replacement of Indonesia's constitutional democracy with the more authoritarian "Guided Democracy," he instilled in the general population a sense of revolutionary will, which promised to overcome all obstacles to development: economic recession, inflation, regional disparity, and corruption.²⁹ In terms of foreign policy, both countries lost their prestige as proponents for Third World unity at the first Afro-Asian Conference in 1955. Instead of seeking peace and stability, both rooted their diplomacy in militant anti-imperialism. A mix of shared anxiety about perceived threats and a desire to transform international politics masked the two countries' ideological differences and clash of geopolitical interests.

One of these undercurrents of discord in bilateral relations manifested itself in the two nations' disparate approaches to nuclear nonproliferation. In 1958, Sukarno wrote an open letter to the London-based magazine *New Statesman* during Indonesia's anti-H-bomb week, which was held to protest the ongoing US nuclear tests at Eniwetok. The Indonesian president wrote that "the moral and political bankruptcy" of the Western powers was reflected first in the form of colonialism and then in that of "a nuclear arms race [... and] the war-time victims of the atomic bomb were Asians." Sukarno further goaded the United States, "how many Asians will die as a result of those tests? Can the scientists tell us?" Sukarno declared: "We utterly deny the right of the West to continue imperiling us and our future."³⁰ In the same year, Indonesia's foreign minister, Subandrio, wrote: "We do not have nuclear weapons and we do not have any interest in that direction." Subandrio elaborated that without a ban on nuclear weaponry, the stability of international politics would be disrupted, particularly endangering the newly independent countries, whose level of development lagged behind that of the West.³¹

On October 7, 1963, Indonesia signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty in Moscow.³² China, on the other hand, refused to join this treaty, which, in its eyes, represented an unjust nuclear monopoly curtailing China's future development. Although the top Chinese leaders never intended to use nuclear weapons in combat to accomplish specific military objectives, leaders such as Mao and Deng Xiaoping viewed nuclear weapons as an effective and necessary tool for "detering aggression and countering coercion" from

²⁷ Taomo Zhou, "Ambivalent Alliance: Chinese Policy towards Indonesia, 1960–1965," *The China Quarterly* 221 (2015): 209.

²⁸ Theodore Friend, *Indonesian Destinies* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 89.

²⁹ Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 150.

³⁰ "Soekarno Hits at H-Bomb Tests," *The Straits Times*, June 28, 1958: 2.

³¹ Soebandrio, G.A. Siwabessy, and Soemarno Sosroatmodjo, *Pengaruh Tenaga Atau Tenaga Nuclear Dalam Hubungan Antar Negara* (Jakarta: Ministry of Information, 1958), 9.

³² Cornejo, "When Sukarno Sought the Bomb," 32.

both the United States and the Soviet Union.³³ Despite initial positive responses from Sukarno and several other Indonesian officials on China's denotation of an atomic bomb in 1964, when the PRC Ambassador Yao Zhongming met with Subandrio to probe the Indonesian government's official stance, Subandrio superficially congratulated China before raising Indonesia's concerns over "pollution caused by radioactive dust and ashes." Beijing believed that Jakarta was using the environmental impact of China's nuclear test as an excuse to express discontent. When Subandrio went on to explain that his seemingly lukewarm attitude was a tactic to protect Indonesia from being identified as a blind follower of the PRC, Beijing became suspicious of Indonesia's complicity in the US imperialists' and Soviet revisionists' joint scheme to contain China.

In addition to Indonesia's tepid attitude toward China's nuclear success, Beijing was also displeased with Jakarta's indecisiveness toward its proposal to replace the UN's Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENDC) with a Chinese alternative—Summit of All Countries of the World on the Complete Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. From the Chinese perspective, the ENDC, headquartered in Geneva, was one of the many tools devised by the imperialists and revisionists to isolate China. While the existing framework only reinforced the great powers' domination of Cold War politics, Beijing's proposal would give the less powerful nations in the formerly colonized world a platform to voice their opinions. Beijing needed Jakarta's backing to overthrow the old system and even rallied support using Sukarno's own formulation that the world struggle was between the "old established forces" and the "new emerging forces." Not yet ready to fully commit itself to China's cause, however, Jakarta took a middle course on the issue. In a written reply, the Indonesian government indicated that while the ideals behind Beijing's proposal were honorable, it would have little chance of success in reality unless the People's Republic participated in a preparatory meeting with the other four nuclear powers: the US, USSR, Britain, and France.

Despite a greater convergence of interests and objectives between the two countries, by late 1964 the Chinese leadership still viewed Indonesia as a country whose socio-economic system was different from the PRC's and whose determination to challenge the existing international order was, at best, wavering. In Chinese eyes, the policymakers inside the Indonesian government, who personified the capriciousness of their country's foreign policy, appeared as "deceptive." Subandrio's and Sukarno's prevarications during their respective meetings with Chinese leaders reinforced the class-analysis framework used by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The Chinese foreign policymakers and practitioners usually categorized leaders of nonsocialist countries in the Third World as "bourgeois nationalists," who could be friendly and progressive but could not be fully trusted as allies. Besides the nuclear issues, Beijing was also dismayed with Indonesia's vacillation on the issue of the Second Afro-Asian Conference (or the Second Bandung), which is also briefly mentioned in the documents below. In late 1964 and early 1965, China had been striving to recreate 1955's Afro-Asian moment with a renewed anti-imperialist spirit. Sukarno, on the other hand, initially showed more interest in organizing the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations with India's Nehru and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, some of the major competitors of the People's Republic at the time. But into early 1965, Sukarno's increasingly truculent style made his country ill-

³³ M. Taylor Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, "China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of Chinese Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure," *International Security* 35, 2 (2011): 51.

fitted for the stability-seeking nonaligned movement. (Although Sukarno converted to an avid advocate for the Second Bandung by June 1965, the conference was ultimately derailed by political upheavals in the host country, Algeria.)

Against this background, the first set of translated documents reveal the conflictual communications between the two countries following China's nuclear test. The PRC's success made Jakarta worry about the challenges a nuclearized China posed to world strategic balance and international governance of atomic weapons. The Indonesian political elites' lingering doubts, in turn, angered and disappointed Beijing.

The Indonesian Government's Attitude toward Our Proposal for a
Summit of All Countries of the World on the Complete Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
October 19–November 19, 1964, CMFA, 105-01870-01

The message from Premier Zhou [Enlai] has been
handed to the Indonesian officials.

[To] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

In accordance with the directions from your telegram on [October] 18, Premier Zhou's message to the heads of state all across the world was handed by Ambassador Yao [Zhongming] to the chief of staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. Since Subandrio had just returned to Indonesia and was busy taking over as the acting president [while Sukarno was on a trip to Europe], it was difficult for him to meet Ambassador Yao immediately. The chief of staff said this message would be passed on to Subandrio immediately. Because the nuclear test in China was a significant event, the chief of staff said that he was not in the position to express his personal take on the issue. But he believed that Subandrio would meet with Ambassador Yao for a discussion. Ambassador Yao stated our position to him based on the declaration of our government and affirmed the emotions and opinions expressed by a number of Indonesian political leaders in their public speeches. The chief of staff said he did not expect that the first successful nuclear test would take place so soon in China. This proved that we, the Asians, are capable of mastering technology whenever there is an opportunity and that we, the Asians, will not fall behind the West forever. He also jokingly mentioned that Indonesia could send personnel to China to learn about nuclear technology.

Chinese Embassy to Indonesia
October 19, 1964

Subandrio Met with Ambassador Yao for a Discussion on the Nuclear Test
[in China in 1964]

[To] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Subandrio met with me on the afternoon of [October] 22. Our talk covered the following aspects:

1. Subandrio said that, on the whole, he completely supported the nuclear test in China. China should have its own nuclear weapons, otherwise the imperialists and the Soviet Union would monopolize nuclear weapons. But China should be cautious when talking openly in the international arena, so as to avoid raising the sense of insecurity or fear among Afro-Asian countries. In addition, he said he had to bring up the issue of radioactive dust and ashes. In the past, French nuclear tests in the Sahara and the

Pacific led to protests by many parties. Although nuclear tests would produce poisonous radioactive dust and ashes, China's success would expedite the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons, which would contribute to world peace. He further said that if he had only mentioned how good and how marvelous China's nuclear test was, others would say Indonesia was China's "tail" and a member of the "Chinese bloc."

