

Howard P. Jones Oral History Interview – JFK#2 03/20/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Howard P. Jones
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Biographical Note

Howard P. Jones was Ambassador to Indonesia (1958-1965). This interview focuses on observations of the incoming John F. Kennedy Administration, United States involvement in Indonesia, and communication with the Kennedy White House regarding Indonesia, among other things.

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By Howard Palfrey Jones

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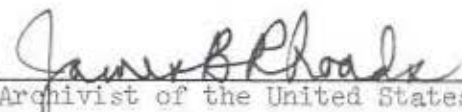
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Howard Palfrey Jones

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Howard P. Jones – JFK #2
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Second Oral History Interview

with

HOWARD P. JONES

March 20, 1970
Boston, Massachusetts

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, I think one of the things that might be interesting to begin with would be a comparison or just your observations on the changes that take place with the incoming Kennedy Administration while you are in Indonesia. Do you see any decided shifts in policy that occur as a result of that?

JONES: There was an immediate lifting of a heavy atmosphere that had been prevailing. I believe we talked about Sukarno's regard for and relationship with Kennedy, did we not? Or hadn't we gotten to that?

O'BRIEN: No, we didn't. We didn't quite get into that.

JONES: Well, let me start off by saying that before Kennedy was elected President I had presented President Sukarno with this book of his speeches which came out.

I've forgotten the name of it. Do you remember?

O'BRIEN: Profiles in--no, not Profiles in Courage.

JONES: No, the book which contained the....

O'BRIEN: Strategy for Peace?

JONES: I guess that was it. Anyway, the one that contained all his speeches. [Interruption] One day when I was having breakfast with him he pulled this book off his desk and said, "I know that a politician often has to say things that he doesn't entirely mean. "But," he said, "if John Kennedy means what he says in these speeches, and it would appear that he does, then he and I are in agreement."

So the year 1961 started off with an expectation on Sukarno's part, that the new American President was a man with whom he could communicate, who understood the economic and social revolution that was going on in Asia, who was sympathetic to the aspirations of the less developed areas of the world, a man who believed in the little man and was interested in doing something for him, and above all, a man who understood, as Sukarno saw it, the flow of history.

As soon as John F. Kennedy was elected President, I telegraphed Washington urging that President Kennedy-- invite Sukarno to the White House. I pointed out that to Sukarno international relations were in large

part personal relations and that it was vital to establish a rapport between the two presidents if our objectives in that country were to be achieved. I informed him that Sukarno had read his speeches and thought they were on the same wave length. The last time we talked did I relate the incident in connection with Sukarno's visit to President /Dwight D./ Eisenhower when he was President?

O'BRIEN: I don't believe you did.

JONES: This illustrates the delicacy of handling heads of state and how one mistake can affect international relations. Sukarno had started off with a high regard for President Eisenhower. (I, too, had a very high regard for Eisenhower. I knew him, was on his staff during the war, and he was a great American.)

In 1956, President Eisenhower invited Sukarno to pay a state visit to the United States. It was Sukarno's first trip to America. The visit went well and Sukarno made a terrific impression on this country as a colorful figure. Unfortunately, he subsequently visited Moscow and then Peking, and when he got back to Indonesia he introduced his concept of guided democracy which most Americans considered to be an adaptation of a communist-style dictatorship.

So that whatever advantage might have accrued from Sukarno's visit here, in terms of either his public relations or ours, was pretty well dissipated by his later actions. Nevertheless, for a time the relations of Sukarno with Eisenhower were fairly good.

It is the custom for a state visit to be returned and Sukarno was counting on the American President paying an official visit to Indonesia. This never materialized.

And then two things happened which turned Sukarno against Eisenhower: First, Sukarno was speaking at the United Nations and was invited by Eisenhower to come to the White House for a brief visit. He did so and was kept waiting in the anteroom of the White House for about ten minutes! This would be hard enough for any head of state to accept. To a proud Asian, this was an insult. It wasn't entirely Eisenhower's fault. Among the people in the Sukarno party was D. N. Aidit, head of the PKI /Partai Komunis Indonesia, the Indonesian Communist party. Sukarno, possibly not realizing the implications of this in an anti-communist America, or perhaps being just mischievous, had included Aidit in the party. Of course, the Eisenhower aide took this up with the President when the party arrived, and it took

the President a couple of minutes to decide what he was going to do about it. He wound up by inviting them all into his office! But the damage had been done. A proud Asian head of state had been kept waiting in his ante-room.

