Introduction
The Indonesian genocide files

On a hot afternoon in 2010, I returned home from the former Indonesian Intelligence Agency’s archives in Banda Aceh with a heavy cardboard box filled with photocopied documents. I did not yet know it, but the documents that I held in my hands would soon definitively shatter the Indonesian government’s official propaganda account of the 1965–66 mass killings and prove the military’s agency behind those events. I have called these documents the Indonesian genocide files.

For the past half-century, the Indonesian military has depicted the killings, which resulted in the murder of approximately one million unarmed civilians, as the outcome of a “spontaneous” uprising by “the people”.¹ This formulation not only denied military agency behind the killings. It also denied that the killings could ever be understood as a centralised, nation-wide campaign.

That was not, however, how the Indonesian military understood the killings internally at the time. Throughout the 3,000 pages of top-secret documents that comprise the Indonesian genocide files, the military describes the killings as an “Annihilation Operation” (Operasi Penumpasan),² which it launched with the stated intention to “annihilate down to the roots” (menumpas sampai ke akar-akarnja)³ its major political rival, the Indonesian Communist Party.

The armed forces implemented this Operation after seizing control of the Indonesian state on the morning of 1 October 1965. They ordered civilians to participate in the campaign from 4 October⁴ and established a ‘War Room’ on 14 October with the stated intention to “carry out non-conventional warfare . . . [to] succeed in annihilating [the military’s target group] together with the people”.⁵ The killings, it can now be proven, were implemented as deliberate state policy.

The use of the term genocide to describe these events has long been contested. This book makes the case that the 1965–66 killings can be understood as a case of genocide, as defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention. In chapter 1, I argue that key orders and records found within the Indonesian genocide files are able to prove the military possessed and acted upon a clear “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such” and that these events thus meet the legal definition of genocide.

This book tells the story of the Indonesian genocide files. Drawing upon these orders and records, along with the previously unheard stories of 70 survivors, perpetrators and other eyewitness of the genocide in Aceh province, it reconstructs,
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for the first time, a detailed narrative of the killings using the military’s own accounts of these events.

Sacred Pancasila Day

During the still cool morning of 1 October 2015, on the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide, Indonesia’s President, Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, stood before rows of soldiers dressed in parade uniform in the capital, Jakarta. The purpose of the event, known as Sacred Pancasila Day, was not to commemorate the victims of the genocide, but rather to remember the trigger event that, in official narratives, overwrites and displaces the killings.

According to this official narrative, 1 October 1965 marks the day the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI: Partai Komunis Indonesia) launched an “abortive coup” against the Indonesian state through a front organisation named the 30 September Movement (G30S: Gerakan Tigapuluh September). The story of the actions of the 30 September Movement is complicated because it contains elements of truth as well as complete fabrications that were used in the psychological warfare operation launched by the military against Indonesia’s population during the aftermath of 1 October.

More ink has been spilled trying to explain the actions of the 30 September Movement than on the genocide itself. Here I do not intend to retell this story in full. Several key points are nonetheless vital to understand how the military leadership justified its attack against members of the PKI and the much larger group of people who would eventually fall victim to the military’s genocidal policies.

Before dawn on 1 October 1965, a group of mostly middle-ranking military officers calling itself the 30 September Movement kidnapped six key superior officers, members of the Indonesian Armed Forces High Command, including the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, General Ahmad Yani, and a lieutenant who was apparently kidnapped in a case of mistaken identity for the Army Chief of Staff, Abdul Haris Nasution. The middle-ranking officers who carried out this kidnapping operation were in close contact with the PKI’s Chairman, D.N. Aidit, and his secret Special Bureau, but Aidit did not inform his other colleagues in the PKI leadership or membership of the operation.

The kidnapped generals were accused by the 30 September Movement of plotting a CIA-backed coup against Indonesia’s popular and self-avowed Marxist President Sukarno. During the course of the operation three of the generals, including Yani, were killed in their homes. The surviving generals and lieutenant, along with the bodies of the three murdered generals, were then transported to Halim Airbase on the outskirts of Jakarta. Aidit was there at the time. Upon arrival, the generals are alleged to have been sadistically tortured and humiliated by communist women; their penises cut off and eyes gouged out as the women engaged in a mass orgy. The generals and lieutenant were then murdered and their bodies dumped down a disused well next to the Airbase in an area known as the ‘Crocodile Hole’ (Lubang Buaya).

Following these killings, the military explained, the PKI, through the 30 September Movement, had attempted to spark a national uprising and “people’s war”11
through a series of radio messages. This uprising was reported to include a plan to massacre the PKI’s political rivals. Supporting this claim, the military declared it had discovered pre-dug graves throughout the country. Specifically, it was said, the communists planned to murder pious Muslims, who were accused of blocking the PKI’s land reform campaign. Within days, the military began to report the PKI and its supporters had begun to murder Muslims.

In response to this alleged communist plot, the military claims it stepped in to “restore the peace” after overseeing the surrender of the 30 September Movement’s visible members during the morning of 2 October. It launched this campaign under the leadership of Major General Suharto, who, as the Army’s Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) Commander, had not been targeted by the 30 September Movement. Upon hearing of the PKI’s planned atrocities, “the people” are said to have “spontaneously” risen up in anger against the “inhuman” and “atheist” (atheis, anti-tuhan) communists. “These tensions”, the official narrative explains, then “exploded into communal clashes resulting in bloodbaths in certain areas of Indonesia”, as civilians set about butchering their former neighbours with machetes until the military stepped in to stop the violence.

The killings are thus depicted as the result of horizontal, religiously inspired violence, sparked by the population’s response to PKI atrocities. The military had saved the nation from the “communists”. It had also saved the nation from itself.

This account is a gross and deliberate distortion of the truth. While it is true a group calling itself the 30 September Movement kidnapped and murdered six generals and a lieutenant during the early hours of 1 October, before declaring its intention to replace the Indonesian government, the actions of this group had no connection to the PKI as a mass organisation, or to the much larger group that was eventually targeted for annihilation by the military. The generals were not mutilated. Nor did the PKI dig mass graves or begin to kill Muslims. These stories were cynical propaganda fabrications intended to justify the military’s own seizure of power.

Rather, records of diplomatic cables between the United States State Department and its diplomatic officials in Jakarta reveal the Indonesian military leadership had been deliberately waiting for a “pretext” event that could be blamed on the PKI, its major political rival, and used to orchestrate the military’s own coup against Sukarno. This coup, military informants had explained, “would be handled in such a way as to preserve Sukarno’s leadership intact”. It was to be a coup that would not appear to be a coup. It was also to be a coup that would rely on the mass mobilisation of the population.

New evidence presented in chapter 2 of this book will show that the military’s preparations to seize power during the lead-up to 1 October were much more extensive than it has previously been possible to demonstrate. While there is no evidence the military pre-planned the genocide per se, the order to carry out systematic mass killings evolved, chapters 3 to 6 will show, between 1 and 14 October. The military had deliberately established structures that would allow it to internally implement martial law once it decided to initiate its seizure of state power. It had also engaged in extensive militia and paramilitary training that would enable it to conduct such an operation.
The military, the Indonesian genocide files show, officially coordinated these preparations on Sumatra, one of Indonesia’s main islands, from April 1965 through a military campaign labelled ‘Operation Berdikari’. It would then activate this Operation during the morning of 1 October, at a time when the military was still ostensibly deciding how to react to the actions of the 30 September Movement. The activation of this Operation entailed the implementation of martial law throughout Sumatra and the activation of a new military command structure in Aceh known as the Defence Region Command (Kohanda: *Komando Pertahanan Daerah*). It would be through this new military command structure that the military would implement the genocide.

