

Dictators are “Disposable”: The Rise and Fall of America’s Military Henchmen

History Repeats Itself? From the "King of Java" to the Pharaoh of Egypt

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From Suharto to Mubarak: History Repeats Itself?

President Suharto of Indonesia was deposed following mass protests in May 1998.

The Western media in chorus pointed to “democratization”: the “King of Java” had been deposed by mass protests, much in the same way as Hosni Mubarak, described by today’s media as “The Pharaoh of Egypt”.



Student protest movement in May 1998 in Jakarta

The 1997 Asian Crisis

The 1997 Asia financial crisis which served to impoverish millions of people was instigated

by institutional speculators. It was a process of deliberate market manipulation. It consisted in destabilizing national currencies, through “short selling”.

The Indonesian rupiah was destabilized, food prices skyrocketed, real wages collapsed by more than fifty percent. Nike workers in export manufacturing were receiving \$45 a month before the crisis. In the wake of the devaluation of the rupiah, their wages plummeted to less than \$20 a month.

The May 1998 protest movement against president Suharto was triggered by widespread poverty and social inequality resulting from the IMF’s deadly “economic medicine” imposed both prior and in the wake of the Asian crisis.

On May 13, 1998, the shooting of six students at Trisakti University in Jakarta led to demands for the resignation of president Suharto, who had occupied the presidency for 31 years.

In a commentary published in the Irish Times in May 1998, Global Research author Finian Cunningham addressed the euphoria of the Western media, which portrayed Suharto as the “The King of Java deposed by his people” (See Irish Times, May 22nd 1998)

[This assessment] seriously misjudges the balance of power not only in Indonesia but in many other parts of the world. The main lesson from Indonesia’s turmoil should be the decisive role played by the United States and the International Monetary Fund. If any party should take credit for decisively bringing down Suharto it is these enforcers of the global capitalist order – not people power ... After 30-odd years of milking the rich resources of Indonesia, it became clear last autumn when Indonesia caught the Asian financial flu, that Suharto was no longer expedient for Western powers. Unlike the other lame Asian Tigers, Suharto proved to be insufficiently nimble in administering the usual IMF neoliberal shock treatment for so-called recovery. ... The upshot of this neo-colonialism allows for greater control of a country’s resources by foreign capital and it invariably leaves the mass of people even more destitute, as wealth is siphoned off at ever greater speed to stock exchanges in New York and London.

Already the signs in Indonesia are ominous. Suharto’s successor is no more committed to democracy and social justice, the country’s military machine continues to operate with brutal efficiency, and, note this, the IMF is redoubling its calls for “market reforms” and cuts in public spending.

Unfortunately, this is not a case of “King deposed by the people”. It is more a case of “Henchman called off by the Mob” – the Mob being the Western financial elite – who can get on with beating up the Indonesian people with another instrument. (Finian Cunningham, Irish Times, 25 May 1998) [1]

The top brass of both the Indonesian and Egyptian military and intelligence apparatus were trained and groomed in America, at the same military academies. Both Mubarak and Suharto were installed by Washington.

Both regimes and their military committed atrocities against their people. Both leaders served to undermine post-colonial nationalism.

The 1965 CIA sponsored Massacre

In 1965, Major General Suharto instrumented a CIA sponsored massacre of more than half a million members and supporters (including family members) of the Communist Party of Indonesia. The massacre was implemented in coordination with the US embassy: the ultimate objective was to weaken and unseat the nationalist Sukarno government which had the backing of the Communist Party.

Air Force Marshall Hosni Mubarak, in a different context, served a similar role in the transition from the nationalist Nasser-Sadat period. He became Vice-President in 1975 and was installed as president in the wake of the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981.

Declassified documents confirm the extent of the US sponsored massacre in Indonesia:.

For example, U.S. Embassy reporting on November 13, 1965 passed on information from the police that “from 50 to 100 PKI members were being killed every night in East and Central Java....”; and the Embassy admitted in an April 15, 1966 airgram to Washington that **“We frankly do not know whether the real figure [of PKI killed] is closer to 100,000 or 1,000,000 but believe it wiser to err on the side of the lower estimates, especially when questioned by the press.”** On [page 339](#), the volume seems to endorse the figure of 105,000 killed that was proposed in 1970 by foreign service officer Richard Cabot Howland in a classified CIA publication.

