



## CIA Stories: The Jakarta Method

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**Vincent Bevins (VB):** But what happens is about half of the people perhaps that are being brought into custody over the next few weeks are taken out in the middle of the night and never come back. They're stabbed, strangled, thrown into rivers. And a million people remain in a concentration camp purely for their political beliefs. You have a concentration camp for left wing socialists. You have a concentration camp for former communists or accused communists. And in this period of 1965 to 1966, approximately 1 million innocent people are killed in this manner.

**Abby Martin (AM):** Vincent, thank you so much for sitting down with me today. I appreciate it.

**VB:** Yeah, thanks for having me.

**AM:** Talk about what the initial policy was of the Jakarta axiom. First say what Jakarta is and then what the Jakarta axiom was as a policy under the Truman administration.

**VB:** So Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia, which is now the world's fourth largest country by population, the largest Muslim majority country in the world. And in the first years after World War Two, the United States finds itself (to be) by far the most powerful country in human history, far more powerful than the Soviet Union, which is its key rival in the emerging Cold War, and in a position to really shape outcomes throughout the globe in a way that is new for the United States. So at the beginning of the Cold War, the United States doesn't really know what it's going to do with the Third World, what we know for the global South, many parts, many parts of Asia and parts of the Latin America, it was not clear to the United States government itself how to deal with anti-colonial revolutions. Countries which were neutral, which were neither communist nor allied with the United States, but which were left leaning and anti-imperialist. And Indonesia becomes the axiomatic case of a nation which is anti-colonial, left leaning but not communist. And it is anti-communist enough. It

has repressed communism enough in the first years after World War Two that it is considered as an acceptable friend for the United States in this new global order. So the Jakarta axiom is this idea that neutral countries can be acceptable to us as long as the Communists are kept very far from power and they remain open to a lot of interaction with the United States government. That's the Jakarta axiom.

**AM:** And in 1953, this changed the tolerance for these independent nations, right? And we saw the kind of origin of this new, very virulent anti-communist crusade that no longer accepted any sort of middle ground.

**VB:** Yes, exactly. So this is a brief period where neutral countries in the Cold War could be accepted as friends. This ends in 1953 with the ascendance of Eisenhower to the presidency and the first successful CIA operation in the Global South, which is the coup in Iran and then the coup in Guatemala in 1954. Iran is '53, Guatemala '54. These two coups really signify the end of whatever the Jakarta axiom had stood for in US foreign policy. Eisenhower was convinced by these successful coups that the CIA was a very useful organisation. The CIA had sort of been trying to find its way since being founded in the forties until 1953. They turned around and said to the president, look what we can do. We can take countries that are neutral and flip them into the pro-capitalist, pro-American, rabidly anti-communist camp. This works. Eisenhower loved this because it seemed like a free pass. There's no consequences, you know. Eisenhower had really had a problem with the American loss of life in the Korean War. And so he was looking for a way to affect the emergence of the new global system, especially in the Global South, without committing American troops, without committing to overt intervention. And by the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, the Jakarta axiom is over. Being neutral in the Cold War now means that you can be labelled an enemy. You can be labelled as a movement that needs to be crushed or exterminated, depending on how big of a threat you are to the nascent U.S. led capitalist order.

**AM:** This anti-communist extermination program spanned 45 years to at least 22 countries. Talk about how the US policy can really be seen extending through all of these countries from Brazil to Vietnam, and why this should all be seen kind of in the same lens.

**VB:** Right. So my book is really about the intentional mass murder of leftists or people that are accused of being leftists. And as you said, I found that this happened in at least 22 cases in the Cold War from the beginning. And I believe 1954 in Guatemala is the first case that we have good evidence of until the end of the 20th century. And I think that these must be seen as interconnected, because if you look at the particular tactics that are used, the ways that this happens across the Cold War, you see an accumulation of techniques and tricks and even rhetorical devices across the entire Cold War. So one thing will work here and then they'll apply that tactic there. One thing will not work here, they'll apply that there. There are 22 countries, there is a variation in the level of the involvement of the United States. You have active assistance. In the case of Indonesia, where there was material assistance offered and then eventually the United States government passed lists of people to the Indonesian military

for them to be killed. In other countries, the assistance was more indirect. It was made clear behind the scenes to a particular government that we will sort of look the other way if you do what you need to do to deal with the local threat. Now, this is not the only method that is employed by the new hegemon the United States in the Cold War to shape outcomes in the Global South, to cement the leadership of the United States in a global capitalist system. There are military coups, there's economic pressure, there's diplomatic pressure. But I think that this method, the intentional mass murder of communists, which happened in at least 22 countries, is fundamental to shaping the type of globalisation that we got at the end of the Cold War, the type of global capitalist system that we now inhabit, and the type of governments that people, especially in the Global South, still live under to this day.

**AM:** Let's zero in on East Asia at the time, and I want you to kind of set the stage for us geopolitically about what was going on that made the United States focus on that region of the world, eventually leading to set Indonesia in its crosshairs.

