

## US loves tyrants

The US Administration is untiring in preaching democracy and human rights to others. But it warmly embraces dictators who loathe democracy and trample on human rights. We are seeing this in Pakistan. We saw it in Indonesia during Suharto's brutal excesses

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Rarely has democracy been so acclaimed yet so breached, so promoted yet so disrespected, so important yet so disappointing.

Today, democracy has become the sine qua non of legitimacy... These days, even overt dictators aspire to the status conferred by the democratic label."

These are the opening lines of the latest report of the Human Rights Watch.

One may not subscribe to the views of the editor of the 2008 report in its entirety, but the role of Western powers, particularly the US, in fostering dictatorship under the guise of democracy, cannot be brushed aside. The HRW report was published a few days after the death of one of the most tyrannical dictators of the 20th century, Gen Suharto of Indonesia.

In an article titled, "Epitaph on a crook and a tyrant," The Economist commented scathingly: "He was a despot, a Cold War monster cosseted by the West because his mos opponents were Communists. Behind his pudgily smooth, benignlooking face lay ruthless cruelty. The he consolidated his power in the mid-1960s, cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Tens of thousands v for years without charge."

A few days before the HRW report was released, fascinating secret documents were declassified in the published by the US National Security Archives. "Suharto: a Declassified Document Obit" details the d of brutality, repression and corruption as well as the longstanding and constant support he received fi US Administrations.

At the end of 1968, barely 18 months after the massacre of supposedly Communist supporters - betw and 1,000,000 Indonesians are said to have died in the crackdown - the National Intelligence Estimati the CIA depicts Suharto as a 'mild' ruler. The NIE happily states: "The Suharto Govern ment provides a relatively moderate leadership... There is no force in Indonesia today that can effectively challenge t position, notwithstanding the fact that the Suharto Government uses a fairly light hand in wielding the power."

'Fairly light hand' indeed! Amid his ruthless crackdown on political parties and opponents in Indonesia visited the US for the first time in May 1970. Though the American Embassy in Jakarta warned the US about pervasive corruption (including smuggling, bribery, kickbacks and nepotism) in the 'New Order' and among military officials, the declassified documents say that the White House "gushed over the s with Jakarta and the Suharto regime's performance".

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told the then US President, Richard Nixon, "There are no issues be and Indonesia... and relations are excellent." Indonesia was termed as one of the "largest democratic world".

Like Gen (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan who has become 'indispensable' in the US-led 'war on te Suharto, too, was a special partner of the US in its fight against Communism.

When Suharto offered his 'help' to Nixon for the USbacked Lon Nol Government in Cambodia, the (in) National Security Adviser said, "What Suharto has done and is doing accords perfectly with your conc responsibilities under the Nixon Doctrine." At the same time, Mr Kissinger was already preparing to cl meet Mao and his comrades in Beijing to chalk out the details of Nixon's trip to China.

When Suharto met Nixon in Washington, he admitted to having "nullified the strength of the Indonesi Party: Tens of thousands of its members have been interrogated and placed in detention" - a euphem killings! During the meeting, Nixon confirmed American support for Indonesia and Suharto was eventi with an increased military package of \$ 18 mil lion. Indonesia could buy 15,000 M-16 rifles to replace had covertly sent to Cambodia to assist the Lon Nol Government.

The same policy of turning a blind eye to the excesses in Indonesia continued during the Ford Admini:

In July 1975, Suharto met then US President Gerald Ford at Camp David. It was five months before tl East Timor. Suharto brought up the subject of East Timor and told Ford, "The only way is to integrate into Indonesia". Ford did not react.



A few days before the full-scale invasion of East Timor by Indonesian troops, Ford and Mr Kissinger stopped in Jakarta on their way back from China. They knew from their intelligence reports that Suharto was planning to annex East Timor. Suddenly, in the midst of the conversation, Suharto began talking about the former Portuguese colony: "We want your understanding, if we deem it necessary to take rapid or drastic action." Ford's answer was clear: "We will understand and will not press you on the issue. We understand the problem and the intentions you have."

Mr Kissinger, however, pointed out that the "use of US-made arms could create problems". But he offered a way out: "It depends on how we construe it - whether it is in self-defence or is a foreign operation." The message to the General was to make it appear a 'selfdefence operation'. Mr Kissinger advised Suharto, "It is important that whatever you do succeeds quickly."

The Indonesian occupation led to thousands of deaths in Timor. In the meantime, Suharto and his family continued to rob their own people. The Economist writes: "Perhaps no leader's family anywhere has ever amassed so much ill-gotten loot. When he was forced to quit at last, the economy was in a tailspin and the stability he had boasted of creating proved an illusion."