Evidence presented in chapter 3 shows that the military leadership pre-emptively treated the 30 September Movement as a coup attempt. Although the 30 September Movement did not declare its intention to replace the government until 2pm during the afternoon of 1 October, the military leadership, in its internal correspondence, had that morning already begun to describe the 30 September Movement as a coup movement. But until 2pm, the 30 September Movement described its actions as an “internal” military affair aimed at alerting Sukarno to the generals’ alleged plan to launch their own coup.

It is at this point that the story of the 30 September Movement often becomes unnecessarily complicated. This is because, in an attempt to highlight the military’s subsequent genocidal attack against the PKI and other individuals who would become caught up in this violence, it is tempting to downplay the actions of the 30 September Movement or to dismiss the military’s claim that the PKI had been involved in its actions. The 30 September Movement did kidnap and murder six key members of the military leadership, though there is no evidence the generals were mutilated, either before or after death.

There is also evidence PKI Chairman D.N. Aidit and the PKI’s clandestine Special Bureau were aware of the plans of the 30 September Movement and that Aidit, as noted, was present at Halim Airbase on 1 October. There is not, however, any evidence that Aidit or the Special Bureau communicated their knowledge of the Movement’s plans to the PKI Central Committee or other parts of their mass organisation either on or before 1 October. Nor is there any evidence that anyone attempted to mobilise the PKI as a mass organisation in support of the actions of the Movement either on or before 1 October. This silence and inaction effectively left the PKI in the dark about the Movement and open to attack. It was, however, consistent with Aidit’s apparent belief that the 30 September Movement was an internal military action.

The leadership of the 30 September Movement consisted of five men. Three were mid-level military officers. Lieutenant Colonel Untung, the Movement’s head, was a battalion commander in the Palace Guard; Colonel Abdul Latief was a member of the Jakarta Regional Military Command; and Major Soejono was a member of the Halim Air Force base guard. The two other members of the Movement’s leadership were Sjam and Pono, both of whom are believed to have been linked to the PKI’s Special Bureau, a secret underground organisation that answered exclusively to Aidit, not to the PKI Central Committee or the party membership.
It appears the initial intention of this group was not to murder the generals, but rather to bring them before Sukarno, who, it was hoped, would use the opportunity to expose the military leadership’s plans to launch a coup and replace the generals with individuals who were loyal to him. Political kidnappings were not without precedent in Indonesia. Sukarno himself had been kidnapped by revolutionary youths in 1945, when he had appeared to backtrack on his promise to issue a declaration of Indonesian independence. He was not harmed by his captors and, upon being released, issued his now famous 17 August proclamation, while his captors were treated as national heroes. After the killings, however, such an ending was no longer possible for the Movement.

Pointing to this failure of logic in the Movement’s actions, scholars have proposed the Movement did not plan to murder the generals and that the killings appear to have occurred in the heat of the moment when several generals resisted arrest. This development then left the Movement scrambling to come up with an alternative plan. It was at this late point (at 2pm on 1 October) that the Movement announced its intention to replace the government with a body called the Indonesian Revolution Council (Dewan Revolusi Indonesia), which it explained would “constitute the source of all authority” in Indonesia until elections could be held. No national elections had been held since 1955.

When the membership of the Indonesian Revolution Council was then announced at 2.05pm over the national radio station, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), which had been seized during the morning of 1 October by the Movement, no mention was made of what Sukarno’s role would be within this new body. It is these later announcements that are touted as evidence by the military that the Movement intended to launch a coup. The general murkiness of the 30 September Movement’s actions coupled with Aidit and the PKI Special Bureau’s involvement in these events made the actions of the 30 September Movement an ideal pretext event for the military. It is hard to imagine the military could have come up with a more perfect sequence of events if it had tried. Some scholars have even suggested Suharto was secretly behind the Movement. Others have suggested he simply had personal foreknowledge of the actions of the 30 September Movement. It was this foreknowledge, it is argued, that allowed him to respond to the Movement so quickly and with such clarity of vision.

This book proposes that the military leadership was actively preparing to seize state power during the lead-up to 1 October 1965. My argument does not require Suharto to have had specific foreknowledge of the actions of the 30 September Movement, though he may have had. He and the surviving military leadership responded so quickly and with such clarity of thought because it had already been training to launch a territorial warfare campaign aimed at seizing state power that was to be framed as a response to just such a PKI provocation. The murder of the generals, which pushed the actions of the 30 September Movement outside the realm of accepted political behaviour, undoubtedly enabled the military to launch a much more aggressive attack than may otherwise have been possible.

The extreme nature of the Movement’s actions has also meant that some scholars have felt compelled to try to downplay the role of Aidit and the PKI’s Special
Bureau as if their involvement may in some way lessen the military’s culpability for the subsequent genocide. The question that should be asked is not whether the PKI leadership was completely innocent of involvement in the actions of the 30 September Movement, but whether the military’s response to this event was proportionate and justifiable. Given the killings of nearly a million people, the answer to this second question must certainly be in the negative.

The murder of up to one million unarmed civilians in a deliberate and systematic campaign to destroy not only the PKI as a mass organisation but also a much broader group of civilians that had no organisational affiliation to the PKI whatsoever, targeted purely because of their alleged “association” with the PKI, is manifestly disproportionate to the actions of the 30 September Movement. Any claim of self-defence is completely without merit. What happened was a crime that must be assessed separately from the actions of the 30 September Movement.

Yet, far beyond justifying the genocide, the military’s official propaganda account of the actions of the 30 September Movement has almost totally displaced and overwritten the genocide as an event. In 1969, Suharto, by then President, opened a giant monument to the dead generals at Lubang Buaya. The site includes seven life-sized bronze statues of the dead generals and lieutenant. They stand atop a bronze frieze that depicts a revisionist re-telling of Indonesia’s post-colonial history, through which the PKI is portrayed as an instigator of chaos and evil. This portrayal was a sharp repudiation of Sukarno’s recognition that for him at least communism constituted an indispensable stream within the variety of Indonesian political thought. Also depicted in the frieze are images of the communist women alleged to have mutilated the generals, shown dancing naked around a man stuffing a body down a well. Suharto, for his part, emerges from this image as a strongman and saviour who was able to restore order and reunify the nation.

Towering over the monument stands a giant garuda, a mythical eagle-like bird, which, since the time of the 1945–49 Indonesian revolution, has come to embody the Indonesian state. Over its chest sits a shield portraying the five principles of Indonesian nationalism, known as the Pancasila (lit. five principles): belief in God, humanity, national unity, democracy and social justice. First enunciated by President Sukarno in 1945, Pancasila was adopted and sacralised by the New Order military regime. The purpose of this symbolism is to project the authority of the Indonesian state onto the military’s propaganda version of events. The story of the military’s crushing of the PKI is the foundation myth of the post-Sukarno Indonesian state.

It is at this site that the Sacred Pancasila Day ceremony is held on an annual basis. The story of the murdered generals overwrites and displaces the story of the genocide. Not once do we see the scenes of military-sponsored death squads executing civilians at military-controlled killing sites. Nor do we see the steady stream of trucks transporting victims to these killings sites from military-controlled jails under the cover of darkness or the mass rallies where the military ordered civilians to kill or be killed, which remain so vivid in the memories of eyewitnesses of this period. The victims of the genocide, if they are mentioned at all, are blamed for having brought their fate upon themselves. This perverse victim-blaming continues to this day.
When Jokowi was asked by waiting reporters at the conclusion of the formal fiftieth-anniversary Sacred Pancasila Day ceremony whether he intended to issue an apology to victims and survivors of the genocide, he broke into a broad smile before replying he had “no thoughts about apologising”.

The West’s best news for years in Asia

If it seems remarkable that the Indonesian state continues to justify the killings, it should be remembered that Suharto’s rise to power on the back of the killings was openly celebrated in the West. The destruction of the “communist threat” in Indonesia was considered a major strategic victory that helped to turn the tide of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Suharto’s rise, TIME magazine explained just after the worst of the killings had ended, was “the West’s best news for years in Asia”.