**VB:** And starting in World War Two. Japan occupies much of Southeast Asia during World War Two, occupies Vietnam, occupies Indonesia. Vietnam, of course, having previously belonged to the French colonial power, Indonesia having previously belonged to the Dutch colonial power, the anti-colonial always left leaning in Southeast Asia in the first half of the 20th century. To be a socialist meant that you are probably in the anti-colonial struggle, and being in the anti-colonial struggle meant that you were a socialist. So the Indonesian anti-colonial movement since the beginning of the 20th century involved an alliance between the Indonesian Communist Party, which was the oldest Communist party in Asia, older than the Chinese Communist Party, Muslim groups and Indonesian nationalists. And they always worked together from the very beginning because if you were against colonialism, you were against capitalism, if you were a socialist, you were in the anti-colonial struggle. Now in World War Two the Japanese occupation in a way provides some space for the anti-colonial movements to rush in at the very end of World War Two and declare independence. And this is what happens in both Vietnam and in Indonesia. The Indonesian anti-colonial independence movement succeeds in repelling the Dutch in the four years from the end of World War 2 to 1949. And Indonesia, as it is constituted, its very national identity is forged in the anti-colonial struggle. There's nothing that had brought these 13, 15, 17,000 islands, depending on how you count it together, other than Dutch colonialism and the idea of an anti-colonial struggle against the Dutch, which is ultimately successful in 1949. So Indonesia comes out of this moment, this moment of decolonisation in Southeast Asia, as by far a more important piece of the global puzzle than Vietnam. And Sukarno, the president, who emerges as the leader of this new nation, which is formed out of the anti-colonial struggle, is really one of the most influential and most eloquent defenders of the Third World movement. The Third World movement, even though the world you know, the term third world today is often pejorative because of the the racism employed in the English language in the last 50 years, the Third World movement was really a entirely optimistic, forward looking project which said, since we are now free of formal colonisation, since we are no longer formally colonised

by the Western European powers, it is natural and right for us to emerge as equals alongside the first world. We are going to reshape the global system in a way which really undoes hundreds of years of colonial formulation of the world system. And Sukarno builds his movement, his new country really along these lines, anti-colonialism in opposition to extreme capitalism, but he's never formally he's never a communist. And (to) the construction of a global alliance of countries in the Third World to reshape the global system.

**AM:** It's a really incredible moment. I mean, centuries of being colonised, centuries of Dutch colonisation, brief occupation by the Japanese, and then an attempt to recolonise on behalf of the Dutch. And then you see this armed conflict where Sukarno emerges as this independence leader. And as you said, I mean, the CIA and US forces basically saw him as a potential long term ally because in the midst of that fighting, he was able to put down some of the communist forces, but then later merged a kind of a broader coalition encompassing the communists. I mean, he didn't ban the Communist Party or anything like that once he was in power.

**VB:** So he was never an anti communist. The Communist Party had always been an important part of the anti-colonial struggle going back to the beginning of the 20th century. There is a power struggle within the revolution. In the 1940s, between 1945 and 1949, the Communists lose that power struggle and there is repression that is carried out against them, not exactly by Sukarno, but Sukarno ultimately takes the leadership of this movement, and that seems to be enough. Now, the Indonesian Communist Party, after this moment where they lose the power struggle within the revolution, re-emerges as an entirely democratic party in this new, young and imperfect democracy in which Sukarno is the president. The Indonesian Communist Party participates in elections, is fully committed ideologically and tactically to participation in this new democracy and to supporting Sukarno as the president. And this works very well for them right. So as we go into the 1950s, the Indonesian Communist Party is fully welcomed back into the Indonesian revolution, let's say, and is absolutely ideologically committed to Indonesia as a young democracy with Sukarno as the leader. And they have no theory or practice of trying to seize power. They have absolutely no armed wing, they have no plans of taking power. They really believe in the development of national capitalism before a transition to socialism. Again, they're a very old Communist Party. They really believe in developing capitalism and then they believe sometime in the 21st century, so 50 years later, Indonesia would be ripe for socialism. And again, Sukarno looks upon the Indonesian Communist Party as you know, it's not his party, but they're an ally in the construction of a new Indonesia and they really begin to become quite popular throughout the country as we get into the 1950s.

**AM:** And I want to kind of walk through the next decade because I think it's really important to set the stage for how the CIA amasses so much power and how this mass extermination campaign is cemented and then deployed for the next several decades. I think another really important moment here is the Chinese revolution in 1949. And of course, this makes the United States especially paranoid about the peripheral threat about other countries being

folded under the influence of China, which is an enormous country. Then the next year, the Korean War, which was basically a genocidal annihilation project, killing a million civilians, decimating the entire country of Korea. That was a three year campaign. And then Eisenhower becomes president 1953. The Dulles brothers, you know, as the secretary of state, of course, another heading the CIA, the newly unaccountable, very powerful CIA, very unaccountable CIA. Talk about how this transition really impacted the shift in policy here.

