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The Long Shadow of the Cold War: The Cold War Policies of the United States towards Asia and their Impact on Indonesia

Research Note

Baskara T. Wardaya

Abstract

In its Cold War policies toward Asia, the United States aimed at seeking economic recovery and geopolitical stability while controlling the process. Along with securing Southeast Asia as an important market and source of raw materials for itself and its allies, the intent was also to rehabilitate Japan and other Cold War allies. In Indonesia these policies resulted in US support for the massive anti-communist purge that began in Indonesia in 1965. This paper intends to show that in Indonesia, the US these policies were a success, as shown by the ouster of President Sukarno and the massive purging of the alleged members of the Indonesian communist party (PKI), as well as the installation of a new and pro-Western government. These successes, along with the benefits that accrued, left the United States reluctant to press the Indonesian government to deal with issues related to the purge. The refusal of the Indonesian government to deal with the 1965 anti-communist purge, in turn, has made it impossible for the purge's victims and survivors to seek justice and reconciliation on the matter. As a result, decades after the end of the Cold War, they continue to suffer from its impact.

Keywords: Cold War, United States, Indonesia, 1965, anti-communist purge, history

Defining the Cold War as "the rivalry that developed between the two super-powers – the Soviet Union and the United States – as each sought to fill the power vacuum left by the defeat of Germany and Japan", Tucker (2017) argues that on each side the rivalry leaders believed that they were compelled to extend their national hegemony to respond to the other's "aggressive" actions. In responding to each other's actions, they used bluff, pride, simple animosity as well as personal and geopolitical ambitions and other means (Tucker 2007: 11).

Baskara T. Wardaya, Department of History, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia;
baskaram@yahoo.com

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Baskara T. Wardaya, Department of History, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; baskaramu@yahoo.com

When discussing US Cold War policies in Asia, Gaddis (2007) observed that the United States “would seek economic recovery and the geopolitical stability it seemed likely to bring, but only where it could control that process and count on quick results: hence the emphasis on rehabilitating Japan, together with securing whatever markets and raw materials it might need from Southeast Asia” (Gaddis 1997: 62). The US political strategy can be summarised in four important points: 1) during the Cold War the US sought economic recovery in Asia and the geopolitical stability it seemed likely to bring; 2) the US did so only where it could control the process and count on quick results; 3) one of the results expected was the emphasis on rehabilitating Japan; and 4) another expected result was securing whatever markets and raw materials it might need from Southeast Asia.

As one of the countries of interest in Southeast Asia, Indonesia was among the sites for the implementation of these US foreign policies in Asia. This was clearly reflected, for instance, when in 1961 US President Kennedy’s undersecretary of state Chester Bowles explained to Indonesia’s President Sukarno that US Cold War policies in Asia were intended to help build a “stable group [of] independent Asian nations as [an] offset and counter to Chinese Communist power”. This was to be achieved, according to Bowles, by building “an arc of stable and free Asian states based on Japan, Indonesia, India and Pakistan”.¹ In a document called “Draft Memorandum on East and Southeast Asia”, Bowles further explained that the US goal for the region was: “the gradual economic integration of the free Asian rim land, from Japan and Korea to India and Pakistan”.² He then stated that “[i]n the long run, such integration is the only viable basis for increasing political cooperation and for coordinated security planning by the free states of the region”.³ Bowles believed that such policies would require the United States to take on the role of a “military shield for the developing nations of South and Southeast Asia” and “the major outside contributor to technical training, economic planning and economic development”.⁴

Using these comments on US Cold War policies toward Asia as a starting point, this article will show that in Indonesia, the United States sought to rejuvenate Indonesia’s troubled economy under the government of President Sukarno by supporting initiatives to remove the president from power and to destroy the political party that had become the main support for the president, namely the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). When this finally occurred, the

1 Draft Memo on East and Southeast Asia, 20 March 1962, Thompson Papers, Box 7, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 26–27.

2 Draft Memo on East and Southeast Asia, 20 March 1962, Thompson Papers, Box 7, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 28.

3 Draft Memo on East and Southeast Asia, 20 March 1962, Thompson Papers, Box 7, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 28–29.

4 Draft Memo on East and Southeast Asia, 20 March 1962, Thompson Papers, Box 7, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 32.

US began to help the succeeding government repair Indonesia's economy while encouraging the government to open its doors to foreign investment, particularly from Japan. Of course, this enabled the US itself to gain better access to Indonesia's market potential. At the same time, the departure of President Sukarno and the destruction of the PKI opened new opportunities for the exploitation of Indonesia's raw materials by the US and its allies.

