

U.S. Covert Action in Indonesia in the 1960s: Assessing the Motives and Consequences

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During the Cold War era, covert action served as an important foreign policy instrument of the U.S. in its struggle to prevail in the global ideological competition with the former Soviet Union. By analyzing the U.S. covert action in Indonesia in the months leading up to the 1965 coup that toppled Sukarno, this paper explores the motives of the U.S. decision making elites who adopted a series of low profile, covert policies – as opposed to an overt confrontationist track – against Sukarno. The article then assesses the way the U.S. policies hammered out the formation of Indonesia’s political landscape at this crucial point in Indonesian politics. The third part of the article seeks to contrast the long lasting imprint that the U.S. policies had left in Indonesia with the so-called democratic norm of Western democracies that Kennedy called for when instituting the Alliance for Progress. The case analysis suggests that the internal constraint, in the form of domestic political considerations, was one of the critical factors compelling the decision makers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to resort to covert action. It also suggests that the U.S. played an instrumental role in the 1965 coup and the genocide that followed. Despite their impressive record of promoting civil liberties at home, the complicity of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in Indonesia calls into question the democratic norm and humanitarian concern espoused by both administrations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Covert action, the attempt by a government to influence events in another state or territory without revealing its involvement, served as an important instrument of statecraft adopted by the U.S. to win in the global ideological competition with the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, when the Cold War temperature was at its height, the U.S. covertly unseated legitimate, popular, and democratically elected governments in Iran and Guatemala. These two U.S. engineered covert operations, code-named AJAX and PBSUCCESS respectively, were a confidence booster for the covert action advocates in the U.S. foreign policy making circle, thereby setting the mold for many more to follow. With the successes of these early cases, the U.S. was ready to exert similar covert pressure on Indonesia to remove Sukarno from Indonesia’s political scene.

The objective of this article is threefold. First, by analyzing the nature of U.S. policies toward Indonesia in the months leading up to the 1965 coup that toppled Sukarno, the article attempts to explore the motives of the U.S. decision-making elites who had adopted a series of low profile, covert policies (as opposed to overt confrontationist track) against Sukarno. Unlike his Republican predecessor, when Kennedy took office he opted an accommodationist approach toward Indonesia. When the U.S.-Indonesian relationship began to sour once again, the two Democratic administrations (Kennedy and Johnson) fell back on low profile policies entailing a series of covert action programs. What had been the motives of the U.S. decision makers that drove their Indonesian policies underground? The article then assesses the way the U.S. policies hammered out the formation of the political landscape of Indonesia at this crucial turning point in Indonesian politics. Assessment of

the U.S. influence during this tumultuous period will naturally bring up this controversial, yet understudied, subject: the U.S. involvement in the 1965 coup and the genocide that followed. Kennedy declared in his inaugural speech that the promotion of democracy abroad under the broad framework of “Alliance for Progress” would be the basis of his new foreign policy initiatives. To what extent did the U.S. elites’ democratic norms and culture reflected in the “Alliance for Progress” guide the policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations toward Indonesia? The third part of the article seeks to contrast the long lasting imprint that the U.S. policies had left in Indonesia with the so-called democratic norm of Western democracies that Kennedy called for when instituting Alliance for Progress.

2. INDONESIA, U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS, AND EARLY COVERT ACTION

2.1. U.S. Interests in Indonesia

Indonesia is the world’s largest archipelago situated between the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, with its islands stretching farther east to west than the entire horizontal expanse of the U.S. When the Kennedy administration was reevaluating U.S. policy toward Indonesia in 1961, however, the American public in general was ignorant of or indifferent to this unfamiliar country in Southeast Asia. Then, what was there in Indonesia that compelled so much preoccupation by the policy-making elites of the U.S. government? What kinds of interests were at stake that forced the American policy elites to resort to any means available just short of open warfare? Review of the U.S. national interests that the American leaders considered at stake in Indonesia seems to be the logical step to start the discussion.

The ignorance and indifference of the American public notwithstanding, Southeast Asia ranked consistently at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda from the 1950s to the 1970s owing to the region’s Cold War geo-strategic value. Because of its location and size, Indonesia was considered one of the most crucial countries in the region.¹ In terms of time and energy invested by the U.S., only Vietnam topped Indonesia among Asian countries in the late 1950s and 1960s. Above all, it was in the geo-political and hence security interest of the U.S. to safeguard Indonesia from the Communist threat. Indonesia was positioned across key sea-lanes that deliver oil to the U.S. and her allies and through which the U.S. naval power moves to defend U.S. interests. Thus, keeping Indonesia from Soviet influence appeared vital to U.S. security interests. In the early 1960s, in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also elaborated on the U.S. security interests in Indonesia. They pointed out that Communist military bases in Java and Sumatra would “clearly isolate Australia and New Zealand, serve as a communist launching area for covert and overt operations against the Philippines, and deny the Free World countries the tremendous oil, tin, and rubber resources which the United States seeks to deny the communists.” Further, the psychological impact of such a Communist victory would “have a major effect on the Free World military forces of Asia and their continued alignment with the United States.”²

¹ At the time, Indonesia, with over 200 million people, was the fifth most populous country in the world.

² Memo, JCS to McNamara, 13 October, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* XXII, 1999, Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, p. 198.

Also at stake in Indonesia were the U.S. commercial interests. Besides concern over the safety of the major trade routes that ran through Indonesian waters, Indonesia's immense natural resources, including some of the largest oil and rubber operations in the world, had already attracted large-scale investments from U.S. corporations by the end of the WWII.³ By 1939 the Dutch East Indies supplied more than half the total U.S. consumption of 15 key raw materials (Pringle 1980: 23). During WWII, control over these vital resources was central to the conflict in the Pacific between the U.S. and Japan. After the war, huge private investments were made by American corporations in the fields of rubber and petroleum production. The important rubber estates and oil fields came to be largely U.S.-owned. The economic interests of such important Cold War allies as Japan were also at stake in Indonesia.

Initially, the U.S. was favorable to the Sukarno regime because Sukarno made a good impression in Washington when he repressed a land reform movement initiated by the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) in the early 1950s. Nonetheless, Sukarno soon disenchanted the U.S. by adopting a series of independent and nationalistic policies. The neutralist and nationalist policies of the Sukarno regime soon proved to be inimical to U.S. strategic and business interests in the region. Sukarno was not a Communist, but his power rested, in large part, on the PKI that enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Indonesian masses. The PKI was the largest political party in Indonesia and the largest Communist Party in the world except for those in China and the Soviet Union. But Sukarno was precariously balancing the PKI against the army; more specifically, he used the PKI to contain the power of the army. The U.S. grew increasingly concerned about the possibility of Indonesia becoming the "next China;" losing Indonesia to the Communists would be the biggest defeat for the U.S. since the loss of China. A former CIA staff officer worried that "it is possible that Indonesia may be the first Southeast Asia country to be taken over by a popularly based, *legally elected* communist government."⁴ The threat of a Communist takeover aside, Sukarno was in disagreement with the West over many diplomatic issues. For instance, Indonesia became embroiled in armed border confrontations with Britain and Australia in 1960. Sukarno also repeatedly threatened to break diplomatic relations with the U.S. In sum, by standing firm on such sensitive issues, Sukarno refused to recognize U.S. geo-political hegemony in the region.

