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Muslim Radicalism: The Anti-Communist Front

Hotel Simpang
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Masjumi Party is the largest Indonesian political organization. Its leaders have made the unbelievable claim of twenty-five million members. Even if its effective voting strength in the coming election proves to be no more than a third of that figure, it is nonetheless true that the Masjumi is the only Indonesian party with organized and considerable strength in villages and towns of all the provinces.

During the first five years of Indonesian statehood, the Masjumi has followed a policy of conservatism on nearly all foreign and domestic issues. It has supported neutralist foreign policy, but has recognized the need for large-scale foreign capital investment in Indonesia. It has supported Indonesia's claim to Irian, but has labeled Nationalist Party attitudes on that area as emotional and unrealistic. It opposed the opening of an embassy in Moscow, but did not make the issue a matter of principle. Its economic development policy is semisocialistic, but it would allow considerable room for private enterprise in the national economy. As a party, it has begun to study the possibilities of establishing a Muslim State in Indonesia, but it has not dogmatically demanded that state law be Muslim law. In the past five years, it has shown itself to be a party of few slogans, guided by reserved confidence and a pragmatic attitude.

Although it is greatly underrepresented in the present Provisional Parliament, the Masjumi has engineered its moderate policy with great effect. In the nervous world of Indonesian politics, the Masjumi has been a nearly indispensable stabilizing factor.

The greatness of Masjumi chairman Mohammad Natsir has been his ability to unite the Masjumi in support of a middle-of-the-road program, despite the extreme and radical outlook of large segments of the party membership. To gauge Natsir's effectiveness, we have only to compare the Masjumi's tentative policy on the creation of a Muslim State with the extreme and impatient views so common among Masjumi members in such places as Langkat, Palembang, or Bantam, who propose a Muslim State before they

understand what they mean by the phrase. Natsir's one conspicuous failure has been in Atjeh, where Masjumi leader Daud Beureueh went into revolt when his disillusionment with the central government outgrew his capacity for patience.

But on the whole Natsir has been remarkably successful in promoting reasonableness and optimism in his party ranks. I have no doubt that the three extremist Muslim rebellions in East Priangan, Atjeh, and South Sulawesi would have spread to other regions were it not for Natsir's persuasiveness and spiritual influence. On the subject of rebellion and politics by force, Natsir is adamant: the Masjumi Party must follow a policy of legality and reason; if it does not, the Masjumi will fail in its mission of interpreting and implementing the true spirit of Muslim legal and political principles.

If we admit the importance of the Masjumi Party and the stabilizing effect of its moderate policy, we must not overlook the rise of an organized faction in the Masjumi which holds comparatively radical views on important issues.

The leader of the faction is Isa Anshary, the obstreperous Masjumi provincial chairman in West Java. His vehicle is the Anti-Communist Front, which was launched in September 1954 and has won the support of important Masjumi leaders in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi.

Although Anshary has not spoken out publicly against his party leaders, his own views are clearly at odds with those of Natsir. The apparent conflict has been carefully hidden and suppressed, but it comes to the surface on the issue of communism.

Natsir is clearly a foe of communism, but his policy has been to soft-pedal anticommunism as a dangerous and disruptive issue. In contrast, Isa Anshary is bending every effort to expand and utilize the issue of anticommunism as a major political weapon.

Anshary's extremism would hardly constitute a threat to Masjumi moderates if national conditions in Indonesia did not so obviously encourage the growth of extremism of all sorts.

As the general election campaign works up momentum, the political atmosphere in Indonesia has become increasingly uneasy. A deteriorating economic situation has contributed to the growth of tension. The present balance of political power seems more and more tentative as disillusionment and despair roll in a wave over the country. For five years Indonesia has worked and worried her way through an unremitting series of crises, but continued success is by no means assured. In this situation, it would be folly to ignore the rise of any political force which could serve as a new focus of loyalties or act as a trigger to upset the present precarious political balance. In this one respect, Muslim extremism is certainly a greater threat than communism.