2. Subandrio later talked about his opinion of Premier Zhou's proposal to convene a summit of all the countries of the world. He expressed his doubt on the feasibility of such a proposal. He will give us a written reply to elaborate on Indonesia's position on the issue, including the following points: 1) the Indonesian government supports Premier Zhou's proposal in general; 2) doubts whether such a proposal is relevant to the current situation and whether it is feasible; 3) holds that any conference on disarmament and prohibition on nuclear weapons is useless without the participation of China; 4) would like to propose that the ENDC in Geneva should invite China and a number of Afro-Asian countries, so that both the issue of convening a summit of all the countries of the world and the issue of disarmament and prohibition of conventional and nuclear weapons could be discussed; and 5) proposes that a discussion on convening a summit of all the countries of the world should take place at the Second Afro-Asian Conference.

3. I expressed the following opinions in response to Subandrio: 1) We appreciate his acknowledgement of how our nuclear test contributed to world peace. On the issue of nuclear dust and ashes, we have taken into consideration the location of the test as well as the turbulence and direction of the wind, and we will never cause damage to the health of the people in our neighboring countries. We urge him to pay attention to the possibility that the imperialists and their lackeys will take advantage of his public speech to drive a wedge between China and Indonesia. He nodded and said yes. 2) We appreciate that he agrees with Premier Zhou's proposal to convene a summit of all the countries of the world. On his doubts about the feasibility of the proposal, I explained that a few countries had already responded positively. The proposal is about our common goals and shared interests, which requires our collective efforts. We should actively create the conditions for their realization. 3) With regard to the other suggestions he offered to Premier Zhou, I will report to my government immediately and inform him once I hear back. I urge him to not release the information to the public before my government replies. I personally think the suggestion to expand the ENDC by including China is inappropriate. It is unacceptable to us. The ENDC is an arrangement made under the auspices of the UN. You, our Indonesian friends, know very well about our relations with the UN. The ENDC is only an old stove on which a few big powers cook together. Why should we accommodate the UN? Indonesia is among the initiators of the Bandung Conference, it also advocates that the New Emerging Forces should unite against the Old Established Forces. On critical issues in the international arena, we should not let the imperialists see the discord between China and Indonesia. He explained again that there are a couple of friendly nations at the ENDC in Geneva, and we should try to win their support so as to undermine the UN. I stated that this is an extremely important issue and exhorted him to wait for the reply from my government. By the end of the conversation he agreed to wait for the reply from the Chinese government. Given that his deceptiveness began to surface, please advise on the best course of action to prevent the Indonesian side from further complicating the situation.

Chinese Embassy to Indonesia
October 23, 1964

Ambassador Yao, Please Set an Appointment with Subandrio

Ambassador Yao,

We have received your telegram on [October] 21 and 22.

We agree with what you said in your previous meeting with Subandrio. Subandrio suggested that the ENDC should invite China and a number of Afro-Asian countries. By saying this, he actually set a different tone from our proposal to convene a summit of all the countries of the world. He is collaborating with the imperialists and the revisionists in their conspiracy to oppose the nuclear test in China. It seems that Subandrio is not only trying to give us a hard time, but also trying to use this as an opportunity to start negotiating with the United States and the Soviet Union. Therefore, we have to clearly express that we will never agree with his suggestion, and we have to resolutely destroy his trickery. Please set an appointment with Subandrio and tell him that according to instructions from the Chinese government, you will convey the following replies to the suggestions he offered in your previous meeting:

1. The Chinese government would like to express its gratitude for Your Excellency's acclaim for the nuclear explosion in China and for your understanding that China should possess its own nuclear weapons. President Sukarno warmly congratulated Ambassador Huang Zhen³⁴ on the success of the nuclear test in China and expressed his full support for China's proposal to convene a summit of all the countries of the world, which encouraged us greatly.

2. On the ENDC, the Chinese government understands that this organization was set up by a UN resolution. The Chinese government has repeatedly declared that until China recovers its legitimate rights at the UN, we will never participate in any conference associated with it. This is the unwavering position of the Chinese government and the Chinese people. The ENDC is manipulated by a few big powers to implement their policies of nuclear monopoly and nuclear blackmail. Indonesia, a country which adamantly opposes imperialism, has not participated in that organization. It does not reflect the will of the peoples of the world and has not achieved any results in the past two years. Even if a few Afro-Asian countries were to be involved, the fundamental characteristic of this committee would remain the same. The Chinese government understands that Your Excellency put forward the suggestion with good will. However, it is impossible to have meaningful discussions about the issues of general disarmament and complete prohibition of nuclear weapons at the ENDC since a minority of big powers controls it. As Your Excellency knows, general disarmament and complete prohibition of nuclear weapons are critical for all the countries in the world and thus should be discussed in a framework which allows all nations to participate equally.

3. The Chinese government puts forwards the proposal to convene a summit of all the countries of the world based upon the aforementioned conditions. We urge the countries that currently own or will soon own nuclear weapons to accept the obligation to refrain from using them. This is not only imperative for preventing a nuclear war and for safeguarding world peace, but also reasonable and attainable. If this cannot be achieved, the so-called advocacy for disarmament and complete prohibition of nuclear weapons can only be regarded as hypocritical and deceitful. This proposal by the Chinese government has already received positive responses and warm support from quite a number of Afro-Asian countries. Of course, it is strongly opposed by the American imperialists and other countries holding a nuclear monopoly and involved in blackmail. We welcome any measure that helps expedite the fruition of China's proposal for the early elimination of the threats of nuclear war.

Please inform Comrade Aidit about the contents of the above message and your previous conversation with Subandrio and solicit his advice.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
October 27, 1964

³⁴ Huang Zhen (1909–89) was the PRC ambassador to Indonesia between 1954 and 1961. Huang later served as the PRC's deputy minister of foreign affairs and the minister of culture.

Meeting between Ambassador Yao and Subandrio

Attachment: Reply from Acting President, Dr. Subandrio, to Premier Zhou Enlai
[originally in English]

Djakarta, October 30, 1964

Excellency,

I have received your message that was handed to me by Ambassador Yao Chung-ming³⁵ in Djakarta on October 19, 1964, in which you put forward the proposal:

“that a summit conference of all the countries of the world be convened to discuss the questions of the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons and that, as the first step, the summit conference should reach an agreement to the effect that the nuclear powers and those countries which may soon become nuclear powers undertake not to use nuclear weapons, neither to use them against non-nuclear countries and nuclear-free zones nor against each other.”

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia notes with satisfaction that: “the Chinese Government solemnly declares that at no time and in no circumstances will China be the first to use nuclear weapons.”

After having given considerable thought to the matter, the Indonesian Government wishes to state that the idea of holding a summit conference on general disarmament and the banning of nuclear weapons is quite agreeable to her since this will conform to the deeply held convictions and fervent aspirations of all peace-loving peoples in the world, including the Indonesian people.

The chances of success of such a summit conference will be enhanced if preparatory to it a meeting could be arranged of the 5 states (the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, France, and the People’s Republic of China) currently possessing nuclear armaments. In the event of solid agreements having been achieved in the meeting of nuclear armaments possessing states, the results could be further consolidated in the larger summit conference.

Failing this, it will be very doubtful whether such a summit conference could be materialized.

Please accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

For the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

Dr. Subandrio
Acting President

His Excellency Chou En-lai
Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China
PEKING

On Presenting a Set of Photographs of the Detonation of
Our Country’s First Nuclear Bomb to President Sukarno

On November 4, 1964, Premier Zhou had a one-on-one talk with Sukarno after the formal meeting, at which Premier Zhou showed Sukarno a set of photographs taken when our first nuclear bomb was detonated. Sukarno expressed great interest. Premier Zhou said we would develop a new set of these photographs later, which would be passed on to him as a gift through Ambassador Yao. He accepted the offer, thanked

³⁵ A different spelling of “Yao Zhongming.”

Premier Zhou, and wished our country further success in the research and development of tools for [nuclear weapons] delivery.

[We] suggest that [we should] arrange for the current shift of diplomatic messengers to take the photographs back to Indonesia on November 21. Please advise if this is appropriate.

The First Asia Department
November 9, 1964

Report on Discussions on the Summit during the Meeting between
Premier Zhou and Sukarno

Ambassador Yao:

Premier Zhou mentioned the issue of Subandrio's reply to our proposal for a summit when he met with Sukarno in Shanghai on November 4. Premier Zhou explained that we are opposed to a meeting among five nuclear powers (the United States, the USSR, the UK, France, and the PRC) for the following reasons:

(1) The purpose of our proposed summit is to break down the nuclear monopoly held by countries such as the United States and Britain;

(2) The issue of nuclear weapons concerns the safety of all the countries of the world. Therefore, all nations in the world, no matter how big or small, should participate in the discussion equally;

(3) The big nuclear powers will only be pressured to give up nuclear weapons and to take initial steps to ban them if all the countries of the world participate.

The premier said that, of course, we know that a summit is impossible now. But it is a goal for our persistent struggle, so that the day will come when the revolutionary forces grow strong enough to make the imperialist nuclear powers follow our will.