Sukarno was also hostile to the business interests of the West. In late 1957 and from 1964~1965, he barely contained mass movements of workers and peasants, whose strikes and occupations threatened first Dutch followed by U.S. and British banks, companies, and plantations. Wise and Ross point out that one of the main reasons compelling the Eisenhower administration to support the 1958 rebellion was to secure U.S. business interests. Statements made by CIA and State Department officials testify to the degree of American fixation on the American business investments in the country; they claimed: "Even if Sukarno were not overthrown ... it might be possible for Sumatra, Indonesia's big oil producer, to secede, thereby protecting private American and Dutch holdings" (Wise and Ross 1964: 139). In 1963 the negotiations between American oil companies and the

³ Indonesia was often referred to as the "Jewel of Asia" by U.S. government officials. In 1965 Richard Nixon called Indonesia "the region's richest hoard of natural resources, the *greatest prize* in South East Asia" (emphasis added) (See McMahon 1981: 76). In addition to oil and rubber reserves, Indonesia has enormous reserves of tin, bauxite, coal, gold, silver, diamonds, manganese, and phosphates.

⁴ Statement of Former CIA officer William Kintner (Quoted from Chomsky 1993: 58). Emphasis added.

Indonesian government were going awry, and Sukarno was threatening to nationalize the U.S. oil assets in Indonesia. Gradually, the U.S. companies started to pack their bags and prepared for departure. On March 14, 1965, Indonesian masses attempted a surprise raid on the U.S. oil installations based in Indonesia. Such ominous developments prompted a fervent reaction from Washington.

2.2. U.S. Covert Action in Indonesia during Eisenhower Years

In the eyes of U.S. policy makers, Sukarno posed a grave threat to U.S. national interests. Hence it is small wonder that they worked to undermine him since the early stages of his presidency. The U.S. push to unseat Sukarno began as early as 1955, when the U.S. transferred one million dollars to the opposing Masjumi Party by way of the CIA during the general election campaign.⁵ In 1958, when armed insurrections against the Sukarno government erupted on several Indonesian islands, the Eisenhower administration decided to collaborate with the regional rebellion forces and launched the largest covert paramilitary action yet seen in U.S. history.⁶ The aim here was of course the outright overthrow of the Sukarno regime. It is confirmed that the U.S. supplied the rebels with military equipment and a small force of B-26 bombers. On May 18, 1958, an American pilot, Allen Lawrence Pope, was shot down on a bombing mission and captured by the Sukarno forces. Even after Pope was captured, the Eisenhower administration emphatically denied the charges of U.S. complicity, arguing that Pope was a mere soldier of fortune. But the capture of Pope gave Sukarno irrefutable confirmation of U.S. involvement in the rebellion. The rebellion failed and the U.S. covert action to oust Sukarno turned out to be a diplomatic disaster that would affect the U.S.- Sukarno relationship for years to come.⁷ Even after the 1958 fiasco, the Eisenhower administration's preoccupation with Indonesia did not diminish. However, the failure of the covert paramilitary action had shifted the emphasis to a covert political action program involving the assistance of pro-American elements in the country.

3. GENESIS OF THE KENNEDY AND JOHNSON'S LOW PROFILE POLICIES

3.1. Kennedy's "Action Plan" to Johnson's "Low Posture Policy"

The U.S. policy toward Indonesia takes a different turn as the new Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy comes into office. Unlike his Republican predecessor, Kennedy insinuated that the so called Third World neutralism of Sukarno's ilk would no longer be frowned upon by the U.S. In fact, Kennedy's Indonesian policy, at least at the initial stage, certainly reflected this accommodationist tone. By siding with Sukarno on the issue of the West new Guinea settlement, Kennedy was able to "restore Indonesian-U.S. relations to sound footing" (Gardner 1997: 172). Sukarno was pleased with these new

⁵ This was a political covert action program to support conservative, right-wing political parties. Despite the efforts of the U.S., the Masjumi party did not fare well in the 1955 election.

⁶ Scholarly works on U.S. involvement in the 1958 rebellions are relatively abundant. See Wise and Ross (1964), Kahin and Kahin (1995), Conboy and Morrison (1999) and Deshpande (1981) for further reference.

⁷ During Sukarno's visit to Washington in 1962, Kennedy commented to one of his aides: "No wonder Sukarno doesn't like us very much. He has to sit down with the people who tried to overthrow him" (Wise and Ross 1964: 145).

developments, and his views toward the U.S. improved. It seemed that Kennedy and Sukarno instantly developed an amicable relationship. After reviewing policy options dealing with the South Asian region, Kennedy articulated his new proactive Indonesian policy initiative: Action Plan. In contrast to Eisenhower's policy of using military force to overthrow Sukarno, economic and military aid was at the core of Kennedy's Action Plan. The idea was that, through a substantial infusion of aid, the U.S. would be able to influence the future course of events in Indonesia. As the relationship between two countries deteriorated once again, however, the U.S. policies toward Indonesia also regressed to more clandestine programs of undermining Sukarno: Kennedy reverted to a series of covert action programs to deal with Indonesia.

The succeeding Johnson administration also adopted "Low Posture" policies, intensifying the covert action programs of its predecessor. Johnson completely withdrew visible aid and assistance programs and removed the Peace Corps and the USIS, both signs of a U.S. presence in Indonesia. However, similar to the Kennedy administration, the Johnson administration used clandestine military aid as its primary means of maintaining contact with the Indonesian army. Hence the administration delayed liquidation of key military aid programs. The findings of the Bunker Mission in April 1965 endorsed the Johnson administration's new "low-posture policy" (Bunnell 1990).⁸ The Bunker Report specifically called for the intensification of such covert action as the U.S. information/propaganda program in Indonesia.⁹ These changes in the Indonesian policies of the two democratic administrations bring one question to the fore: why did they revert to the covert, low profile policies against Sukarno? Why not open aggression?

3.2. Covert Action as a Means of Conflict Resolution

There are various means to which sovereign states can resort in order to resolve disputes with other states. In most cases, states work out their differences by relying on bilateral or multilateral diplomatic means. In some cases, however, states resort to more violent means – including the threat, or actual use, of over military force – to resolve disagreements with other states. Yet still in some other cases, states fall back on more clandestine means, i.e., covert action, to resolve conflicts with other states. What are the motives of the decision makers in democracies when they decide to use covert action instead of openly aggressive military action?

Two groups of theories strive to explain the motivations of the decision makers when they opt to use covert action instead of overt intrusion as a means of resolving conflict with other states: they are the "external constraint" and "internal constraint" explanations. The external constraint explanation of covert action asserts that the objects of secrecy lie outside the territorial boundary of the states that initiate the action. A concealed identity allows the initiator to infiltrate the central organs of the target states, an action which frequently proves to be critical in subverting the governments in those target states. Maintaining secrecy is crucial to protecting the agents/agencies that may already have been successful at their mission, preventing any possible counterintelligence attempts by the target

⁸ On the recommendation of Ball and Rusk, the Johnson administration sent Bunker to Indonesia to reevaluate the situation there in April 1965. The Bunker report recommended maintaining a U.S. presence in Indonesia and maintaining contact with friendly figures.

⁹ Report from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to President Johnson, Washington, undated. From *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) XXVI*, 2001, Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, pp. 255-263. Hereafter, *FRUS XXVI*.

governments. Overt support of the opposition forces in the target states could sometimes backfire, making actual patriotic opposition there look like treason. In short, covert wars are waged to keep the target states in the dark. The rationale of covert action is largely based on this line of argument. Understandably, this type of explanation is widely promoted by the decision-making elites in democracies, particularly by those who have a record of endorsing covert action abroad. Covert action also helps to avoid confrontations with other powers that have a stake in the target country and might feel threatened by a change of regime (Gibbs 1995). Similarly, secrecy allows elites to fend off adverse international opinions; covert action, if kept secret, helps give the appearance of peaceful, conciliatory international behavior (James and Mitchell 1995: 91-92).