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Masjumi members of the moderate Natsir group are far from "soft" in their thinking about Indonesian communism. If they tend to oppose Anshary's methods as dangerous and disruptive, it does not mean they regard communism's growth passively. In fighting communism, they give priority to the establishment of an integrated Masjumi organization and the development of a practical party program--in short, they emphasize positive goals and distrust the idea of a passionate, militant crusade. Such an attitude seems to be based on strong confidence rather than faint-heartedness. The difference of opinion within the Masjumi Party does not concern the question of "whether to fight communism" but of "how to fight communism."

Readers of these letters may remember Isa Anshary for his fierce criticism of President Sukarno in 1953, when Sukarno spoke out against the idea of a Muslim State in Indonesia. Since his rise to national prominence at that time, Isa Anshary has been unconstrained and sometimes violent in abusing his political foes. It is in keeping with the growing extremism of Indonesian politics that Anshary's radicalism has now taken an organizational form in the Anti-Communist Front.

In a recent interview with Isa Anshary at Masjumi headquarters in Bandung, West Java, I learned that the present Anti-Communist Front is the outgrowth of a 1952 plan to create a "Front for God and Democracy" (Front Ketuhanan dan Demokrasi). According to Anshary, he felt that the alarming growth of Indonesian communism since that time demanded a "firmer" anticommunist stand, hence the adoption of the title "Anti-Communist Front."

Anshary is a very short man, stocky and hunched in the shoulders. In dress, he is the opposite of the Djakarta cosmopolite: conservative plaid sarong, tight jacket, white shirt with no tie (many Muslims here see the tie as a symbol of the cross), and black fez. He is tough, thick-skinned, and single-minded. He possesses immense nervous vitality which he pours wholeheartedly into a cause: the defeat of communism in Indonesia. He clearly and vigorously supports a positive change in government through the establishment of a Muslim State. Anshary's energy is seen in his working schedule: chairmanship of the Masjumi in West Java, establishment of the Anti-Communist Front, editorship of a Muslim magazine (Aliran Islam), frequent press conferences, a heavy speaking schedule, and authorship of several books on politics and Muslim affairs.

Anshary is also called a fanatic, and the term seemed apt to me as I watched him expound his beliefs. His scowl is angry and his gaze is glaring and convinced. A recent illness has left his eyes red and glazed, adding to his look of passionate determination. He is a Muslim scholar of considerable learning, but his scholarship is primarily a political weapon. He is capable of causing great discomfort to those he chooses to support. Isa Anshary has been called communism's most dangerous foe in Indonesia, but he may be its unwitting ally, for his Anti-Communist

Front could conceivably bring on the kind of chaos which would nourish and benefit Indonesian communism.

I had entered Anshary's office carrying a brief case, perhaps a mistake in view of President Sukarno's recent attack on foreigners who bribe Indonesian opposition leaders. I was greeted by Anshary and Rusjad Nurdin, assistant chairman of the Anti-Communist Front, with all the easy cordiality which Americans can expect from Indonesian Muslim leaders. As we exchanged greetings, I had the feeling that I was being thrust into the role of "fellow anticommunist." Anshary asked me my opinion of a New York anticommunist organization which had contacted him shortly after the Anti-Communist Front was set up. I hadn't heard of it. He told me about his difficulties in finding capital to publish an anticommunist magazine. I had no helpful suggestions to give, so we settled down to the interview.

Anshary first dug into his well-worn brief case and handed me three mimeographed sheets. One was a sketchy announcement of the aims and composition of the Anti-Communist Front. The other two were copies of fatwa (Muslim legal instructions) on communism issued by the ulama (religious scholars) of the West Java branch of the Masjumi Party and the Islamic Union (Persatuan Islam). I read through the materials while Anshary talked with Rusjad Nurdin about arrangements for their trip that afternoon to attend the annual Masjumi Party Congress in East Java.

