

Paul Wolfowitz, Reagan's Man in Indonesia, Is Back at the Pentagon

By Tim Shorrock

In an unguarded moment last May, Richard Holbrooke opened a foreign policy speech in Italy with a fawning tribute to his host, Paul Wolfowitz, the dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Wolfowitz was a senior diplomat in the Reagan and first Bush administrations, having succeeded Holbrooke in 1983 as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. President Bush recently appointed him to the number two spot in the Defense Department.

In his new position of deputy secretary, Wolfowitz will have day-to-day control over the Pentagon and a perch to play out his hard-line views on theater missile defense (TMD), which he supports; North Korea, which he views as the rogue nation TMD was designed for; Iraq, where he wants the United States to arm the opposition; and China, which, according his comments to the *New York Times* last year, he sees as "the major strategic competitor and potential threat to the United States." Wolfowitz will also play a key role in forming and shaping new military alliances—a job he took to with relish in the waning years of the cold war.

Holbrooke, a senior adviser to Al Gore, was clearly aware that either he or Wolfowitz would be playing important roles in next administration. Looking perhaps to assure Europe of the continuity of U.S. foreign policy, he told an audience in Bologna last year that Wolfowitz's "recent 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: Classic Bipartisan Foreign Policy

The example he chose to illustrate his point was East Timor, which was invaded and occupied in 1975 by Indonesia with U.S. weapons—a security policy backed and partly shaped by Holbrooke and Wolfowitz. "Paul and I," he said, "have been in frequent touch to make sure that we keep [East Timor] out of the presidential campaign, where it would do no good to American or Indonesian interests."

East Timor is a classic example of the bipartisan nature of U.S. foreign policy during the cold war—and the secrecy surrounding U.S. military support for authoritarian leaders like President Suharto, who ruled Indonesia from the U.S.-backed coup in 1965 until his downfall in 1998. There is an unbroken link from the Ford-Kissinger years, when the U.S. backed Suharto's invasion of the former Portuguese territory. This continued through the Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton eras, when U.S. policy focused on supporting Suharto's military and burnishing his image to the world.

That policy finally changed under Clinton when it became clear that Suharto and his excesses (in East Timor and within Indonesia itself) had become a liability to U.S.-Indonesian military ties. At the same time, U.S. corporations were demanding political stability and national cohesion to keep reaping profits from their investments in Indonesian natural resources and manufacturing. Throughout that period, however, the U.S. military covertly maintained support of the Indonesian military, even as the generals were openly backing militia groups in East Timor that ravaged the territory after its citizens voted overwhelmingly for independence in 2000.

If Holbrooke is to be believed, he and Wolfowitz tried to keep the long, sordid history of American involvement with Suharto hidden from the American electorate during the most recent campaign. That in itself is a sad commentary on the mentality of these men and their dislike of open debate about U.S. foreign policy goals. But perhaps Bush didn't keep to his script; it was he, after all, who brought up Indonesia, mentioning during the second presidential debate that he supported President Clinton's decision to back the Australian force that entered East Timor to end the bloodshed in 2000 (this was the same session when Gore showed his bipartisan colors, too, asserting his support for Reagan's invasions of Grenada and Panama).

Knowing Bush and his shaky understanding of anything outside of Texas or baseball, we can be almost certain that his lines on East Timor came right out of Wolfowitz who, along with Condoleezza Rice, formed the core of Bush's foreign policy advisers—a group known as the “Vulcans.” According to the *Washington Post*, Rice and Wolfowitz (who was recruited into the Bush camp by Dick Cheney, his former boss at the Pentagon, and George Shultz, Reagan's secretary of state) briefed Bush every Monday during the campaign. “Though hardly monolithic in their views, Bush's foreign policy advisers tend toward the internationalist wing of the Republican Party, favoring free trade and an active overseas role that pays special attention to the care and feeding of allies,” the *Post* reported.

Care and Feeding of Dictators

Indeed, Wolfowitz's career is a textbook example of cold war politics that focused for nearly 50 years on the care

and feeding of dictators like Suharto, Chun Doo Hwan in South Korea, and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. While there were differences in nuance between presidents, these policies remained remarkably consistent from administration to administration. Where Wolfowitz and the Reagan Republicans departed from the Democrats was in their public stance toward these unsavory figures.

Wolfowitz was Holbrooke's immediate successor in the top Asia slot at the State Department, serving there from 1982 to 1986. For the next three years he was U.S. ambassador to Jakarta, and from 1989 to 1993 he was the “principal civilian responsible for strategy, plans, and policy under Defense Secretary Dick Cheney,” according to his official biography. He has remained tightly linked to Indonesia through his role in the U.S.-Indonesia Society, a private group funded by the largest U.S. investors in Indonesia that, behind the veneer of “cultural exchanges,” pushes for closer ties with Jakarta. Its past members have also included members of Indonesia's intelligence and military forces. Wolfowitz is also on several corporate boards, including Hasbro Inc., a major investor in Asian toy factories.

