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Our Little Secrets

Tsunamis of Blood

By JOSEPH NEVINS

When I saw Paul Wolfowitz's smug grin in the January 17 issue of *The New York Times*, it was clear that trouble was on the horizon. The photo showed him in tsunami-stricken Indonesia, accompanying the country's defense minister, Juwono Sudarsono.

The first and only time I ever encountered Wolfowitz in person was on May 7, 1997. I was in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington. The occasion was a hearing of the House of Representatives' Committee on International Relations' Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. The subject was "United States Policy Toward Indonesia."

Wolfowitz served as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs from 1982 to 1986, and as ambassador to Indonesia during the Reagan administration's final three years. He thus was the primary architect of U.S. policy toward the resource-rich country in the 1980s. During his tenure, U.S. support for the Indonesian army peaked despite, among many crimes, the military's illegal occupation of East Timor, which resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 people. At the time of the May 1997 hearing on Capitol Hill, he was serving as the dean of the School of Advanced International Studies of the John Hopkins University.

Wolfowitz's testimony that day stressed Indonesia's many "achievements" and invoked Jakarta's charade-like prosecution and sentencing to minimal prison terms of a handful of low-ranking army officers in response to international criticism over what Indone-

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The Election in Iraq

How Do the Votes Add Up?

By PATRICK COCKBURN

It was a very strange election. Not since the war which overthrew Saddam Hussein had there been such a gap between the reality of politics in Iraq and the picture presented by the US and British governments.

It was not a bad election but it came too late. It may join a list of polls from Haiti to Cambodia lauded by the media at the time as a breakthrough but which never affected the real structure of power. Many Iraqis used the same words about the elections. They said they are "like a film" or "like a movie directed by the US".

If the elections had been held soon after the fall of Saddam Hussein it would have been before the present miserable system had begun to jell. The splits between Sunni, Shia and Kurd would not have been so deep. The insurgents would not be so well established. It was ironic that at the very moment that Iyad Allawi, the interim prime minister, was congratulating everybody on the elections as the beginning of the end of the great Sunni rebellion the insurgents were to shoot down a British C-130 killing all ten on board. No wonder Tony Blair refused to reveal the casualties when he appeared before the press to praise the election as justifying the war.

The poll was portrayed as though Washington and London had finally been able to reach their goal of delivering democracy to Iraqis - as if this had been their aim in overthrowing Saddam Hussein. In fact the US postponed elections to a distant future after the invasion of 2003. Victory over Saddam Hussein was so swift that the American administration thought it could rule Iraq directly. Iraqis, and then only those who arrived on the back of a US tank, would play a limited, subservient role.

It was only in the autumn of 2003 that the US made two unpleasant Discoveries. The guerrilla attacks in Sunni districts of Iraq were escalating by the day. They were supposedly confined to "the Sunni triangle", a description which has a comfortably limited ring to it, but in practice is an area larger than Britain.

The second development which Paul Bremer, the head of the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority, was slow to understand was that an elderly Shiite cleric living in an alleyway in the holy city of Najaf had more influence than any of the whisky-swilling former Iraqi exiles on the US payroll.

In June 2003, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most influential Shi'a leader, issued a religious ruling saying that those who drew up Iraq's constitution must be elected, not nominated, by the US and the Iraqi Governing Council, whose members Washington had appointed. In November 2003 he issued a further ruling saying that the transitional government must be elected.

Shi'a leaders believed they had made a grave mistake after Britain defeated the Turkish army and occupied what became Iraq in the First World War. It was Shi'a who revolted against the British occupation in 1920 with the result that Britain relied on the Sunni community to rule Iraq and the Sunni kept their grip on power under the monarchy, the Republic and Saddam.

The reason why there was a poll on January 30 was that the US, facing an escalating war against the five million Sunni, dared not provoke revolt by the 15-16 million Shi'a. The price the US paid was to have an election in which the Shi'a would show that they are a majority of Iraqis.

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sia termed “the Santa Cruz incident”—a November 1991 massacre by the U.S.-armed and trained army of hundreds of peaceful pro-independence demonstrators in East Timor’s capital.