When I had finished reading, I asked Anshary to elaborate on his reasons for establishing the Anti-Communist Front.

He answered that the obvious and pressing reason was the recent growth of communism in Indonesia. "The PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) has grown strong in the last few years for two reasons. First is the protection it has received from the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet. You may now say that the PKI holds a 'whip-position' in parliament, for its support is indispensable to the cabinet. The second reason is the opening of Moscow and Peking embassies in Djakarta, which give advice and support to the PKI."

Because the PKI has flourished under the Ali Cabinet, Anshary felt that the projected "Front for God and Democracy" should be called instead the "Anti-Communist Front." It is imperative, he felt, that the thousands of good Muslims who support the communists be given correct information about the nature of communism. If they are not, the PKI will continue to gain strength. As the PKI grows, he saw its policy becoming more and more "brutal" and "rude." As an example of its rudeness, Anshary pointed out the posting of tens of thousands of communist election posters on the property of known anticommunists. If the signs are ripped down, they appear again the next day.

The PKI has won support through slogans which appeal to

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the "stomach." Anshary feels that the greater part of this support can be weaned away by "a spiritual movement" which will show that when communists talk about food, they are really trying to deceive Indonesians into overlooking the basic atheism of communist beliefs.

Anshary sees some signs that the PKI has begun to lose strength in certain fields. He mentioned specifically the inroads made on SOBSI (the communist-controlled labor federation) by rival unions, among them being the Indonesian Islamic Federation of Labor. He also felt that the PKI has lost support in several regions for its attacks on favorite regional leaders, such as Vice-President Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir of West Sumatra.

To illustrate the working methods of the Anti-Communist Front, Anshary described the success of his recent speaking and organizing trip in North Sumatra. In Medan, a branch of the Anti-Communist Front had been established under the leadership of the articulate Muslim theologian, Ghazali Hasan (see my letter on the Medan Ulama Conference), and a series of anticommunist meetings were held in the surrounding area. Anshary claimed that "hundreds" of PKI members had left the communist camp as a result of his short speaking tour in North Sumatra. He saw further evidence of his success in the heated PKI reaction to the Anti-Communist Front, especially in the torrent of insults which North Sumatran communists have poured on anticommunist Muslim leaders.

Since Anshary's conversation had turned almost completely to politics, I asked him about the connection between the Anti-Communist Front and the Masjumi Party. I had been told by a Masjumi spokesman in Djakarta that there was no organizational link between the two organizations. Yet I was now sitting in the Masjumi Party office in Bandung, speaking with the two highest Masjumi officials in the province, and holding in my hand the fatwa of a Masjumi ulama board which unmistakably supported the Anti-Communist Front. I also remembered the opening sentence of an article by Anshary himself on the Anti-Communist Front, "Since we, the Masjumi leaders of West Java, proclaimed the establishment of the Anti-Communist Front..."

Anshary confirmed, but in rather ambiguous terms, the headquarters testimony that the two organizations are separate. He said that the Anti-Communist Front is not a political group but a "spiritual movement." Since it is not a political group or party, it can in no sense be considered a part of the Masjumi Party or a competitor to the Masjumi. It is an elite organization of leaders, and it has no desire to attract a mass membership. Its entire organization consists of a five-man headquarters in Bandung, and five-man branch committees in North Sumatra, Central

Sumatra, South Sumatra, East Java, and South Sulawesi. It so happens that its leaders are Masjumi members, but it welcomes the cooperation and participation of Christian and nationalist leaders of like mind on the communist problem.

The careful distinction between Masjumi and anti-communist activities should not obscure the factional nature of Isa Anshary's efforts. His Anti-Communist Front is an activity within the Masjumi Party, sponsored not by party headquarters but by the Masjumi West Java branch. It promotes and propagandizes anticommunism, while the party as a whole tends to avoid the issue. Moreover, its policy seems to reflect an excitement common to the Masjumi rank and file. As the election campaign progresses, newspapers have reported fistfights involving Masjumi followers and communists, several slander suits have been brought against Masjumi members, and strongly worded anticommunist and antigovernment letters-to-the-editor have appeared in the press. Masjumi sentiments seem to correspond more and more to the tone of Isa Anshary's extreme statements and less and less to that of official Masjumi pronouncements.