Since the end of the Second World War, the Unites States had sought to increase its influence over Southeast Asia. In early 1965, the United States media was preoccupied with the war in Vietnam. The United States government, however, considered the sprawling archipelago nation of Indonesia to be of at least equal strategic importance to the whole of Indochina. Indonesia, then the sixth most populous country in the world, lies across key sea-lanes through which the United States Navy passes. These sea-lanes are also some of the world’s busiest commercial routes. Blessed with abundant raw materials, Indonesia was a major supplier of oil, tin and rubber and the site of significant American economic interests.

Indonesia was also home to the largest communist party in the world outside of the USSR and China. In August 1965, the PKI boasted a membership of 3.5 million people. When members of the PKI’s affiliated organisations were also taken into account, adjusted to account for duplication of membership, the PKI and its affiliated organisations had a following approaching 20 million. In addition to being highly active, Indonesia’s communist movement was embraced by Indonesia’s popular and self-proclaimed Marxist President Sukarno, who had declared communism to be a key element of Indonesian nationalism in 1961. As the PKI’s influence grew, the United States government became increasingly concerned that Indonesia would become a new southern front for communist expansion should the PKI succeed in coming to power, a situation that could draw the United States into a second Vietnam-type war that it could ill afford. As such, the US committed itself to supporting all domestic attempts within Indonesia to crush the PKI before it could come to power. As we shall see, the US would also play a major, covert, role in supporting and facilitating the genocide.

This concern with Indonesia’s internal affairs was not new. Since the mid-1950s, the United States government had repeatedly attempted to implement regime change in Indonesia. This covert campaign had included the transfer of one million dollars to Indonesia’s main Islamist party Masjumi during the 1955 general election, in an attempt to counteract support for Sukarno’s Indonesian National Party (PNI: Partai National Indonesia) and the growing PKI. After the vote resulted in a tie, the Eisenhower administration threw its support behind a series of regional rebellions on Indonesia’s Outer Islands in 1958, where rebels were supplied with
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military equipment and a number of B-26 bombers. It was hoped that the rebellions, which were supported by Masjumi and key Indonesian military leaders who were dissatisfied with the trajectory in which Sukarno was taking the nation, would result in the breaking up of Indonesia. This plan was dramatically exposed, however, when Allen Pope, an American CIA operative who was piloting one of the bombers, was shot down by the Indonesian Air Force. This incident led to an even further deterioration of relations between the two countries.

The Kennedy administration demonstrated a more accommodative approach when it attempted to appease Sukarno in 1962 by supporting Indonesia’s claim to the territory of Dutch New Guinea or West Irian (Irian Barat), today divided into the two provinces of Papua and West Papua. West Irian was the final territory claimed by the Dutch East Indies to remain under Dutch control and held a special place in Indonesia’s nationalist rhetoric. US-sponsored talks led to the signing of the ‘New York Agreement’ between the Netherlands and Indonesia in August 1962. Under the terms of this agreement, Indonesia was to be awarded control over West Irian after a brief transitional period that was to be overseen by the United Nations, with the provision that Indonesia should facilitate an election on self-determination in the territory before the end of 1969. Sukarno was pleased with this development and approved a series of American loans, which the Kennedy administration hoped could be used to leverage US influence over the President, who was courting Soviet and Chinese overtures at this time. In addition to supplying financial support, the United States provided specialist military training to Indonesian military officers, many of whom were sent to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

This brief honeymoon period ended abruptly when Sukarno announced his opposition to the formation of an independent Malaysia (including former Malaya and former British possessions on the island of Borneo), in January 1963, on the grounds that the new nation would remain under British political control and function as a neo-colonial force in the region. Britain had granted independence to peninsular Malaya in 1957, in the hope of retaining its military base in Singapore, which it considered critical to its ability to maintain its naval presence in the ‘Far East’ and to honour its security commitments to the American-led Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and for the defence of Australia and New Zealand. In 1963, the territories of Sarawak and Sabah, which shared a border with Indonesia’s provinces on the island of Borneo/Kalimantan, were incorporated into the new Malaysian federation. Sukarno subsequently threw his support behind the ‘Crush Malaysia’ (Gan-gyang Malaysia) campaign, resulting in low-level border skirmishes that, by August 1964, threatened to escalate into full-scale war. In a further sign of deepening tensions, Indonesia withdrew from the United Nations in January 1965 after Malaysia was admitted as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

In the face of growing anti-Western demonstrations throughout Indonesia, including the storming of the US consulate in Medan in February 1965 and other attacks against American government buildings in Jakarta in March, the Johnson administration adopted what it called a “low-posture policy”. This policy entailed the withdrawal of most embassy personnel and the dramatic reduction
of United States’ visibility, while the remaining American officials would quietly keep contact with “the constructive elements of strength in Indonesia” and try to give these elements “the most favourable conditions for confrontation [with the PKI].” The United States, in other words, would reduce its visible presence within Indonesia in order to encourage an internal showdown against the communists, as soon as a suitable opportunity arose. As outlined above, the United States government was aware and supportive of the Indonesian military leadership’s intention to wait for a suitable pretext for launching this campaign such that the military could preserve Sukarno’s leadership while justifying its seizure of power as a reaction to PKI provocation.

Such a tactic would have the benefit of providing the military with a free rein to crush the PKI while acknowledging the immense popularity that Sukarno continued to enjoy. The United States Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones (1958- April 1965), further speculated at a closed-door meeting of State Department officials in the Philippines in March 1965 that: “From our viewpoint . . . an unsuccessful coup attempt by the PKI” would be the ideal pretext to “start the reversal of political trends in Indonesia”. This assessment appears to have been adopted by United States officials at this time. The United States government and its friends in the Indonesian military leadership spent the next few months “waiting for some sort of dramatic action from the PKI that would provide a justification for repressing it”.

This opportunity presented itself on the morning of 1 October.

The United States consulate in Medan, North Sumatra, initially appears to have been caught off-guard by the actions of the 30 September Movement. Before dawn, the consulate staff began to send telegrams to the State Department asking for further information about whether a coup was underway. The United States government, however, was quick to extend its support to Suharto and to stress its preference for decisive action. In a significant show of public support for the new emerging regime, the new United States Ambassador to Indonesia, Marshall Green (June 1965–1969), attended a mass funeral for the murdered generals on 5 October in Jakarta.

During the first week of October, the US embassy and policy makers in Washington were concerned that the military leadership “would not take full advantage of the opportunity to attack the PKI” but would instead settle for “only limited action” against those “directly involved in the murder of the generals”. This was despite “repeated” assurances to army generals since early 1965 “that the United States would support them if they moved against the PKI” and despite the military leadership having already begun to move publically against the PKI. On 5 October, the same day as the mass funeral in the capital, US Ambassador Green cabled Washington to propose that he once again “indicate clearly to key people in army such as Nasution and Suharto our desire to be of assistance where we can”. This proposal received the support of the State Department. As this book will show, however, the United States had no reason to worry about the resoluteness of the military’s intentions.

The exact role played by the United States in the genocide remains unclear, as US government archives relating to Indonesia from the period remain sealed.
is known, however, that at a minimum, in addition to openly celebrating Suharto’s rise to power, the United States supplied money and communications equipment to the Indonesia military that facilitated the killings;\(^53\) gave fifty million rupiah to the military-sponsored KAP-Gestapu death squad;\(^54\) and provided the names of thousands of PKI leaders to the military, who may have used this information to hunt down and kill those identified.\(^55\) The United States, Britain and Australia additionally played an active role in “black propaganda operations”\(^56\) in Indonesia during the genocide, including broadcasting clandestine radio broadcasts into the country.\(^56\) These broadcasts repeated Indonesian military propaganda as part of a psychological warfare campaign to discredit the PKI and encourage support for the killings.