The sequel was President Eisenhower passing up Indonesia on his Asian trip. Sukarno was very upset about this and took it as a personal affront. So that by the end of the Eisenhower Administration, relations were very cool between the two presidents.

Both governments hoped that with the advent of Kennedy into office this could be changed. And so when Sukarno went to Washington in April of Kennedy's first term--the President having acceded to my suggestion that he invite Sukarno--this was a visit which held much promise.

O'BREN: I was curious in regard to these policies in the late Eisenhower Administration. I understand Sukarno and some of the high military leaders know of the background of Allen L Pope and his association with the Central Intelligence Agency. Did they know the full extent of the CIA activities in Indonesia in 1958?

JONES: I would say no. I think that the Indonesian leadership had put two and two together and probably pieced out

a pattern that provided them with what they considered was a fairly full picture. But no. The only real evidence that they ever had, or thought they had, was the ammunition that was dropped in Pakanbaru, Pope's capture, and the obvious fact that planes which were flying supplies for, and/or bombing, the area had to come from somewhere. Knowing the range of these planes, it was very simple for them to draw an arc or a circle around the strike area and realize that the planes had to come from Singapore, Manila, or possibly one or two other points, all within the U.S.-British sphere of influence. So the Indonesians were fairly definite in their conclusion that the United States Government, directly or indirectly, was supporting the rebels and keeping them in business.

The Prime Minister in 1958 publicly charged foreign assistance to the rebels and clearly pointed the finger at the United States. Then, of course, when The Invisible Government came out, that was a very popular book in Indonesia.

O'BRIEN: I'll bet.

JONES: And so, what they didn't know, they learned through The Invisible Government. Whether that painted an accurate picture or not, it represented the picture that Sukarno and the Indonesians accepted as accurate.

O'BRIEN: Well, was the purpose of the involvement, from your vantage point, basically to overthrow the government of Indonesia, or was it to perhaps move them to the right, or the combination of both, or opportunism, or. . . .

JONES: No, U.S. policy was not directed at overthrowing the Indonesian Government, but at influencing its course. Even the rebels were aiming at a return to constitutional government, considering that Sukarno was exceeding his lawful powers as president. There was no intention on the part of the rebels to secede or even establish their own government. Their objectives were directed towards achieving a realignment within the government and a new policy direction.

The major issues involved in the rebellion were economic. Take Sumatra. Sumatra was supplying something like 75 percent of the foreign exchange that the country took in and was getting about 3 percent of it back in public improvements, schools, hospitals, roads, highways, harbors. There was great discontent in these outer regions which were really producing the money that kept the economy going. They wanted a fair shake.

It did happen that the people who were on the rebel side were anti-communists who felt Sukarno was moving too far left. But this was a secondary issue

in the rebellion which can be judged from the fact that there were strong anti-communists in the government. /Abdul Haris/ Nasution, chief of staff of the Army, was one of the strongest anti-communists in Indonesia. /H./ Djuanda the Prime Minister was anti-communist. So you had an ironical situation in which the anti-communist forces of the country were divided by the rebellion. This obviously made no sense at all from the standpoint of a U.S. policy designed to curb the power and influence of communist elements in Indonesia. /Armi/ Sjarifuddin, the Prime Minister of the rebel government, was a strong anti-communist. His close friend, Djuanda, Prime Minister of the Djakarta government, was also an anti-communist, and so the issues became badly confused. As this fact was brought home to the U.S. Government, our position gradually changed.

This was really the first problem I had to tackle when I arrived in Indonesia as Ambassador. Indeed, I had hoped to get there in time to prevent the rebellion from breaking out into actual military conflict. This was in nobody's interest. You asked me about our stance. Our stance, policy-wise, originally was to keep the pressures that were being generated from the outer islands on the central government.

We felt that it was important to keep these opposition elements alive, that they could exert a salutary influence upon the Sukarno Government. There was no intent in Washington so far as I am aware to escalate this support to the point of military action. The objectives of the U.S. Government were quite limited in this respect.

O'BRIEN: Well, in Washington is the State Department completely privy to the other agency's involvement in this? Do they have full knowledge of it?

JONES: The State Department is responsible for policy. The CIA could take no action outside of the policy framework. Now, there was some freewheeling, as you know, in the earlier stages of CIA. And the extent to which the U.S. Government -- the State Department and the White House, and so on -- knew everything that was going on is something I don't think any of us know. But we all know that when you have agents out in the field they become sometimes overexuberant and overenthusiastic about their activities. And they're far from home base. These men are likely to make mistakes or take positions which don't really represent the positions or thinking back home at all. I'm not saying this was the case in 1958. I am saying this was a possibility.