The tone of Anshary's thinking can be seen in the content of his recent press interview with the correspondent of a Djakarta daily: "Corrupt leaders who take millions are ignored, while ticket scalpers who make one rupiah are 'purged.'.....I didn't use the word 'kafir' [against the communists] prematurely; I used it much too late.....Some Muslim leaders are just like bamboo; they sway whichever way the wind blows.....The Muslim community will certainly win in the coming election." And in regard to the economic situation, he quoted a little four-line jingle: "Djawa Timur, Djawa Barat, Bapak Makmur, Rakjat Melarat" (rough translation: "Java West, Java East, The big-shots take most, The people get least"). Isa Anshary is consistently more aggressive in his statements than his superiors. And in his violence he is so articulate that he is now popularly considered to be a political force in his own right.

It is possible that Natsir and his group silently condone Anshary, but it is more likely that they disapprove of his temper and worry about its consequences. If such a basic policy split exists on communism, the Muslim State, or election tactics, it is buried now under fine distinctions about the difference between "party" and "spiritual" activities. No open split occurred at the December Masjumi Party Congress; Natsir was re-elected party chairman by a large majority and the congress resolutions failed to support the Anti-Communist Front. To the outside world, the Masjumi Party appears solidly unified, but the outsider should realize that the Anti-Communist Front appeals to sentiments which are already strong--and in some areas violent--in the Masjumi lower ranks. At this level, anticommunism is as much a "political" issue as it is a "spiritual" problem, for it could easily become a vehicle for the expression of widespread feelings of hope, fear, and frustration.

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To support his definition of the Anti-Communist Front as a spiritual movement, Anshary presented his opinion that communism is much more than a totalitarian political movement. If it were nothing more, the Masjumi could carry on the anticommunist struggle alone, for it is a political party. But he feels that communism also has the nature of a competing religion, with its own dogma, holy book, and holy men. Since this is true, it is not sufficient to attack communism in the field of politics alone; it must also be fought on the level of theology and philosophy.

To achieve its purposes, the Anti-Communist Front sponsors speaking tours by anticommunist leaders and finances the publication of books and pamphlets. One of its current projects is the translation of "The God That Failed." Another will be the publication of Isa Anshary's forthcoming book, "The Red Danger in Indonesia." In addition to these longer works, the organization publishes and distributes religious documents such as the fatwa Anshary had given me at the start of the interview.

These fatwa are worth quoting at length, for they reveal a great deal about the personality, motivation, and political background of Muslims like Isa Anshary:

DECLARATION OF THE ULAMA OF THE MASJUMI
PARTY OF WEST JAVA

HAVING STUDIED and analyzed in the deepest manner the nature of the communist-Marxist ideology, both from the point of view of religious faith and theology--from which we see clearly the atheistic and antireligious nature of communism--and from the point of view of politics and economics--from which we see clearly that communism is antidemocratic, proposes the abolition of private property, and advocates class struggle and war between social groups,

MINDFUL that communist-Marxist ideology and teachings are not only in total conflict with the teachings and law of Islam, but that they also constitute a dire threat to religion in general and threaten the security of the Republic of Indonesia which is based on a Belief in One God,

DELIBERATING the necessity for all Muslims, especially the ulama and zu'ama, to take a firm stand against communist ideology, in keeping with the teachings of Islam (the Koran and Hadith), and the responsibility of the Indonesian Islam Community to protect the State and nation from the danger of communism,

HAVING HEARD the views and discussions of the representatives, based on their interpretation of the Koran and Hadith,

WE CONCLUDE:

