

US backed Suharto despite rights abuses

WASHINGTON—THE UNITED States on Monday declassified documents detailing how Washington propped up ex-Indonesian dictator Suharto, who died at the weekend, at the expense of democracy and human rights.

The documents, declassified following requests under a freedom of information law, showed the US administration did not use its leverage to bring Suharto to account during his 32-year reign until his last

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months in office. (See related story in *The World*, Page A23.)

During his rule, Suharto allegedly amassed billion of dollars in state funds. (See table above and story on Page A11.)

"One thing that is clear from the tens of thousands of pages which we had declassified concerning US ties with Suharto from 1966 to 1998—at no moment did US presidents ever exercise their maximum leverage over his regime to press for hu-

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Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan, as well as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

They also mirrored US perceptions of Suharto from the earliest years of his violent rule, including the 1969 annexation of West Papua, the 1975 invasion of East Timor, and the so-called "mysterious killings" of 1983-1984.

Steadfast ally

The United States was a steadfast ally of Suharto for much of his rule, providing him aid, weapons and diplomatic support as it regarded him as an effective bulwark against communism.

Suharto made his first visit as head of state to the United States in May 1970 amid rampant corruption and a major crackdown on political parties at home.

But at the White House meeting, Nixon told the Indonesian leader he was presiding over one of the "largest democratic countries in the world."

"There are no issues between the US and Indonesia," Kissinger wrote to Nixon approvingly, "and relations are excellent."

Talks with Ford, Reagan

In his talks with Ford at the White House five years later, Suharto brought up the question of Portuguese decolonization in East Timor and declared "the only way is to integrate the territory into Indonesia."

Ford gave no response, according to the documents.

There also was no mention of human rights in Indonesia in the briefing papers of Suharto's meeting with Reagan in October 1982.

Two years later, when then Vice President George H. W. Bush visited Jakarta on the heels of an alleged massacre of hundreds of civilians in East Timor and "mysterious killings" in Indonesia, the discussions centered largely on US ties with the Soviet Union and China.

500,000 killed

The US Embassy in Jakarta estimated that the government had summarily executed about 4,000 people at that time, documents showed.

Human rights abuses during Suharto's rule included a 1965-1966 crackdown on suspected communists and sympathizers estimated by historians to have killed at least half a million people.

Following Suharto's death Sunday, he was hailed by the US Embassy in Jakarta as a "historic figure" who "achieved remarkable economic development."

"Though there may be some controversy over his legacy," Suharto "left a lasting imprint on Indonesia and the region of Southeast Asia," the embassy statement read.

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mean rights or democratization." Brad Simpson of the National Security Archive told *Agence France-Presse*.

The body, a nongovernmental research institute at George Washington University in Washington, collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the US Freedom of Information Act.

Simpson, who directs the Archive's Indonesia and East Timor documentation project, said the only time Washington "decisively intervened" in Indonesia was in 1998, when it was reeling from a financial meltdown amid unprecedented riots.

Bill Clinton, the Democratic US president at that time, phoned Suharto to about half a dozen times, pressing the Indonesian leader to adopt a stringent adjustment program demanded by the International Monetary Fund, according to the documents.

Suharto yields

Suharto adhered to the demands of the United States and the IMF.

"I think it is indicative of the kinds of pressure the US could bring to bear when it decides that it is in our interest to do so, but this was done on behalf of international financial institutions never on behalf of human rights activists and the pro-democracy movement in Indonesia," Simpson said.

The declassified documents include transcripts of Suharto's meetings with Presidents Richard Nixon,