

Diplomacy and cultural understanding: learning from US policy toward Indonesia under Sukarno

During the first two decades of the Cold War, especially during the administration of the United States presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953- 1961) and Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969), relations between the US and Indonesia were marked with suspicion, ambiguity, and antagonism. This was in part due to the failures of many US policymakers in understanding--let alone respecting--Indonesia's culture and politics, especially as they manifested in the political views and personality of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. Failing to see Sukarno as a Javanese-Indonesian leader whose views on domestic and international politics stemmed from his Javanese background, many Cold War US policymakers considered him a communist demagogue who threatened US interests and world peace.