In contrast, the “internal constraint” explanation of covert action asserts that elites in a democracy may resort to the covert use of force to skirt constraints imposed by domestic political participants. In democracies, political institutions provide the mechanism whereby the public sets the parameters within which the decision-making elites should act. Elites may influence the public over the short run, but in the long run, elites must operate within the parameters set by the public or risk being replaced by new elites (Reiter and Stam 2001). Therefore, the foreign policy decisions of democracies reflect in general the will of the public. The extent to which the public affects particular foreign policy decisions hinges on a number of intervening variables.¹⁰ Nonetheless, foreign policy issues involving the use of military force cannot be made without the contemporaneous consent of the public in democracies. When the elites are confronted with popular objections to the overt use of force or anticipate the domestic political repercussions of that action, so the argument goes, they may opt to use covert actions to skirt this domestic opposition.¹¹ Domestic opposition can come from (a) participating elites within the administration itself (e.g., State department officials), (b) attentive elites/public (e.g., Congress via legislation or the War Powers Act and opinion leaders such as journalists and scholars), and (c) the mass public or voters (via either an *ex ante* approval mechanism or *ex post* electoral punishment). At times domestic opposition may arise from the external constraints; negative international publicity surrounding overt policies may sometimes lead the domestic audience to oppose those policies. But this purported link between the external and internal constraints is not always clear. For instance, in the early 1980s, the controversial French nuclear test in Pacific had created vehement opposition from international communities. Nonetheless, the French public in general felt that the nuclear test was in the national interest of France and hence firmly stood behind its government’s policies.

What follows next is an analysis of the decision-making processes of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that led to low-profile policies in Indonesia. In so doing, I will assess the validity of the contending claims that vie to explain the motives of democratic decision-makers in choosing covert action – i.e., “external constraint” vs. “internal constraint” explanations. To gauge the accuracy of each explanation, I will also investigate the manner in which the U.S. governments have handled secrecy shrouding covert operations. If the external constraint explanation of covert action is correct, it is expected that the government will not be overly concerned with maintaining secrecy from domestic

¹⁰ These intervening variables will include: (1) the salience of the issue, (2) the stage of policy development, (3) the beliefs of elites and the public regarding the role of the public in foreign policy making process, (4) the quality of decision makers’ leadership and the public’s political skills, and (5) the availability of information.

¹¹ Of course, not every state – or democracy for that matter – is able to engage in covert action. The number of states with covert action capacity is expected to be limited.

audiences after the covert engagement has been revealed to the target countries and major adversaries. Once a specific covert action program becomes obsolete, governments will declassify the relevant documents to their public, since the adoption of covert policies was motivated to deceive the enemy states/governments. Governments will not safeguard secrecy simply because doing so may “embarrass state officials or generate public opposition (Gibbs 1995: 214).” In contrast, the internal constraint explanation implies that covert action, which is known to target or enemy states, will remain classified even after that program has been long ceased, since target of secrecy is not the enemy states but the public.

3.3. Public Opinion and its Restraining Effect

Let us first examine U.S. public opinion surrounding Indonesian policy in the early 1960s and its impact on U.S. foreign policy making. In contrast to the enthusiasm of the elites, ambivalence and remoteness best describe the public attitude toward Indonesia and her leader in the early 1960s. To the general public and Congress, Indonesia was less important than mainland Southeast Asia – Indochina – which was considered a crucial buffer zone from Communist China. For this reason, in order to pursue a more proactive Indonesia policy, the Kennedy administration took great pains to convince those outside the administration of the strategic and economic importance of Indonesia. But the Action Plan failed to attract many enthusiasts outside the administration. The general public and Congress simply did not consider U.S. interests at stake in this remote and unfamiliar country of Southeast Asia. Critics argued that aid to Indonesia was in reality aid to Communists.¹²

Beginning in 1963, the highly nationalistic and confrontational policies of Sukarno made the already unpopular Indonesian policy even harder to defend domestically. Sukarno visited the U.S. twice during his tenure – in 1962 and 1964 – to discuss the West Irian disputes and *Konfrontasi*, respectively. His visits somehow managed to diminish his already meager standing with the U.S. public and Congress. Sukarno had received particularly bad press coverage during the escalation of “*Konfrontasi*” in July 1963.¹³ By adopting the ideology of “Guided Democracy” and the controversial “*Konfrontasi*” policy against the Philippines, Sukarno further lowered his reputation in the U.S. Outside the administration, Sukarno was generally seen as the expansionist aggressor with sole responsibility for the escalation of *Konfrontasi*. Subsequently, public opinion and press demanded a harder line against Sukarno, which in turn reinforced Congress’s position against aid. Congress and the public did not approve of Kennedy’s proactive Indonesian policy, which would provide military aid and economic assistance to increasingly unpopular Sukarno. The U.S. public and press simply identified the proactive Indonesian policy as direct support for Sukarno. As Congress moved to restrict administration policy initiatives, the decision makers had to modify the proactive Indonesian policies.¹⁴

Public opposition to the Action Plan notwithstanding, the Kennedy administration continued seeking a “foot in the door” in Indonesia – a “toe-hold” policy. That is, the

¹² For the trend of U.S. public opinion on Indonesia in the early 1960s, refer to Aandstadt (1999) and Bunnell (1990).

¹³ *Konfrontasi* was a confrontationist policy applied by Sukarno against the formation of Malaysia proposed by Britain and Malaya.

¹⁴ For the nature of Kennedy’s toe-hold policy in Indonesia, see the memoir of the then U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia (Howard Jones 1971).

decision makers in the administration wanted to maintain the military aid programs as much as possible. Thus, strategies were devised to evade public criticism. For instance, the decision makers took advantage of loopholes in the new Congressional aid impediments (Jones 1971). Consequently, despite congressional restrictions, some portions of the covert action programs in the form of military assistance to maintain contact with the Indonesian army survived until the end of Kennedy's presidency. One of the reasons the Kennedy administration went underground in Indonesia was that the media, public, and Congress were opposed to the proactive Indonesian policies including continued aid. Adoption of the low-profile, covert "toe-hold" policy by the Kennedy administration had the aim of circumventing Congressional oversight and public opposition to the administration's proactive Indonesian policy.

After President Johnson took office, the press, public, and Congress became even more antagonistic to Sukarno. Johnson also found himself surrounded by many other foreign policy imperatives, leaving less time and energy for Indonesia. In December 1963, as the press and public increasingly clamored for a harsher stance against Sukarno, the House finally banned any kind of aid – military or economic – to Indonesia. Against this backdrop, what were the policy options available to the Johnson administration that wanted a proactive American role to defend the U.S. interests in the region? Sustainance of the aid certainly was not a viable option and Johnson was well aware of the political repercussions of this option. In his conversation with Secretary of Defense McNamara, Johnson said: "Now I talked to Dick Russell about that and he says that I ought to be impeached if I approve it (aid to Indonesia)."¹⁵ Secretary of State Rusk in his memorandum to Johnson also pointed out the danger of proactive Indonesian policy: "The primary disadvantage of this policy is the risk of domestic criticism of continuing aid and friendly relations with Sukarno at this time."¹⁶ The Johnson administration strongly believed that the stabilization of Indonesia was vital to the U.S. national interests and continually argued for renewal of aid to Indonesia. But its argument fell on deaf ears. The fear of a negative public reaction made Johnson balk at making any controversial aid determinations, particularly in an election year.

Then was the military intervention a practicable option? Given the negative publicity surrounding Sukarno in the U.S., Johnson might have gained a short-term domestic political advantage by assuming a tougher line – by demonstrating the U.S. military might – against Sukarno. But the administration feared that an overt confrontationist policy could escalate the dispute into a full-blown war. Given the major military commitment in Viet Nam, what the Johnson administration could not afford was another war in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ Similar to the Kennedy administration, the Johnson administration considered direct military involvement in Indonesia as the least attractive option. Some may argue that

¹⁵ Parentheses original. Telephone Conversation between President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara, 2 January, 1964, *FRUS XXVI*, p. 1. Johnson also said: "Whether this money (aid) in the pipeline constituted a violation of the act of Congress, I don't think it does. You see this damn Republican put a prohibition in there unless I made a finding it was in the national interest." Telephone Conversation between President Johnson and Senator Richard Russell, 10 January, 1964, *FRUS XXVI*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, 6 January, 1964, *FRUS XXVI*, p. 6.