The premier told Sukarno that we sent letters suggesting a summit to the governments of 128 countries, 57 of which replied. Only the United States, Japan, and Thailand openly opposed the idea. Some other countries expressed regret for their inability to participate but did not object to the proposal.

With regard to the reply from Subandrio, the premier said that the letter expressed less confidence in a summit among all the countries of the world than in a meeting among the five nuclear powers.

The premier told Sukarno that Subandrio had informed Ambassador Yao that the contents of this letter should not be published before further discussions. The premier asked for Sukarno's opinion. China would not protest if the Indonesian government decided to publish the letter. Sukarno explained that Indonesia agreed with China's proposal for a summit among all the countries of the world. A meeting of the five nuclear powers could serve as a preparation for this summit. This is just Indonesia's preliminary proposal, not a formal suggestion. Sukarno said at the end that he would confer with Subandrio after he returned to Indonesia on November 5 and would formally inform Ambassador Yao of his decision on November 6. We predict that there will be three possibilities: 1) the Indonesian government publishes the letter; 2) the Indonesian government does not publish the letter; 3) the Indonesian government revises the contents of the letter. No matter which option they choose in the end, we will respect their decision rather than imposing our views on them.

The meeting lasted for two hours and both sides thoroughly exchanged their views on international affairs. Afterwards, Sukarno and the premier had a one-on-one discussion for almost 90 minutes, focusing on the issue of anti-imperialism.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
November 5, 1964

A Brief Summary of the Situation after Sukarno Returned

[To] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

I acknowledge receipt of your telegram on [November] 5.

After Sukarno returned to Indonesia, he had been busy receiving the president of Mali and stabilizing internal politics. He seemed exhausted. As of now, he has not contacted me to discuss Subandrio's letter in reply to the premier's proposal to organize a summit of all countries for the purpose of nuclear disarmament. I suggest we do not press him for a response on this issue. We could try to influence him indirectly through proper channels.

Yao Zhongming
November 12, 1964

The ambivalence in Indonesia's attitude toward nuclear weapons soon disappeared. A combination of military, diplomatic, and domestic factors prompted Sukarno's desire for an atomic bomb. In September 1965, the Indonesian president sent a team of nuclear specialists and air force personnel to China. They were courteously received and closely watched by their Chinese host. The next set of documents delineates this trip.

DOCUMENT SELECTION 2

The Indonesian Atomic Energy Group's Visit to China

In the two months before G30S, detonating an atomic bomb in Indonesian territory had become President Sukarno's major ambition.³⁶ First and foremost, an atomic bomb could be understood as Sukarno's response to perceived threats from the intensification of the conflicts in Indochina, the increased US military presence in Southeast Asia, and the escalation of hostility from Malaysia and the United Kingdom during *konfrontasi*. In 1963, Sukarno launched a military campaign in Borneo, aiming to block the formation of Malaysia, the British design for decolonization through the amalgamation of the already independent Malaya (Peninsular Malaysia or West Malaysia today) with Britain's remaining colonies of Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei. Ideologically, instead of seeing London's proposal as a means of decolonization, the Indonesian president regarded the plan as Britain's diehard attempt to safeguard its imperial interests. Sukarno thus saw *konfrontasi* as part of a global campaign on behalf of the Third World against old and new colonialism. Moreover, from a geopolitical perspective, the British arrangement to restructure state boundaries in Indonesia's vicinity would pose a grave challenge to the country's already vulnerable national unity.

In late 1964 and early 1965, as the military conflicts intensified across the Indonesian-Malaysian borders, Sukarno had probably begun to regard nuclear weaponry as an effective tool to deter Malaysia. Indeed, Malaysia had been apprehensive toward China's success in acquiring a nuclear weapon and potential Sino-Indonesian nuclear collaboration. In November 1964, the PRC chargé d'affaires in London reported that the

³⁶ US Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, "Indonesia's Efforts to Acquire an Atomic Bomb," September 29, 1965, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00472A000600010003-2.pdf>, accessed April 30, 2014.

anticommunist prime minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, or “the Tunku” as he was commonly known, confessed that his country was afraid of China’s new nuclear power. The Tunku is reported to have claimed: “If nuclear technology is used for peaceful purposes, it will be great. But if it is used for military purposes, not only us but also everyone else will be nervous.”³⁷ In early 1965, even before Sukarno’s public announcement of his nuclear ambition, Kuala Lumpur had already arrived at the conclusion that the Indonesian president was “pinning his own prestige and that of Indonesia on building a bomb.”³⁸ But the spokesman for the Malaysian Foreign Ministry scoffed at General Hartono’s 1964 claim that Indonesia would build its own nuclear bomb in less than a year, commenting that the number of Indonesians with degrees in physical science might be fewer than two hundred.³⁹ Instead of acquiring a nuclear bomb independently, the spokesman announced that the Indonesians had “decided they must become a nuclear power even if it means giving themselves over to Communist China.”⁴⁰

Besides attempting to deter Malaysia, Sukarno was probably trying to resurrect Indonesia’s lost status as a central figure of the Afro-Asian world by recasting it as a nuclear power. The spiraling *konfrontasi* had alienated Indonesia from many of its former friends, who were pursuing neutralism in the Cold War. In January 1965, Sukarno withdrew Indonesia from the UN in response to the US endorsement of Malaysia’s entry into the UN’s Security Council. Sukarno announced that the UN had fallen under the domination of “Old Established Forces” and he proposed that the “New Emerging Forces” should build their own platform in international politics as a counterbalance: the Conference of Neo-Emerging Forces (CONEFO).⁴¹ The PRC, whose seat at the UN was still denied, ardently supported Sukarno’s plan. In contrast to his reluctance in 1964, a year later Sukarno readily joined China in its efforts to reconfigure the Cold War international structure through proactive anti-imperialist struggles. On August 17, 1965, in his last Independence Day speech, Sukarno declared that Indonesia was “fostering an anti-imperialist axis—the Jakarta–Phnom Penh–Hanoi–Peking–Pyongyang axis.”⁴²

While in the past nuclear weapons represented the West’s racist disregard for human lives in the Third World, in 1965 Sukarno and the Indonesian political elites following him began to regard them as a status symbol. Shortly after his official announcement of Indonesia’s nuclear ambition at the Muhammadiyah Congress in Bandung, Sukarno called on countries opposed to imperialism to arm themselves with nuclear weapons in his message to the eleventh session of the World Congress against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, in Tokyo. “Nuclear weapons in the hands of the New Emerging Forces are weapons for the defense of peace and freedom, while on the contrary, nuclear weapons

³⁷ “Malaysia’s Response to Our Atomic Bomb,” November 6, 1964, CFMA, 105-01243-03.

³⁸ “Peking May Help Sukarno on Bomb,” February 4, 1965, *Canberra Times*, in “China-Political-Relations with Indonesia,” December 30, 1964–February 4, 1965, *The Australian National Archives*, 3107/40/106 PART9.

³⁹ “Peking May Help Sukarno on Bomb.”

⁴⁰ “A-Bomb for Sukarno?”

⁴¹ “Face the Nation,” Columbia Broadcasting System Television Network (filmed in Jakarta), broadcast on January 31, 1965. Cited in Alastair M. Taylor, “Sukarno—First United Nations Drop-out,” *International Journal* 206 (1965): 208.

⁴² Marshal Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation, 1965–1968* (Washington, DC: The Compass Press, 1990), 36.

in the hands of the imperialists are weapons for war and oppression," Sukarno wrote.⁴³ Sukarno's words mirrored the message sent to the same conference from the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, which claimed that the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons deprived other countries of their right to develop them for self-defense. Zhou declared that China was developing nuclear weapons precisely for the purpose of breaking up the nuclear monopoly and bringing about the thorough destruction of nuclear weapons.⁴⁴ Along similar lines, when Chinese Foreign Minister and Vice Premier Chen Yi attended the Independence Day celebrations in Jakarta in August 1965, Subandrio said:

I only realized recently that it was wrong for Indonesia to sign the Limited Test Ban Treaty in Moscow in 1963 ... the only way to avoid nuclear war and to safeguard homeland security is for more Afro-Asian countries to obtain nuclear weapons and to break up the monopoly of nuclear technology by the Western imperialists and the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

Last but not the least, Sukarno probably wanted to use nuclear weapons to stabilize Indonesian domestic politics. The electrifying social atmosphere created by Sukarno's announcement of Indonesia's nuclear aspiration helped distract the Indonesian people from the domestic economic crisis. In addition, a China-assisted nuclear weapons program might help ameliorate the antagonism between the PKI and the Indonesian army. Under Guided Democracy, Sukarno had been maintaining a delicate balance between the Indonesian communists and the army's anticommunist senior generals. In this triangular relationship, Sukarno might want to use nuclear weapons as a unifying force. Sukarno might have assumed that nuclear aid from China, a perceived foreign sponsor of the PKI, would enhance the army's prestige. The army would subsequently soften its opposition to the PKI and decrease its pressure on Sukarno, who relied heavily on the PKI for gaining public support.⁴⁶ In 1964 and 1965, China's support for Indonesia's *konfrontasi* had fostered an increase in exchanges between military personnel in the two countries. Furthermore, contrary to the army's later allegations that Beijing supplied weapons to the PKI for the purpose of staging its "betrayal" of the nation, all the arms deals were made on a government-to-government level.⁴⁷ The army's non-hostile attitude toward the PRC can be detected in an intriguing telegram. On October 7, 1965, Chinese Minister of Defense Lin Biao received a message of congratulations on the sixteenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC from his Indonesian counterpart, General Adul Haris Nasution. Nasution was originally a kidnapping target during the September Thirtieth Movement, but survived because his personal aid, Pierre Tandean, was mistaken as him. In addition to goodwill on behalf of the Indonesian Armed Forces, Nasution expressed his hopes for "the further development of the existing good relations between the armed forces of the two countries."⁴⁸ The telegram was published

⁴³ "Peking, Indonesia Urge Spread of Nuclear Arms," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1965: A22.