In his prepared statement submitted to the subcommittee, Wolfowitz praised Indonesia’s dictator, Suharto a man who seized power in 1965 through what the CIA described “as one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century.” [And the CIA should know since its station chief in Jakarta submitted lists of Communists and others to Suharto’s death squad organizers. Eds.]

In 1998, huge protests led Asia’s long-est-reigning dictator to step down. Wolfowitz quickly changed his tune, later characterizing Suharto in an interview on *PBS Newshour with Jim Lehrer* as someone who “without any question was fighting reform every step of the way.” Yet, he continued to defend the Indonesian military as a force for good.

On February 17, 1999, Wolfowitz was in the secretary of state’s private dining room for a working dinner called by its hostess, Madeleine Albright. The invited guests were academics, all of whom were Indonesia specialists. At the end of the dinner, the secretary of state asked the guests specific questions about developments in Indonesia, a country she was pre-

paring to visit in March. The last topic of discussion was East Timor.

Geoffrey Robinson, a historian at the University of California, Los Angeles made it clear in his remarks that only a legitimate act of self-determination—in the form of some sort of universal ballot organized and run by the United Nations—would satisfy the East Timorese population, and that there were no viable alternatives.

Sitting at the other end of the table, Wolfowitz quickly responded, informing Albright and the other guests that independence for East Timor was simply not a realistic option. Only the Indonesian military had been able to put an end to the fighting, according to the esteemed former professor.

A State Department official politely called the evening to a close as soon as Robinson informed Wolfowitz of the wrong-headed nature of his analysis.

The Indonesian army’s myriad crimes in East Timor could not have happened without the significant economic, military, and diplomatic support of the army from the United States. Indeed, such support was decisive in allowing the 1975 invasion to take place and for the occupation to endure as long it did. But Washington has effectively buried this history.

The intentional nature of this “forgetting” — in addition to the deep bipartisan nature of support for U.S. empire — was on shameless display on May 13, 2000, in Italy at the Bologna Center of the Johns Hopkins University. The guest speaker was Richard Holbrooke. Introducing him was Dean Paul Wolfowitz.

After Wolfowitz’s flowery welcome, Holbrooke returned the favor, cracking a joke about how the introduction showed that he gets “better treatment from Republicans than Democrats in some quarters.” He then praised the former ambassador to Jakarta as “a continuing participant in the effort to find the right policy for one of the most important countries in the world, Indonesia.” Holbrooke proceeded to explain how Wolfowitz’s “activities illustrate something that’s very important about American foreign policy in an election year and that is the degree to which there are still common themes between the parties. East Timor is a good example. Paul and I have been in frequent touch to make sure that we keep it out of the presidential campaign, where it would do

no good to American or Indonesian interests.”

Yet, despite such efforts, Congress significantly weakened military ties with Jakarta in 1999 and has since prevented reinstatement as a result of public outrage over the army’s atrocities in East Timor and elsewhere, and past U.S. support for such. It is this situation that Paul Wolfowitz and the Bush administration are eager to reverse. The tragedy in Indonesia—especially in the region of Aceh where over 150,000 lost their lives and a long-standing war over independence is taking place—has provided an opportunity to do just that.

In Jakarta on Sunday, February 16, Wolfowitz argued that weak ties with the Indonesian army exacerbate the problems of Indonesia (which presumably include fighting “terrorism” and providing humanitarian relief to tsunami victims)—and thus those of the United States. The way to promote the army’s supposed efforts to make itself more professional and accountable, he asserted, is to increase U.S. military sales and training—the same argument that he used to make in the 1990s when Washington’s relations with Jakarta came under attack.

But just as before, there is no evidence to indicate the army’s conduct has changed or is interested in doing so. Human rights groups report continuing widespread atrocities—especially in Aceh and West Papua. An October report by Amnesty International, for example, writes of “evidence of a disturbing pattern of grave abuses of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” in Aceh for which Indonesian security forces bear “primary responsibility.” The human rights violations—including extrajudicial executions, torture and the rape of women and girls—have taken place at a scale “so pervasive that there is virtually no part of life in the province which remains untouched,” the Amnesty report says.

As it did in the 1980s and 1990s, Paul Wolfowitz’s current recipe for Indonesia will not bring about “reform,” but will only make Washington complicit in the armed forces’ crimes. CP

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