On December 12, 1975, the UN Security Council deplored "the military intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in Portuguese Timor" and called upon "the Government of Indonesia to withdraw without delay its armed forces from the territory". But with the US (and Australia's) support, the resolution was left to gather dust on a shelf at the UN.

The Indonesian rule in East Timor was marked by extreme violence and brutality. The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor has officially estimated that there were at least 102,800 conflict-related deaths between 1974 and 1999 "namely, approximately 18,600 killings and 84,200 'excess' deaths from hunger and illness". East Timor had to wait till May 2002 to become a sovereign state.

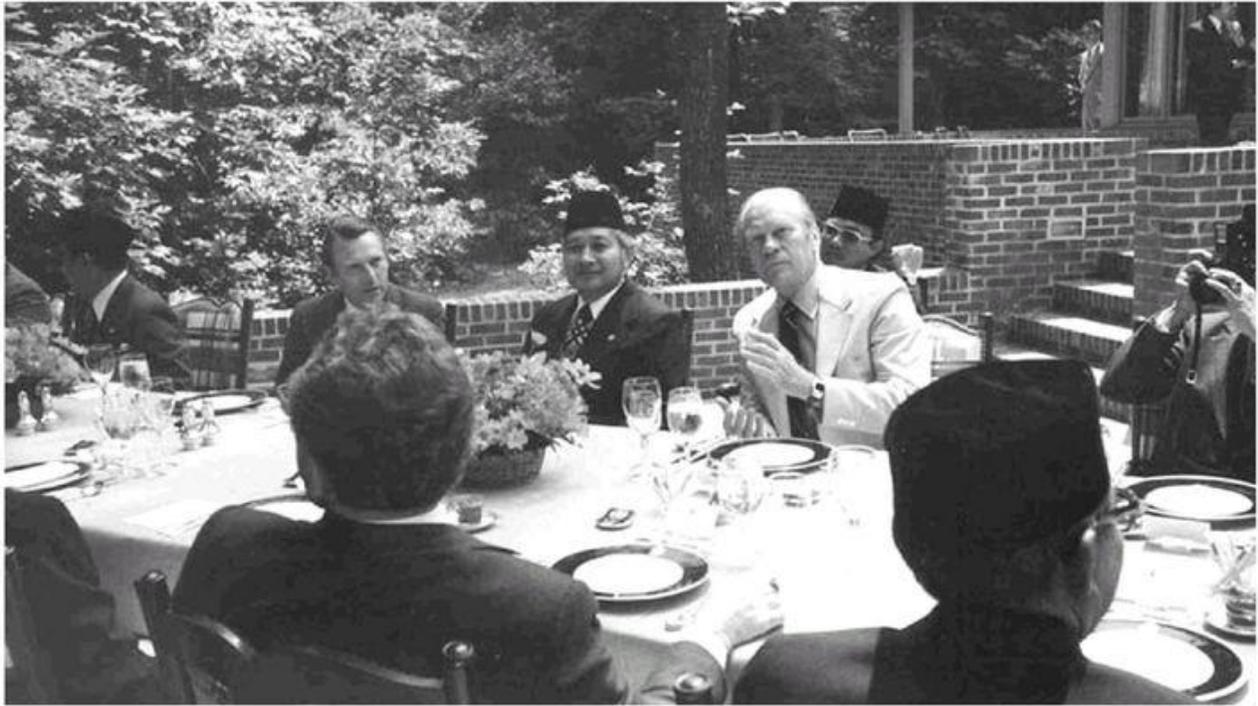
The most surprising fact is that the same policies continued during subsequent US Administrations. Even under Mr Jimmy Carter, who still makes a big show of his pro-democracy credentials, the policy was not changed.

Mr Richard Holbrooke, then US Assistant Secretary of State, visited Jakarta in April 1977 and had a long meeting with Suharto just before the presidential and parliamentary elections. During the run-up to the elections, hundreds of Suharto's opponents were arrested and critical newspapers shut down.

Although the American Embassy had termed Mr Holbrooke's trip "an unusual opportunity" to speak about "human rights and democracy", the Assistant Secretary "acknowledged efforts President Suharto appeared to be making to resolve Indonesian problems". These 'efforts' had nothing to do with upholding human rights and preserving democracy.

Human Rights Watch has rightly entitled one of the chapters of its report as "Banking on the 'democrats' rather than democratic principles". The policy continues till today under the Bush Administration.

In 30 years, it will be interesting to read declassified files of US-Pakistan relations and see how Washington justifies its support for the Musharraf regime in Pakistan.



July 5, 1975: President Ford hosting a luncheon for Indonesian President Suharto at the Laurel Lodge at Camp David



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