⁴⁴ "Peking, Indonesia Urge Spread of Nuclear Arms," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1965: A22.

⁴⁵ "Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi's Visit to Indonesia and His Meetings with President Sukarno, and etc.," August 16, 1965, CFMA, 105-01324-03.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia*, 107.

⁴⁷ Zhou, "China and the Thirtieth of September Movement," 38.

⁴⁸ "Dealing with Indonesian General Nasution's Congratulatory Telegram on the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Founding of the PRC," October 7, 1965, CMFA, 117-01220-01.

in the *People's Daily*, an organ of the CCP, on the same day (October 7, 1965), whereas news about G30S was withheld until late October. It was unusual for foreign ministers of defense to send congratulatory telegrams on the PRC's national day. The political upheaval in Indonesia left Beijing confused about Nasution's intentions. It seemed likely that before G30S, the Indonesian army was not staunchly anti-PRC.⁴⁹ The Indonesian army—on board with Sukarno and the PKI—appreciated all forms of aid, including nuclear technology and materials, from communist China. However, contrary to Sukarno's hopes, the army's sheer pragmatism did not translate into less opposition against the communists at home.

Beijing responded positively to the change of attitude among Indonesian political and military elites, although with much caution. Previous scholarship by David Mazingo and J. A. C. Mackie speculated that agreements on nuclear assistance were reached during the visit of a 42-member Indonesian delegation led by Subandrio to China in late January 1965.⁵⁰ Yet, according to the available materials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry archives, the Chinese leaders were more circumspect in their discussions and negotiations with the Indonesian visitors. On January 22, 1965, during a meeting with military officials from the Subandrio-led delegation, Luo Ruiqing, the chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) general staff, who played an important role in China's nuclear weapons program, said: "We have detonated a nuclear bomb. That involved advanced and complicated technology. But detonating a nuclear bomb does not mean that our troops have been equipped with nuclear weapons. Of course, you have not yet requested nuclear weapons from us."⁵¹ Luo seemed to be indicating that China only possessed a basic nuclear capacity and would not initiate overseas exportation of nuclear technology. When meeting with Chen Yi in Jakarta in August 1965, Subandrio formally put forward requests for nuclear assistance. He said: "Indonesia is determined to build its own nuclear weapons. And Indonesia hopes that China will provide assistance in that regard, as well as in the realms of economic development and arms."⁵² After Chen Yi expressed his support and encouragement, Subandrio proposed sending an economic delegation to China for more detailed discussions. During a private meeting between the two leaders a few days later, Chen Yi gave Subandrio more explicit assurance: "We can give you help in this regard. If we do not give you assistance, we are not your true friend. To our knowledge, you have some foundation. Building a nuclear bomb is not an impossible mission, we can totally build it by ourselves. Both parties can discuss this issue secretly."⁵³

Soon after the meetings between Chen Yi and Subandrio in Jakarta, an Atomic Energy Group affiliated with a 54-member Indonesian Economic Delegation arrived in China, on September 16, 1965. The Atomic Energy Group initially consisted of four scientists and engineers—nuclear physicist Djali Ahimsa; chemist Ahmad Amiruddin; a

⁴⁹ Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 170.

⁵⁰ See: Mazingo, *Chinese Policy Towards Indonesia*, 211; and Mackie, *Konfrontasi*, 287–88.

⁵¹ "Minutes of the Meeting between the Chief of the PLA General Staff Luo Ruiqing and Military Officials from the Indonesian Delegation (on Future Visits, the Possible Chinese Aids of Equipment, and Exchange of Intelligence)," January 24, 1965, CFMA, 105-01910-07.

⁵² "Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi's Visit to Indonesia and His Meetings with President Sukarno, and etc."

⁵³ "Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi's Private Meeting with the Indonesian First Deputy Prime Minister Subandrio," August 21, 1965, CFMA, 105-01912-09.

chemical engineer, possibly named “Suroto”; and an electrical engineer, whose name remains unidentifiable. Later, two additional military personnel—Air Commodore Sutopo and a lieutenant colonel, possibly named “Setiawan”—joined the group, as their purpose for visiting China had shifted from a study of China’s rocket engineering to a study of nuclear technology.⁵⁴ Sutopo took charge as the head of this expanded team.

The Chinese government acted with discretion when hosting the Atomic Energy Group. On September 22, Zhou Enlai carefully set the parameters for bilateral nuclear collaborations within the civilian realm. He emphasized that China “still had a long way to go toward complete self-reliance,” and its development of nuclear weapons “remained in the testing phase.” The purpose of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group on this visit was “to explore the possibilities of building basic nuclear projects for peaceful use [in Indonesia], for scientific research, industrial production, education, etc.” Zhou continued to say that “for a wider range of collaboration, a decision needs to be made between the top leaders of our two countries. Once our party and government make the decision, Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi and I will discuss with President Sukarno when we meet at the Second Afro-Asian Conference.”⁵⁵ In Beijing, the day-to-day activities of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group was mostly arranged by a “reception team” from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The leaders of the team, Li Yi and Zhang Wenyu, were both deputy directors of the Nuclear Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.⁵⁶ In the accounts by the team, neither they nor any of the Chinese scientists the Atomic Energy Group interacted with had participated in China’s nuclear weapons program. The reception team repeatedly emphasized to the Indonesian visitors that the Chinese Academy of Sciences only focused on basic research and, as a result, could not take the Indonesian guests to military sites or sensitive facilities directly related to the production of uranium and plutonium. Thus, their visits were confined to educational, research, and industrial units.

Given there has not been any evidence so far to suggest that China ever exported nuclear technology or materials for military use during the Cold War, it seems safe to assume that Beijing was not ready to share its nuclear technology with Indonesia by late September 1965. In the first document below, a telegram from the National Science Committee in Beijing to the Science Committee and Foreign Affairs Office in Shanghai, there was a brief mention of adopting the same standard for hosting the Indonesian

⁵⁴ The names of the Indonesian delegates were transliterated into Chinese characters. However, it is uncertain what the spelling would be in *bahasa Indonesia*. Djali Ahimsa’s, Ahmad Amiruddin’s, and Sutopo’s names are easily identifiable as they are relatively prominent figures. The spellings of “Suroto” and “Setiawan” are my own speculations based on pronunciations. The name of the electrical engineer is *Kunduo’a’qi* in Romanized Chinese, and I am unable to match it to an Indonesian name.

⁵⁵ “Minutes of the Meeting between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and the Indonesian Economic Delegation,” September 22, 1965, CFMA, 105-01321-07. As mentioned earlier, the Second Afro-Asian Conference was originally scheduled to convene in Algeria in June 1965, but was cancelled due to a coup in the host country. China and Indonesia had been planning a make-up conference before the September Thirtieth Movement took place.

⁵⁶ Li Yi (1913–96) served as the deputy director of the Nuclear Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences between 1956 and 1975 and was the chief engineer of China’s first domestically manufactured cyclotron. Zhang Wenyu (1910–92), a renowned physicist, was the deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Sciences’s Nuclear Research Institute at the time of the Indonesian delegation’s visit. In 1973, he became the inaugural director of the academy’s Institute of High Energy Physics. Although he stayed on the research track, his wife, fellow physicist Wang Chengshu, was transferred to clandestine sites in the Gobi Desert to develop strategic weapons. See Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 46.

visitors as the one previously set for a nuclear delegation from the United Arab Republic. This note suggests that Indonesia was not the first or the only Afro-Asian country that came to China to acquire information on its nuclear program. At the same time, China might be formulating a standard protocol for introducing its technological progress to foreign guests with diplomatic courtesy, but under strict security procedures. Indonesia might not be treated in a fundamentally different way from other friendly nations in the Afro-Asian bloc.