This propaganda campaign was also extended to domestic audiences in the West. In Australia, where extensive news media surveys from the time of the genocide have been conducted, the accusation that the PKI had carried out an abortive coup was repeated uncritically while the mass killings themselves received very little media coverage or coverage that was “grossly distorted”.\(^57\) Reports of the genocide did not make headlines; the number of dead was systematically underreported, while the killings were largely reported as “agentless”. When agency was attributed to the killings, “Moslem extremists” and “students”, rather than the military, were usually the ones identified.\(^58\)

Racism also permeated reporting of the killings. NBC reporter Ted Yeates, in a 1967 special report into Suharto’s “decisive victory” in “our war in Asia”, depicted Indonesians as monkey who had performed the genocide as the continuation of an ancient “passion play”.\(^59\) Cutting between footage of Sukarno and Suharto and a performance of kecak dance in Bali, in which participants percussively chant “cak” and move their arms to depict a battle from the Ramayana, Yeates compares Sukarno to the “monster king” Rahwana and Suharto to the “good king” Rama, while comparing the Indonesian people to Rahwana and Rama’s “rival armies of monkeys”\(^60\).

The concept of “amok”, one of the few Indo-Malay words to make its way into the English language, was also often employed to describe the killings.\(^61\) According to the racist colonial-era trope, Indonesians were depicted as naturally “submissive” to authority but as also possessing the propensity to erupt into murderous violence if provoked by religious leaders or “alien” political provocateurs, such as the PKI, who were alleged to have disrupted the “harmony” of traditional village life. In this way, the killings were explained to Western audiences as “an unavoidable tragedy”.\(^62\)

This pattern of minimisation and gross misrepresentation of the violence in Western media reporting of the genocide mirrored public statements by Western political leaders at the time. President Johnson, United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Ambassador Marshall Green refused to comment publicly on the killings.\(^63\) In justifying this silence, they cynically claimed information about the number of people killed was too sketchy to justify public comment, while suggesting that condemning the killings could have constituted “interference” in Indonesian domestic affairs.\(^64\) It is clear this coordinated policy of silence was intended to deflect attention from the events in Indonesia and the United States’ own role in supporting the killings.
Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt was less guarded in his public comments. In mid-1966, on a visit to New York, Holt remarked: “With 500,000 to one million communist sympathisers knocked off, I think it’s safe to say a reorientation had taken place.” His remarks, stunning in their callousness, were not only a frank admission of conditions in Indonesia, but a declaration of implied approval for the killings. Despite being published in the *New York Times*, Holt’s comments were ignored by the Australian media. Richard Tanter has proposed this media silence was a deliberate attempt, either imposed or self-imposed, to “protect” readers from the reality that the Australian government was supporting a “holocaust” in Indonesia.

The United Nations also failed to condemn the killings. Instead of launching an investigation into what was happening, the United Nations welcomed overtures by Indonesia’s new post-genocide Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, for Indonesia to re-join the international organisation, before re-admitting Indonesia on 28 September 1966 without debate. At that time, the violence in Indonesia was ongoing. Indeed, neither the United Nations 1965 or 1966 official Yearbook makes any reference to the killings, noting only Indonesia’s aggression against Malaysia prior to the killings and Indonesia’s subsequent return to the organisation. This lack of concern for the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Indonesia is deeply troubling. Suharto was an important pro-West ally and the United Nations would close its eyes to human rights abuses in Indonesia throughout the long three decades of the New Order regime.

The international community, it appears, was determined to ignore the killings entirely or to treat the victims as unavoidable Cold War collateral damage.

**Investigating the Indonesian genocide**

Academia, for its part, has also historically shown a reluctance to characterise the killings as the result of a centralised military campaign. The first academic accounts of the killings essentially repeated the military’s own propaganda version. In a classic account of the killings that is still viewed as a standard text in some universities today, Ulf Sundhaussen, in his 1982 study, *The Road to Power*, explained that although:

> [t]he simplest way of explaining the mass killing is to charge the Army with having used its near-monopoly of the means of violence to kill the communists. . . . It would be difficult to prove that the massacre was planned by Soeharto and the officers supporting him, or even to argue that they stood in any way to gain from it.

Indeed, Sundhaussen continued, the military acted to limit the killings, which were primarily carried out by “Muslims” and “villagers”, whom the military were unable to “stop”. The PKI itself, Sundhaussen claims, was ultimately to blame for the genocide, as a result of its political campaigns before 1 October 1965, which had “eradicated the harmony in the community”. “It is this reckless breaking-up of community accord by the communists,” Sundhaussen explained, “which must be primarily regarded as the cause for the indiscriminate mass slaughter in 1965/6.”
In the case of Aceh, Sundhaussen proposed:

Violent mass action against the PKI first began in Aceh. When rumours reached that area that Muslims had been killed by communists in Jogjakarta, Acehnese in a frenzy of jihad (holy war) set out to kill all communists in Aceh. . . . In Aceh General Ishak Djuarsa attempted to limit the mass slaughter.72

Sudhaussen thus depicted the genocide as the result of spontaneous, religious-inspired popular violence, with the military acting to bring this violence to an end.

Harold Crouch presented a somewhat different analysis in his classic 1978 study, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*. In this study, Crouch cautiously suggested that the military may not have initiated the genocide, but seized the chance to work with others to conduct it, explaining:

While it is not clear that the army leaders intended that the post coup massacres should reach the ferocity experienced in areas like East Java, Bali and Aceh, they no doubt consciously exploited the opportunity provided by the coup attempt to liquidate the PKI leadership. In rural areas of Java and elsewhere, army officers coordinated with members of anti-Communist civilian organisations to murder several hundred thousand PKI activists. . . .73

The genocide is thus depicted by Crouch as having begun spontaneously and as not being entirely under the control of the military. Rather, Crouch describes the relationship between the military and civilian anti-Communist organisations during the killings as being based on shared goals and mutual assistance rather than on a chain of command relationship. As for the scope of the killings, he suggested they were limited to PKI cadres only.

In the case of Aceh, Crouch observed:

The first full-scale massacre of PKI supporters broke out in Aceh in the first part of October. Although the PKI in Aceh was very small, the Muslim leaders in Indonesia’s most strongly Islamic province regarded it as a threat to Islam, and its largely non-Acehnese following became the target of what amounted to a holy war of extermination. Although the army commander, Brigadier General Ishak Djuarsa, reportedly “tried to limit the killing to only the cadres,” many of his troops apparently shared the outlook of the religious leaders.74

Here, Crouch describes the killings as the result of spontaneous, religiously inspired violence, while the military is portrayed as having acted to bring the violence to an end.

This account is likewise mirrored in Robert Cribb’s 1991 account of the killings in the province. Cribb observes:

In strongly Muslim Aceh, where the PKI’s support was miniscule and largely confined to the towns, cadres and their families are reported to have been
eliminated swiftly in early October. We know little more, but the fact that Aceh’s history contains a number of instances of the rapid and ruthless elimination of political opponents when the opportunity presented itself makes this brief account plausible.75

As with the two above accounts, Robert Cribb presents the killings in Aceh as the result of spontaneous religious violence. He also adds a dash of cultural determinism, suggesting that “Aceh’s history” reveals a propensity towards violence. This explanation is perplexing considering Cribb’s pertinent criticisms of the use of “amok” theory to explain the violence.76 Indeed, Sundhaussen’s explanation that the “Acehnese” erupted into a “frenzy of jihad” and Cribb’s more secular explanation that Acehnese had a historical propensity to unleash murderous violence against their political opponents reflect stereotypical tropes of Acehnese as “fanatical Muslims” that have existed since colonial times.77 These tropes, this book will show, were consciously exploited by the military during the time of the genocide.