¹⁷ For the impact of Vietnam War on the U.S. Indonesian policy (see Bunnell 1990: 29-30). The Johnson administration was escalating its military intervention in Vietnam in 1965, which was the year when hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops were sent in and the saturation bombing of the northern part of Viet Nam began.

Johnson's rejection of force in Indonesia was due to military, not political, considerations. But it should be noted that the military constraints that the U.S. was facing in Indonesia were closely related to the governing considerations of the American elites. An effective military plan against Indonesia would have required a huge commitment entailing sizeable American casualties and economic cost. After all, Indonesia was a big country; the overt military action against Indonesia would incur more financial and human costs than the American public would tolerate, particularly at a time when they were entangled in a major military venture in Asia. Unlike the swift military operation of 1965 that crushed the pro-Bosch constitutionalist movement in the Dominican Republic, overt military intervention in Indonesia would have taken a much heavier toll on the U.S. (Vatikiotis 1990: 16-17). Chances of swift military operations were very slim from a military standpoint, and the American public was ill prepared for military involvement in another drawn-out war in Asia. That is, another drawn-out war in Asia would involve very grave political risks. In contrast to a military endeavor, covert action did not entail any significant political costs; it required far fewer resources, both human and economic, than open aggression.

By and large domestic political considerations forced the Johnson administration to adopt a "low posture" policy. The shift to a low-posture policy was in large part a tactical move in response to the constraint of public opinion and Congressional opposition; it was the *internal constraint* in the form of anticipated political costs that the elites in the Johnson administration attempted to circumvent by choosing "low-posture" covert action against Indonesia. While maintaining a fall-back position, however, the Johnson administration covertly intensified key military aid programs and contacts with pro-U.S. army generals in Indonesia.

3.4. External Constraint Explanation

External constraints – particularly in the form of adverse international publicity – must also have weighed heavily in the thinking of the American decision makers when they decided to go underground. Bloch and Fitzgerald (1983: 43) pointed out that British covert actions in the post-WWII era were intended to defend the British government against "charges of warmongering, imperialism, and interference." Similarly, it is believed that the U.S. covert action during the Cold War era also had the intention of fending off negative international opinion that would have accompanied overt interventionist policies. According to the assessment of the Bunker report, adoption of a low-posture policy would abate anti-American sentiments and campaigns and delude the PKI and Sukarno, thereby enabling the Johnson administration to protect the U.S. agencies and agents operating in Indonesia. The evidence suggests that these kinds of arguments cannot be summarily dismissed.

A major sticking point of the "external constraints" explanation (or any variants thereof) is that not only the target states, but other states interested in the target often have been well aware of both the objectives and the magnitude of the U.S. covert involvement. As close observers of the U.S. covert actions have testified, the Soviet Union, as well as the majority of people in the targets of U.S. covert action, knew about the U.S. secret involvement from the early stages of covert actions (Treverton 1987; Cottam 1988; Love 1960). By the time the U.S. adopted a series of low profile policies in the early 1960s, most Indonesians were already well aware of the U.S. covert operations in their country. During 1964 and 1965, rumors of U.S. clandestine activities were widespread in Indonesia; the accusations of CIA plots against Sukarno appeared frequently in the Indonesian press in early 1965 before the

coup took place (Scott 1985: 255). Many Indonesians believed that the role of the U.S. had been instrumental to the overthrow of Sukarno and the mass killings.¹⁸ In the U.S., however, the mass media helped the Johnson administration conceal U.S. complicity in Indonesia. During the critical period of 1965 to 1966, the American press possessed information concerning the U.S. role and activities in Indonesia, but chose not to share the information with the American people (Kadane 1990). The U.S. press was particularly slow in analyzing the coup and reporting on the massacre. The headlines of the U.S. press mostly dealt with Vietnam, while the press of the rest of the world focused on the barbaric massacre occurring in Indonesia. Only 3 months after the coup, when the killing was brought to an end, did the analysis of the 1965 coup and the story of mass slaughter begin to appear in the American press (Kadane 1990).

In addition, if the external constraint argument is correct, why did the U.S. government try so hard to protect from the American public the nature of the U.S. covert actions even after the U.S. covert engagement had been made public in the target governments – well after the covert engagement had been terminated? After the American covert role in the 1958 local uprising was revealed in Indonesia, the Eisenhower administration went to great pains to hide this from the American audience.¹⁹ Government spokesmen at all levels were flatly denying the allegations in an effort to keep Congress, the media, and the public in the dark. Succeeding administrations declassified some secret government documents produced during the months leading up to the 1965 coup, but many of the actions of the U.S. during the coup, not to speak of the massacre, and much of what American leaders and intelligence services did in liaison with right-wing forces of Indonesian army, still remain under the seal of national security. Subsequently, the U.S. public in general had been oblivious to the anti-Sukarno covert action undertaken by their government. When the 1965 coup broke out and the mass killing of the Indonesian masses followed, the U.S. public had practically no idea how deeply its government had been involved in the affairs of Indonesia. Since the Kennedy and Johnson administrations manufactured misleading official explanations to address uncomfortable questions from the public and Congress, the U.S. public was completely ignorant of the specifics of its government's Indonesian policies, not to mention their objectives. Even top-ranking members of Congress were kept in the dark about the progress and details of the U.S. subversion and infiltration in Indonesia. The extent of the secrecy shrouding relations between the U.S. and the Indonesian military is illustrated by the fact that Zablocki, the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Far East, did not understand in the summer of 1965, why the administration wanted to increase military aid to Indonesia.²⁰ The *New York Times* falsely reported in 1965: "All United States aid to

¹⁸ Interview with Ray Zulfirman Parsioan, an Indonesian expert and a political science major at Yale University.

¹⁹ The Eisenhower administration denied the U.S. role, even after the U.S. pilot was captured during the secret bombing mission. This incident was significantly downplayed in the U.S. media. The U.S. complicity in the 1958 Indonesian uprisings went unnoticed until well into 1970s (Deshpande 1981).

²⁰ Zabloscki was worried that increased military aid to Indonesia would be used to Sukarno's advantage. In a closed-door hearing, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William McGeorge Bundy, said that: "this (military) equipment is being sold to the Indonesian army and not the Indonesian government." Rep. Broomfield asked: "What's the difference?" Bundy replied: "When Sukarno leaves the scene, the military will probably take over. We want to keep the door open." Broomfield continued to ask what proof the State Department had that the army leaders would be friendly to the U.S. Bundy replied: "We have hopes." See Allen-Scott report in the *Hall Syndicate*, 15

Indonesia was stopped” when in fact the U.S. covert aid programs were still under way (*New York Times* 5 August, 1965).