In any event, there likely was a gap between Jakarta's expectations and what Beijing was willing to offer. According to Djali Ahimsa, the off-the-record purpose of the trip was to receive substantial assistance from China for Indonesia's nuclear project. Most importantly, the group intended to bring back plutonium from China, which was part of the behind-the-scenes deal between the leaders of the two countries. Djali Ahimsa was confident that, with plutonium from China, Indonesian nuclear scientists would be capable of building an atomic bomb. In addition, the two countries had also tentatively scheduled a visit from Chinese nuclear scientists to Indonesia in 1966 to provide training and technical support. In September 1965, Tsinghua University and the Bandung Institute of Technology were discussing the possibility of collaboration, but no technical staff from China arrived before the Movement took place.⁵⁷ There is no source available from the Chinese side to support Djali Ahimsa's claim of plutonium transfer, and while the agreement on research collaboration cannot be specifically verified, it seems reasonable in the context of existing archival evidence. It is possible that the deal for plutonium transfer was made at a higher level, the records of which remain classified. It is also possible that, as one CIA report suggested, Jakarta misconstrued Beijing's statements of general support as a relatively firm commitment.⁵⁸ The likelihood of the latter scenario is high, given that the Chinese Academy of Science's records describe the purpose of the Atomic Energy Group's visit as a lot less ambitious than procuring plutonium. The group was described as being on a preliminary research trip to obtain basic knowledge of China's nuclear industry in preparation for putting forward more specific requests for aid in the future. The members of the Atomic Energy Group repeatedly complimented China's achievements, condemned the United States, criticized the USSR, and vowed to take "the Chinese road" to development. While trying to please their host, they constantly expressed high hopes for collaboration with China in the military application of atomic energy. Meanwhile, the Chinese reception team seemed always on guard, taking time to deliberate in response to the Indonesians' questions and requests.

On the Indonesian Nuclear Experts' Visit to China,
September 16, 1965, CFMA, 105-01322-06

The Science Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Foreign Affairs
Office of the Shanghai Municipal Government:

⁵⁷ Zhou, "China and the Thirtieth of September Movement," 44.

⁵⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, "Indonesia's Efforts to Acquire an Atomic Bomb."

Four Indonesian nuclear experts will arrive in Beijing on September 16 and will visit Shanghai around the National Day [October 1]. As approved by the premier, we propose the following units for them to visit. Please prepare according to the same standard set for the reception of the nuclear delegation from the United Arab Republic.

1. The Shanghai Nuclear Research Institute under the Chinese Academy of Sciences: the domestically manufactured cyclotron, 200 kWt electrostatic accelerator, radioisotope equipment, and electric technology laboratory.

2. East China Research Institute of Computer Technology: 10,000 instructions per second (KIPS) computers.

3. Institute of Electronic Optics: 200,000x electronic microscopes.

4. Shanghai Machine Tools Plant: refined machine tools and constant temperature workshop.

5. Shanghai Industrial Exhibition Center.

6. Shanghai Electric Machinery Plant.

7. Shanghai Heavy Machinery Plant.

National Science Committee
September 16, 1965

Briefings on Receiving the Atomic Energy Group of the Indonesian Economic Delegation, 21 September–28 September 1965, CFMA, 105-01323-02

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 1, September 18, 1965

The first meeting with the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

This afternoon, all the members of the team at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in charge of receiving the Indonesian delegates (Comrades Li Yi from the Nuclear Research Institute, Zhang Wenyu, Shen Junxiong, and Zhang Tao from the Geology Institute) participated in the first meeting with the Atomic Energy Group of the Indonesian Economic Delegation. The head of the group [Air Commodore Sutopo] said that the main goal of their visit to China this time is to understand the status of China's research on atomic energy. He put forward the following requests:

1. To visit laboratories and to understand the development of relevant research.

2. To visit some chemistry laboratories, including laboratories where analyses on raw materials, such as uranium, take place; to understand the procedure for processing used fuel.

3. To see how atomic energy is used for military purposes.

4. To visit nuclear reactors that are already in use, including those for research purposes, for power supply purposes, and for other purposes.

5. To discuss the possibility of sending staff to conduct research with the Chinese experts. The head of the group asked whether the Chinese Academy of Sciences also took charge of nuclear research for military purposes. Comrade Li Yi said the research institutes within the Chinese Academy of Sciences only carry out basic scientific research. He [Sutopo] asked again: "Is research for military purposes conducted at some other units?" We answered: "It should be understood that way."

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 2, September 20, 1965

The second meeting with the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

Based on information we obtained, we know that the head of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group, Sutopo, visited the Indonesian Embassy [in Beijing] on the morning of September 18. After the first meeting yesterday afternoon, this group returned to their hotel and held an internal meeting for discussion.

This afternoon the second meeting between the two sides took place, the contents of which can be summarized as follows:

1. The head of the group put forward a list of requests, which can be divided into three categories: a) places they want to visit; b) negotiations; c) other.

a) The factories and laboratories that select uranium ore, refine, and process the raw materials into fuel; the factories and laboratories that process burnt materials; all kinds of reactors, especially the ones for power supply purposes; the factories that produce heavy water, graphite, zirconium, and beryllium.

b) In the negotiation, the Indonesian side proposed long-term cooperation between the two countries on atomic energy, including the exchange of intelligence, experts, and materials, as well as the possibility of training Indonesian professionals in China.

c) Protective measures against nuclear radiation.

2. The head of the Atomic Energy Group repeatedly requested a schedule, so that he could report to the head of the Indonesian Economic Delegation. He expressed the intention to stay in China for three weeks. If necessary, the visit could be further extended for a couple of days or a week.

3. The head of the Atomic Energy Group said that the Indonesian leaders had seen a documentary about China's nuclear test. The group requested to see that documentary, too.

4. The group is scheduled to visit the nuclear reactor at Tsinghua University tomorrow ([September] 21).

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 3, September 21, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

1. This morning the reception team accompanied the Atomic Energy Group on a visit to the nuclear reactor, optics laboratories, electronics laboratories, affiliated factories, the computer science research institute, and the program control machine tool at Tsinghua University. Professor Gao Jingde from the Scientific Production Department of Tsinghua University received the guests on behalf of the university.⁵⁹ After Professor Gao briefly introduced the history of the university, the guests showed interest in the Chinese education system, the policy of the Party on education, and the situation of Chinese

⁵⁹ Gao Jingde (1922–96), electrical engineer and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. He was the president of Tsinghua University from 1983 to 1988.

higher education in engineering, including the length of study and status of foreign students. When talking about engineering colleges and institutes, the head of the group [Air Commodore Sutopo] asked if Tsinghua had any department related to aviation and spaceflight.

2. During the car ride, the head of the group disclosed that he had been working for the Indonesian Air Force. He was appointed as head of the Atomic Energy Group by the National Research Department. Setiawan disclosed that he used to work at the Indonesian Embassy in the Soviet Union. The above information proved again that these two people are military officers.

3. Setiawan raised the following questions during conversations with our staff: Why did the People's Liberation Army remove collar insignias and badges? What is the difference between the people's commune in China and the collective farms in the Soviet Union? He also expressed a wish to visit the homes of his acquaintances, to talk to ordinary people and to get to know their living standards and lifestyles. He asked whether this was permissible. Our answer was "yes." Setiawan said: "I was never allowed to do this during my two-year stay in the Soviet Union, which was very bad." He also asked: "Do you think peaceful coexistence is the main reason for the Soviet Union to side with the United States?" He also asked his interpreter whether the Chinese Academy of Sciences produces atomic bombs. Our answer was: "The institutes at the Chinese Academy of Sciences conduct basic scientific research; they do not produce atomic bombs."

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 4, September 23, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

1. Yesterday ([September] 22) the Atomic Energy Group visited the Departments of Applied and Theoretical Physics, Chemistry, and Oriental Languages at Peking University. The vice president of the University, Huang Yiran, received the guests.⁶⁰ In his brief introduction of the history of Peking University, Vice President Huang highlighted the university's revolutionary tradition and principle of self-reliance. In the morning, the guests visited the laboratories for nuclear physics, electronics, and radiation chemistry. In the afternoon, they visited the laboratories for research on general physics, intermediate physics, solid-state physics, semiconductors, colloid chemistry, organic extraction, and heavy water analysis. They also visited the library of the Department of Oriental Languages.