The following findings are based on library research, especially on literature concerning US policies toward Indonesia during the Cold War and the 1965 anti-communist purge. The paper particularly relies on the research of John Lewis Gaddis (2007), who investigated materials available after the end of the Cold War, and research done by Bradley Simpson (2010), whose use of primary documents from the US National Archives revealed the strong connection between US Cold War policies toward Indonesia and the reorientation of Indonesia's economy and politics after 1965. While Gaddis excellently summarised his observations on US Cold War policies in Asia and Simpson brilliantly described the important role of the US in the changing of Indonesia's economic and political orientation, neither discussed the impact of the purge on the Indonesian government and the victims of the purge. Therefore, this paper intends to continue and enrich their studies by further exploring the missing part. The results are presented using the narrative-analytical method defined by Loeb et al. (2017) as a "descriptive analysis [which] characterizes the world or a phenomenon by identifying patterns in data to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent" (Loeb et al. 2017: vii). We will thus examine this period to guide us through an overview of the Cold War policies of the United States in general and their impact on Indonesia in particular.

US Cold War policies in Indonesia

Although not a major site in the Cold War, Indonesia was deeply affected by the international rivalry. This was true especially when the two chief opponents in the rivalry, the United States and the Soviet Union, sought to carve out a sphere of influence in Indonesia (Wardaya 2007). When the US began to implement its Cold War policies toward Asia, it made Indonesia a major focus in Southeast Asia (Gaddis 2007). As mentioned above, the US policies comprised efforts to pursue economic recovery and geopolitical stability; to control the process and count on the results; to rehabilitate Japan; and to secure Southeast Asia for its market and as a source of raw materials.

In the case of Indonesia, the implementation of these policies resulted in US support for the ouster of President Sukarno and the massive anti-communist purge that swept Indonesia in 1965 and afterwards. The purge – also called

the “1965 Affair” the “1965 tragedy”, “1965 events” or simply “65” – resulted in mass killings of civilians and was one of the largest mass killings during the Cold War period. As Geoffrey Robinson has stated, it “was comparable to some of the most notorious campaigns of mass killing and imprisonment of the post-war period, including those that occurred in Bosnia, Cambodia and Rwanda” (Robinson 2018: 4). Moreover, the purge “far surpassed other campaigns that have become iconic symbols of authoritarian violence in Latin America, such as those in Argentina and Chile” (Robinson 2018: 4).

Seeking economic recovery and geopolitical stability

In the 1960s, the US was concerned about the economic instability of Indonesia. This was because the country’s economy was in very serious trouble, which was feared to have implications for other Southeast Asian nations. While the Bank of Indonesia was running a US\$300 million foreign exchange deficit, the industrial sector was barely able to manage, due to the difficulties in accessing foreign commercial credit, spare parts and raw materials (Simpson 2010: 164–165). In such a situation massive capital flight occurred while corruption was rampant. For ordinary Indonesian families it was even difficult to satisfy their daily basic needs. After returning from a visit to Jakarta, an IMF official described the debt level of Indonesia as not only bad but also “extremely unusual – a debt probably worse than any other case in recent history”.⁵ The economic situation was so unstable that the government was unable to formulate a 1965 budget (Simpson 2010: 164–165).

In politics, beginning in 1950 Indonesia had embraced the parliamentary system of democratic government. However, due to frequent unresolved rivalries among the existing political parties and pressures from the Army, in 1959 the system was abandoned. Influenced by the Army, President Sukarno discontinued the parliamentary system and replaced it with what he called a “guided democracy”, in which he ruled as a near-absolute leader. Under this “guided democracy” Sukarno built close relations with the PKI. He even increasingly relied on the communist party for political support. This development worried Washington. Concerned about the growing threat of the communists, “US officials [...] looked to the [Indonesian] armed forces as a counterweight” (Simpson 2010: 32). They believed that “[s]o long as Sukarno remained in power and the Army remained on the defensive, the PKI would continue to grow in strength, until Indonesia eventually became a ‘modified Communist regime’” (Simpson 2021: 138). Soon US policymakers began to look for an opportunity that could be used as a trigger to change Indonesia’s economic and political direction. In particular they looked

5 Memo of Conversation, “Indonesian Economic Stabilization and Debt Rescheduling”, 26 July 1966, Record Group 59, Central Files, 1964–1966, E 1, Indonesia, United States National Archives.

for a pretext that could be used to remove President Sukarno from power and to destroy his main political support – the PKI. ¹¹