This asymmetry in the knowledge between the citizens of the initiating states and the target countries is observed in cases of U.S. covert action besides the one reviewed in this article. For example, in Guatemala, the CIA’s plan to overthrow the democratically elected government of Arbenz leaked to the Guatemalan newspapers at the early stage of the U.S. covert operations. Subsequently, the Guatemalan people and the world were made aware of the American conspiracy in Guatemala. But the State Department denied the U.S. involvement, stating: “It is the policy of the U.S. not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations.” It was the leaks, not the covert operations, that were discredited in the U.S. *Time* magazine denounced the revelations as bogus; it contended that “the revelations were less of a plot than a scenario masterminded in Moscow and designed to divert the attention from Guatemala as the Western Hemisphere’s Red problem child” (Treverton 1987: 45). PBSUCCESS (the code name for the operation to overthrow Arbenz) went on without the knowledge of Americans. In the U.S., PBSUCCESS remained one of the best-kept secrets of the Eisenhower administration for a long time (Treverton 1987: 46). Likewise, the U.S. covert efforts to replace a democratically elected leader, Lumumba, with a would-be dictator, Mobutu, in Congo were well known to the Soviet Union and other states interested in Congo even before the U.S. covert operations had actually begun (Gibbs 1995). In most cases of U.S. covert operations abroad, although the U.S. government has taken great pains to protect the secrecy within the country, the covert roles played by the U.S. government have become virtually “known-secrets” outside the U.S. Ramsey Clark, the Attorney General under the Johnson administration, argues that the U.S. decision-making elites were not concerned that covert action “be kept from their intended victims.” They were more concerned that “the American people not know of them (covert actions).” He further argues:

The Cambodians knew they were being bombed. So did the Libyans. The long-suffering Iraqis knew every secret the U.S. government conceals from the American people and every lie it tells them. Except for surprise attacks, it is primarily from the American people that the U.S. government must keep the true nature and real purpose of so many of its domestic and foreign acts secret while it manufactures fear and falsehood to manipulate the American public (Clark 1998: 2).²¹

4. U.S. COVERT ACTION, 1965 MILITARY COUP, AND THE MASSACRE

What follows in this section of the article is the discussion of the extent to which a series of U.S. low-profile policies had contributed to the demise of the Sukarno regime and one of the most ghastly genocides of the 20th century. There is not a shortage of works focusing on the 1965 coup to overthrow Sukarno and the massacre that followed.²² However, much of what happened in Indonesia from 1965 to 1967 is poorly documented

July, 1965.

²¹ George Ball, the Undersecretary of State during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, also pointed out that covert action allowed the elite faction to avoid “asking itself the tough questions it would normally ask before taking action in the open.”

²² See for example Wertheim (1979), Holtzappel (1979), Vatikiotis and Fonte (1990), Brands (1989), Scott (1985), and Johnson (1976). David Johnson’s 1976 article, “Gestapu: The CIA’s ‘Track II’ in Indonesia,” is available at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/54b/033.html>.

and, of the documents that do exist, much about them is both controversial and difficult to verify (Scott 1985: 239). Given the poor condition of documentation on the events and the clandestine nature of the U.S. operations, it is small wonder that no scholarly consensus exists on how these gory events developed and who the responsible parties were. Detailing the U.S. participation in the coup and massacre would be a Herculean task. But enough has been made known to uncover what the U.S. was attempting to achieve during this critical period in Indonesia.

4.1. GESTAPU

The early 1960s was a precarious time for Indonesia. Class tensions mounted, with peasants seizing the estates of large landowners and oil and rubber workers occupying the U.S.-owned enterprises. In the meantime, Sukarno was striving to solidify an iron grip on his country, by instituting a system of “Guided Democracy” with the support of the PKI. On September 30, 1965, a group of middle-ranking army officers under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Untung arrested and executed the army chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Yani (who was known to be close to Sukarno), and five other leading generals, and announced the establishment of the “Revolutionary Council.” The Revolutionary Council declared that their “September 30 Movement (aka GESTAPU)” was aimed at preempting a CIA-sponsored coup by the “Generals’ Council” to overthrow Sukarno. Within 24 hours, however, General Suharto routed the rebel officers and took the control of the capital, Jakarta. As soon as Suharto assumed the reigns of government from Sukarno, he launched the greatest anti-Communist purge program in history, which resulted in the slaughter of at least half a million Indonesians. The coup and genocide forever changed the political scene on the streets of Indonesia as well as her foreign policy.

The official account of the events, which was provided by the Suharto regime and unreservedly accepted by the West, seems to be placing most of the blame on the PKI. The PKI wanted to take over Jakarta and thus egged on senior officers in the army (Generals’ Council) to conspire a coup against Sukarno. Several scholars also sided with this view. Justus M. van der Kroef (1996: 458-487) argued that the coup was part of “the final acceleration of the PKI’s drive to power, which began almost exactly two years to the day before the September 30 coup.” Parker also supports van der Kroef’s observation, by claiming that the leader of the PKI was “preparing his own offensive against the Army leadership” before the September 30th incident took place (Parker 1969: 298). But what would have been the motives of the PKI leaders to strike against their biggest patron, Sukarno?²³ Was the PKI equipped with military means strong enough to plot and carry out a coup?²⁴ Besides, as Hauswedell (1973: 141) argued, “the apparent ease and swiftness with which the Communist Party was destroyed after the October 1, 1965, coup, the strength of the very heterogeneous coalition which participated and rejoiced in its annihilation, and the lack of resistance the party offered against its fate – all these facts support the charges that the pre-coup political offensive of the PKI had merely been a bluff without real substance.”

Given the improbable scenario of the PKI orchestrating the coup, several studies assert

²³ Nasution, a known Americanist in Indonesian army, assessed: “PKI was still supporting Sukarno and would not go so far as to adopt tactics directed at Sukarno.” Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, 19 March, 1964, *FRUS XXVI*, p. 81.

²⁴ PKI was lacking military prowess of other Communist parties that operated in China, Vietnam, or Korea at the time.

that the coup was the outcome of a power struggle within the Indonesian army and that GESTAPU was indeed a countercoup on the part of the middle-ranking officers led by Untung to preempt the conspired coup of Generals' Council. But was not Gen. Yani – one of the 6 victims of GESTAPU – Sukarno's closest and loyal follower in the army? One would be hard-pressed to prove that Yani and other victims of Gestapu had strong motives to conspire a coup against their guardian, Sukarno. The implausibility of this scenario led Hughes to raise the possibility that Untung knew that "there was no general's plot at all, and must have used the whole story to cover his own coup attempt" (Hughes 1967: 106). But if Untung were indeed staging his own coup, why would he have excluded Suharto from his purge list and let him take over the whole event? After all, the greatest beneficiary of Gestapu and the ensuing massacres was Suharto, not Untung. Thus Wertheim concludes that it was Suharto who masterminded the whole event by manipulating young middle-ranking officers (Wertheim 1970: 56-57).

The flaw of the two groups of interpretations that I reviewed above is that they both consider the coup and massacre as affairs endogenous to Indonesia. When the coup and massacre were taking place, the Cold War temperature was at its height. Given the fact that the U.S. was trying all means short of open military intervention in order to steer the Indonesian politics into accepting her own worldview, it would be a gross misinterpretation to unravel the mysteries surrounding the sudden reversal of fortune purely in domestic terms. Aandstadt (1999) points out that the news of a coup attempt by an unknown group of young officers came as a surprise to Washington. Reviewing the conversations which took place between Helms, Rusk, Ball, and McNamara, he argues that the key decision makers in the Johnson administration had been ignorant of the coup plot before it took place. Nor did they know who had instigated the coup or how it had developed during the first critical day.²⁵ Brands also asserts that, with regard to the coup, the CIA "was as unenlightened as everyone else" (Brands 1989: 22). Had the U.S. decision makers indeed been ignorant of the coup? Granted that they had been unaware of the exact timing and the main cast of this political drama, can we safely absolve the U.S. of the blame? Bits and pieces of evidence – circumstantial and hard – have surfaced implicating the U.S. in a plot to overthrow Sukarno and attendant communist witch hunting. The U.S. had been far more than just an innocent bystander to the evolving course of events in Indonesia.