2. The foreign guests responded very positively. Amiruddin said: "You have done a great job with both teaching and research. In particular, you have built your own equipment and nurtured young people." After visiting the heavy water analysis laboratory, the foreign guests wanted to obtain information about the methods used in the process. Peking University agreed to offer it. The head of the group also raised the possibility of sending Indonesian exchange students with Professor Zhang Longxiang.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Huang Yiran (1908–79), communist party cadre and translator of *And Quiet Flows the Don*, an epic novel by Russian writer Mikhail Alexandrovich Sholokhov.

⁶¹ Zhang Longxiang (1916–96), biochemist who was the president of Peking University from 1981 to 1984.

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 6, September 25, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

1. Visit to the First Institute of Atomic Energy Research

On September 24, the Atomic Energy Group visited the First Institute of Atomic Energy Research. Deputy director of the institute, Zhang Wenyu, accompanied the group for a visit to the electrostatic nuclear accelerator, the electron linear accelerator, atomic-beam instruments, research laboratory on nuclear emulsion, as well as the library and factory attached to the institute.

Djali Ahimsa requested information on the most recent developments in our MRI studies, and we plan to give him the research papers presented at the science conference last year in Beijing.

2. The group members wanted to find out the structure of atomic-energy-related organizations in China. After visiting the First Institute of Atomic Energy Research, the foreign guests asked whether there was a special committee for the management of atomic energy in China. They also asked about the affiliation of the atomic energy institute, the relations between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the National Science Committee, about whether the Ministry of Defense has its own research institute on atomic energy, and about the relations between the Ministry of Defense and the First Institute of Atomic Energy Research.

3. Upon the request of the Atomic Energy Group, the reception team screened a documentary entitled "The Successful Detonation of Our Country's First Atomic Bomb." Suroto said that if Indonesia had its own atomic bomb, the American imperialists wouldn't dare to invade. He also said that they were not willing to accept US aid, which was always conditional. The United States always wanted to control other countries. He expressed that the United States was the common enemy of our two countries and the common enemy of the peoples all around the world.

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 7, September 25, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

1. The Indonesian Atomic Energy Group visited the Second Institute of Atomic Energy Research. From 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., the vice chief of the institute, Li Yi, briefly introduced the history of our country's foundational science research on atomic energy and provided an overview of the institute. Later the group visited the heavy water reactor built with Soviet aid, the cyclotron, the proton electrostatic accelerator, the radioisotope equipment, nuclear emulsion production facilities, and nuclear electronic instruments invented and produced by the researchers themselves at the institute.

2. The foreign guests were satisfied with the visit. The head of the group, Sutopo, said: "We have seen all the things we hoped to see." They praised the work accomplished by the Chinese researchers and expressed their admiration for it. They said: "China has accomplished a lot on the self-reliant path of development. After we return to Indonesia, we will report to the Indonesian scientists and people on China's accomplishments. We need to learn from China's experience. As long as one has the resolution to develop independently, nothing is impossible. [...] We used to know very little about nuclear technology in China. After visiting the institute today, we came to know

that basic research on nuclear energy in China is among the most advanced in the world. [...] We must learn from the experience of our Chinese brothers; we must take the Chinese road.”

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 8, September 26, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

Today the whole group toured the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs. Comrades Zhang Wenyu and Shen Junxiong accompanied the guests and exchanged ideas with them on professional matters.

The head of the group, Sutopo, said Indonesia wanted to further its research but did not have sufficient funds. The existing financial resources were scattered here and there, achieving nothing in the end. Comrade Zhang Wenyu told him that we had the same experience in the past. The Party told us that we should set priorities for ourselves and decide what is worth pursuing. Sutopo showed great interest when hearing this. In addition, the group seemed to have deeper thoughts on the relationship between basic industry and scientific research after visiting the nuclear institutes. Some said: “The basic industry in Indonesia is backwards and weak. Therefore, it is difficult to improve the level of our scientific research.”

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 9, September 29, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

Our reception team accompanied the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group for a visit to the Geology Institute (received by director Hou Defeng⁶²) on the afternoon of September 27, and the Physics Institute (received by director Shi Ruwei⁶³) on the morning of September 28.

National Science Committee, Briefings on Receiving Foreign Guests,
No. 10, September 29, 1965

Briefing on the visit of the Atomic Energy Group of the
Indonesian Economic Delegation

Today at 9:00 a.m. we had a fourth meeting with the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group and shared our experiences with scientific research. The Indonesian delegates first discussed the condition of nuclear research institutions in Indonesia, the process of purchasing and installing a 250 kWt reactor from the United States despite technical difficulties, and the progress of their research in physics and chemistry so far. The

⁶² Hou Defeng (1900–80), renowned geologist and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In the 1960s, he participated in surveys on uranium mines and on nuclear test venues in Xinjiang.

⁶³ Shi Ruwei (1901–83), renowned physicist, specialist on magnetism, and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

information they provided confirmed what we had known beforehand. We shared our views on and experiences with research planning, approval procedures, academic exchanges and academic democracy, the relationship between basic research and cutting-edge science, and the method of training research personnel through practice.

The head of the group, Sutopo, said: "Our two countries should join hands in opposing American imperialism. All science serves political purposes. Nuclear research was only for peaceful purposes in the past [in Indonesia]. A few months ago, we were tasked to study the military use of nuclear energy. We hope to collaborate with China on the military application of nuclear energy."

Information on the Atomic Energy Group under the Indonesian Economic Delegation

Following the arrangement by the Foreign Affairs Office, the premier will meet separately with the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group at 4:00 p.m. on October 1. The details are as follows:

1. The members of the group

Altogether six people:

Sutopo (head of the group, high-ranking official in the National Research Department)

Djali Ahimsa (Physical Engineer)

Ahmad Amiruddin (Ph.D. in Chemistry)

Suroto (Chemical Engineer)

Kunduo'a'qi (Electrical Engineer)

Setiawan (Official from the National Research Department)

We know from materials obtained earlier that originally there were only four people in the group. The two extra members were said to be on a trip to study and observe rockets in China. But they did not put forward any request related to rockets after their arrival in China. According to the list of names provided by the Economic Delegation, Sutopo is an air commodore and Setiawan is a lieutenant colonel. During our conversations, Sutopo revealed that he is working for the air force while Setiawan said he worked in the Indonesian Embassy in the Soviet Union for two years.

2. The purpose of their visit and their requests

On September 20 they put forward the following list of destinations they would like to visit during their stay:

1) The factories and laboratories that select uranium ore and refine and process the raw materials into fuel;

2) The factories and laboratories that process burnt materials and recycle used uranium and plutonium;

3) All kinds of reactors, especially plutonium reactors;

4) The factories that produce heavy water, graphite, zirconium, and beryllium.

Based on the requests above and the content of our discussions, [we think] the purpose of their visit to China is to understand the condition of our country's nuclear industry, the administrative structure of nuclear energy research and of production entities for military use, and the status and organization of our nuclear research. All this information would prepare them to formulate more specific requests in the future.

Our reception team repeatedly emphasized that the Chinese Academy of Sciences only conducts basic research. The head of the Indonesian Economic Delegation conveyed the intentions of our government to the head of the Atomic Energy Group. Therefore, when we discussed the schedule for their stay on September 23, we did not include any item directly related to the production of uranium or plutonium and the head of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group seemed satisfied. In Beijing, the main destinations were units of education and research; in Shanghai, they will continue to visit research and education organizations, as well as industrial sites.

3. Activities

Visit to Tsinghua and Peking Universities, Institute of Atomic Energy Research (First and Second), the Geology Institute, and the Physics Institute.

4. Reactions of the Foreign Guests

The reaction was good overall. [The foreign guests] expressed satisfaction and admiration [for our country] during visits and discussions. [The foreign guests] gradually understood the means to conduct research and training through self-reliance. The head of the group, Sutopo, said: "The Chinese example shows that as long as one has the resolution to develop independently, nothing is impossible," and "we must learn from the experience of China; we must take the Chinese road." They also seemed to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between basic industry and scientific research.

When visiting the Institute of Atomic Energy Research and the Geology Institute, they expressed the desire to collaborate but did not put forward a concrete proposal.

They tried to find out about the organizational structure of our country's nuclear industry. They had the following questions: Is there a committee for the management of atomic energy? Which organization oversees the Institute of Atomic Energy Research? What is the relationship between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the National Science Committee? Does the Ministry of Defense have its own research institute on atomic energy? Besides the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is there any other organization that reviews the proposals for reactors drafted by the Institute of Atomic Energy Research? Which department is in charge of the geological survey of plutonium? Does the Chinese Academy of Sciences make nuclear bombs?

5. Requests [the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group] might put forward during their meeting with the premier

- 1) A request for more information on the organizational structure of our nuclear industry;
- 2) A request to visit facilities related to nuclear industry;
- 3) A request for help training personnel and for research equipment.