The opportunity came when in the early hours of 1 October 1965, a group of left-wing Army officers, who called themselves *Gerakan 30 September* or the “September 30th Movement”, launched a secret military operation in Jakarta. They kidnapped and killed six generals, who were the top leaders of the Indonesian Army (Hearman 2018: 12–13). Before it was clear who the culprits behind the military operation were, one of the surviving Army commanders, the right-wing Major-General Suharto, claimed that the PKI was the sole mastermind of the killings. Under Suharto’s command, all newspapers were ordered to close, except two Army-owned newspapers.⁶ The claim that the PKI was the mastermind of the incident was subsequently used by Suharto and his supporters as a pretext for a nation-wide military operation to purge members of the PKI and those suspected of having a connection with the communist party (Roosa 2008).

The purge began in mid-October 1965 when victims were apprehended, detained, interrogated and tortured. Many of them ²⁵ were taken to special sites where they were summarily executed. Their bodies were buried in makeshift mass graves or thrown into nearby rivers (Cribb 1991: 81, Robinson 2017: 474). In the ensuing operation, the purge not only targeted PKI leaders and official members but also members of organisations that were considered to have a connection with the party (Cribb 1991, McGregor et al. 2018). Beginning in 1969 those who had survived the detentions and mass killings in Java were sent to Buru Island, a penal island located in the Moluccas, in the eastern part of the country. ²⁶

The anti-communist purge took place in different parts of Indonesia, from Aceh in the northernmost territory of the country (Melvin 2018) to the island of Timor in eastern Indonesia (Kolimon et al. 2015). The heaviest purges, however, took place in the provinces of Central Java, East Java and Bali (Cribb 1991). The main perpetrators of the violence were military personnel, but in the actual killings they were often aided by members of anti-communist paramilitary and civilian groups (McGregor et al. 2018: 14.) In total, it was estimated that at least half a million Indonesians were killed in the purge (Kammen / McGregor 2012, Robinson 2018, Hearman 2018).

After destroying the PKI and other leftist elements, Suharto moved to gradually evict President Sukarno from his position. On 11 March 1966 he pressured the president to sign a letter which would give him “executive authority” (Robinson 2018: 65). With this letter in hand, Suharto became the *de facto* leader of Indonesia. He immediately seized the moment by removing all obstacles to his effort to take over the nation’s highest office. In March 1967 the Indonesian Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (whose membership Suharto

6 Namely *Angkatan Bersendjata* and *Berita Yudha* (Hearman 2018: 71).

had modified) declared Suharto as Acting-President, and in March 1968 it declared Suharto the President of Indonesia – Sukarno’s rule was officially over. Suharto, as the all-powerful new leader of Indonesia, established a government called *Orde Baru* or the “New Order” (Robinson 2018: 3).

The United States welcomed the new government, especially knowing that Suharto was willing to reverse many of President Sukarno’s policies, particularly by opening itself up to close collaboration with the US and its Cold War allies. The ³³ 1966 edition of the US-published *Time* magazine, for example, exalted the destruction of the Indonesian communists as “the West’s best news for years in Asia” (McGregor et al. 2018: 2). For the adherents of the so-called “domino theory” (Tucker 2007: 26), the defeat of the communists in Indonesia was a particular source of relief. For them, preventing Indonesia – an important “domino” in Southeast Asia – from joining the communist side of the Cold War was indeed necessary to prevent other “dominoes” in the area from following suit. Moreover, the defeat of Indonesian leftist elements was equally necessary to open doors for US economic interests as well as geo-political interests in Southeast Asia.

Controlling the process and counting on quick results

On the surface, the removal of President Sukarno from power and the destruction of the PKI appeared to be simply an Indonesian domestic affair, in which the United States was merely a passive bystander that was grateful for these circumstances. But a deeper look shows that this was not the case. As the events in Indonesia unfolded, the US was closely observing. As part of its Cold War policies toward Asia, Washington was actively (albeit covertly) supporting the elements within the Indonesian Army that worked to ouster Sukarno and destroy the communist party. Even if American officials were not in total control of the events, they tried to intervene as much as they could to influence the dynamics of the process, anticipating that, as Gaddis observed, the results of the process would serve US interests.

¹⁵ Prior to the 1965 purge in Indonesia, for instance, US Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman had stated that the United States was “in a position to press discreetly for a re-direction of Indonesia’s economy toward a more rational pattern which cannot help but affect the country’s political orientation”.⁷ This statement clearly reflected Washington’s desire to control the economic and political dynamics of Indonesia.

