Islam, a Forgotten Holocaust, and American Historical Amnesia
イスラム教、忘れ去られたホロコースト、そして歴史に対するアメリカの記憶喪失症

Peter Dale Scott

In a September 2014 address to the nation, President Obama attacked ISIL (or ISIS) as “terrorists... unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children.” But of course such terrorism in the last half-century is hardly “unique.” Nor is it unprecedented. Still less is it confined to America’s foes. In fact the first major Muslim extermination campaign against civilians killed without trial for their “Westernness,” occurred a half century ago, on a far, far vaster scale, and with active American support and encouragement.

If you did not know this, consider these four questions:

1) What has been the largest planned civilian massacre since the Nazi Holocaust?

2) What was the largest massacre ever effectively ignored by the U.S. governing media until after it had been completed?

3) What major CIA operation is almost never treated in the many histories that have now been published about the CIA?

4) What massacre was part of a process later celebrated by Time Magazine as “the West’s best news in Asia”?

The answer to all four questions, I believe, is the same: CIA and Pentagon encouragement of a rebellious cadre of anti-Communist generals who in 1965 resolved the question of Indonesia’s uncertain future by a ruse to overthrow its elected president Sukarno and kill off the members and suspected sympathizers of the nation’s largest political party. This was the Indonesian Communist Party or PKI, which was also the largest Communist party in the world outside of the Sino-Soviet bloc. The total number of those killed will remain forever unknown, but was once estimated by Amnesty International to be “many more than one million.”


Although the Indonesian Army presided over the massacre, it mobilized a major Muslim youth group, Ansor, to carry out many of the actual murders.\footnote{3} A large number of people besides Communists and their families were summarily killed; one group in particular consisted of rural educators. The massacre has been commemorated, appropriately, as “The Forgotten Holocaust of Indonesia.”\footnote{4}

In recent years some British scholars and journalists have acknowledged candidly “that the British and American governments did not just cover up the massacre: they had a direct hand in bringing it about.”\footnote{5} But it is still almost impossible to discuss this involvement in America itself. Wikipedia does mention the CIA, but primarily to state that “the CIA described the massacre as ‘one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century, along with the Soviet purges of the 1930s, the Nazi mass murders during the Second World War, and the Maoist bloodbath of the early 1950s.’” Essays I wrote on the topic were published in Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and four times in Indonesia – but never in the United States.\footnote{6}

Since 1980 there have been occasional references in America to post-coup U.S. assistance to the new Suharto military junta after the massacre. Tim Weiner, for example, writes in his CIA history of “$500,000 of medical supplies...with the understanding that
the army would sell the goods for cash. But there was active U.S. encouragement and support for the massacre itself. As I have described elsewhere, government-connected American academics, like Guy Pauker and William Kintner, urged their contacts in the Indonesian army, both directly and in print, to “to strike, sweep their house clean,” while “liquidating the enemy's political and guerrilla armies.”

According to Bradley Simpson, the United States government also provided the Indonesian Armed Forces with covert monetary assistance, small arms from Thailand, and communications equipment.

The support was not merely rhetorical. In July 1965, two months before the coup, and at a time when Congress thought it had terminated U.S. aid to Indonesia, Rockwell-Standard secured a contractual agreement to deliver two hundred light aircraft to the Indonesian Army in the next two months.

One year earlier, a memo to President Lyndon Johnson from Secretary of State Dean Rusk, on July 17, 1964, made clear the importance of U.S. military aid to anti-Communist elements in the Indonesian Army: "Our aid to Indonesia ... we are satisfied ... is not helping Indonesia militarily. It is however, permitting us to maintain some contact with key elements in Indonesia which are interested in and capable of resisting Communist takeover. We think this is of vital importance to the entire Free World."

Finally there is the admitted but still disputed fact, first reported by journalist Kathy Kadane in May 1990, that in the course of the massacre, personnel in the U.S. Embassy passed up to 5000 names of alleged PKI cadres to the Indonesian Army. Though an Embassy officer, Robert Martens, acknowledged to the New York Times “that he had passed the list of names,“ the Times nonetheless chose to run a
belated and “balanced” story in which U.S. Ambassador Green dismissed the claim of Embassy involvement as “garbage”.12

The following table of Wikipedia hits (under the categories of killings, massacre and genocide) will illustrate how much more awareness there is in our society of holocausts committed by our enemies, such as Pol Pot in Cambodia, than by those such as Suharto associated with ourselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>KILLINGS</th>
<th>MASSACRE</th>
<th>GENOCIDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POL POT</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUHARTO</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This cultural bias becomes encoded in our own brains, and more importantly in the brains of those who govern us and the world. Our leaders assume, like the British before them, that American actions are “clearly directed to others’ benefit.... Where others push their national interest, the U.S. tries to advance universal principles.”13

But American government today has become manic in its hubristic confidence that its interventions worldwide are always benign14 In that book I attempt to explain the origins of this mania rationally. In this essay I suggest that one place to begin by acknowledging America’s involvement in the holocaust of 1965.

Peter Dale Scott is a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. His latest book is The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on U.S. Democracy, published by Rowman & Littlefield. He is also the author of Drugs Oil and War, The War Conspiracy: JFK, 9/11, and the Deep Politics of War, and American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection and the Road to Afghanistan. His website, which contains a wealth of his writings, is here.


Related articles

- Jeremy Kuzmarov, “Distancing Acts:” Private Mercenaries and the War on Terror in American Foreign Policy
- Peter Dale Scott, North American Universities and the 1965 Indonesian Massacre: Indonesian Guilt and Western Responsibility
- Benedict Anderson, Impunity and
Reenactment: Reflections on the 1965 Massacre in Indonesia and its Legacy

- Geoffrey Gunn, Suharto Beyond the Grave: Indonesia and the World Appraise the Legacy

Notes


2 Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman, The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 208. Contemporary estimates are discussed by Robert Cribb, and compacted into an assessment of “as low as 200,000 or as high as one million” (Robert Cribb, “Unresolved Problems in the Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966,” Asian Survey, July/August 2002, 559). Wikipedia suggests that the present consensus estimate of deaths is 500,000.


4 International Institute of Social History “1965: The Forgotten Holocaust of Indonesia,” commemorative event of October 2005. A better word is needed for a campaign of mass political killing, a term analogous to genocide but explicitly highlighting the political goals. No such term currently exists. I propose the term “policide” (the killing of many) but will also use the awkwardly suitable term “Holocaust” in this essay: Stalin’s campaign against the kulaks can also be called a policide, but hardly a Holocaust. Estimates of the number killed in Stalin’s campaign vary widely, but even so it appears that the primary effort was to deport rather than kill them.


9 Church Committee Hearings, p. 941; cf. p. 955.


11 Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalogue, 1982, 001786 [DOS Memo for President of July 17, 1964; italics in original].