The reception team of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group
Chinese Academy of Sciences
September 29, 1965

After extensive interactions with the Chinese nuclear-science community, the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group was scheduled to attend Chinese National Day Celebrations on October 1, 1965. On the evening before the commemoration ceremonies took place, the visitors were received by top Chinese leaders, together with other Indonesian dignitaries invited by the Chinese government for this special occasion. The development of nuclear weapons in Indonesia and in the broader Third World was an important topic in their ensuing conversations. Yet less than twenty-four hours later, the

shocking news of the September Thirtieth Movement reached Beijing. The third and final set of material captures this fateful meeting.

DOCUMENT SELECTION 3

Mao's Mention of the Nuclear Bomb to Indonesian Visitors before G30S

In October 1964, China and Indonesia achieved historic breakthroughs in their respective nuclear development programs one day apart from each other. In 1965, Indonesia's September Thirtieth Movement occurred at the same time as the PRC's National Day celebrations (October 1). At the time of the Movement, approximately 4,500 Indonesians were visiting China as part of political, economic, military, and cultural delegations dispatched by the Indonesian government as well as by the PKI and affiliated organizations. At the national banquet in Beijing on the evening of September 30, 1965, the Indonesians made up the largest percentage of foreign guests.⁶⁴ This striking synchrony has drawn attention from scholars searching for clues about China's role in the Movement. It becomes more perplexing when we take into account the conversation below between Mao Zedong and Chairul Saleh, cabinet minister and speaker of the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly, who led a 45-member governmental delegation to China. Also present at the meeting were Ali Sastroamidjojo, the Chairman of the PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia, the Indonesian National Party) and former prime minister, as well as delegates from the Indonesian National Military Academy and Air Force Academy. On the Chinese side, President Liu Shaoqi, Premier Zhou Enlai, the president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Guo Moruo, and PLA Marshal Ye Jianying attended the meeting. During this discussion, which took place a few hours before the Movement's attempted coup, Mao openly espoused the idea of a nuclearized Indonesia. Given Mao's grandiose and erratic personal style, it is unclear what exactly he meant and why he brought up such a sensitive topic at such a sensitive time.

It is likely that Mao's remarks expressed his confidence in the development of a leftist government inside Indonesia and the further convergence of the two countries' goals in foreign policy. As the conversation started with Mao's philosophical contemplation of the issues of life and death and physical and spiritual existence, it is reasonable to understand "the nuclear bomb" in this context as a symbol for militant confrontation against both superpowers, especially since Mao brought up the issue of the nuclear bomb when talking about the Western powers' and Soviet Union's erroneous assumption that the Asians were incapable of mastering high-end technology. There is ambiguity about the extent of Mao's "unconditional" support to Indonesia. In the context of the conversation, Mao's offer could be interpreted either narrowly, as referring solely to the steel industry, or broadly, as an offer that would include nuclear assistance. It is more likely that Mao promised a continuation of general Chinese economic aid to Indonesia, which did not necessarily include nuclear technology. Consistent with the cautious tone adopted by other Chinese leaders, Mao emphasized that China's nuclear program was "currently at the beginning stage." He further urged

⁶⁴ "Minutes of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's First Meeting with the Delegation of the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly (on the Domestic Situation in Indonesia and the Afro-Asian Conference)," September 30, 1965, CFMA, 105-01917-03.

the Indonesian leaders to be patient and to concentrate their efforts on agriculture and light industry, with the possible implementation of five-year plans. Instead of initiating a plan for concrete aid of nuclear technology and materials, Mao was probably using the nuclear bomb as a carrot to entice Indonesia to join China in its fierce struggle against imperialism in all forms. Therefore, Mao's mention of the nuclear bomb shortly before the Movement does not suffice as evidence for his role as "the architect of the coup," as the Indonesian Army later deemed him. Existing evidence demonstrates that a clandestine group within the PKI independently made the plan for G30S, which was then shared by Aidit with the top Chinese leaders in early August 1965 and was carried out at a time that took Beijing by surprise.⁶⁵

The Movement ended any further consideration of an Indonesian atomic bomb or Sino-Indonesian collaboration in the nuclear field. For Djali Ahimsa from the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group, news of the Movement came when he was watching a military parade on Tian'anmen Square in celebration of the PRC's National Day on the morning of October 1, 1965. An unknown Iraqi diplomat, noticing Djali's traditional Indonesian cap, *songkok*, informed him of "a coup in Indonesia." Djali Ahimsa returned immediately to his hotel room and turned on the radio. Broadcasts from Radio Australia confirmed that a group calling itself the September Thirtieth Movement had murdered six top generals and seized the national radio station in Jakarta.⁶⁶ Djali, together with the rest of the Atomic Energy Group, was originally scheduled to have a more extensive discussion on potential Chinese nuclear assistance to Indonesia with Zhou Enlai the next day.⁶⁷ However, due to the political changes in Indonesia, the official meeting was relocated to Zhou Enlai's private residence inside the Forbidden City. Zhou told the group members to wait and see what developed in their country in the wake of the Movement. When Djali Ahimsa asked about the possibility of visiting a uranium enrichment plant in Chengdu in southwest China, Zhou said he would try to make the arrangements, but there was no follow-up on this request.⁶⁸ On October 6, Djali Ahimsa returned to Indonesia on the same flight as Sutopo, the head of the Atomic Energy Group. Despite a G30S-related shortage of transportation that affected thousands of travelers, Djali and Sutopo belonged to a small number of privileged high-ranking officials who managed to obtain seats on an airplane sent by the Indonesian Air Force from Jakarta's Halim Airbase to Beijing. According to Djali, all of the passengers wore thick jackets inside the cabin because the airplane's heating system broke down. Unsure of what was waiting for them back in Indonesia, some returning delegates even brought toy rifles from Beijing, hoping that they would provide protection.⁶⁹

As the political situation in Indonesia stabilized and Suharto cemented his hold on power, the country halted any efforts toward a military nuclear program and returned to its previous trajectory of civilian use of atomic energy. In 1970, Indonesia signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and ratified it in 1979. The

⁶⁵ See: John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); and Zhou, "China and the Thirtieth of September Movement," 51–59.

⁶⁶ Author's interview with Djali Ahimsa, Jakarta, April 18, 2013.

⁶⁷ "Minutes of the Meeting between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and the Indonesian Economic Delegation."

⁶⁸ Interview with Djali Ahimsa.

⁶⁹ Interview with Djali Ahimsa.

Indonesian government agreed to international safeguards on nuclear materials while BATAN continued to conduct research on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and successfully added two research reactors in Yogyakarta and Serpong as well as a cobalt radiator in Pasar Jumat.⁷⁰ Although many other visitors to China were persecuted for their alleged association with communism, the three members of the Indonesian Atomic Energy Group with verified identities, Sutopo, Djali Ahimsa, and Ahmad Amiruddin, not only remained unscathed through the 1965–66 regime change, but rose to prominence under Suharto's New Order. Chairul Saleh, Mao's main interlocutor in the document below, was detained by the Suharto regime without judicial process and died in 1967 as a political prisoner.⁷¹ In contrast, Air Commodore Sutopo was appointed by Suharto as the minister of communication in July 1966.⁷² Djali Ahimsa was Indonesia's representative at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Geneva between 1968 and 1983. He later returned to Indonesia to lead BATAN as its director general. Ahmad Amiruddin was the director of a BATAN Research Center at Pasar Djumat between 1966 and 1970, and later entered politics as the governor of South Sulawesi and vice chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly.⁷³

Minutes of Chairman Mao Zedong and President Liu Shaoqi's Meeting with the
Indonesian Delegation, September 30, 1965, CFMA, 105-01917-02

Chairul Saleh: President Sukarno wishes Chairman Mao good health forever; he wishes that you would lead not only China but also all the emerging anti-imperialist forces.

Chairman Mao: I am dying. Some people hope that I will die soon. Now many people say that Mao Zedong's health is collapsing, he cannot work well or speak clearly. Other people say that he can still speak clearly but cannot walk well. I think there is some truth in it.

Chairul Saleh: We are not included in the type of people the Chairman just mentioned.

Chairman Mao: That's good. According to the theory of dialectics, it is not logical to say that I will go on living for a very long period of time. The general assumption of formal logic is that all human beings live and die. The particular assumption is that a certain person, for example Zhang San,⁷⁴ is human and therefore he will ultimately die.

Chairul Saleh: That is inevitable.

Chairman Mao: Because the general assumption has a history of hundreds of thousands of years, it is evident that all ordinary human beings must die eventually.

⁷⁰ See: Richard Dean Buns and Hon. Phillip E. Coyle III, *The Challenge of Nuclear Non-Proliferation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 167; and Sulfikar Amir, "Nuclear Revival in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Asian Survey* 50, 2: 272.

