Declassified files outline US support for 1965 Indonesia massacre

Embassy documents show US officials carefully tracked killings

Between 500,000 and 1m communists and dissidents were thought to have been killed by the Indonesian military in 1965-66 © AP

12 HOURS AGO by Krithika Varagur in Jakarta

The US actively supported the Indonesian military's killing of as many as 1m suspected communist sympathisers in the mid-1960s despite concerns about the reasons behind the massacre, according to newly declassified American documents.

Some 30,000 pages of files from the US embassy in Jakarta — declassified on Tuesday — showed that American officials carefully tracked the 1965-66 killings, for which the US provided the Indonesian military with money, equipment and lists of communist officials during the height of the cold war.

The documents also show that the US had credible information to contradict the Indonesian military's claims that the killing of six army generals in a botched September 1965 coup had been ordered by the Indonesian Communist party (PKI).

The massacre paved the way for the 32-year military dictatorship of Suharto.

"The files . . . comprise the largest and most complete record of Indonesian politics at that time," said Bradley Simpson, an Indonesian history professor at Northwestern University who led

the files' digitisation. "Particularly because the Indonesian government hasn't declassified most of its own records from the period."

According to a November 1965 file, US officials were informed that the killing of the six army generals was not necessarily the doing of the PKI, but may have been an "intra-government operation to seize [a] limited group of top generals".

"The generals' murder on September 30 [1965] is the central event to the Suharto regime's narrative," said John Roosa, an Indonesian history scholar at the University of British Columbia. "It is remarkable that US ambassador at the time, Marshall Green, was aware [that the plot was exaggerated] in 1965, and in fact gave credence to it, according to these documents."

The files also show that US officials were informed that many confessions from suspected communists had been falsified by the Indonesian military.

The declassified files comprise most of the US embassy in Jakarta's daily record between 1964 and 1968 — a restive period that saw Indonesia transition from the autocratic, postcolonial government of its founding president Sukarno to Suharto.

One declassified embassy report from 1967, when Suharto was firmly ensconced as a leader, states that the US had a "heavy stake in the outcome" of the authoritarian regime's success.

Anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International has called Suharto, who embezzled more than $30bn from Indonesia during his lifetime, one the most corrupt leaders in modern history.

The files also contain further evidence of the US's role in the allocation of Indonesia's natural resources in the years following the massacre. The Indonesian economy had collapsed during the regime change, and two documents from 1967 show the Suharto administration trying to entice western companies to return to the country.

The declassification is a joint project of the US government-affiliated National Declassification Center and the National Security Archive, a non-profit organisation headquartered at George Washington University in Washington, DC.