**VB:** Yeah, and I think it's important that the CIA is not just very unaccountable. There is no accountability whatsoever. They can really do anything, right. And to explain sort of the bizarre turns that the CIA takes in the late forties and 1950s you have to really point to the fact that the US is more powerful than any country's ever been. And there is no one to get the CIA in trouble. You know, often they get caught and it doesn't matter. So Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala finds out that the CIA is attempting to organise a coup to overthrow him. This is published in local newspapers. It doesn't matter because there's no referee to blow the whistle on the clandestine operation of the hegemon right. There's nothing that can be done to stop the CIA at this moment in Cold War history. So the success of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 is hugely important for shaping US politics. This is seen as a huge loss for US power of course. In this McCarthyist moment which is happening around the same time you ultimately see the purge of the State Department of a lot of the people that actually understand Asia because they're seen as too soft on communism. The success of the Chinese revolution, really, really warps U.S. approach to Asia. And then Korea is, as you rightly point out, a horrible, horrible humanitarian disaster, whereas we might rightly point to the fact that many, many, many more Koreans have died for Eisenhower, this was an unacceptable loss of American life. So he's really looking for a way to shape outcomes in the global South without getting American troops on the ground. And the CIA, which is founded in the 1940s and given a very large amount of resources and given a remit to fight communism, they initially try to take on the Second World, the actual Soviet bloc or countries which are allied with the Soviet Union, and they fail over and over and over. They send people in Ukraine, they send people in Albania, they don't know what they're doing. Everyone is captured. They make alliances with former Nazis in Europe. They try to set up networks to infiltrate the Soviet Union or countries which will soon join the Warsaw Pact. Doesn't work at all. So the CIA takes this huge amount of money, this huge amount of power within the US system, this total lack of accountability that it is able to enjoy at this moment in history in turns to the Global South. And even the most sympathetic historians of the CIA recognise that they don't really know what they're doing. They're looking for somewhere to do something (so) that they can turn around and say, we're fighting communism. And of course, this being the United States, a capitalist country in which large firms have a large degree of influence over the United States government, if they can believe that they are fighting communism, and if they can believe that they are also helping a US business. In the case of Guatemala, United Fruit was very important. In the case of Iran, English petroleum interests were very important too. This would provide for them what they would believe to be a great opportunity to push forward American interests around the world. And because of the success for them, for Eisenhower,

of Iran '53, Guatemala 1954, the Dulles brothers really gain a huge amount of power to do what they want in the rest of the world. And then they turn their attention to Indonesia starting in 1955.

**AM:** I think this is a really significant moment because it shows that in places like Iran and Guatemala, the leaders were not communist and in fact Arbenz and Mosaddeq were I mean, Arbenz in the case of Arbenz during his inauguration, saying we want to lift Guatemala out of feudalism and become a modern capitalist state, talking about the Soviet Union in a critical way. Mosaddeq certainly was no communist, but because of the tolerance of the Communist Party, the option that maybe some time in the foreseeable future because the Communist Party wasn't put down, that was enough. That was enough. And I think that it's just really crazy. The extent of the operations that took place in Iran, basically staging terrorist attacks against mosques, framing the communists, spreading propaganda with the willingness, I'm sure, of many mainstream media officials to basically paint Mosaddeq as a communist and then Arbenz, even though he was willing to compromise and he was willing to be friendly, that was not enough. And what happened in Guatemala really was a horrifying, horrifying tragedy. I wouldn't even call it a tragedy. I mean, it was a horrifying practice that was put in place. I'm sure that there were many, many people on that list that were just merely peasants who maybe opposed the United Fruit's attempt to just take over all the land. And maybe Arbenz's very modest attempts at land reform at the time. I mean, it's very troubling to think of who was actually on that list. Was that the first time that the United States, after Arbenz tried to resign and appoint the head of the armed forces, which still wasn't good enough for the United States?

**VB:** One of their own men.

**AM:** Then they had to put their own puppet who was even more rabidly anti-communist and I guess was willing to carry out the mass executions of communists. Was that the first time that these people were actually given lists on behalf of the United States, saying, here, here's thousands of names, go kill them?

**VB:** And this is. Yeah, So across the Cold War, this is the first evidence that I have of US officials pressing local officials to carry out the execution of leftists in Guatemala, 1954. This happens later in Iraq in 1963 and Indonesia in 1965. And it's remarkable to read these accounts because even the people that are in charge of carrying out a coup or know that they're going to be now participating in a coup government are shocked by this. They are really shocked by the US turning around and saying, no, here, you need to kill these people now. And very notably, Che Guevara was living in Guatemala at the time, and Che Guevara believed, looking back, that this proved that there was no democratic road to reform in Latin America. A lot of the radical armed movements that emerged in the Cold War emerged from this kind of a dynamic where they look somewhere and see that a democratically elected government is trying to do some very basic reforms. They all get killed. So this proves to me that the only thing that I can do is go into the mountains, arm and carry out a violent

revolution. And this dynamic is repeated after 1965. Many left wing movements around the world take this lesson from what happens in Indonesia in 1965. But you pointed earlier to adapting to a dynamic which I think is quite important to highlight. If you take a huge step back and in this book, that's really what I'm doing over and over and look at outcomes across the Cold War, it doesn't tend to be armed, rigidly hierarchical Marxist-Leninist parties which get overthrown in this type of thing. They tend to defend themselves. They tend to survive. Ho Chi Min's movement in Vietnam eventually wins a war against the United States. The Chinese Communist Party: still running mainland China. It tends to be the reformists, the centre left liberal movements that want to work within democratic systems. They get overthrown by these types of interventions because they are more susceptible to that, because they believe in the rules as presented to them. And Arbenz is a great example of this. The consequences of the coup in 1954 in Guatemala lasts decades. You mentioned that the United States insisted on their man. This man was somebody who was not even really respected within the Guatemalan armed forces. This causes huge problems about, ultimately, civil war, which leads to eventually the execution of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans into the 1980s, often along ethnic lines. Often in particular, indigenous communities were being marked out as communist or communist sympathetic or being sort of somehow racially inclined to support communism. So the human costs of the 1954 coup in Guatemala are really, really shocking and I think are with us to this day. I mean, even just in this part of the United States, you feel the consequences of (them).