For US foreign policy officials, especially for those who subscribed to the “domino theory”, there had been a strong view that a failure to prevent Indonesia from being taken over by the communists would cause other nations of

⁷ Letter from Hilsman to Cornelius Gallagher, 12 July 1963, Record Group 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1963, POL 1, Box 3940, United States National Archives.

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Southeast Asia to follow and “fall” under communist domination (McGregor et al. 2018: 9). The fact that despite maintaining relations with the West, Sukarno had also been maintaining close relations with the socialist bloc of the Cold War certainly worried these officials. They were similarly upset that during the first half of the 1960s PKI membership had continued to increase and that Sukarno was building an ever-closer alliance with the political party. Even as he moved closer to the socialist countries, US officials observed, Sukarno¹⁰ began to distance himself from the West, such as by withdrawing Indonesia¹⁶ as a member of the United Nations and forming the so-called CONEFO (Conference of the New Emerging Forces) in January 1965 as a challenge to the UN (Hearman 2018: 12).

Responding to these political dynamics in Indonesia, the United States did not want simply to watch events unfold. Instead, it decided to get involved, albeit secretly. As Simpson explained, “for Washington to stand by helplessly while the world’s fifth largest country ‘went Communist’ would present one of the great anomalies of the Cold War” (Simpson 2021: 146). To prevent this from happening, Simpson further explained, policymakers in Washington sought to implement an “expanded program of covert action to exploit the increasing social and political polarization in Indonesia and to provoke a violent clash between the Army and the PKI or a military coup against Sukarno” (ibid.: 146). More explicitly, US officials worked “to entice the PKI into a coup attempt or some other rash action in the hopes of provoking a violent response by the Army” (ibid.: 174).

In August 1964, US officials began to work on intensifying the rivalry between the PKI and the Army. This was necessary to create a particular political situation in which there would be a confrontation between the PKI and the communist supporters on one side, and the Army with its anti-communist forces on the other (Simpson 2013: 45). The idea was to create a situation in which the PKI would be provoked to launch a coup, but a coup that could be easily³⁰ suppressed. Reflecting the intention to create such a situation, in February 1965 United States Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard P. Jones, said: “From our viewpoint [...] an unsuccessful coup attempt by the PKI might be the most effective development to start a reversal of political trends in Indonesia.”⁸

Soon the US government under the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, with the support of US Cold War allies, began to seek ways to provoke the PKI into launching a coup. One of their methods was to spread propaganda that the Army was planning to stage a coup, to lure the PKI to pre-empt it. To give the impression of a political crisis, the administration began to recall its diplomats from Jakarta, claiming that this was done in anticipation of a “coup” by the Army (Roosa 2013: 31).

8 Presentation by Howard Jones at the 1965 Chief of Mission Conference, n.d. Howard Jones papers, Box 22, Hoover Institution.

As the Indonesian Army carried out the anti-communist purge, the US government was closely following what was happening (Simpson 2013: 43). From Jakarta, the new US Ambassador Marshall Green assured Secretary of State Dean Rusk that the reemergence of the PKI was being prevented: “The Army, as well as Moslem political groups who have vested interest in preventing the resurgence of the Communist that has been decimated by wholesale massacre,” he told Rusk, “will prevent a renaissance of the PKI.”⁹

As the massacres were being conducted, the US was also providing the Indonesian Army with small arms, communication equipment and medical supplies. Despite its limited amount, the aid that Washington provided was an important gesture towards the Indonesian Army. For the Army, the assistance was a sign that Washington did not object to the ongoing purge. Instead, Washington was giving the “green light” for the “wholesale massacre” (van Klinken 2016: 99). At about the same time, Robert Martens, an American Embassy official in Jakarta, was helping the Indonesian Army by providing lists and details of known communists, which later were used by the Army to track down the communists to arrest or execute them (Kadane 1990: 1, 22).¹⁰

When eventually Sukarno was removed from power and the PKI, too, disappeared from the Indonesian political scene, the United States moved to help Indonesia’s economy recover, thereby providing political stability (Simpson 2010).

Rehabilitating Japan

Gaddis’s observation about rehabilitating Japan as part of US Cold War policies in Asia also clearly reflected US policies toward Indonesia. When the process of removing the threat to US interests in Indonesia was completed, the United States began to help the Suharto government re-direct the country’s economic and political orientation in a way that would be beneficial to the US and its allies, especially Japan. Considering Indonesia’s previous policies to have been anti-Western and closed to foreign investment, the US encouraged the Suharto government to build close collaboration with the US and its allies.