1. The communist ideology is in complete conflict with Islamic law and teachings and constitutes a danger to religion and the State of Indonesia.
2. Muslims who accept the communist faith are hereby excommunicated (murtad) from the Islamic faith.
3. It is forbidden (haram) for Muslims to become members of the Indonesian Communist Party or bodies and organizations whose clear aim it is to establish the communist ideology and law in Indonesia.
4. We commend the establishment of the ANTI-COMMUNIST FRONT by the Masjumi leaders of West Java and urge all Muslims in Indonesia to form branches of the ANTI-COMMUNIST FRONT in their localities, as evidence of a clear stand in opposition to the communist ideology.
5. To adopt an attitude of silence toward the communist ideology sponsored by the Indonesian Communist Party signifies a willingness to tolerate the propagation and victory of an ideology which incurs the wrath of Allah.
6. We call on all Muslim ulama and zu'ama to implement the teachings of Islam by forming a powerful united Islamic front to prevent the spread of the dangerous ideology of Communism.
7. We call on all groups and political parties which are anticommunist to cease their cooperation with the Indonesian Communist Party.

The fatwa issued by the Islamic Union is similar. It begins by citing the authority of fourteen separate verses from the Koran, and concludes by stating:

1. It is the responsibility of every Muslim to uphold Islamic law in his personal life, in society, and in the state.

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2. It is forbidden by law for a Muslim to become a member of a party or organization whose ideology is in conflict with the teachings and law of Islam or opposes the implementation of Islamic law.
3. It is the responsibility of every Muslim to present testimony and instruction to those Muslims who become members of parties or organizations whose ideologies conflict with Islamic teachings and laws and which oppose the implementation of Islamic Law, so that they may return to the true path and enter the ranks of those who struggle for the establishment of a state based on Islamic Law.
4. If, after testimony and instruction have been presented, they remain members of such parties and organizations, holding clearly to the belief that the ideologies of these organizations are superior to the ideology of Islam (The Law of God), they are then to be considered excommunicated (murtad) from the Islamic faith.
5. Those who have been excommunicated from the Islamic faith may not receive Muslim prayers or a Muslim burial after death. And it is forbidden for Muslim men and women to marry with such people.

These fatwa--which are binding directives to those who accept the authority of the issuing scholars--point to a central element in Isa Anshary's outlook: Muslim law and political action are inseparable. Political action can be based only on religious instruction by competent authority, and religious instruction must result in political action.

The Masjumi Party is founded on a religious basis, but its program and policy have been determined by Masjumi politicians, not the Masjumi ulama. Political decisions have not been based on fatwa, but on the deliberations of leaders chosen by a method considered proper to Muslim organization and guided by a party constitution which stresses Muslim principles. In practice this has meant a division between political and religious functions in the Masjumi. The proper role of the Masjumi ulama has been to interpret and advise, not to exhort and direct.

In Anshary's political scheme, the role of the ulama is more significant. In commenting on the fatwa quoted above, Anshary has written:

In these statements we find an answer to the slanders and accusations of certain elements which claim that the ulama and religious teachers have been nonactivated by

the Masjumi Party.....Of course, the ulama do not have the function of dealing with party membership and development, but, in accordance with their (proper) function, the Masjumi ulama must become fighting theologians. With the Koran in their right hand and the Hadith in their left, the Masjumi ulama present true and firm directives which serve as beacons to light the road to battle.

It is obvious that he is referring to the ulama of his own West Java branch of the Masjumi, who support him at every turn, and not to the Ulama Board of the Masjumi central organization, which has until now given him little religious justification for his political steps.

The differences between Anshary and the Natsir group in matters of theology and political theory are doubly difficult to analyze because neither side has formulated its viewpoint systematically and thoroughly. We see evidences of a profound difference in temperament and outlook, but we see no formal opposition or philosophical dispute. This is only to be expected, for the very real heterogeneity of the Masjumi has given rise to worried emphasis on unity. Very few Indonesian organizations of any type have achieved a substantial enough unity of opinion to dare to air their internal differences in public, and the Masjumi is no exception. We should also keep in mind that the subject of Muslim political principles has only recently become a matter of serious discussion. We are now living in a period in which potentially momentous differences in outlook are first being discovered and considered.