On another highly controversial issue – that of U.S. involvement in the killings – the volume includes an “Editorial Note” on [page 387](#) describing Ambassador Marshall Green’s August 10, 1966 airgram to Washington reporting that an Embassy-prepared list of top Communist leaders with Embassy attribution removed “is apparently being used by Indonesian security authorities who seem to lack even the simplest overt information on PKI leadership at the time....” On December 2, 1965, Green endorsed a 50 million rupiah covert payment to the Kap-Gestapu movement leading the repression; but the December 3 CIA response to State is withheld in full ([pp. 379-380](#)).

The CIA’s intervention in the State Department publication is only the latest in a series of such controversies, dating back to 1990 when the CIA censored a State volume on Iran in the early 1950s to leave out any reference to the CIA-backed coup that overthrew Mossadegh in 1953.

(see National Security Archive,
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB52/>

Regime Change in Indonesia

The atmosphere in Jakarta in May 1998 was one of jubilation, very similar to what is now occurring in Egypt. Suharto was replaced on the orders of Washington by his Vice President B. J. Habibie.

“ For the students it was a case of “The king is dead, down with the king!”... The mood had begun to change in the early hours when rumours ran wild that President Suharto was going to address the nation at 9a.m. Hundreds gathered round a large television monitor in the filthy, dimly-lit foyer as a tired looking Gen Suharto appeared.

They listened silently until the only Indonesian president they have ever known

told them: "I have decided to step down from office as the president of Indonesia, effective today, Thursday, May 21st, 1998, from the time I finish reading this statement."

At that they emitted a collective yell of jubilation which continued for several minutes. No one heard Gen Suharto go on to announce that under the constitution his deputy, Mr B.J. Habibie, would become president for the remainder of his term which ends in 2003. Nor did they hear Gen Suharto conclude by saying: "I beg forgiveness for any mistakes and shortcomings." [massacre of 500,000 people, M.C.]

The students were dancing on the roof, leaping into the long ornamental fountain outside, jumping in the air and even rolling among the debris of three days of occupation.

Some wept, others prayed, couples hugged each other, incredulous that just nine days after troops killed four of their number at Trisakti campus in Jakarta, they had managed to bring down the leader they held accountable.

.... The night before, Gen Wiranto had assessed the security situation with the three service chiefs and the head of the national police. The outlook was bleak. Students representing 50 universities were planning to stay in parliament until Suharto resigned. **They had widespread support, even from the military.** [This support was part of the process of regime change compare with Egypt, M. C.Emphasis added]

"The building belongs to the people, all of us," said the Jakarta military command spokesman, Lieut-Col Nachrowi, **explaining he had no orders to break up the demonstration.** [compare to Egypt, February 2011, MC]

The students had co-operated with the soldiers, calling in Jakarta's military commander, BrigGen Silalahi, when key documents went missing after two intruders infiltrated the student body. [compare with Egypt]

Meanwhile, events elsewhere were moving fast. The US Secretary of State, **Mrs Madeleine Albright, suggested publicly that Gen Suharto quit, signalling the end of international support.** President Suharto had found it impossible to put together a reform committee he had promised on Tuesday, as academics had shunned it. [History repeats itself. Compare Madeleine Albright's statements to those of to Hillary Clinton, M. C.] Gen Suharto had no alternative but to hand over power to his long-time crony, Mr Habibie, and seek an assurance from General Wiranto, another protege whom he put in place in January, that the family would retain its status and wealth.

The decision was taken at one o'clock in the morning in the Suharto home. Its full implications did not dawn on the students until they listened to recordings of Gen Suharto's resignation statement.

The euphoria quickly wore off. They had got rid of "the old thief" as an economics student put it, but Habibie "is just the same, another criminal". A middle-aged woman, who said she worked on the president's staff, remarked in disgust, "He was always bowing and kissing Suharto."

The students had tasted a heady victory; they did not want to be deceived by a compromise which left Mr Suharto's allies in place. They had opened up the political landscape for genuine democratic reform, but they felt they must be active and vigilant and not let their gains slip away.

Dr Amien Rais – an old friend of Mr Habibie – said yesterday he would wait to see the composition of the new cabinet, to be announced this morning, before

deciding whether to endorse it; his advice will carry great weight with the students. But as of now they are staying put in the parliament.

Throughout the day yesterday, more and more students arrived to share in the celebrations of an astonishing victory, the toppling of the longest-serving Asian leader. Small trucks cruised around with volunteers throwing out drinks and bags of rice donated by a wealthy sympathiser. Students danced and sang and took pictures of each other.