To the casual reader, the consensus found within these three accounts may appear to strengthen their veracity. This apparent consensus, however, is deeply problematic. Indeed, as far as Aceh is concerned, all three accounts are drawn from the same source: a single interview with the architect of the genocide in the province, Brigadier General Ishak Djuarsa. As an examination of the footnotes of these studies reveals, Crouch drew his original quote from Sundhaussen’s 1971 PhD dissertation, who drew his information from an interview with Djuarsa, while Cribb in turn has referenced Crouch.78 The sum of our understanding of the genocide in Aceh in these three studies rests on an interview with the very person who, as will be shown throughout this book, is perhaps most accountable for the genocide in that province.

I do not intend to criticise these early studies unfairly. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s, when these accounts were written, limited sources were available against which military propaganda accounts could be compared. It was often difficult for researchers to travel outside Indonesia’s major cities without a military chaperone. It was also impossible to access internal military documents of the type found in this book.

It is not the case, however, that no alternative sources were available. Academic contemporaries of Sundhaussen and Crouch led by Benedict Anderson, Ruth McVey and Rex Mortimer were highly critical of the military’s propaganda account. Indeed, both Anderson and McVey were banned from Indonesia for writing a critical analysis of the 30 September Movement and the military’s reaction in 1966, known as the ‘Cornell Paper’. In this report they argued that the military’s attack had been offensive and “quite separate” from the 30 September Movement’s activities.79 Mortimer, for his part, explained:

There was no immediate, spontaneous explosion of violence; indeed, the first outbursts seem to have occurred only after the army had despatched reliable units to areas where the feelings of the populace, played upon by
dramatizations of the murders of the fallen generals and a campaign to pin responsibility on the PKI, could be given full reign.80

These accounts were, however, largely sidelined. The banning of Anderson and McVey from Indonesia was held up as a warning, while Mortimer, a self-declared Marxist, was dismissed as being “partisan”.81

The idea that the genocide was the result of spontaneous violence has also been contradicted by eyewitness accounts of the killings, which began to trickle and then flood out of Indonesia from the 1990s. These eyewitness accounts have often formed the backbone of newer studies of the killings. Beginning with Cribb’s pioneering work to tell the stories of victims through his 1991 edited collection, The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali, these newer studies have generally been structured as regional studies and have provided scholars with critical insights into particular aspects of the military’s initiation and implementation of the genocide. Early examples of such studies focused on the role of the military’s Para-Commando Regiment (RPKAD: Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat) in leading the outbreak of violence in Java and Bali,82 as well as on the role of the military in conducting large-scale arrest campaigns leading to the systematic execution of these detainees at military-controlled killing sites.83

These accounts led some scholars to criticise the understanding that the genocide occurred as the result of spontaneous violence. Geoffrey Robinson, writing in 1995, observed, “The victimization and the physical annihilation of the PKI were not simply or even primarily the consequences of a spontaneous or natural religious impulse”.84 Instead, Robinson proposed, the massacre was the result of a military campaign led by Suharto, who had orchestrated a “counter-coup” in the wake of the actions of the 30 September Movement.85

The question of whether or not the genocide was the result of a deliberate and centralised military campaign, however, remained an open debate. Cribb, for example, suggested in 2002 that while:

[t]here is a powerful argument that the killings came about as a deliberate and massive act of political assassination carried out by Suharto and his allies in the army against their rival for power, the PKI. . . . The main objection to this explanation is that it does not seem to account for the scale of the killings. . . . The Indonesian army could have achieved its primary goal of destroying the PKI as a political force with a much smaller death toll. If the killings were solely a matter of military agency, one has to believe that Suharto wanted mass violence for the sake of its terrifying effect and to bloody the hands of as many people as possible in order to ensure that they would never be able to swing back to the PKI if political circumstances changed.86

If Cribb seems to be ruling out the later interpretation, we must infer that the very scale of the genocide, the fact that it was nation-wide and that it was able to generate such a large death toll is, here, to be taken not as proof of the centralised and coordinated nature of the campaign, but rather, paradoxically, as evidence of
its spontaneity and decentralisation. Likewise, the examples of military coor-
dination that have been uncovered through regional studies have not always been
explained as evidence of the centralised and coordinated nature of the campaign,
but rather as evidence of “regional variation”, an ambiguous concept that side-
steps this paradox at the heart of national interpretations of the 1965–66 events.87
After all, even a nationally coordinated, centrally organised campaign might still
be expected to show some degree of “regional variation”.

For many years the main difficulty in proving whether there was military agency
behind the genocide has been the lack of documentary evidence with which to
counter the military’s own account of what happened. Indeed, until the discovery
of the Indonesian genocide files in 2010, it was seriously debated whether the
military had kept records or even issued orders during the time of the genocide.88

This difficulty in accessing military records has not prevented major strides
being made in research in recent years. Indeed, it could be said that research
into the genocide is currently undergoing a renaissance.89 This process has been
focused around the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide and has been largely driven
by the runaway success of Joshua Oppenheimer’s award winning 2012 documen-
tary film, The Act of Killing, which depicts some of the civilian perpetrators
of the genocide boasting about their participation in the killings and the killers’
relationship to the Indonesian state.90 This film has dealt a spectacular blow the
military’s official propaganda account of the killings. Likewise, Oppenheimer’s
second (2014) film, The Look of Silence, which presents the killings through the
eyes of the brother of a man killed by members of a military-sponsored death
squad in rural North Sumatra, has shone a bright light on the continued impunity
enjoyed by perpetrators of the genocide.91

The international attention generated by Oppenheimer’s films, both nominated
for an Academy Award, has spurred unprecedented interest in the genocide and
led to an array of civil society initiatives, including the International People’s
Tribunal for 1965, which convened a non-legally binding investigation into the
killings in the Hague in 2015.92 It has also sparked a variety of official responses
by the Indonesian government aimed at damage control.

In April 2016, the Indonesian government convened a ‘National Symposium on
the 1965 Tragedy’.93 Billed as a means for victims and civil society representa-
tives to meet with the government, hopes for change were quickly squashed when
Indonesia’s then Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs,
Luhut Pandjaitan, who provided opening remarks for the Symposium, cast doubt
on the existence of mass graves, while reiterating the government’s refusal to
issue an apology to victims of the genocide.94 “We will not apologise,” he stated
before explaining, “We are not that stupid. We know what we did and it was the
right thing to do for the nation.”95

Luhut then issued a rather unusual challenge at a press conference following
the Symposium:

We don’t have any evidence now that a [large] number of people got killed
back in 1965 . . . Some people say 80,000 or 400,000 [people were killed],
[but] we don’t have any evidence of that . . . I challenge some of the media, if you can show us where the mass graves are, we are more than happy to look.  

I would like to present this book as evidence not only of the existence of mass graves, but as evidence the Indonesian state is fully aware that the genocide was implemented as deliberate state policy.

**Discovery of the Indonesian genocide files**

My interest in the topic of the ‘1965–66 mass killings’, as they are commonly referred to in Western literature, was initially borne out of a desire to better understand the more recent separatist conflict in Aceh. This interest grew as I realised that patterns in military violence seen in Aceh during the conflict often drew their origin from the 1965–66 period.

Between 1976 and 2005, Aceh was locked in a bitter separatist war. This conflict officially began on 4 December 1976, when Hasan di Tiro, a descendant of a prominent *ulama* (Islamic scholar), originally from Pidie in North Aceh, declared Aceh’s independence. He portrayed his struggle to be a continuation of both Aceh’s *Darul Islam* (Abode of Islam) rebellion (1953–62) and its holy war against the Dutch (1873–1914) (see chapter 2). Just as important to Tiro’s decision to lead an armed rebellion against the Indonesian state was his failure to secure a pipeline contract with the new Mobil Oil gas plant that was being built in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh, when he was outbid by Bechtel. Nonetheless, Tiro’s message of anger against the central government struck a chord. Aceh was, and remains to this day, one of Indonesia’s poorest provinces and numerous young men soon began to join Tiro in the mountains. In a vicious cycle, the Indonesian military treated Aceh’s civilian population as potential combatants, which, in turn, spurred support for the separatists. It is believed that approximately 15,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed as a result of the conflict.