Among the assistance that the United States offered to the new government was to coordinate financial aid for Indonesia in order to rebuild the country’s economy. However, the US did not want to do this task directly. Instead, it asked Japan to carry out the task, although certainly under US supervision. This was in part because at this time the US government was facing congressional restraints on foreign aid and also because the US was focusing on the conflict in Vietnam (Simpson 2010: 212). According to Simpson (2010: 212), “US officials still saw integration with Japan and the regional economy as the

9 Memorandum of Conversation, Document No. 191, 14 February 1966; see also Keefer 2001.

10 Not all American politicians, however, agreed with what Washington was doing in Indonesia; see van Klinken 2016: 105. See also Bellamy 2012: 211.

logical goal of Indonesian development and consequently desired that Tokyo carve out a role commensurate with its interests". These officials believed that "the economies of Japan and Indonesia are complementary" (Simpson 2010: 212) and that compared to any other country, Japan was the country that most needed Indonesia's raw materials, especially oil.

Japan was more than happy to accept. Believing that "Japan should play a leading role in constructing the Indonesian economy" its foreign minister promised that his government would make assistance to Indonesia a "high priority" (Simpson 2010: 212). The foreign minister knew that by coordinating international financial assistance and closely collaborating with the new government, Japan would have greater access to Indonesia's raw materials. Moreover, he also knew that this effort would help Japan to rehabilitate itself in the eyes of Indonesians, since during the Second World War Japan had conquered Indonesia under brutal military rule and had stolen millions of barrels of oil from the country (Simpson 2010: 100).

Officials in Washington were pleased with Tokyo's cooperation, believing in the importance of a "close liaison with [the] Japanese" while viewing Japan as the "only major free world country able to exert substantial influence in Indonesia".¹¹ In the words of James Thomson, a foreign policy official at the Johnson Administration, "[t]he Japanese are being set up as our front men".¹² While tasking Japan with the coordinating job, the United States was also hoping to assist the Indonesian Army in building a regime of government that was not only moderate and responsible, but also economic-minded (Simpson 2010: 207).

It should be noted that, like the United States, Japan was not merely a bystander in the process of unseating president Sukarno in 1965, nor was it a passive recipient in the outcome of the changing of government in Indonesia. It had worked hand in hand with the United States in the process of ousting the president. In late October of 1965, for instance, while Sukarno was still officially President, Japan had covertly shifted its support from Sukarno to Suharto. It had also secretly sent rice and textiles to opponents of President Sukarno. At the same time Japan was also suggesting that other countries "do something extra in the field of economic assistance for Indonesia" and claiming that an Army-dominated government would be "so much better" for the country.¹³

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11 Telegram 1623 from Tokyo to State, 4 November 1965, Record Group 59, Central Files, 1964-1966, POL 23-9, Indonesia, United States National Archives.

12 Note from Thomson to Komer, 18 March 1966, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume 26, p. 422.

13 Telegram 1623 from Tokyo to State, 4 November 1965, Record Group 59, Central Files 1964-1966, POL 23-29, Indonesia, United States National Archives.

Markets and raw materials

Reflecting Gaddis's observation, the opening of Indonesia's doors for foreign investment, in turn, also provided the United States with greater opportunities for access to Indonesia as a market for its exports, as well as those from Japan and other Cold War allies. The departure of President Sukarno and the destruction of the PKI were almost immediately followed by negotiations between the new Indonesian government and foreign investors. According to Simpson, beginning in early 1967 "a steady stream of prospective foreign investors descended upon Indonesia. [...] Scores of US companies sent representatives to Jakarta during the first half of 1967. [...] The bulk of them were small or medium-size firms involved in raw materials extraction and production: mining, timber, independent oil, chemical and fertilizer companies, and the banks that financed the ²" (Simpson 2010: 243). In April 1967, for instance, two trade missions came to **Jakarta from Oregon and San Francisco**. They came to represent "midsize firms exploring concession possibilities in timber, plywood, chemicals, mining, and oil".¹⁴

The arrival of US companies in Indonesia was soon followed by companies from US Cold War allies, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Australia and France (Simpson 2010: 244). Within a few months after the arrival of trade missions, executives from leading firms met with top officials from Indonesia's new government in Geneva, to discuss the newly-opened opportunities to invest in Indonesia (Simpson 2021: 245). It was not surprising, then, that in October 1967 the American Embassy in Jakarta reported to the ²US States Department that the Hotel Indonesia, the main hotel of Jakarta, **was** "crowded with businessmen from the US, Western Europe, Japan and neighboring Asian countries" **seeking investment opportunities**.¹⁵

