

# Indonesia: America's Model "Democratic Leadership". A Historical Review

Iran: a Democratic Haven compared to Western-backed Dictatorships

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Region: [Asia](#)  
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*First published by GR on April 1, 2018, this article by renowned geopolitical analyst Shane Quinn focusses on*

*US government support for the notorious dictator General Suharto of Indonesia, and Washington's involvement in the bloodbath which took place there in the mid-1960s.*

*Analysed too is the mainstream media's support for Suharto.*

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*It may be no exaggeration to say that, in the post-World War II period, Iran has been persecuted largely without a break. The threats continue to the present day, with the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel pondering how to curtail Iranian influence.*

*In mainstream dialogue, Iran is routinely portrayed as the bad guy on the world stage, along with Russia and North Korea. This despite the fact, since the 1950s, the US has been the world's leading purveyor of terror - toppling democratic regimes at will and imposing military dictatorships.*

Israel's murderous policies in the last half century rank them as among the cruellest regimes on earth. Over the past generation, Israel have become increasingly feared and disliked, not just in the Middle East, but even [in Europe](#).

Saudi Arabia themselves constitute the most extreme fundamentalist regime on earth. At home, Saudi governments have indoctrinated their extreme Wahhabi messages in schools and workplaces, while spreading it elsewhere by supporting terrorist groups like ISIS. By comparison, Iran looks like a democratic haven.

Currently the Saudis, bolstered by support from the US, France, Germany and Britain, are implementing a devastating war against neighbouring Yemen. UN humanitarian groups have repeatedly lamented the slow response by "the international community" (meaning the West). Indeed, their long record when it comes to human rights is hardly encouraging.

In the mid-1960s, the US paved the way for General Haji Suharto to take power in resource-laden Indonesia. Suharto ranks as one of the most notorious mass murderers of the post-World War II period. Up to a million people, mostly displaced Indonesian peasants, were killed by his regime during purges against Communists and Nationalists.

Suharto was praised to the hilt for years by Western leaders, newspapers, liberal commentators, and so on. In 1967, US President Lyndon B. Johnson [said](#) he felt the Suharto

regime “has great potential”.

Such comments came after the bloodletting of 1965-1966, in which hundreds of thousands of Indonesians were killed by Suharto’s death squads.

President Johnson assured that Suharto’s Indonesia was “one of the few places in the world that has moved in our direction”. The American leader praised Suharto for displaying “resolute leadership”, thanking him for the “solid achievements of your stabilisation efforts in the past year”.

Johnson further guaranteed Suharto the “respect and support of free peoples”, while promising continued American aid to his murderous regime. In response, Suharto was grateful for Johnson’s “effective assistance” in putting “our house in order”.

Johnson’s Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey, visited Indonesia in early November 1967, and was also impressed by Suharto. Humphrey reported to the US National Security Council that Suharto was “an honest, hard-working man who benefited from his training at Fort Leavenworth [in Kansas]”.

The US Vice-President noted that other “Indonesian military leaders are now showing the great benefit of their military training in the United States”.

According to the US State Department, the genocidal dictator “proved to be a leader of sound instincts and one truly dedicated to improving the position of his people”. In 1969, US President Richard Nixon visited Indonesia, leading to further “excellent” relations between the two countries according to Henry Kissinger, National Security Adviser. The purpose of Nixon’s Indonesian trip was “to thank us [the US] for the aid we have provided”.

Kissinger lauded Suharto and his government’s commitment to the “concept of Asian responsibilities under the Nixon doctrine” – of “peace, stability and economic development” in south-east Asia.

Long gone were the pacifist doctrines of Suharto’s predecessor, Ahmed Sukarno, who had sadly been implementing “politics of emotion and policies of adventure”. Instead, Suharto brought “a pragmatic approach to Indonesia’s problems”.

With the American public’s attention almost entirely on Vietnam, the astonishing genocide in Indonesia was overlooked. Instead, fantasies were conjured by mainstream commentators to ensure no protests were forthcoming.

For over two decades, Suharto continually had the description “moderate” pinned beside his name. Oxford English Dictionary describes the word moderate as “(of a political position) not extreme, make or become less extreme or intense” – while Collins English Dictionary outlines moderate as “not extreme or excessive, a person who holds moderate views, esp. in politics”.