In days to come they will all want to say they were there in the parliament, when the Javanese king, as Gen Suharto was known, was toppled." (Conor O'Clery, The day the 'king of Java' was deposed by his own people, Irish Times, May 22, 2011).

The outcome of Suharto's demise was continuity. To this date, the military machine combined with a ruthless form of capitalist development prevails in Indonesia. The country is rich in natural resources. It is an oil producing economy. Yet poverty and unemployment are rampant. The country's wealth is appropriated by foreign conglomerates with the support of the military machine and police apparatus.

Both Suharto and Mubarak were America's henchmen recruited from the ranks of the military. They are disposable leaders. When they are no longer needed, they are replaced. In the words of Finian Cunningham in relation to Indonesia (1998), "the country's military machine continues to operate with brutal efficiency..."

Democratic elections took place in 1999, Abdurrahman Wahid was appointed president by the Parliament with Sukarno's daughter Megawati as Vice President. Wahid was later impeached. The illusion of a populist government prevailed with Megawati as a figurehead president (2001-2004).

Meanwhile, the role of the military and its links to the US have remained unscathed. In 2004, a (former) career military commander with close ties to the Pentagon, trained at Fort Benning and the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono became president. He was reelected in 2009.

Egypt: US Sponsored Coup d'Etat?

In Egypt, following Mubarak's demise, the military machine prevails. Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Egypt's defense minister, commander in chief of the Armed Forces and since February 11, 2011 head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, is the de facto Head of State, the Vice presidency is held by Omar Suleiman. Both men are US appointees.



Field Marshall Tantawi and US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

Tantawi has developed a longstanding relationship to the US military, at the highest levels, from the time when he was in command of allied forces during the Gulf war in 1991. Ahmed Shafik, a former commander in Chief of the Air Force occupies the position of Prime Minister.

The military not only has the mandate to implement democracy, several opposition leaders including Mohammed Al Baradei have called upon the Egyptian population to support the military.

The US supported civil society opposition (which includes Kefaya, the April 6 Movement) is in liaison with both the military and the US embassy. They are reported to have “met with senior members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces”. “The protesters said the generals voiced their “sincere intention to preserve the gains of the revolution.”” ([Egypt's opposition fights itself as army tightens control - World Wires - MiamiHerald.com](http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/02/14/2067022/egypts-opposition-fights-itself.html#ixzz1ECBNPOhF), February 14, 2011)

Sincere intention? Both Suleiman and Tantawi, now in charge of “the transition to democracy” on behalf of the protest movement, are Washington’s new military henchmen. So much for democracy. Both men are responsible for carrying out torture on behalf of the CIA under the agency’s “extraordinary rendition” program.

While one set of opposition figures battled itself, a group of seven young, middle-class democracy activists said that they had met with senior members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The protesters said the generals voiced their “sincere intention to preserve the gains of the revolution.”

Read more:
<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/02/14/2067022/egypts-opposition-fights-itself.html#ixzz1ECBNPOhF>

Egypt as being the most common destination for suspects that are sent by the U.S. for interrogation and ultimately torture. Extraordinary rendition is ... torture by proxy, sometimes, or outsourcing torture. Now, sometimes CIA agents actually come with them, and they’re in the interrogation room. Most of the time, they’re outside the interrogation room so that after the detainee is tortured, the CIA can come in and ask them questions.

....The United States sends Egypt \$1.5 billion per year, most of which goes to the military. And yet all along the United States has known about these egregious human rights violations by the Egyptian government. We funded the whole government and the police who were committing the acts. Omar Suleiman, the vice president, was the linchpin for Egyptian torture when the CIA sent prisoners to Egypt in its extraordinary rendition program. And he actually committed some of the worst torture himself. He oversaw the torture by the secret police, and yet he's a very close friend of the U.S. government, including the Obama administration. (Marjorie Cohn, [Egypt was a common destination for torture of detainees sent by U.S.](#) Global Research, February 16, 2010).

Washington is the puppetmaster, which controls both the military machine as well as Egypt's civil society opposition. The terms of "negotiation" between the representatives of the protest movement and the military have already been determined in Washington DC.

The US funded civil society and youth organizations have betrayed the grassroots movement.

Note

1. On a personal note. It is through this 1998 article in the Irish Times on Indonesia that I first established contact with Finian Cunningham, who is now a regular contributor to Global Research.]

Michel Chossudovsky, Bandung, Indonesia, 15 February 2011

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