Among the arriving American companies, a mining company called Freeport Sulphur was probably one of the companies that benefitted most (Poulgrain 2020: 251). Even as the anti-communist purge was still taking place in parts of the country, officials from the company were already negotiating with the Indonesian Army to cut a deal to exploit the gold mine located in West Irian, now West Papua (Poulgrain 2020: 256, 26²⁰; Simpson 2010: 231–232). Called "Erstberg", the site being negotiated was **one of the largest copper and gold deposits in the world** (Poulgrain 2020: 256). According to Poulgrain, by 2011 the company "was one of the two largest mining enterprises in the world", with an overall revenue of just under US\$19 billion in 2010 (Poulgrain 2020: 262). According to one report, in 2018 alone Freeport Sulphur (now called Freeport Indonesia) accumulated profits as high as US\$4 billion dollars.¹⁶

¹⁴ **Indonesia Bi-Weekly Economic Summary** ² 8-31 April 1967, Record Group 59, SNF, 1967–1969, E 2-2, Indonesia, United States National Archives; AICOC Information Bulletin 830, April 1967.

¹⁵ Airgram A-189 from Jakarta to State, 14 October 1967, Record Group 59, SNF, 1967–1969, E 2-4, Indonesia, United States National Archives.

¹⁶ <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2018/12/20/> (accessed 13 June 2021).

The opening of Indonesia to Western nation¹⁰ markets became public when in April 1967 the Indonesian Ambassador to the United States declared that the new government of Suharto had abandoned the policy of “rigid state control of the economy” pursued by the previous government and was now willing to open itself to market forces. The same ambassador also encouraged the United States and other nations to “cooperate with Indo[nesia] under favorable terms in developing the nation’s rich natural resources”.¹⁷ From that time onward foreign companies competed with each other to gain market share in Indonesia. As reported by the Dutch newspaper *De Volksrant*, a “fierce international competitive struggle for a favorable position in the Indonesian market has broken out”.¹⁸

Since then, US exports to Indonesia have continued to increase. By 2019, for instance, Indonesia was the United States’ 34th largest goods export market, worth ¹²\$7.7 billion. As reported by the US government, US exports to Indonesia include mineral fuels, oilseeds, oleaginous fruits, machinery, wood pulp, food waste, animal feed, soybeans, cotton, wheat, dairy products, distiller grains and services exports such as travel, financial services and intellectual property.¹⁹

Impact of US Cold War policies toward Indonesia

For the United States, the ouster of president Sukarno and the PKI from the Indonesian political scene meant the removal of two major obstacles to the integration of Indonesia into the Western political and economic system (Simpson 2008: 2). The int²²egration was seen as necessary, since the archipelagic nation of Indonesia was not only rich in natural resources, but also the largest nation in Southeast Asia, while strategically located between mainland Asia and Australia. To guarantee that its political and economic regime would not turn again to the “wrong” side, the US and its Cold War allies supported the authoritarian Army-dominated government of President Suharto. During the post-1965 period the support of this government resulted in an obvious reluctance to press the Suharto regime to deal with the 1965 mass killings. Consequently the 1965 Affair left compelling and lasting legacies in Indonesia until today, as for example:

17 “International Envoy Stresses Nation’s Needs, Chances for Private Firms to Aid Development Effort Profitably” (*International Commerce*, 17 April 1967); “Indonesia Enacts More Measures to Attract New Investors, Bring Back Firms Formerly Active There” (*International Commerce*, 15 May 1967); “Post-Sukarno Welcome Mat: Indonesia Courts Firms It Earlier Ousted in Bids to Improve Deteriorating Economy” (*Wall Street Journal*, 18 April 1967).

18 Airgram 806 from The Hague to State, 26 May 1967, Record Group 59, Central Files, 1967–1969, T7, Indonesia-Netherlands, United States National Archives; Winters 1966: 57.

19 Official Website of the Office of The United States Trade Representatives, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/southeast-asia-pacific/indonesia> (accessed 10 June 2021).