⁷¹ "Chairul Saleh Dies," *The Straits Times*, February 9, 1967: 1.

⁷² Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "The New Indonesian Cabinet," July 30, 1966, CIA-RDP79T00827A000400020005-7, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00827A000400020005-7.pdf>, accessed January 20, 2018.

⁷³ See: A. Amiruddin, "Pusat Penelitian Pasar Djumat Badan Tenaga Atom Nasional," in Badan Tenaga Atom Nasional, *Sepuluh Tahun Tenaga Atom di Indonesia*, 7.1–7.6; and "Mantan Gubernur Sulsel Ahmad Amiruddin tutup usia," *Antara News*, March 24, 2014, <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/425386/mantan-gubernur-sulsel-ahmad-amiruddin-tutup-usia>

⁷⁴ Chinese name for an unspecified person, equivalent to "John Doe" in English.

Ali Sastroamidjojo: But the ideal of the human being never dies.

Chairman Mao: That's right. Now the population of the world has grown again. It used to be 2.7 billion, now it is 3.2 billion. The population of Indonesia has also grown.

Chairul Saleh: Indonesia's population at present has surpassed a hundred million.

Chairman Mao: Yes, your land can feed a larger population than that of the United States or the Soviet Union. There are only a few populous countries in the world: Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Japan, China—there are only five altogether in Asia. In the Americas, only the United States has a population of more than 170 million. I heard there has been a small growth recently, which made it 180 million. In Europe, there is only one [populous] country, the Soviet Union. It has a population of 220 million. There are all together seven populous countries in the whole world: one in the Americas, one in Europe, five in Asia. It is wrong to assume that Asians are incapable. More people means a need for more food, more clothes, and, since the world is not peaceful now, so we need military forces and, moreover, the atomic bomb. Do you want to build atomic bomb?

Chairul Saleh: We would love to.

Chairman Mao: You should build one.

Chairul Saleh: We do not agree that nuclear weaponry should be dominated by a few big powers.

Chairman Mao: That's right. Two big countries in the world want to monopolize nuclear power, but we won't listen to them. Yet we have created our own. However, we are currently at the beginning stage. The Americans sent out a message threatening that they will blow up our nuclear reactors. That will be the end of the world. Some people say, reactors can be blown up, but ideals cannot be blown up. Even if the first batch of nuclear reactors were blown up, people with ideals could build a second batch.

Chairul Saleh: Yes, new ones could be built.

Chairman Mao: It was the Secretary of Defense of the United States who said that.

Chairul Saleh: Modern technology can no longer be monopolized by imperialists.

Chairman Mao: Yes, there should be no monopoly. All [technologies] should be shared.

Chairul Saleh: Therefore, we are very happy. Chairman Mao just said that China was only at the beginning stage of nuclear technology development. But for us, China creating its own atomic bomb is an event with great significance. We are greatly encouraged, both spiritually and materially, by this event. It will further encourage all the New Emerging Forces to build a new world.

Chairman Mao: You have to build up your agriculture and light industry first. And you need to find the raw materials to build an atomic bomb. Are there any in your country?

Chairul Saleh: I believe there are. Our current geographical survey has shown some positive signs. Now we are vigorously conducting surveys and making use of our natural resources.

Chairman Mao: Do you have either iron mines or coal mines? The resources in your country are richer than those of my country. You have a huge amount of petroleum and rubber, both of which are rare in the world.

Chairul Saleh: That is true. Therefore, we sent an economic delegation to China to learn from China and foster closer collaboration between the two countries. Developing the iron industry and heavy industry are the most important tasks for Indonesia. We don't have large-scale ironmaking and steelmaking industries. In that regard, we would be glad to build up these industries as soon as possible, if China is willing to offer us help.

Chairman Mao: This is totally workable. We surely can help you unconditionally.

Chairul Saleh: Thank you very much.

Chairman Mao: Producing coke fuel is not that difficult either.

Chairul Saleh: We have all kinds of resources for developing the steel industry. There are iron mines in Indonesia, as well as tin, nickel, and alumina mines with significant outputs. We can exchange alumina with China. Alumina can be used to build up the aluminum and aircraft industries. We are equipped with very good resources in this regard, and we have a great amount of reserves. Currently, Indonesia can only produce some raw materials. But we do not have industries that can refine these materials. Therefore, we urgently need to build some industries for processing and refining them.

Chairman Mao: You can get started with a five-year plan, which should include training of personnel for science and technology research and a geographical survey. No need to rush; just take one step at a time. We suffered because we were impatient in the early years. Now, our situation has improved. But we have made many mistakes and many shortcomings remain. It is wrong for you to assume that China is good at everything. That is not true.

Chairul Saleh: Yes. Learning from our friends' experience is very important. It itself is science.

Chairman Mao: Yes, we need to be honest and truthful.

Chairul Saleh: Yes. However, this does not undermine our respect and high regard for the great accomplishments China has achieved in such a short period of time.

Chairman Mao: All in all, the situation has somewhat improved when compared with Old China. But China is still backwards when compared with the economically advanced countries in the world. The United States looks down on us. Great Britain looks down on us. France, West Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union—all these countries look down on us. Their disdain can be justified because they have their own advanced technology. For example, the United States and the Soviet Union have plenty of atomic bombs. If they decided to drop these bombs, there would be a high level of casualties. Therefore, they bully us, and they bully you.

Chairul Saleh: Maybe they are more advanced than us in technological development. But ideologically and aspirationally, they are not necessarily more advanced than us.

Chairman Mao: Yes. That is well said. Their ideals are US imperialism and Soviet revisionism. We are against imperialism.

Chairul Saleh: For Indonesia, anti-imperialism is not only a principle, but also something everyone can feel in daily life. It is the same for all developing countries. Anti-imperialism is not just a theoretical stance, but also their everyday life because imperialism puts pressure on the people.

Chairman Mao: Yes, they oppress us, and we oppose them. Take the example of Japan. Japan used to be a big imperialist country, wasn't it? It "educated" you, "educated" us, and "educated" many other countries! Now Japan wants to revive imperialism. It wants to target us. We also need to get prepared to oppose with their ambitions! Japan needs your petroleum, rubber, and tin!

Third World Solidarity in the Atomic Age

China's 1964 nuclear explosion changed international politics during the Cold War in complex ways. While some world leaders declared it a danger to world peace,

others—mostly from newly independent countries—derived satisfaction from the fact that a member of the Third World could independently acquire the technology to build the world's most advanced weapon. One of the latter leaders was Indonesian President Sukarno. Inspired by China's nuclear prowess, he attempted to direct Indonesia's nuclear program toward military use. Sukarno's openly expressed nuclear ambition sent a shock wave through the world in 1964 and 1965, and created longstanding mysteries about Chinese nuclear exports. Through unpacking three sets of Chinese archival materials, this article unveils the details of visits to PRC nuclear research sites by Indonesian research and military personnel and the nature of bilateral political and academic discussions on nuclear weapons. It argues that, while there was no movement of nuclear fuel or technology across the borders of the two countries, Sino-Indonesian exchanges still reveal the fluidity of individual political players' stances, the complexity of bilateral relations, and the paradoxical quality of Third World solidarity in the atomic age. Like a magnet, the nuclear bomb attracted Indonesian elites across the political spectrum to the PRC, including left-leaning politicians, such as Sukarno and Subandrio, as well as anticommunists or neutralists, such as army general Nasution and nuclear scientists whose careers later flourished under Suharto. Strikingly different from Indonesian politicians who were labeled as "pro-China," many of the military and technical experts who approached Beijing for nuclear aid peacefully transitioned into the Suharto era and achieved personal success. While Mao was trying to lure Indonesia with the idea of a nuclear bomb without offering actual support for its construction, these Indonesian professionals may have been merely interested in obtaining nuclear fuel and technical know-how despite their constant expressions of admiration for the People's Republic's political ideology and developmental model. At the same time, notwithstanding its appreciation for Indonesia's cooperation in exchange for nuclear aid, Beijing distrusted Indonesia's "bourgeois nationalist" leaders. Fissures between the two countries were deeply entrenched even when they shared substantial mutual interests in the short term. But these schisms sometimes appeared to be invisible to the two superpowers, which at the time were anxious about reining in potential proliferators in the Third World, particularly the rise of new nuclear powers in the Asia-Pacific against the backdrop of the conflict in Vietnam. A China-assisted nuclear explosion in Indonesia would represent an extreme form of intra-Third-World collaboration, which was at the same time an outgrowth of the bonds that formed at the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference and a betrayal of the Bandung spirit of nonaggression and nonviolence. China's and Indonesia's turn toward nuclear weapons shook the moral foundation of Bandung, when the Third World stood in opposition to the radioactive Cold War.