**AM:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, the mass migration of Guatemalans still to this day, the generational trauma that has been unresolved from so many mass disappearances and deaths. And I think, as we know, left is synonymous with that. Anything I mean, peasants, students, activists, communists, it doesn't even matter. At a certain point you're basically targeted if you just are not what the US wanted you to be. As you mentioned, I mean, it basically became this kind of neo feudal status. Slavery was essentially reinstated after the US guy was put back in power and that had really profound implications. The next year, there's another huge CIA counterinsurgency in the Philippines which cemented another American kind of friendly regime for several more years. In 1955 as well you had a pretty significant event in Indonesia that I think shifted a lot - The Bandung Conference. Talk about the significance of this, how it kind of brought together this new Non-Aligned Movement and why that posed a threat to the United States. Yeah.

**VB:** So Bandung is a city on the island of Java in Indonesia, and the 1955 Afro-Asian conference is really the moment in which the Third World becomes a formal movement, in which representatives of half of the world's population come together in Bandung and in Indonesia under President Sukarno, who calls this conference in concert with many other third world leaders.

**President Sukarno:** This is the first inter continental conference of coloured peoples, so-called coloured peoples in the history of mankind. I am proud that my country is your host. It is a new departure in the history of the world that leaders of Asian and African

peoples can meet together in their own countries to discuss and deliberate upon matters of common concern.

**VB:** So he said this was the first time ever that the world's formally colonised people came together without the colonisers deciding what they were going to do. And the Bandung Conference is really the birth of the Third World Movement as a movement. And as I said, the goal is to reformulate the global system along truly postcolonial lines. So there are huge other leaders in the Third World movement: Nehru from India, Nasser in Egypt, but half of the world's population is represented. And this is something that is incredibly inspiring to the people of Africa and Asia. And this is one of two things in 1955 about Indonesia, the officials in Washington really do not like. The United States is taking leadership of a global system that they are inheriting, in a sense, from the Western European colonial powers. And this is a movement which wants to reshape it, which wants to challenge the type of global capitalist system the United States is trying to shepherd into existence. Another thing that happens in 1955 in Indonesia, which convinces the CIA and other officials in the United States government that Sukarno is no longer somebody that is a friend, but that Indonesia, as constituted under his leadership, is a threat, is that the Indonesian Communist Party starts to do better and better in elections. And according to CIA and MI6 declassified documentation, which we now have access to, these agencies knew very well that the reason the Indonesian Communist Party was winning elections is because they were simply popular. They were doing outreach to peasants, they were forming cultural organisations, they were actually helping people across the country. They were seen as the least corrupt party in the country at the time, which is very important to regular people. So in 1955 the CIA tries something that they tried in Italy just after World War Two. Just after World War Two in Italy, the CIA was worried that the Left and the Communist Party would win elections in Italy and France. The Communist Party was very popular just after World War Two. So what they did in Italy was to fund huge amounts of money to the Christian Democrats and to pay for campaigning essentially against the left. Now, in 1955 in Indonesia, they try to do the same thing. Well, they do the same thing, it just doesn't work. They funnel huge amounts of money into the conservative Muslim Party at the time. This does not work. The Indonesian Communist Party continues to do better and better in elections until by 1958 they take much more radical action. And so what happens is that in Indonesia, the CIA foments, encourages and then participates in a civil war, until you have bombing campaigns carried out by American pilots dropping bombs on Indonesian civilians in the islands and pretending that they're not. And so you have these strange moments between the Indonesian leadership, President Sukarno, and the parts of the American government, which are officially, technically, supposedly still his friend, where the Indonesian government is saying, we think that you are doing this. The United States government says that's crazy, you're not. The US press criticising very sharply and in a condescending manner the Indonesians for making this claim until an American pilot crash lands on the island of Ambon with his identifying papers on him. And it becomes incredibly clear that what the left has been saying is correct, that the United States has been killing civilians and trying to break apart this nation. And again, it's very important to



remember: there was hundreds of years of colonisation and at this point, five years of independence. It was not clear at all to the people of Indonesia that this decolonisation thing was going to stick. They were very worried about being inserted into a new global system in which they were not really going to be allowed to be sovereign. Indonesia is not that far from Vietnam, where the United States is helping France to try to reconquer the country. So this the Indonesian left had been saying all throughout the fifties, "I think the United States is not going to live up to what they say that they are. They are not going to live up to these revolutionary ideals that they claim to espouse. They're going to be another imperialist power, just like the Western Europeans, we can't trust them". In 1958, when a CIA pilot has taken off from Singapore, crash lands on the island of Hambone days after carrying out a murderous bombing campaign, this signifies a real rift and it proves the left is right about Indonesia. Now, Sukarno (is) never adopting a communist position officially. He moves a little bit closer to the Soviet Union at this point, and even the US ambassador, who has been in Indonesia long enough to really understand the country, writes in his memoirs that he understands why Sukarno would do this. He understands why Sukarno feels like he needs to just sort of take some of his eggs and put them in this other basket to get some military and financial assistance from the other superpower, because the United States is bombing and killing civilians. Now, when this strategy fails, when the CIA is exposed as bombing Indonesian civilians trying to break up the country, participating in a civil war, the United States completely flips its strategy in Indonesia. Instead of going to war with the Indonesian military, they again take something which has been a long time practice in Latin America. They form very close relationships with the Indonesian military. They take thousands of officials from the Indonesian military bringing them to Kansas for training. They wine and dine them. They treat them very nice and they teach them what it is that we as the new superpower want to see in your country. These are the kinds of things that we think you should be doing. These are the ways that we think that you should be approaching development. We think that you should get more involved in the economy. We think that actually the Indonesian military should play a role in pushing Indonesia into the global capitalist system. So there's a total flip, you know, and Sukarno has no choice but to stay sort of friends with the United States because what are you going to do? This is the most powerful country that's ever existed. So from 1958 to 1963/64, you have thousands of Indonesian military officials coming to the United States for training, being treated very well, and also a lot of Indonesian academics coming to training.