Notice that, as Isenberg (1989) in an article to *Policy Analysis* points out, American efforts to undermine Sukarno definitely continued in the early 1960s. These efforts subsided to a certain extent during the early months of Kennedy's presidency. But as the relations between the two countries cooled off once again, supporting the right wing forces of Indonesian army had become a key ingredient in American low profile policies – Kennedy's toe-in policy and Johnson's low posture policy. The military support plan included not only weapons and monetary aid to the army, but also managerial training and a counterinsurgency program.²⁶ The U.S. weapons supply to pro-U.S. army forces and

²⁵ On 1 October, 1965, upon receiving news of the coup, Under Secretary Ball called Secretary of Defense McNamara and said: "The people we have depended on in the Army are under house arrest or have been shot – we do not know." Ball then called DCIA Helms and received confirmation from him that the U.S. indeed had not been involved (See Aandstadt 1999). But Ball's statement also indicates that the U.S. maintained close contact with a group of pro-U.S. army generals.

²⁶ The *New York Times* (13 March, 1966) also confirmed that: "The United States continued to retain excellent contacts with the top military leaders, even after Mr. Sukarno had renounced American aid (in December 1964)." Eugene McCarthy wrote: "Indonesia, where military elements

training continued despite the official termination of such aid and training by the administration (Refer to the U.S. government documents in *FRUS XXVI*).

Neither had there been any sign of decline in the CIA's clandestine activities in Indonesia since 1958. The influence of the CIA was felt in right-wing circles and particularly in the military. According to an article in the *New York Times*, the CIA had been the principal arm of American policy in Indonesia in the early 1960s:

It (CIA) is said, for instance, to have been so successful at infiltrating the top of the Indonesian government and army that the United States was reluctant to disrupt CIA covering operations by withdrawing aid and information programs in 1964 and 1965 (*New York Times* 27 April, 1966).

As with other covert operations launched by the U.S. during the Cold War era, propaganda was an element indispensable to the Indonesian operation. The U.S. had maintained the cultural penetration programs and “psy-ops (psychological operations)” – under the auspices of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) – that had been active in Indonesia since the 1950s. In the 1960s, Indonesia entailed the largest USIA effort in Asia next to Japan. The cultural programs were aimed at countering hostile ideologies against the U.S. while promoting a pro-U.S. world-view.²⁷ The USIA, with help from the CIA, succeeded in penetrating the local Indonesian press; it monitored the Indonesian media and supported pro-U.S. media groups by transferring direct monetary support. But the efforts of the USIA were disproportionately directed at cultivating and training personal contacts with higher-ranking army officers. The evidence also suggests that the U.S. intensified its cultural/psychological operations beginning in 1965. Fifteen days before the coup, Ambassador Green called for an increased “psy-war (psychological war)” program in Indonesia.²⁸

According to former CIA officer McGhee's testimony, the 1965 coup materialized after “the U.S. ‘did their damndest’ through public pressure and more discreet methods, to prod the Indonesian army to move” (McGhee 1990: 24). McGhee further argues that the CIA published a secret booklet about what really transpired in Indonesia in 1965. According to McGhee's own book, *Deadly Deceits*, the booklet, now completely destroyed, noted that the CIA was “extremely proud of its successful [one word deleted] and recommended it as a model for future operations [one-half sentence deleted]” (McGhee 1983: 58). Deletion was the result of CIA censorship imposed on McGhee's book, but it does not take a genius to figure out whom the deleted parts of the sentences implicate – the U.S. in general and the CIA in particular.

appear to have taken de facto control of the government in the wake of recent turmoil, received ... nearly \$64,000,000 in military-grant aid from the United States between 1959 and 1965.” (See *Saturday Review* 9 July, 1966).

²⁷ Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, 24 August, 1967, *FRUS XXVI*, p. 138.

²⁸ See cable from Green to Rusk, 15 September, 1965, National Security Archives (NSA) <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>. The replacement of Ambassador Jones with Marshall Green deserves an attention given the alleged roles he played in Korea and Australia. Green served as *charge d'affaires* in South Korea, while General Park Chung Hee carried out a military coup in 1961. He is believed to have played a certain role in Park's coup. Green was later posted to Australia, where he is believed to have played a role in dismissing the Whitlam's Labor government in November 1975. There is little doubt that the White House, the Pentagon, and the CIA had a hand in the destabilization of the Whitlam government, the first Labor Party government in 23 years, prior to its dismissal by the Governor-General. I owe these points to Peter Kornbluh.

Indeed the relationship between the U.S. and the right wing forces of the Indonesian army, including Gen. Suharto, seems to be the key to solve the mysteries surrounding the coup. When Suharto was weighing the risky decision to strike, the U.S. provided him with key logistical equipment such as field radios and Jeeps, which would prove critical to the success of coup. It is true that initially the Johnson administration did not trust him and feared that he might be another nationalist of Sukarno's ilk. Aandstadt (1999) argues that Suharto was not an American crony. But well before the coup took place, Sukarno had already established close allies in the U.S. military establishment and retained close ties with the U.S. intelligence officers stationed in Indonesia. A memorandum prepared by the CIA, entitled "Prospects for Covert Action," indicates that Washington had sought ways to encourage the army leaders to oust Sukarno and establish a military government in Indonesia. The CIA assessed the situation: "There are good men in government who are willing to work for the things they believe in ... [less than 1 line of source text not declassified] continues to find it possible to work with such individuals ... Among them some have already demonstrated a capability for limited but effective clandestine political action."²⁹ Recently declassified government documents issued by the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia at the time of coup and massacre testify to the extent of American influence on the Indonesian army.³⁰ In a cable sent to Green in October 1965, Rusk made it clear that the Johnson administration would back the army leaders and the establishment of a military-run government.³¹

Lack of hard evidence prevents this author from asserting that the U.S. masterminded the 1965 coup. But given the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and right wing military officers in Indonesia, tacit consent from the U.S. must have been virtually a *sine qua non* for them to launch such a military adventure. Although the U.S. presence in Indonesia might not have directly set off the Sukarno overthrow, the U.S. provided a shield behind which the anti-Sukarno forces could operate effectively. Additionally, the overthrow of Sukarno consisted of much more than the final military action. The coup was a logical outcome of the long, complicated American covert operations involving the mobilization of anti Sukarno forces and economic, political, and psychological, as well as military, warfare.³² As McNamara acknowledged in 1967, the U.S. covert operation programs in Indonesia "paid dividends."³³

²⁹ Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency for the Department of State, "Prospects for Covert Action," 18 September, 1964, *FRUS* XXVI, p. 162.

³⁰ "[O]ur training programs give us a unique opportunity to shape the thinking of Indonesia's future civilian police and military leaders ... contacts maintained between U.S. and Indonesian military personnel have been beneficial from an intelligence gathering aspect, as well as for maintaining U.S. influence among the Indonesian military leaders." Sukarno's Confrontation with Malaysia, January-November 1964, National Security Archives (NSA) <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>.

³¹ See cable from Rusk to Green, 29 October, 1965. National Security Archives (NSA). Green replied that he had assured army leaders "that the U.S. government is generally sympathetic with, and admiring of, what the army is doing." He also recommended increased covert efforts "to spread the story of the PKI's guilt, treachery, and brutality," although he was unsure of the evidence of the PKI's role.

³² Such activities greatly strengthened the position of the right-wing army clique vis-à-vis Sukarno and the PKI. This scenario was followed closely in Chile in the years 1970~1973 (See Scott 1985: 235, 242). As had been the case in Chile, the gradual cutoff of all economic aid to Indonesia in the years 1962~1965 was accompanied by a shift in military aid to friendly elements in the Indonesian Army. Before the military coup broke out in Chile, Santiago was rampant with the rumor that "*Djakarta se acerca!* (Jakarta is coming!)."