In 2003 the military intensified the conflict. This followed a swell in popular support within Aceh for independence. The pro-democracy movement that had been the driving force behind the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 had morphed into a pro-referendum movement in Aceh by 1999. At one point, approximately 500,000 of Aceh’s 4.2 million people had converged on Banda Aceh to demand a vote on whether Aceh should “join or separate” from Indonesia. Police had thrown off their uniforms and abandoned their posts. The military, however, had regained the upper hand and launched a brutal attack against both the separatists, known as the Free Aceh Movement (GAM: *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*), and civilian activists.

In addition to employing a territorial warfare strategy of the type used in 1965–66, the military also relied heavily upon the use of civilian militia groups and mandatory “night watch” (*jaga malam*) campaigns. In Aceh’s rural villages (*kampung*), the military would travel from *kampung* to *kampung* searching for suspected GAM militants. Individuals who were accused of being “GAM”, or who were accused of having connections to the organisation,
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could be shot on sight. In Aceh’s towns, the military pursued civilian activists. Many of these activists, mostly university-age students, were rounded up, interrogated and tortured. Others were “disappeared” and their mutilated bodies later discovered. The public display of bodies was a common sight. Then, with no end to the conflict in sight, the war was short-circuited by a freak act of nature.

During the early hours of 24 December 2004, an Indian Ocean tsunami sent 30-meter-tall black waves over the province. The devastation was apocalyptic. Approximately 170,000 people in Aceh were killed and 504,518 were made homeless. Entire villages and subdistricts were destroyed. In some places the ground was swept clear. Dotted concrete foundations were the only evidence that houses had once stood in the area. In other places, the debris of smashed buildings made roads unpassable. The tsunami stopped the worst of the fighting. It did not stop the military from brutalising suspected separatists, many of whom had descended from Aceh’s hilly interior to search for loved ones.

I first travelled to Aceh six weeks after the tsunami. At the time I was a second-year undergraduate student researching the conflict in Aceh. Prior to the tsunami, Aceh had been closed to foreigners and it was not known how long Aceh’s borders would remain open. My plan was to interview student activists involved in Aceh’s pro-referendum movement and GAM fighters. In addition to carrying out these interviews, I volunteered with a local NGO distributing food aid to tsunami victims. Later I would work for the Aceh Monitoring Mission, which oversaw the 15 August 2005 peace deal between GAM and the central government, as well as for the Indonesian government’s tsunami Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Board.

In February 2005, bodies were still being fished from the sea and food was scarce. The war, meanwhile, continued to grind on. At night I could hear gunfire. During the day, I passed through apparently endless military roadblocks and saw tanks and armoured vehicles snake through the streets. At all times people were careful about what they said, speaking in whispers and looking out the corner of their eyes, fearful that a wrong word or gesture might place them under suspicion. It is a testament to the brutality of the conflict that many people I spoke to described the tsunami as a blessing in disguise. These experiences formed a snapshot in my mind of a society gripped by fear and military terror. It would be to these scenes that my mind would often wander as I read accounts of military actions in 1965.

To begin with, I assumed that the brevity with which the topic of the genocide was treated in the literature was a reflection of the fact that we already knew so much about these events. It was when I decided to investigate what had happened in Aceh in 1965 – something that I thought could be resolved by a quick visit to the library – that I was faced with the realisation that only a handful of paragraphs could be found in the literature regarding the killings in the province and that, in fact, very little was known about the killings as a national event. It was from this initial investigation that I embarked on the research that would eventually result in this book.
During my research I conducted three fieldwork trips: the first in early 2009, the second in late 2010 and early 2011, and the third between mid-2011 and early 2012. During these trips I met with former members of the PKI, family members of people who had been killed during the genocide, former military personnel, government officials and members of the civilian militias and death squads who had participated in the genocide. I also met with other eyewitnesses who were able to recall the killings. In total, I conducted over seventy interviews in Banda Aceh, North Aceh, East Aceh, Central Aceh, West Aceh, South Aceh, Medan, West Sumatra, Jakarta and Hong Kong.

I located my interviewees by means of a referral method, whereby I would travel to a specific location and establish contact with human rights activists or other local contacts who were aware of older members in the community linked to the events of 1965–66. I would then meet these potential interviewees, who would often refer me on to others. This method was adopted as a result of the continued sensitivity with which the killings are still viewed in Aceh. The 1965 genocide remains a much more sensitive topic than the recent separatist struggle in the province. Thus while former members of the Free Aceh Movement and other survivors and participants in the recent separatist struggle often speak proudly of their actions, people considered to be associated with the PKI retain a sense of stigma even fifty years after the event. There is no official registered network of survivors or perpetrators of the genocide in Aceh. The interviews presented in this book represent the largest collection of oral history testimony to be collected on the topic in Aceh.

The interview process was a humbling experience. Many of the survivors I met had never spoken publicly about their experiences. Some wept, and all spoke with a steely determination. Most have attempted to keep their status as survivors secret, for fear of continued intimidation and harassment. As they told me about loved ones who had been murdered it struck me as unbelievably tragic that even to this day they have not been able to mourn publicly. Many continue to express bewilderment about why their lives were so suddenly and irrevocably turned upside down. Suppression of information about the genocide has also meant that survivors are often confused about whether or not their own experiences are unique. One of the most common questions I was asked was whether the killings had been similar in other areas. It may well be that the social taboo surrounding discussion of the genocide has helped preserve the integrity of their testimony.

Speaking with perpetrators was a surreal experience. While villagers who had been forced to participate in the killings were often reluctant to speak about their experiences, former death squad leaders spoke openly and boastfully about their actions. They considered themselves national heroes. Their greatest regret was that they had not received more recognition for their actions. As I sat drinking tea with such men I quickly discovered that so long as I kept my opinions to myself, they were more than happy to speak openly to me. They believed, or at least told themselves, that what they had done was right. I also came to realise, as so many have before me, quite disconcertingly at first, the humanness of such individuals. They were not monsters. They spoke to me politely and in some cases even kindly. I can only imagine the fear they must have once inspired and the horror that they have seen and implemented,
but today they are grandfathers, hoping to tell their stories before it is too late. This realisation does not minimise their crimes. It did, however, make me see that even in the most extreme of circumstances people like to externalise evil: it is something that we like to think that only our enemies can do. Such thinking makes it only too easy for great wrongs to be committed in our name.

During the course of my fieldwork I also conducted extensive archival research. After discovering with great disappointment that all pre-2004 newspapers in Aceh had been destroyed by the tsunami, which had inundated the offices of Aceh’s daily newspaper _Serambi Indonesia_, parts of the Aceh Information and Documentation Centre and the Aceh Provincial Library. I was fortunate to discover the Ali Hasjmy Library, originally the personal collection of Ali Hasjmy, Aceh’s Governor between 1957 and 1964, and its extensive collection of public government records and rare memoirs stretching back to the time of the national revolution.

I was also able to collect many public government documents and statistics from the Aceh Provincial Library, the Aceh Information and Documentation Centre and the Aceh Statistics Bureau, and to search the collections at the Banda Aceh Legal Aid Organisation (LBH – Banda Aceh), the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS), Tikar Pandan, the Aceh Institute and Isa Sulaiman libraries. I am most grateful to the archivists at these institutions who graciously allowed me to spend days poring through their collections. It was only at the Medan-based _Waspada_ newspaper, which reported on and sold newspapers in Aceh throughout the 1960s, that I felt restricted in my ability to enjoy unhindered access to these collections. Having been invited to return the next day to begin my research, I was sadly told on my return that their collection of newspapers from 1965 had mysteriously “disappeared”.