**AM:** It's amazing because the Bandung Conference was basically rejecting European colonialism and the legacy of that. But then as it became crystallised that the US was fomenting this civil war, I mean, it had no choice but to adopt a rejection of American imperialism and this kind of newly formed consciousness that, oh no, the United States is trying to actually subvert all of our postcolonial movements and independence movements in order to fold us into their economic world order. And that moment, when this CIA agent spawned from Miami, Florida just parachutes onto the land, I think that's when it was kind of impossible to deny that these very well-funded and well-armed rebellions that were

happening were, in fact, completely constructed by the United States. Then you had this transition in policy. Kennedy takes over. And, you know, it's really significant how many soldiers actually were kind of pushed to the US for funding and training and taught anti-communism. I mean, talk about the mentality of the armed forces under Sukarno before and after this. I mean, were they loyal to him? And how did that really shift with the training here?

**VB:** Yeah the book 'The Jakarta Method' is often about global comparisons and taking a really worldwide look at how things are different from here to there. And I've been living in Brazil primarily for the last 12 years. And one thing that is totally different from Latin America in Southeast Asia is that when US officials in the Cold War get to South America, they realise that the elite is anti-communist. We have this shared history of settler colonialism in the Western Hemisphere. It doesn't take much convincing in South America to get the white elite to adopt radical anti-communism its guiding philosophy. Often the United States will learn things even from the Brazilian or Chilean anti-communist elite in Southeast Asia is totally different. Even this conservative Muslim party that is getting funding from the CIA in 1955, an American journalist, Richard Wright, an important figure, a literary figure in the Cold War, talks to this party and even this CIA funded conservative Muslim party tells him we're not really anti-communist. No one here is really anti-communist. This basis for a relationship doesn't work. We don't think that you can construct a friendship based on a hatred of communism. We don't have this here. We all kind of fight together to kick out the Dutch. We don't see them as an internal enemy. And officially, rhetorically, the Indonesian military remained committed to revolutionary anti-colonial ideology up until the moment that they really started killing people. So one way to put it is that it took ten years for the United States in Indonesia to construct the necessary anti-communist base in the country that would serve as (an) ally in a future authoritarian capitalist state.

**AM:** And at the time that these soldiers were being transferred and trained here in the United States, Sukarno changed his tune as well because internal politics shifted as well. As you mentioned US policy, internally, there was kind of more anti-American sentiment rising. At the time there was actually an assassination plot, assets picked out to execute Sukarno. And there was also kind of a harebrained scheme to stage a fake pornographic tape that framed Sukarno to just try to make him look bad among the population. Now, talk about how bizarre this story is.

**VB:** It seems that they made the tape. It seems that the CIA came to their friends in Hollywood and the idea was to create a sex tape which would purportedly show Sukarno having intercourse with a Russian KGB agent. And the idea would be to leak this as proof that Sukarno was compromised by the Soviet Union and also a bad Muslim and a bad man. And, you know, they wanted to destroy the reputation of the founding father of a country. So as ridiculous and absurd and funny as it is, it's really not funny. Apparently, they never released the tape because it wasn't good enough. But apparently they hired a Mexican-American actor because they thought that was close enough to Indonesian, put him

in a bald cap because they wanted to expose Sukarno as being bald and further humiliate him. But eventually it was not released. But I mean, this is the kind of thing that the CIA would just do all the time. They had the money they had the time, and they would come up with every plot that they thought would conceivably work. It came out later that they had greenlighted an assassination plot. They had found the person that would do it. Did they actually get that person to do it? We don't know. But they were considering every type of way that they could crush the leader of this young country, including creating a sex tape to be released to the press.

**AM:** Yeah, I mean, I think it's a good point that this is as absurd as it sounds. It's actually really disturbing the lengths that they would go to just completely denigrate and humiliate someone who is revered in a country just to lower his standing and potentially turn the population against them. I mean it really was multifaceted. At the same time, this shift in strategy, you know, it was a little bit maybe too obtuse to just parachute CIA agents from Miami and bomb the Indonesian people. So I think CIA memos coming out later, State Department memos coming out later to reveal that really the modus operandi was to have covert involvement, really no(thing) overt on the ground. And that's why training the soldiers became very important to this operation. Another really important thing (that) happens is the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, this fake event that served as the precursor to get involved in Vietnam. And then Sukarno immediately aligns himself with North Vietnam, which further upset the United States, of course.