³³ In the 1967 Fulbright Committee hearings on the U.S. Foreign Assistance Program, Senator Sparkman questioned McNamara:

4.2. Indonesian Holocaust

The U.S. complicity in the massacre that followed the coup has also been an under-publicized issue in the West. But it is confirmed that U.S. officials provided the Suharto forces with the death lists, thereby helping them to organize the mass slaughter. A former political officer in the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Robert Martens, said that he gave the lists to an aide of Adam Malik, the Indonesian foreign minister who played a crucial role in the coup. It is also confirmed that the lists of names were passed on from Martens to Malik, and then to Suharto's headquarters (Kadane 1990).³⁴ It also appears that officials in the U.S. Embassy and the CIA approved the release of the lists and carefully followed the progress of the extermination campaign by the Sukarno forces.³⁵ As the suspected PKI members were being slaughtered, U.S. officials checked off the names against their own list. Joseph Lazarski, the former deputy CIA station chief, recalled that by the end of January 1966 there were so many checked-off names that the CIA concluded that the PKI had been completely destroyed. Lazarski said:

We were getting a good account in Jakarta of who was being picked up. The army had a shooting list of about 4,000 or 5,000 people (See Kadane 1990).

Interviews and testimony of other former officials confirm the U.S. involvement in the Indonesian massacre. It is alleged that the initiative in drawing up the death lists originated from Colby, the future DCIA and then chief of the CIA's Far East division. Colby recalled that in the early 1960s he had discovered that the CIA did not have comprehensive lists of PKI leaders. He argued: "(This) could have been criticized as a gap in the intelligence system." Thus, the lists were prepared for "operational planning" and, without them, "you're fighting blind."³⁶ The reaction of the Johnson administration to the developing situation in Indonesia following the 1965 coup could be summed up as silent celebration.

Sparkman: At a time when Indonesia was kicking up pretty badly – when we were getting a lot of criticism for continuing military aid – at that time we could not say what that military aid was for. Is it secret any more?

McNamara: I think in retrospect, that the aid was well-justified.

Sparkman: You think it paid dividends?

McNamara: I do sir.

See *Hearings on Foreign Assistance* (1966: 693), Washington, D.C.: The United States Government Printing Office, before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

³⁴ The Martens lists provided a detailed read-out of the PKI leadership structure, including the names of provincial, city, and other local PKI committee members, as well as the leaders of the PKI-controlled trade unions, and women's and youth groups. Martens later said: "They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment." See the *Washington Post*, 21 May, 1990 for Kathy Kadane's revealing article, "U.S. Officials' List Aided Indonesian Bloodbath in '60s." The article also appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* on 20 May, 1990.

³⁵ Edward Masters, the Embassy's political section chief, said he could not remember whether the decision to release the names had been cleared with Washington (See Kadane 1990).

³⁶ Colby compared the preparation of death lists with the Phoenix Program that he directed in Vietnam, in which 20,000 cadres and sympathizers of the National Liberation Front were targeted for assassination. When Colby was asked if the CIA had been responsible for sending Martens to compile the lists, he replied: "Maybe, I don't know. Maybe we did it. I've forgotten." From an interview with Colby (See Kadane 1990).

Ambassador Green expressed satisfaction to Washington: “Army is doing a first-class job here of moving against communists.”³⁷ In an article entitled “Elated U.S. Officials Looking to New Aid to Jakarta’s Economy” to the *New York Times*, Max Frankel wrote:

The Johnson Administration found it difficult today to hide its delight with the news from Indonesia, pointing to the political demise of Sukarno and the Communists. After a long period of patient diplomacy, designed to help the army triumph over the Communists, officials were elated to find their expectations being realized (*New York Times* 12 March, 1966).

James Reston’s article implied that the U.S. had a significant impact on the 1965 coup and the ensuing massacre:

The savage transformation of Indonesia from a pro-Chinese policy under Sukarno to a defiantly anti-Communist policy under General Suharto is, of course, the most important of these developments. *Washington is careful not to claim any credit for this change in the sixth most populous and one of the richest nations in the world, but this does not mean that Washington had nothing to do with it ...* There was a great deal more contact between the anti-communist forces in that country and at least one very high official in Washington before and during the Indonesian massacre than is generally realized. General Suharto’s forces, at times severely short of food and munitions, have been getting aid from here through various third countries, and *it is doubtful if the coup would ever have been attempted without the American show of strength in Vietnam or been sustained without the clandestine aid it has received indirectly from here* (emphasis added) (*New York Times* 19 June, 1966).³⁸

5. U.S. COVERT INTERVENTION IN INDONESIA AND DEMOCRATIC NORM

According to some scholars, what separates the political culture of liberal democracies from that of non-democracies is the prevalence of peaceful and democratic norms of conflict resolution. As long as human beings are in charge of politics, conflicts are bound to appear. In liberal democracies, however, so goes their argument, democratic culture and peaceful norms render violent and forceful resolution of conflicts unwanted. Since the totalitarian political system is lacking in this peaceful culture of conflict resolution, disputes are settled mostly by violent and forceful means in totalitarian states. They further argue that this democratic culture percolates into decision-making elites’ foreign policy behavior in liberal democracies. That is, elites in liberal democracies externalize internal democratic norms in conducting world affairs. Thus in general they refrain from resolving conflicts violently in international relations. They also respect the democratic political processes present in other democratic states and show concern for the democratic potential of their diplomatic partners. When they do aggress toward other states, the motives of these democratic elites are to preempt anticipated aggression of their counterparts. They launch preemptive strikes for fear that their good will – peaceful conflict resolution norms – may be exploited.³⁹

5.1. Complicity of Western Democracies in Indonesia

³⁷ Cable from Green to Rusk, 4 November, 1965, National Security Archives (NSA).

³⁸ The article was entitled “A Gleam of Light in Asia”.

³⁹ Some scholars assert that these democratic norms account for the fact that democracies apparently do not fight each other, while they do so against non-democracies (Bruce Russett 1993). See also William J. Dixon (1994: 14-32; 1993: 42-68; 1998: 103-126) and Thomas Risse-Kappen (1995).

How would this norm-based argument explain the fact that the leading Western democracies colluded in order to replace a legitimate government in a sovereign state with a military dictatorship more to their liking? Evidence surrounding the 1965 coup suggests that the U.S. had not been the only Western democracy involved in the overthrow of Sukarno and the ensuing mass slaughter. Such democratic states as Great Britain, Japan, and Australia had collaborated with the U.S. in an effort to undermine Sukarno and the PKI and to solidify Suharto's military dictatorship. Among the three democratic states mentioned, the role of Australia would become relatively well known. A series of revealing articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1999 suggests that the Australian role was as active as that of the U.S., if on a smaller scale. According to declassified Australian government documents published by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Australian military, intelligence, and diplomatic services were closely involved in the 1965 coup. The published documents demonstrate that the Australian military had trained some of the Indonesian officers who took part in the coup and the massacre that followed. It is also indicated that the Australian Embassy in Indonesia called for more decisiveness from the Suharto forces in purging PKI members (*Sydney Morning Herald* 12 July, 1999).⁴⁰ In the name of preventing a Communist takeover, the U.S. and Australia, among other leading Western democracies, abetted and condoned the mass murder of Indonesians, which is considered as the worst holocaust except for that committed by Nazi Germany. A historian, Gabriel Kolko, writes:

The "final solution" to the Communist problem in Indonesia was certainly one of the most barbaric acts of inhumanity in a century that has seen a great deal of it; it surely ranks as a war crime of the same type as those the Nazis perpetrated. No single American act in the period after 1945 was as bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia, for it tried to initiate the massacre, and it did everything in its power to encourage Suharto, including equipping its killers, to see that the physical liquidation of the PKI was carried through to its culmination (Kolko 1988: 64).