1) *A long-ruling undemocratic government.* The “success” of the anti-communist groups in the 1965 purge ushered in President Suharto’s government, which was militaristic and authoritarian (Challis 2001). During its three-decade rule (1966–1998), public discussion on issues related to the 1965 massacres was forbidden. People were allowed to discuss the issues only if the discussion was along the lines of the government’s narrative of the 1965 events (Bevins 2020). To prevent people from creating their own narratives, the government produced and used a particular narrative of the 1965 Affair resting on two basic assumptions: the PKI was the sole mastermind of the 1 October 1965 incident, and the subsequent massacres of the suspected members of the PKI were thus justified. These two points were needed by the Suharto government to rationalise its rule and to control people’s memory of the massacres. From the *de facto* transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto in 1966 until the latter’s fall in 1998, the government unswervingly exploited the narrative of the 1 October incident and the mass killings of 1965 as a “master narrative”, giving rise to policies that warranted the “dominant role of the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) in the nation’s life, the circumscription of political parties, Islam, and civil society, and the ruthless suppression of dissent” (Simpson 2008: 2).

Throughout the government’s militaristic rule, these policies resulted in unspeakable human rights violations, superficial stability in the name of *pembangunan* (“development”), excessive use of state violence, manipulated general elections and the repression of civil society (Simpson 2010). In the meantime, during the same period many foreign companies invested in extractive mining operations, which over the years seriously harmed the Indonesian environment, such as the gold and copper mining operations in Papua.²⁰ Likewise, substantial damage was done to Indonesia’s tropical rainforest due to similar extractive mining activities in many other parts of the country (Simpson 2008: 258). Even years after Suharto’s reign had ended, Indonesia was still haunted by its legacies of widespread corruption, repression of freedom of speech, environmental degradation and the use of religion for political purposes (Simpson 2010: 4).

2) *A culture of denial.* From the early days of its rule, the government of President Suharto persistently denied any concept of truth-telling about the 1965 massacres. It rejected any narrative that was different from the “master narrative” it had created and refused to have an open discourse on the massacres. On the contrary, shortly after taking power, the Suharto government produced narratives that repeated the claim of PKI’s central role in the killings of the generals and that served to justify the anti-communist massacres.²¹

Instead of allowing any open discourse about the massacres, the Suharto government relentlessly produced anti-communist propaganda. The propaganda

20 For the history and politics of the discovery of the gold and copper mines in Papua see P. 29 rain 2015.

21 Among others, the Suharto government published a monograph on a “coup attempt” by the September 30 Movement in Indonesia. See Notosusanto / Saleh (1971).

was not only directed against the PKI but also against 1965 survivors and their families – or against anyone who entertained leftist ideas (McGregor et al. 2018: 16). With this propaganda the government continuously “warned” the people of the *bahaya laten* (“latent danger”) of the PKI and leftist ideas in general. One of the government’s aims in creating such a narrative and propaganda was certainly to generate fear among the populace so that it would be easy to control them (Marching 2017: 17–38).

Under Suharto’s rule, no one responsible for the massacres was ever held accountable for what they had done. Rather, they were regarded as “heroes”, amongst which Suharto was one. Meanwhile, the victims of the massacres were considered to have deserved their punishment because they had participated in a coup against a legitimate government. Not a single effort was made by the Suharto government to deal with the massacres or to open any dialogue with the massacres’ survivors (Santoso / van Klinken 2017).

In 1998 the Suharto government fell, but its legacy of denial continued. The narrative on the PKI as the mastermind of the 1 October 1965 killings of the generals remained. Likewise, the propaganda about the PKI as a latent danger did not cease. This remained the case even as no official policy by the government was ever issued to address problems related to the 1965 mass violence, let alone alleviate the sufferings of its survivors. At the same time, propaganda on the importance of preventing the revival of the PKI (*kebangkitan* PKI or PKI *baru*, “new PKI”) can be found everywhere, as if the PKI was still in existence. In state schools, students learn about the 1965 Affair only from textbooks that tell solely the government’s version of the events. Even today, many official archives on 1965 are heavily guarded by the government (Eickhoff et al. 2018: 455).

In 2004 the Indonesian parliament passed a law on the formation of a truth and reconciliation commission to deal with the events of 1965. But in 2006 the Constitutional Court declared that the law was unconstitutional and repealed it. Since then, efforts to revise and revive the law have been unsuccessful (Herman 2018: 3, Eickhoff et al. 2017: 455). In 2008 the government assigned a National Commission on Human Rights (*Komnas HAM*) to investigate gross human rights violations during the 1965 Affair. For three years the commission conducted nationwide research and investigation into the events of 1965. When in 2012 the commission submitted an 850-page report, the government simply rejected it (Eickhoff et al. 2017: 455).

3) *Suppression of discourse.* In line with the Suharto government’s legacy of denying truth-telling about the events of 1965, succeeding governments also suppressed attempts outside the state’s control to discuss topics related to the 1965 tragedy. Any event that the government thought could challenge its official narrative of the 1965 Affair would be attacked by paramilitary groups,

often accompanied by the local police. As Eickhoff et al. (2017: 458) put it, “efforts to suppress demands for justice continue actively, both as a matter of public policy and among shadowy civilian groups enjoying military protection”.