**VB:** Well, the United States changes its stance towards Indonesia after the death of Kennedy. LBJ takes office and he doesn't have time to care about Indonesia. He doesn't care as much about foreign policy as Kennedy does. And he sort of cedes Southeast Asia policy, especially Indonesia, to advisors that really want to switch policy.

**AM:** Because Kennedy was saying he didn't want to ostracise this huge region of the world, but he still was overseeing this policy of training the soldiers.

**VB:** Yes, absolutely. Kennedy had the official policy of trying to keep together this shaky friendship with Sukarno. When Kennedy won his election, Sukarno was excited because Sukarno believed that Kennedy was one of the few people in the US political establishment that had some kind of sympathy for the Third World. From 1963, Kennedy is trying to keep alive this friendship. Kennedy's ambassador to Indonesia is trying to keep alive this friendship. LBJ is no longer willing to spend the political or financial capital to keep alive this friendship. They bring in an ambassador, which many people on the ground believe is an ambassador who is kind of a specialist in regime change, in constructing authoritarian governments. He had been in South Korea previously. And now we're seeing the transition of that sort of uprising and revolutionary moment in the 1962 dictatorship. Soon afterwards, and from 1963 to 1965, conditions deteriorate between the United States and Indonesia. It becomes clear to Sukarno because he can read the newspapers that in Congress they're saying we should not give any more money to this person unless he does exactly what we say. He

says this is an insult to my sovereignty. He says very famously, go to hell with your aid, which was a very explosive way of saying, if you want to help me, you could help me but we are our own country. This causes a further deterioration in the relationship between the two countries. Sukarno moves towards alliances with the socialist countries in Asia, which is something he had refrained from doing for a very long time. And he's seen now as, again, a real problem for officials in the United States government.

**AM:** So when these soldiers were being trained in the U.S., what was Sukarno thinking? I mean, he was obviously aware they were being shipped back and forth for training. Was he like, oh my God, this is not going to go well for me?

**VB:** So starting in 1958, both the CIA and MI6, we now know from declassified documents, recognise that the Indonesian Communist Party would have won elections if they were held in a free and fair manner, this does not happen. The group which is pushing hardest for a new political system that does not have free and fair elections is the Indonesian military. But also Sukarno occupies this very important role in a new, less than democratic system from 1958 to 1965, trying to balance through force of influence, force of rhetoric, his popularity the two real forces in the country which now exist which are the very popular and unarmed Indonesian Communist Party and the very well-armed Indonesian military. So people that are paying attention know that this is unstable, but it appears to Sukarno at least that he's doing his best to balance these forces in the new situation after 1958. Technically, there's still the state of emergency, which was declared during the Civil War, started by the CIA: this never ends. The Indonesian military is able to take a larger share of control not just symbolically within the state, but they're really running parts of the economy. So it doesn't seem great, but it seems like he's doing his best. And to the Indonesian Communist Party, and this is the source of huge amounts of retrospective analysis in the decades later, it appears to them that if they prove that they're very, very, very popular, if they can have huge rallies, if they can be inserted into almost every part of the country, if they have huge bases of support amongst teachers, amongst workers, cultural organisations, the largest feminist organisation probably in the world at the time was associated with the Communist Party. If they can show in the streets and in the villages that they are incredibly popular, this is the best way to shore up their power within the system. And again, they developed no theory or practice of armed struggle. They believe rallies, popularity and being present everywhere would be enough. And they really were present everywhere. I mean, if you were from certain parts of Java, if you were from Bali. Bali was a very important base of support for the Indonesian Communist Party and if you were into studying you might join the Indonesian Communist Party because a lot of your teachers would have been in the Indonesian Communist Party. Your mayor was very often in the Indonesian Communist Party. If you were into the arts or culture it was the Indonesian Communist Party that was putting on concerts or Indonesian drama performances in your village. If you were in the Indonesian women's movement, the feminist movement, you were associated with the Indonesian Communist Party and they got to the point where around 25% of the country was officially or unofficially affiliated with the Indonesian

Communist Party. It was the largest communist party in the world outside of China and the Soviet Union. So the largest communist party, largest socialist party outside of the world of actually existing socialism, perhaps the largest democratic socialist party in the world's history I think, probably. So even though this instability was clear if you looked at it from this perspective, there were a couple of other perspectives from which you could look at it and think, well, Sukarno is the president, the left is clearly supporting him. He recognises us as an important part of the Indonesian revolution. We're building popularity, that's the way forward.

**AM:** And it was at this time that the US plan to depose Sukarno actually did come to fruition through the well trained army. Yeah, and all of these military members talk about the coup that was led by right wing General Suharto and what his ties were to the United States.