5.2. Democratic Norm and Regime Change in Indonesia

When Sukarno's regime was overthrown in 1965, Indonesia was a constitutional republic with an elected president, an elected parliament, and an appointed judiciary. Indonesia was a typical case of third world nascent presidential democracy; the president and his ministers had far more power than the parliament or judiciary. The government operated under the basic framework of a 1945 constitution, which was modified by two constitutional revisions between 1950 and 1959. Victory in the 1955 national election, which was considered free and fair, awarded Sukarno a legitimate mandate to rule the country. However, in 1956 President Sukarno called for reforming the party system and replacing liberal democracy with what he called "Guided Democracy," which would give the president broader governmental authority. By instituting the system of "Guided Democracy," Sukarno dissolved the parliament and imposed a presidential constitution by decree. In so doing, he eased the country from a parliamentary democracy to a more authoritarian state form. Nonetheless, in general Indonesia during Sukarno's reign fares better than Indonesia during Suharto's presidency in terms of democracy scores provided by both Polity98 and Vanhanen's datasets (See Tables 1 and 2).⁴¹

⁴⁰ The documents published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* are from the period after the coup took place on 1 October, 1965. Larger portions of the documents concerning the 1965~1967 events in Indonesia are still classified by the current Australian government.

⁴¹ The Polity98 project extends Polity III through 1998 and contains corrections to the Polity III data.

Table 1. Democracy Scores for Indonesia Polity98

Period	Democ	Autoc	Xpreg	xrcomp	Xropen	xconst	Parreg	parcomp
48-49	5	2	2	1	4	7	2	3
50-56	3	3	2	1	4	5	3	3
57-58	2	3	2	1	4	4	3	3
59-65	0	5	2	1	4	3	3	2
67-97	0	7	2	1	4	2	4	2

Notes: (i) Democ: Democracy Score – general openness of political institutions. Range = 1~10 (0 = low; 10 = high) (ii) Autoc: Autocracy Score – general closedness of political institutions. Range = 1~10 (0 = low; 10 = high) (iii) Xpreg: Executive recruitment regulation – institutionalized procedures regarding the transfer of executive power. (iv) xrcomp: Executive recruitment competition – extent to which executives are chosen through competitive elections. (v) Xropen: Executive recruitment openness – opportunity for non-elites to attain executive office. (vi) xconst: Executive constraints – operational (de facto) independence of chief executive. (vii) Parreg: Regulation of participation – development of institutional structures for political expression. (viii) parcomp: Competitiveness of participation – extent to which non-elites are able to access institutional structures for political expression.

Table 2. Democracy Scores for Indonesia Vanhanen’s Poliarchy Dataset

With Western democracies’ tacit support, Suharto was officially inaugurated as president in 1968. Presidential elections were held in 1971, but they were tightly controlled by the government. He instituted the *Orde Baru* (new order) regime, which championed a largely pro-Western policy. Indonesia ended its confrontationist policy with Malaysia and began to promote U.S. security and commercial interests in the region. Subsequently, the big investments and corporations from the West returned to Indonesia. In the meantime, Suharto relied on a brutal dictatorship to maintain his grip on the country. Basic human rights were severely violated and many democratic principles espoused in the constitution were not practiced.

But at odds with the stipulations of norm-based argument, not only did the leaders in the world’s leading democracies collaborate to secretly replace the legitimate government

Period	Index of Democracy	Competition	Participation
1949~1954	0	40.35	0
1955~1959	8.76	38.85	22.55
1960~1970	0	0	0
1971~1976	4.15	18.6	22.3

of Sukarno with this autocratic regime of Suharto, but they also helped in the consolidation of his military dictatorship in Indonesia. Shortly after Suharto seized power, Western democracies provided the military government with a “steady flow” of aid and loans carrying particularly low interest rates (Pilger 1995: 15). In 1975, Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, which established the beginning of the mass

Ted Gurr and Keith Jagers are the principle investigators. See Jagers and Gurr (1995) for the authoritative description of Polity III. The data were downloaded from www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/polity/. Most of the empirical DP works have adopted the democracy ratings of Polity III. Vanhanen’s index of democracy was retrieved from the Poliarchy dataset, compiled by Tatu Vanhanen, that covers 187 countries over the period 1810 to 1998. The current version of the dataset is 1.2 and available for downloading at www.svt.ntnu.no/iss/data/vanhanen/.

killing that continued into the 1990s. But throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s, the U.S. supported Indonesia's claim to East Timor and downplayed the mass murder.⁴² The complicity of the major Western democracies in Indonesia raises questions about the so-called democratic and humanitarian concerns of these countries. For public consumption, decision-making elites extolled "democratic values," but the actual records prove they demanded and supported a brutal military dictatorship that unabashedly served the permanent interests of the West. Safeguarding such interests in the region proved more of an immediate concern for the elites of Western democracies than any concern over democracy and human rights.

6. CONCLUSION

A relative dearth of documentary evidence and gaps in the government records make it hard to detail the roles of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the overthrow of Sukarno. 14 years ago, Kolko (1988: 124) observed: "U.S. documents for the three months preceding September 30, 1965, and dealing with the convoluted background and intrigues, much less the embassy's and the CIA's roles, have been withheld from public scrutiny." In recent years, the U.S. government declassified a bulk of documents concerning its Indonesian policies in the 1950s and 1960s. Nonetheless, many of the archives dealing with specific U.S. covert activities leading up to the coup and ensuing massacre have yet to be opened, and some of the most sensitive portion of the U.S. government documents are believed to be permanently disposed of.⁴³ Kolko also observed: "the release of these papers would embarrass the U.S. government (Kolko 1988: 125)." Given the detailed materials available before and after July-September 1965, it does not take a leap of faith to believe that Kolko's observation is still valid. Only congressional investigations and hearings of the Chile project's magnitude can reveal the full story of U.S. involvement in Indonesia. But the possibility still remains that U.S. involvement in the coup in Indonesia had been one of the most successful U.S. covert operations and the best-kept secrets in Washington. As one scholar aptly put it, the CIA's involvement in the 1965 Indonesian coup may be "the most brilliantly disguised secret in the entire history of the agency" (Hughes 1967:106). The case study in this article indicates that a series of low profile policies undertaken by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in Indonesia were motivated to a large extent by a desire on the part of the decision making elites to evade domestic political repercussions when the creation of popular consent for overt policies had seemed unattainable.

During the Cold War era non-aligned Third World regimes became the targets of U.S. covert action despite considerable political moderation and the absence of close ties to the Soviets (Forsythe 1992: 388). Particularly during the 1950s, the elites in the Eisenhower administration developed a foreign policy that equated the independent, non-alignment policies of Third World countries with grave challenges to the U.S. national interests. It is believed that the Kennedy administration held different views toward neutralist Third World countries. By instituting the "Alliance for Progress" program, Kennedy declared that Third World neutralism, the type advocated by Sukarno, would no longer be discredited by the U.S. But circumstantial evidence suggests that there had been a dire discrepancy

⁴² In 1993, Philip Lietch, a former senior CIA operations officer based in Jakarta in 1975, said: "Suharto was given the green light (by Kissinger) to do what he did." (See Pilger 1995: 15).

⁴³ Conversation with Peter Kornbluh.

between the public rhetoric of the Kennedy administration and its behind-the-scenes activities. In contrast to their impressive record of promoting civil liberties at home, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had subordinated promotion of democracy and respect for human and civil rights to the goal of preserving clientele state structures amenable to the U.S. permanent interests in conducting world affairs. The revulsion against neutral Third World regimes inhospitable to U.S. interests preceded the concern for the "Alliance for Progress" and preservation of democratic values.

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