

Documents show US participation in 1965-66 massacres in Indonesia

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Declassified documents published last week confirm that the US government was intimately involved in the campaign of mass murders conducted by the Indonesian military and Islamic organisations during the 1965-66 coup led by General Suharto.

Not only did Washington have detailed knowledge of the massacres that killed up to one million workers, peasants and suspected supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The US escalated covert operations to instigate the military takeover, encouraged the bloodbath, and urged the military to go further in order to overthrow President Sukarno.

Diplomats in the Jakarta Embassy kept a record of which PKI leaders were being executed, and regularly informed the US Secretary of State that tens of thousands of alleged PKI sympathisers were being murdered. It was a “fantastic switch,” one US official enthused.

This material is another warning of the utter ruthlessness of American imperialism. US governments and their diplomatic, military and intelligence agencies have a proven record of overthrowing governments and participating in immense violence and repression in order to pursue its strategic and economic interests.

In the words of one secret diplomatic cable, the United States had a “heavy stake in the outcome” of the bloody political purge. As Washington escalated the Vietnam War, it regarded Indonesia, the most populous and strategically located country in South East Asia, as a linchpin of its continued post-World War II domination of the region.

The US, led by Democrat President Lyndon Johnson, was determined to oust Sukarno, a bourgeois nationalist who collaborated with the PKI as a means of keeping control over the rising social, economic and political unrest among the many-millioned Indonesian working class and peasantry.

Suharto, who formally ousted Sukarno in March 1966,

ruled Indonesia with US backing for the next 32 years before being toppled in May 1998. To this day, the country’s military retains far-reaching political and economic power, and basic democratic rights remain suppressed.

The 39 documents were posted on October 17 by the National Security Archive at George Washington University, after being processed by the National Declassification Center (NDC). They provide only a partial picture of Washington’s hand in one of the greatest imperialist crimes of the twentieth century.

Of the 30,000 pages processed by the NDC, several hundred documents remain confidential and are undergoing “further review.” The files do not include US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents, which remain secret.

Even without the CIA material, the record is undeniable. Documents published in 1999 already proved that the US and its allies, particularly Australia, helped orchestrate the coup. They drew up lists of PKI and other figures to be assassinated, and urged on the massacres to ensure that Suharto fully seized power and established a military dictatorship.

The latest material points to covert US operations to oust Sukarno, which had been underway since at least 1956, being intensified in the lead-up to the coup. The first document, dated June 7, 1965, records US diplomats welcoming a move by army commanders in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province, to overrule the local governor, using powers granted to the military by Sukarno himself. “Army officials clear winner in first skirmish,” the US consul in Medan, Robert Blackburn, reported to the Jakarta Embassy.

Significantly, this “first skirmish” was more than three months before the so-called September 30 Movement, an alleged PKI-orchestrated plot to kidnap and kill leading generals. Suharto seized upon this supposed plot, the

circumstances of which remain highly questionable, to instigate the bloodshed.

Many examples can be cited of US culpability for the Indonesian killing fields. On October 12, 1965 recently-arrived US ambassador to Indonesia, Marshall Green, who played a key role in the coup, sent a telegram to Secretary of State David Dean Rusk reporting on a conversation with the German ambassador to Indonesia. According to the latter, “Indo Army is now considering possibility of overthrowing Sukarno himself and is approaching several Western Embassies to let them know that such a move is possible.”

The American Embassy made clear that any US aid was contingent on Sukarno being removed. In an October 23 letter, Norman Hannah, the political advisor to the commander-in-chief for the Pacific (CINCPAC) asked Ambassador Green how to respond to the “reasonable possibility that the Indonesian Army might request our help.” A week later, Green asked the Johnson administration to “explore [the] possibility of short-term one shot aid on a covert, non-attributable basis,” precipitating an expansion of US covert support that would include money, communications equipment and arms.

A November 20 Jakarta Embassy telegram to Rusk pointed to the fraudulent character of the September 30 Movement allegations. Reporting on conversations between Western observers and leading PKI members in Jakarta and central Java, including Jogjakarta, it indicated that the PKI figures had no knowledge of the supposed plot and “there was great confusion in Party ranks on what they were supposed to do.”

On November 30, a weekly embassy summary sent to the State Department said the repression had “reached the stage of mass executions in several Indonesian provinces, apparently at the behest of General Suharto in Central Java at least.”

In a December 21 weekly report, Embassy First Secretary Mary Louise Trent noted that at least 100,000 people had been killed, and lauded the “striking Army success” of its efforts to accumulate power.

US authorities knew the September 30 Movement plot was concocted as a pretext for the coup. Ambassador Green, in a March 4, 1966 telegram to the State Department said the allegations were manufactured to serve “the propaganda needs of the moment.” The military wanted to foster the notion that “the whole pro-Communist movement ... should be considered guilty ‘in principle’.”

Two documents from 1967 underscored the corporate interests at stake, as Suharto’s regime sought to meet the needs of US firms by drafting a new foreign investment law and signing concession agreements with oil, mining, and timber companies.

One report noted the “red carpet treatment” afforded a Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Pacific Trade Mission that arrived in Jakarta on April 18, 1967, for a week-long stay. Indonesian regime and business leaders were “cooperative and forthcoming.”

After meeting Ambassador Green, Business International Corporation chairman Elliot Haynes wrote in a diary that multinational corporations, including Uniroyal and Goodyear, were interested in setting up operations in Indonesia, while companies like Alcoa wanted lower income taxes.

US and global media outlets have barely reported the release of the documents, and provided few details of their contents. One reason is that the corporate media was complicit in the coup, assisting the US and Suharto’s regime to justify it and whitewashing the massacres.

A November 1966 report to the State Department recorded a trip embassy officials took with a *New York Times* reporter to central Java, accompanied by military representatives. In an early example of “embedded journalism,” officials showed off several “model” villages under military control. The author noted that the army had an “ironclad grip” on the province, complete with roadblocks, ID cards, house-to-house searches and a ban on gatherings of five people or more.

Today, the *New York Times* and the media establishment continue to collaborate closely with Washington as the US and its allies bomb civilians, devastate cities, assassinate people, provoke conflict after conflict, from the Middle East to Korea, and prepare for wars against their rivals, including China.



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