**VB:** So this is a part of the story which is slightly mysterious. A lot of my book, the Jakarta Method, is based on declassified State Department files. We do not have full information as to what the CIA and MI6 were doing in 1963/64, but the best evidence suggests that they began to agitate behind the scenes for a clash between this very well-armed Indonesian military and the popular but unarmed Indonesian Communist Party, knowing very well what happens when an armed and an unarmed group clash using black propaganda, lying, trying to whip up a conflict, using media resources within and outside of Indonesia, spreading rumours in Indonesia and in a mysterious way, this clash does happen. There is the kidnapping of a few generals by a group which claims to be a defence of Sukarno's revolution. For reasons which we don't understand till to this day six of these generals end up dead. And then immediately in this moment of confusion, this clash of a movement which claims to be defending the left leaning nature of the Indonesian political system. General Suharto seizes power, jumping over the head of President Sukarno, who should still be in charge of the country. And he just starts acting as if he is the dictator of the country. Sukarno issued his orders - he (Suharto) ignores them. Now, a lot of people on the ground do not understand why this works, but immediately the United States recognises him as the de facto leader of Indonesia, supplies him with communications equipment which he uses in his very important propaganda effort, which consists of shutting down every outlet in the country which the military does not control. And then on the outlets which the military do control, spreading the story that what had actually happened is that the Indonesian Communist Party had organised a coup attempt taking these generals captive, and that the Indonesian women's movement, the feminist movement, which was very popular in Indonesia, had tortured these men to death in a tantric sexual, satanic communist orgy and castrated them and throwing them into a well. This story is broadcast throughout the entire country because all of the other press is shut down. US and UK media reproduce this story knowing that it's a lie. We know now that the Western media helped to spread this story, knowing that it was a lie. And this story is used to justify a nationwide crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party. So now you have General Suharto acting like he's the dictator, though technically, legally, Sukarno is still in charge, but not in charge of any of this. And over the next few weeks, millions of communists or accused communists are rounded up and imprisoned and taken into custody. Now, a lot of

the people that I met researching this book, because for this book I spent a lot of time interviewing people that lived in this period, told me that they went in voluntarily because they were the Communist Party - "I had no idea what was happening back in the capital. I knew I didn't do anything wrong. I'm studying to be a middle school teacher. I'll go in and I'll talk to the police and I'll tell them that I don't know anything and you know, no big deal. You know, a third of the city is in the Communist Party." But a million, 2 million, 3 million perhaps people are taken into custody over the next few weeks and they get there. And again, they told me in prison, I thought it was going to be fine, I thought that they were going to talk to me and then we were going to go. But what happens is about half of the people perhaps that are being brought into custody over the next few weeks are taken out in the middle of the night and never come back. They're stabbed, strangled, thrown into rivers. And a million people remain in a concentration camp purely for their political beliefs. You have a concentration camp for left wing socialists. You have a concentration camp for former communists or accused communists. And in this period of 1965 to 1966, approximately 1 million innocent people are killed in this manner. Now, why do I say approximately? Because since this time, no one has really looked into this in a rigorous manner. This has never been something where there's been a UN investigation. There's never been a truth commission in Indonesia to find out exactly how many people were killed. Sometimes they say 500,000, Sometimes they say 1 million. One general sort of bragging said it was 3 million. But it is through this violence, and that's important to understand, through this violence that Suharto is able to establish a stable military dictatorship. The Indonesian Communist Party was perceived by him to be a threat to the possibility of forming a capitalist, US aligned authoritarian regime. And so it was after that he believed that enough of the left had been murdered and the rest of the country had been terrified into silence that he was able to establish this new government. It was not an act of sort of wanting revenge or something he did in an irrational manner in order to establish this regime. It was through this mass murder that the Suharto dictatorship was able to take shape. And we know now from declassified files that the Indonesian military did this, believing that they would be rewarded for it by the United States and they were. Once they cemented this new authoritarian capitalist regime in Southeast Asia, in the largest, most important country in the region they were welcomed with open arms into the so-called free world. Suharto was allowed to run the country however he wanted. He was allowed to be one of the most corrupt leaders that ever existed. They were allowed to receive all kinds of diplomatic, financial, military aid from the United States. And in the years after this mass murder, with 1 million people still in concentration camps for being leftists and bodies still floating in rivers throughout the country, US corporations came to decide in, you know, air conditioned hotel rooms in Jakarta how to piece up, how to divide the economy amongst them and who was going to run the Indonesian economy. And this is how the Indonesian economy was run for the next few decades.

**AM:** I mean, the sheer barbarism that was unleashed, facilitated, condoned, advocated by United States forces seems so egregious even for the time because of how popular the Communist Party was, because of how many millions of communists were everywhere in the

country to actually follow through with an extermination campaign like that is so unbelievably cruel and evil - it's really hard to wrap your mind around.