I was on my way to Indonesia as Ambassador when the rebellion actually broke out. I arrived after an expeditionary force had been dispatched to quell the rebellion. This created a new situation: would you take sides, or would you not, and to what extent, et cetera? There was a dichotomy in American policy at that point, which was unfortunate.

O'BRIEN: Was it basically Defense and State lining up on one side and staying together?

JONES: No, I don't believe there was an intra-mural or departmental conflict in Washington. There were differences of view in both departments. When these were resolved, State and Defense were together. But there was at the time a dichotomy in our position. We were doing our best to build up good relations with the central government--and at the same time it was obvious that we were unsympathetic to Sukarno and favoring the rebels. So a situation existed which could not long be maintained. If we hadn't shifted our policy, I wouldn't have been there very much longer as ambassador. We were riding two horses, each of them galloping off in opposite directions.

O'BRIEN: Were you in for any surprises when you got to Djakarta in 1958?

JONES: Such as--?

O'BRIEN: Either policy or the activities of the United States Government in Indonesia?

JONES: Yes and no. Yes, in that I was unprepared for the situation I encountered. No, in the sense of policy surprises. When I left Washington, the view was that the central government was moving ever leftward and the rebels were the principal counterforce. This turned out to be an inaccurate assessment. Thus only former Vice President Mohammad Hatta, explaining the situation after my arrival described Nasution, the chief of staff of the Army, as a strong anti-Communist. We hadn't known much about Nasution. Hatta said, "Well, from your point of view, you couldn't have a better man. The communists call me Public Enemy Number One and they call him Public Enemy Number Two."

Well, this destroyed immediately the concept of an anti-communist versus a communist confrontation. It meant that the real issues in the rebellion must be sought elsewhere. This new light on the situation was what really brought about a change in policy.

O'BRIEN: Well, how did you accomplish this policy turnaround? Did you have any resistance in Washington to the turn around at this point?

JONES: You hammer away at Washington with your views, and they respond, and you have a dialogue going back and forth by cable, and ultimately you come to an agreement or you don't come to an agreement. In this case we came to an agreement. They accepted my recommendations and we had this shift in emphasis.

I am sorry but I shall have to excuse myself in a few moments.

O'BRIEN: Okay. Let me ask then just one more question and this will be it for today. I wonder, in 1960 when the Kennedy Administration comes in, you have almost a special kind of access to the White House. Your telegrams are sent to the White House with a great deal of frequency, and there are people in the White House, in a sense, that become very concerned about Indonesia much more than other nations.

JONES: That's right.

O'BRIEN: How does this come about? Is it through a contact? Do you have any contacts with the members of the incoming administration before 1961? How do they become as concerned with Indonesia as they do?

JONES: Well, that's a very interesting question and the answer in terms of contact is negative. I had my hands full in Indonesia and had very little contact

with members of the incoming administration before the President was elected. I had met the President when he was a U.S. Senator. And I knew a number of the people in his administration. But the concern over Indonesia resulted from the increase in tension in the area which might have led to war between Holland and Indonesia and further alienated Indonesia, then the fifth largest country in the world in population, from the West. At the time, too, I was firing back some very strong cables that had to be considered at the White House level. Also I returned periodically to talk with the people in the State Department and the White House. I accompanied Sukarno when he made his visit in the Kennedy Administration.

President Kennedy was vitally interested in foreign affairs. You can't quite say he was his own Secretary of State to the extent that Franklin Roosevelt was, but, you know, he would reach for the phone and call a desk officer in the State Department when he wanted to know something. He was operating, and he was fully in touch and cognizant of everything that was going on. He also had competent assistants like Michael V. Mike Forrestal and James C., Jr. Thompson and Robert Komer all of whom were following Indonesian affairs and

tremendously helpful to me. The President was remarkably well informed. He would talk about Indonesia with almost as much insight as a desk officer in the State Department. It was a real privilege to talk with a President who had as much feel for foreign affairs as President Kennedy. He was interested. He made a point of knowing what was going on. I never had to brief him very extensively. His staff had briefed him. We would talk. I'd start to explain the background of a problem and he would interrupt with, "Never mind that. I'm familiar with the background. What's the situation now?" In an hour with President Kennedy we could cover a lot of ground, and did. As a result, the White House was in almost as close touch with Embassy thinking as the State Department. This was a vital and important relationship to maintain in the light of the problems Embassy Djakarta was facing.

O'BRIEN: Well, would you like to cut it there?

JONES: Yes. Thank you.