My first major breakthrough came in early 2010, when Indonesia researcher Douglas Kammen sent me a scanned copy of a document that would change the course of my research.100 This scanned 250-page typescript document was entitled the ‘Complete Yearly Report for Kodam-I/Kohanda Atjeh for the Year 1965’. It had been produced by the Aceh Military Command and signed by Aceh’s Military Commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Ishak Djuarsa (1 October 1964–1 April 1967). This document had never previously been cited. Similar reports have yet to be discovered elsewhere in Indonesia. Tellingly it included a comprehensive eighty-nine-page report by Djuarsa detailing the military’s “annihilation campaign” against the PKI in the province. It is undoubtedly authentic.

This report also includes a remarkable collection of “attachments”, including a “death map” recording the number of “dead PKI elements” (oknum PKI jang mati), and a flow chart labelled ‘Result of the Annihilation of Gestok during 1965 in Kodam-I/Atjeh’, plotting these deaths to demonstrate graphically which of Aceh’s districts had higher death counts. The attachments also include: various military organisational charts and tables detailing the military chains of command in operation in the province at the time, stretching from the provincial down to the district, subdistrict and village levels; tables detailing the number of military personnel in each district and the number of arms they had been distributed; as
Figure 0.1 Death map: ‘Attachment: Intelligence map’. Circled numbers show “Dead PKI elements”.
Figure 0.2 First page of the Military Chronology: ‘Chronology of events related to the 30 September Movement in Kodam-I/Aceh Province’. 
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well as the number of civilian militia members at the disposal of each of these military detachments at the time of the genocide. The report additionally includes a twenty-one-page ‘Chronology of events related to the 30 September Movement in Kodam-I/Aceh Province’, which provides an hour-by-hour account of events between 1 October and 22 December.

Reading this document, I began to believe for the first time that it would be possible to create an accurate chronological narrative of the genocide in the province based on the military’s own account of events – a first for the killings nationally. The Complete Yearly Report also made it possible to cross-check the information I had been hearing in my interviews and to begin to move from the flexible time-pans of hearsay to establish certain facts.

My second major breakthrough occurred in late 2010 when I decided to search the Aceh Government Library and Archives, the site of the former Indonesian Intelligence Agency’s archives in Banda Aceh. Armed with the knowledge that documents had indeed been produced during the killings, I entered the Archives and requested permission at the front desk to access its catalogues. Direct shelf access to the documents was not possible, but I was able to request a collection of seventeen files based on their titles, unsure whether the information in them would be of any use. The titles of these files were obscure, ranging from ‘Proceedings of the Special Meeting of the West Aceh Level II Provincial Government on 11 October 1965 to discuss the affair that has named itself G.30.S/PKI’,101 to ‘Report of the Regent and District Head T. Ramli Angkasah in leading the District Government in North Aceh’,102 to ‘Former Civil Servants that have been involved in the G30S PKI in Aceh Besar’.103

When I had first requested to view the files, I had been hopeful that I might be given a handful of documents. When I was subsequently presented with a box containing over 3,000 pages of photocopied classified documents I could not believe my luck.104 These documents, combined with the Complete Yearly Report, are by far the most detailed collection of documents ever recovered from the time of the Indonesian genocide. They fundamentally change what is knowable in terms of both chronology and accountability. They were, as one of my colleagues observed, not just a proverbial smoking gun but a “smoking arsenal”.

The most important of these documents is the ‘Proceedings of the Special Meeting of the West Aceh Level II Provincial Government on 11 October 1965 to discuss the affair that has named itself G.30.S/PKI’ file, which I will hereafter refer to as the ‘Chain of Command documents bundle’. This bundle contains eight documents, collectively twenty-one pages in length, that were collated by the West Aceh Level II Provincial Government. It includes executive orders produced in Banda Aceh initiating the genocide in the province. Another significant file within the collection relates to the establishment of death squads in Aceh. This file includes the founding document of the East Aceh Pantja Sila Defence Front death squad, as well as a document produced by the East Aceh Level II Provincial Government endorsing the establishment of this death squad and pledging the state’s full support and material assistance for its activities. Another bundle of documents records the campaign of anti-Chinese violence that broke out in the
province in April 1966. These documents provide the first documentary evidence that systematic race-based killings did occur in Aceh during the genocide. Other documents record the military’s campaign at the district and subdistrict levels in Banda Aceh, North Aceh, East Aceh, West Aceh, South Aceh and Central Aceh. There is also a large collection of documents that record the subsequent purge of the civil service throughout the province.

It is these documents, together with the information drawn from my interviews with survivors, perpetrators and other eyewitnesses of the genocide, that form the basis of this book.

Notes

3. The earliest known use of this phrase occurred at midnight on 1 October 1965. See below.
7. ‘Pancasila’, lit. ‘five principles’, is the name given to the five guiding principles of Indonesian nationalism first enunciated by Sukarno in 1945. These principles – belief in God, humanity, national unity, democracy and social justice – are vague in nature and were adopted and sacralised by the New Order regime.
9. The remaining kidnapped generals and lieutenant were Major General S. Parman, Major General Mas Tirtodarmo, Major General R. Suprapto, Brigadier General Soetojo Siswomiharjo, General Donald Ishak Panjaitan and Lieutenant Pierre Tandean.
15. Some have proposed Suharto was not attacked because he was the ultimate “dalang” (puppet master) behind the Movement. See, for example, Wilem Frederik Wertheim, ‘Whose Plot? New Light on the 1965 Events’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1979), pp. 197–215. While this is possible, I do not think his subsequent actions are reliant on such an interpretation.
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20 Ibid., p. 189.
22 Aidit did not, for example, issue a radio announcement, despite the 30 September Movement occupying the national RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) radio station in Merdeka Square, Jakarta, until 6pm on 1 October. Nor did the PKI issue a call to arms in its national daily newspaper, *The People’s Daily* (Harian Rakjat), which printed its 2 October issue during the afternoon of 1 October. Instead, the newspaper characterised the actions of the 30 September Movement as an internal military affair.
28 While it may appear to be hair-splitting in the face of the Movement’s actions in killing the generals, the Movement initially described its actions as a means of protecting Sukarno. The Movement’s failure to repeat its earlier pledge of loyalty to Sukarno at 2pm appears to have been a tactical error as it further alienated potential pro-Sukarno allies while making it even easier for the military leadership to justify responding with force to the Movement.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 367.
38 Joseph Barkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (New York: C.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1976), p. 215. Barkholder Smith, a former CIA operative who was head of the CIA’s Indonesia desk at the time, describes Masjumi as “progressive Moslems”.
40 The problematic nature of this transfer and the subsequent injustices suffered by the people of West Papua have been well documented. Richard Chauvel, *Essays on West Papua, Volume I* (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 2003).
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43 Easter proposes that the desire to prevent such a war (which could have become a second Vietnam) was one of the major reasons the US, Britain and Australia pushed so hard for the Indonesian generals to take action against Sukarno. Ibid., p. 90.
45 Cited in, David Easter, Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia, p. 137.
46 John Roosa, Pretext for Mass Murder, p. 190.
47 Ibid., p. 191.
49 John Roosa, Pretext for Mass Murder, p. 194.
50 Ibid., p. 193.
52 In mid-2017 the National Archives and Records Administration in Maryland announced it would soon be declassifying US embassy files from Jakarta produced between 1963 and 1965 due to public interest in the files. The National Security Archive plans to scan these files and make them available to the public in late 2017.
53 In late 1965, the United States supplied the Indonesian military with state-of-the-art mobile radios, flown in from the Clark Air Base in the Philippines. An antenna was also given to the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad). Ibid., p. 194.
59 The relevant extract of the report, narrated by Yeates, reads as follows: “Indonesia’s present turmoil, conflict and power struggle is not altogether new. The Balinese kecak, a kind of Hindu passion play, illustrates vividly complex and alien struggles going on today. Here the priest blesses the participants, one hundred men representing rival armies of monkeys, one good, the other evil, each convinced they are in the right.” The report proceeds to cut between images of men performing the kecak dance, in which participants percussively chant “cak” and move their arms to depict a battle from the Ramayana, and contemporary news footage from Indonesia. “Today’s real battle between the forces of good and evil,” Yeates
continues, “rages in the streets. They [anti-Sukarno demonstrators] demand social
reform and political freedom. Their cry is not ‘down with America’ or ‘Yankee go
home’, what they are demanding in effect is ‘down with the communists’, ‘Yan-
kee come back’. The garish leader of the forces of evil is a monster king called
Rahwana.” Footage is shown of a man dressed as the monster king Rahwana,
cheered by his army of monkeys, and then swiftly shifts to an image of Sukarno.
“President Sukarno, with flamboyance and arrogance, led Indonesia to liberation
in 1945 after 350 years of Dutch rule.” The camera cuts again to an image of
Rahwana and then back to Sukarno. “He also let his nation fall under communist
influence, into bankruptcy and chaos. The good king, portrayed by a girl, is named
Rama.” An image of a girl dressed as Rama is shown. “Rama, with the help of his
army, tries to save the country and destroy the evil forces of Rahwana. Today it is
General Suharto and his army that crushed the communist coup.” The camera cuts
to an image of Suharto. “It is General Suharto who leads the effort to remove Presi-
clip/51A08495_s01.do.