In September 2017, for instance, a mob of hundreds of people surrounded and attacked a legal aid centre in Jakarta where scholars and 1965 survivors were going to have a public event on the 1965 tragedy. For two days the centre and surrounding area were attacked and seized by the mob, with many aging survivors inside fearing for their lives. The attack ended only after the police intervened and dispersed the mob (Hearman 2018: 3).²²

When in April 2016 the government sponsored a national symposium on 1965, many people came to join. They were excited about the symposium, thinking of it as a sign that the Indonesian government was finally willing to deal with the issues of 1965. To the excitement of the 1965 survivors and activists, at the end of the event recommendations for resolving the problems from 1965 were declared. But as time went on, the recommendations were never transformed into government policies (Santoso / van Klinken 2017: 594–608).

When Joko Widodo, a former businessman, was elected president in 2014, there were hopes that he was going to take the initiative to address the issues of 1965 and open the discussion. After all, in his presidential campaign, he had been supported by democracy and human rights activists. Born in 1961, he was only four years old when the 1965 massacres took place, and therefore needn't fear being labelled a “communist” even if he chose to help the 1965 survivors. Again, however, the hopes were dashed. In October 2015 Widodo said that he would not apologise to the victims of the 1965 mass violence. Similarly, in June 2017 the president blatantly and almost literally repeated Suharto's expression in suppressing his political opponents when he said: “Show me a PKI member, [and] I'll bash him” (Rizal 2020: 262).

4) *The survivors' suffering.* Today many of the purge's survivors are still traumatised by what they endured during the violence of 1965 and afterward. They still carry with them the stigma of being “traitors” to the nation. Many of them remain afraid to discuss their experiences except to personally trusted persons (Bevins 2020: 253, Marching 2017). In their advanced age, many of the survivors live in abject poverty and are socially marginalised, with very limited access to economic support and health services. Often, family members of 1965 survivors are also afraid to say anything about their family background, as if their parents or grandparents were criminals. As Bevins (2020: 251) describes, in Indonesia being considered a communist “marks you for life as evil, and in many cases, this is seen as something that passes down to your offspring, as if it were genetic deformity”.

Not surprisingly, decades after the former political prisoners were released from prison, they still carry with them the stigma of being “communist” and “traitors to the state”. Because of this, they have had to remain watchful (*berjaga-jaga*) against any undesirable consequences (Roosa et al. 2004: 137). For them, the legacies of the 1965 Affair continue and are still being lived every single day of their lives. Examples of the affairs’ survivors who had to carry such stigma can be found in the life stories of former political prisoners such as Magdalena Kastinah (Rahayu / Ismunanto 2018: 45–54), Toegiman Tugiatmojo (Tugiatmojo 2018: 27–29), a man from the Ledhok Ratmakan neighborhood in Yogyakarta (Wardaya 2013: 129–130) or a woman from the village of Prambanan, Yogyakarta (*ibid.*).

As Subrahmanyam (2010) noted, with the signing of the peace treaty in Paris on 19 November 1990 the Cold War officially ended. In Indonesia, however, the legacies of the Cold War continue to persist, as shown by the observations above. At the time of the writing of this article the Indonesian government continues to refuse to acknowledge (let alone apologise for) the mass killings of the alleged communists as part of the implementation of US Cold War policies in Indonesia. Because of this, the impact of the Cold War continues to haunt Indonesia, while the survivors of the purge continue to suffer.

Summary

Gaddis observed that the Cold War policies of the United States in Asia were aimed at economic recovery and geopolitical stability, controlling the process, rehabilitating Japan and opening the Southeast Asian market to foreign investors. However, Gaddis did not discuss how these policies were implemented in Indonesia, especially with regard to the 1965 events. The United States’ Asian Cold War policies towards Indonesia became very clear in the position that Washington took towards the ouster of President Sukarno and the mass killings of the alleged members of the PKI, as well as in the emergence of the New Order government. The success of the implementation of these policies and the benefits the United States gained from their implementation made Washington unwilling to press the Indonesian government to deal with the impact of the purge. The absent of such pressure, in turn, left the Indonesian government less willing to deal with the consequences. In this context, it has remained almost impossible for the purge’s victims and survivors to seek justice and reconciliation on the matter. For them, even decades after the Cold War, its impact continues to burden them.

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