During his tenure in the Reagan and Bush administrations, Wolfowitz played a key role in defining U.S. policy toward South Korea and the Philippines at a time of intense repression and growing opposition to authoritarian rule. In a speech last year to the right-wing Heritage Foundation, he castigated those who criticized Reagan for embracing Chun and Marcos, and defended Reagan's policies as the best hope for Asian democracy.

During a 1983 visit to South Korea, he recalled, the Korean government jailed many dissidents, requiring Wolfowitz

to become a “poor hapless administration official sent out to brief the traveling press corps on what was going on and to explain what was our human rights policy.” That policy, he insisted, was to quietly advise Chun, who was later held responsible for the murders of at least 200 people during the 1980 Kwangju rebellion, to “honor the South Korean constitution and to step down after one term as president.” Chun's decision in 1986 not to run again, he argued, “has indeed been far more important in resolving human rights problems in Korea than any number of lists of political prisoners that the American president might have taken to him.”

That is fantasy, and an insult to the hundreds of political prisoners jailed and tortured by Chun as Reagan and Wolfowitz whispered democratic shibboleths in his ear. Even long-time diplomats who supported the basic thrust of U.S. policy in Korea believe that Reagan's public embrace of Chun discouraged Korean dissidents and fueled the fierce anti-American sentiment that still burns today. (As recently as last year, U.S. soldiers in Seoul were warned not to travel alone because they might be attacked.) But more to the point, it wasn't American pleading that forced Chun out. Rather, it was millions of students, workers, and ordinary citizens pouring into the streets day after day that forced Chun to back off and eventually slink away to his family home in the mountains.

In his Heritage speech Wolfowitz also took credit for the downfall of Marcos. The “private and public pressure on Marcos to reform,” he asserted, “contributed in no small measure to emboldening the Philippine people to take their fate in their own hands and to produce what eventually became the first great democratic transformation in Asia in the 1980s.” Once again,

Wolfowitz was rewriting history, implying that the Filipino people, like the South Koreans, ignored two decades of massive U.S. military and financial support for Marcos. In both countries, U.S. policy toward these dictators (which in Korea would include Park Chung Hee, Chun's assassinated predecessor) only began to weaken when U.S. officials decided that their continued hold on power would lead to further instability, thus threatening U.S. "interests."

With anticommunism no longer the dominant theme in U.S. foreign policy, U.S. military support for people like Chun or Marcos will be harder to defend. But given the history of Wolfowitz's dealings with U.S. allies, it seems reasonable to conclude that he and the Bush administration will conjure up other national security justifications to support unpopular leaders.

Imagine what would happen in Iraq, for example, if its U.S.-backed opposition (which Wolfowitz strongly supports) somehow managed to overthrow Saddam Hussein, despite its lack of support inside Iraq. Overnight, the new leaders would become strategic U.S. allies, they would be presented with new weapons systems, and their life stories would be embellished into legend. When authoritarian tendencies eventually emerged, the American people would be told that allies can't be perfect, but that we have Paul Wolfowitz working behind the scenes and in public to get our allies to straighten up.

Whitewashing U.S. Allies in Indonesia

If that sounds like hyperbole, consider Wolfowitz's recent public comments on Indonesia. As late as May 1997, he was telling Congress that "any balanced judgment of the situation in Indonesia today, including the very important and sensitive issue of human rights, needs to take account of the significant progress that Indonesia has already made and needs to acknowledge that much of this progress has to be credited to the strong and remarkable leadership of President Suharto."

Three years later, Suharto had been swept out of office and replaced by an uneasy coalition of reformists, led by President Wahid. Standing alongside Wahid was the Indonesian army, led by General Wiranto, who for years was a key ally of Suharto and who maintained extremely close relations with the U.S. military. But that coalition was deeply split when Wiranto's military supported the death squads that murdered hundreds of people and laid waste to much of the territory of East Timor in 1999. In February 2000, Wiranto was forced to step down after being accused by international observers and his own government of masterminding the rampage.

A few days later, Wolfowitz appeared on the PBS *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*. In the opening segment, reporter Gwen Ifill ran a clip of Holbrooke, then the UN ambassador, calling the struggle in Indonesia one between "the forces of democracy and the forces that look backward." Asked to comment, Wolfowitz quickly agreed with Holbrooke's characterization, saying

"the stakes (in Indonesia) are huge... it's very, very important to the United States." Then Wolfowitz commented on the credentials of General Wiranto—a man he knows well.

"You asked is Wiranto a reformer or anti-reformer," Wolfowitz said, "I think the truth is he is history, whichever he was... Wiranto was the general who commanded the army during the first elections in Indonesian history... where the army genuinely played a neutral role. He may have done bad things in East Timor or failed to stop bad things in East Timor, but that's what makes it so tricky is this president (Wahid) is a reformer. The old president (Suharto) without any question was fighting reform every step of the way... Wiranto, we don't know. And I think he should be given a fair trial on these charges in East Timor."

The fact is, we did know about Wiranto; apparently cold war habits die hard. Wolfowitz's efforts to whitewash the likes of Chun, Marcos, Suharto, and Wiranto illustrate the bankruptcy of U.S. foreign policy from Reagan to Bush. Americans concerned about what is being done abroad in their names need to watch Wolfowitz's every move, from Korea to Iraq to Colombia.

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The Republican Rule

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