For someone with so much blood on his hands, it was clear denial of genocide and a grotesque mutation of a word. The Washington-based media company, US News & World Report, hailed Suharto’s vicious takeover with the headline, “Hope Where There Once Was None”.

Philip Shenon of the New York Times absolved Suharto of any blame for the

massacres, outlining that he “came to power in the midst of the bloodshed in the 1960s”. A clear reversal of the reality.

In the Wall Street Journal, Barry Wain [described](#) how Suharto “moved boldly... in consolidating his power”, while using “strength and finesse... by most standards, he has done well”. A Wall Street Journal headline ensured its unsuspecting readers that Suharto was, “A Figure of Stability”.

The well-regarded Economist magazine, headquartered in London, explained that Suharto was “at heart benign”, at least to multinational exploitation. The famous New York-based weekly, Time, assured its millions of readers the dictator’s arrival was “the West’s best news in Asia”. The disgrace of the Free Press could hardly be more dramatic.

In an era before alternative news, and with few dissenting voices, such scandalous falsehoods were allowed to continue largely unchallenged.

The Indonesian genocide continues to be glossed over, even decades later. Upon Suharto’s death in January 2008, the Netherlands’ then foreign minister Maxime Verhagen said: “Under Suharto’s rule, Indonesia experienced a period of relative stability. The economy grew strongly, notably in the 1980s. After he stepped down, Indonesia democratically chose a new leader. That confirms that Indonesia is a democratic country where the people have the last word”.

The Dutch were colonial masters of Indonesia from 1800 up to the end of World War II. The same 2008 [report](#) by Reuters Staff commended Suharto for “allowing rapid development and holding together the diverse nation”. Australia’s then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the deceased autocrat was “an influential figure in Australia’s region and beyond”.

Reacting to Suharto’s death, Marilyn Berger of the New York Times [wrote](#) under the sub-heading ‘Enigmatic and Magical’, that the mass murderer “spoke in gentle tones, smiled sweetly to friend and foe”.

While acknowledging some of the atrocities, Berger added that “his rule was not without accomplishment. He led Indonesia to stability and economic growth... President Suharto restored order to the country”.

Suharto never stood trial for his vast crimes, nor was he even charged, dying of natural causes aged 86. After leaving power in 1998, he resided lavishly in a mansion in the capital Jakarta, protected by soldiers and politicians. His personal fortune was estimated to be at least \$15 billion, much of it through embezzlement as he enriched his family and close allies.

There were no calls from democratic leaders to bring Suharto to justice. Saddam Hussein’s crimes cannot even begin to compare with his Indonesian counterpart. The Iraqi despot was “a moderating force” as long as he was a useful ally to the West.

When Hussein became an unwanted nuisance, the “brutal dictator” tag was quietly applied to him. He was unceremoniously removed, caught, and hanged. A similar story with Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi – once a trusted ally of the West, but ousted and killed when he was no longer needed. Gaddafi’s crimes are a mere footnote in comparison to Suharto.

A few days ago the former Bosnian Serb leader, Ratko Mladic, was found guilty by “an

international tribunal” and sentenced to life in prison. Mladic himself was never recorded relaying a direct order for genocide.

Unlike the powerful Kissinger, for example. In 1969, Kissinger declared an open call for genocide in Cambodia: “Anything that flies on anything that moves”. He was relaying President Nixon’s call for a “massive” bombing campaign against Cambodia, which killed up to a million people.

Had Mladic been heard declaring something similar, the trial would have been over in no time. Yet in Kissinger’s case, there was hardly a murmur. Indeed, his advice has been sought by successive US presidents. In 2016, the Obama administration awarded Kissinger the “Distinguished Public Service Award”. Kissinger even received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, four years after his genocidal order on Cambodia, a defenceless country.

In the mainstream, Kissinger is called a “realist” foreign policy thinker to present times. Three years ago Time magazine ran a story headed, “Henry Kissinger Reminds Us Why Realism Matters”. It seems crimes are crimes when designated only to official enemies.

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