If a Muslim State is to be established one day in Indonesia, the entire nation may become painfully aware of the elusive but real differences between Natsir's pragmatic, rationalistic view of Muslim politics and Isa Anshary's "theopolitics." For the present, however, the danger of division lies not so much in the realm of theology and political theory as it does in the field of practical politics and tactics for the election campaign.

Because it is a minority group in the Provisional Parliament, the Masjumi has had to accept the rule of the Ali Sastroamidjojo nationalist-coalition cabinet. During Ali's reign, the Masjumi Party has lost the greater part of its direct influence in the Indonesian civil service. It now stands more and more in the position of an alternate elite group, building its hopes for power on the support of its mass organization in the General Election.

While Natsir relies on the election as a possible and desirable means to power, many lesser party leaders fail to share his confidence. In Atjeh, the leaders of an important party branch went into revolt instead of waiting to press their claims through parliamentary channels. In other areas, the impatience and anger of religious teachers and Muslim youth

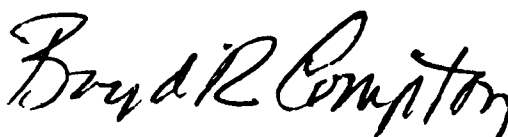
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groups is evident from their statements on communism and the failures of the nationalist government. Here and there in Java and Sumatra, the Muslim guerrilla bands (hizbullah) of the revolution have been reactivated in the form of veterans' associations or cooperatives. Emissaries from the Darul Islam rebels are said to be active in spreading extremist propaganda among the young Muslims throughout the country. In this situation, it is a tremendous challenge to the Masjumi high command to implement an election policy of restraint and confidence.

The chosen field for Anti-Communist Front activity is among the zealous minor religious leaders of the strongly Muslim areas of Indonesia--areas which the visitor in Djakarta has either never heard of or discounts because the orthodoxy of their Muslim belief is open to dispute. Areas in which such leadership is prevalent are: Bantam, Tjeribon-Tegal-Pekalongan, Madura, Bandjarmasin, Palembang, Minangkabau, South Tapanuli, Langkat, and South Sulawesi. In these areas, leaders like Ghazali Hasan of Medan are likely to be attracted as much by the force of Anshary's direct emotional appeals as by the persuasiveness of Natsir's reason. Anshary's appeal is "Fight!"; in effect, Natsir's is "Wait." If the election is held according to plan and with sufficient honesty, there can be little doubt that Natsir's stand is justified, and that Anshary's is dangerously disruptive. But if developments of the next few months threaten to postpone the election or greatly lessen Muslim chances of victory, we must expect a ground swell of aggressive extremism from Masjumi branches throughout the islands. At the worst, such a development could bring an extension of Muslim rebellion in Indonesia. At the least, it could strengthen Anshary's position in the Masjumi organization and force central party policy away from moderation and toward extremism.

I would emphasize again that Anshary remains a Masjumi leader in good standing. He has not opposed Natsir's leadership openly or directly. But Muslim extremism already threatens the Indonesian state in the form of three small but vigorous rebellions. It is latent in a good part of the legal Masjumi movement. The establishment and initial growth of the Anti-Communist Front provides a legal vehicle for the expression of extreme and radical views on communism and other issues. If the Anti-Communist Front expands rapidly during the next six months, the growing antagonism between Communism and Islam in Indonesia could reach a critical point before the General Election is held. The final complexity of Indonesian politics is seen in the possibility that such a crisis might lead not to civil war or to victory for either the "red" or the "green," but rather to a decisive move on the part of those who now control the means of power in Indonesia--the westernized civil servants, army officers, and police commissioners who look with almost equal distaste on the extremism of either the Muslim Anshary or the communist Aidit.

Sincerely yours,



Boyd R. Compton