60 Ibid.

61 The concept of “running amok”, originally a term used to refer to the redemption of
honour by an individual or group of soldiers by means of frenzied violence, result-

62 Geoffrey Robinson, The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali (Ithaca,

63 Arnold C. Brackman, The Communist Collapse in Indonesia (New York: W.W. Nort-
on & Company, 1969), p. 122. Green was less guarded in his 1990 memoir, where
he blamed the PKI for bringing the genocide upon itself. “In the last analysis,” Green
explained, “. . . the bloodbath visited on Indonesia can largely be attributed to the fact
that communism, with its atheism and talk of class warfare, was abhorrent to the way
of life of rural Indonesia.” Marshall Green, Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation,

64 Arnold C. Brackman, The Communist Collapse in Indonesia, p. 122.

6 July 1966, cited in Richard Tanter, ‘Witness Denied: The Australian Response to the
Indonesian Holocaust, 1965–66’, Paper prepared for the International Conference on
Indonesia and the World in 1965, Goethe Institute, Jakarta, 18–21 January 2011. Avail-


68 ‘Yearbook of the United Nations: 1965’, Office of Public Information, United Nations,

69 In 1969, for example, United Nations Secretary General, U Thant, “saw no reason
to undermine the West’s policy of encouraging and supporting the anti-communist
President Suharto” when it became clear the new regime had no intention of hon-
ouring its commitments to facilitate a vote on self-determination in West Irian in
1969. John Saltford, The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua,
The United Nations has also been criticised for its failure to prevent Indonesia’s inva-
sion and occupation of East Timor in 1975.

71 Ibid., pp. 218–219.

72 Ibid., pp. 214, 218.


74 Ibid., pp. 142–143.


77 For a discussion of the development of this stereotype and its use up to the time of the recent separatist struggle in Aceh, see, Elizabeth F. Drexler, *Aceh, Indonesia: Securing the Insecure State* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 60, 75, 83, 106. Such stereotypical tropes have not been limited to Aceh. In the case of Bali, Geoffrey Robinson has convincingly demolished the trope of “the Balinese” as possessing a unique and “exotic” character featuring inexplicable shifts between extreme submissiveness and frenzied violence. Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*.


81 See, for example, Justus M. van der Kroef, ‘Review: Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno’, *Journal of Asian History*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (1975), pp. 193–194. In this review van der Kroef describes Mortimer’s analysis as “decidedly lacking in objectivity”. He dismisses Mortimer’s discussion of Suharto’s potential role in the coup as “highly tenuous”, p. 193. The re-writing of the history of the Indonesian genocide will require a sober disengagement from Cold War narratives and a perhaps uncomfortable acknowledgement that these classic accounts often came perilously close to becoming an uncritical repetition of military propaganda.


in the Indonesian Genocide’, PhD thesis, University of the Arts London, 2004, p. 98; for South Sulawesi, Taufik Ahmad, ‘South Sulawesi: The Military, Prison Camps and Forced Labour’, in Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (eds.), The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, pp. 156–181. The best sustained narrative describing how killings were implemented at military-controlled killing sites, as told by former death squad members who participated in the killings, can be found in, Snake River, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer, 2004. This film has not been publically released but was submitted as part of Oppenheimer’s PhD thesis, ‘Show of Force’.


85 Ibid. This argument was also supported by Saskia Wieringa, who, writing in the same year, explained how military-fabricated stories about members of the left-wing women’s organisation Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia: Indonesian Women’s Movement) participating in sadistic and sexualised acts against the generals murdered by the 30 September Movement at Lubang Buaya had been used to justify the killings. Saskia Wieringa, ‘The Politicization of Gender Relations in Indonesia: The Indonesian Women’s Movement and Gerwani Until the New Order State’, PhD thesis, The University of Amsterdam, 1995.


87 The concept of “regional variation” appears to stem from Robert Cribb’s assessment that the “ferocity [of the killings] seems to have been a product of local factors”. Robert Cribb (ed.), The Indonesian Killings, p. 23. This concept has resulted in a tendency to describe the killings as a series of inter-related but separate events that occurred in each province. This approach was used by Crouch and Sundhaussen, who provide brief overviews of the killings in several provinces. Harold Crouch, The Army and Politics in Indonesia, pp. 143–154; and, Ulf Sundhaussen, The Road to Power, pp. 214–219. The two major national studies of the killings, Robert Cribb (ed.), The Indonesian Killings; and Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (eds.), The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, meanwhile, present the killings as a series of regional studies without providing an overall analysis of these studies.


90 The Act of Killing, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer (Denmark: Final Cut for Real, 2012).

91 The Look of Silence, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer (Denmark: Final Cut for Real, 2014).
92 I was fortunate to contribute to the International People’s Tribunal’s Final Report. The Final Report of the International People’s Tribunal is available online: www.tribunal1965.org/final-report-of-the-ipt-1965/.


96 Ibid.


99 The collections at these two institutions were only partially destroyed by the tsunami.

100 My sincere thanks to Douglas Kammen for sending me this document, which apparently mysteriously appeared at The Royal Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) to be scanned as part of the Aceh Digital Library project. Initiated by KITLV as a response to the destruction of Aceh’s library and archive collections during the tsunami, the Aceh Digital Library project digitised a major part of the literature on Aceh that is kept in the KITLV Library. It may never be known exactly why this document was given to KITLV. It is my suspicion that it was inadvertently included in a mass collection of printed material from a government archive in Aceh. No other ‘Complete Yearly Report’ produced by the Aceh military command can be found in the collection, though multiple yearly reports relating to various government departments produced during the 1960s and 1970s have been included, such as the ‘Complete Yearly Report’ of Aceh’s Department of Education and Culture for the year 1970. The Complete Yearly Report produced by the Aceh military command is undoubtedly authentic. Orders and details found in the report can also be found in the documents I independently recovered from the Aceh Government Library and Archives in 2010. It is hard to understand why the Aceh government would possess and treat as authentic such self-incriminating documents if they are not, in fact, genuine. Likewise, orders and details contained in both of these sources have been independently confirmed by my interviewees, including both survivors and perpetrators.


104 I was given each of the files I had requested. I do not know if the files were reviewed before being released to me. I paid for photocopying costs. I cannot remember the exact amount, but it was not significantly different to the amount I would usually be asked to pay for photocopying at archives in Aceh.