**VB:** Yeah I mean, I always feel very embarrassed to say this because what I went through is absolutely nothing compared to what these people went through. But just to hear them tell the story in that way and to tell me that we never thought we were opposed to the country. We never saw ourselves as rebels. We never thought that anything like this could happen to us. We thought that we were part of the Indonesian revolution alongside the military. And I went in thinking that we were just going to clear this up and nothing was going to happen. And for them to have realised later that it was precisely because they believed that their popularity made them safe, that they were not. It was precisely because they believed that, because we have 25/30% of the country that we would clearly win elections, that we don't need to worry about self-defence because we're part of this together, that they were so vulnerable. I mean, it would be impossible to kill approximately 1 million people in this period of time if they had been violent or preparing for some kind of a conflict with the military, they weren't. They simply weren't. The rank and file in the Indonesian Communist Party had never imagined that this could be possible. But this was something that to this day you can feel the way that it traumatised Indonesia and at the time it sent ripples across the entire Cold War. I mean, we've forgotten about this event in the English speaking world, but for the people that were paying attention to the Cold War in 1965, this was a huge deal. I mean, this was the largest socialist party outside of the Soviet Union and China that went from being in a position to really influence the situation in the country in the Fall to decimated by the Spring. And as I said earlier, left wing movements around the world, some of them took the lesson that, again, that there is no democratic route to reform in the global South, in a world of U.S. hegemony, they will always come for you. You must be armed and ready for self-defence because they are coming for you sooner or later. The Communist Party of the Philippines, which was founded around this time, took an explicitly militant view as a result of this. The Chinese cultural revolution happens soon after the decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party, and this event is a major theme in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In Latin America there are all kind of splits within the left as to how to interpret what happens in Indonesia, but this absolutely sends a shockwave across the entire global system, and it is meant to right? The way in which the Indonesian Communist Party is decimated is meant to terrify the rest of the country into silence, because, as I said, there's 25 million people that were somehow or another affiliated with the party. You weren't going to kill that many, but you could kill so many in such a way that everybody else was too afraid to speak up. And this is where the dynamic of disappearances becomes important, because they didn't just come into a village and kill everyone in the streets. As horrible as that sounds, that would have been less effective than what they did, because what they did is they took everybody into prison and some of those people were killed. Now, the natural human response for a mother or a sister or a friend of someone that's been taken into prison is to assume that the person that I know might still be alive.

**AM:** Alive.

**VB:** I don't want to do anything that can jeopardise my friend or my son or my comrade that's in jail. So this dynamic of disappearance becomes really important for the terrorism that is inflicted upon the population. And to this day it is very difficult to find somebody that is old enough that will admit what they were really doing in 1963, even if they were only sort of sympathetic to the left or maybe if they really were on the left. To this day, people don't want to talk about what they were doing before 1965. And again, this dynamic of disappearances, which is so effective, horribly effective in Indonesia in 1965, pops up in Latin America in the Cold War, one year later in Guatemala, in Venezuela. And there has been a trading of US officials from Southeast Asia to those countries in that time. So it is possible, though I don't have the proof that disappearances were so effective in Indonesia in 1965 that they were brought to Latin America in 1966. And of course, disappearance becomes a very famous tactic of repression in the rest of the Cold War.

**AM:** One really incredible thing about your book as you mentioned, is that it crystallises these points with the State Department's own cables and documents themselves, and one that documented the effects of these US operations admits that the PKI, the Communist Party in Indonesia had basically ceased for the foreseeable future to be a power element. Very effective, it says, totally disrupting the party's organisational apparatus and basically saying here estimates of the number of killed several hundred thousand. To see that, it's kind of bone chilling to just see that just callously casually written up in a State Department cable like this, kind of flippantly. Then following up crystallising this point, and I think this really says it all, Vincent: without becoming directly involved, promote arrangements between Suharto and American oil companies.

**VB:** Yes, yeah. I mean, so it's a cliché but, it tends to be the case that if you want to explain US foreign policy, US oil companies are often involved. And there was a very fascinating dynamic during the transition, during the mass killings and during the moment in which Suharto was unofficially the president or unofficially leading the country, but had not been cemented as the actual president that parts of the Indonesian military, even the military, wanted to go forward with a program which would have nationalised Indonesian oil and would have put Indonesians in control of Indonesia oil resources. This elicits an immediate and very aggressive response from the United States. They make it very clear you're not going to do this, activating all kinds of diplomatic resources. This is not going to be acceptable. And Suharto backs off.

**AM:** I always think about this time, well I think about what I think about the corporate media in general and just think about the compliance, the imperial stenography, the willingness to go along with these campaigns and projects. I mean, you work for The Washington Post. I don't understand how the international press was undeterred by this mass murder. And



actually covering for it just unquestioningly printing whatever the United States and its allies wanted to. I mean, famously, James Reston in The New York Times (was) calling what happened in Indonesia a gleam of light.

**VB:** Generally speaking, the response of the mainstream liberal media in the United States, in the English speaking world in general, was to celebrate very clearly, very openly this flip that Indonesia goes from the anti-colonial left leaning camp to a radically anti-communist, pro-capitalist and pro-American camp. And being open about the fact that mass violence has been employed to make the split possible, they sort of muddy the waters as to who carries out the violence. They sort of blame it in a very racist way on, well, the Asians have sort of exploded into violence in a way which is very typical in that part of the world. But they're very open about the fact that there's mass violence that makes this transition possible and they stop talking about it. It's basically Western press celebrating publicly that this is a success for the West, and then they stop talking about exactly how it happened. Now, they played another role in making it happen in the first place. And I think in a dynamic that is important to understand is that from 1945 to about 1975, the CIA was seen by much of the US press as an ally in the Cold War. If the CIA called you and said "please, can you say this?", often they would. I mean, this happened very famously in Guatemala in 1954. The New York Times had a reporter that was a little bit too good in Central America. And the CIA got in contact with the owners of The New York Times and said, "can you please take him off of this story? We need this to go unreported." Then they did, because they believed that the CIA was part of this patriotic effort to fight communism. These were people that were coming out of World War Two. They believed it was kind of the same thing. Now, by 1975, the Church commission, all the publications about all of the insane things that the CIA had been doing, this changes now after 1975, I think you see a more subtle mechanism through which US ideology is reproduced in mainstream liberal publications. But back then you could really ask The New York Times to tell the story this way or that way. And we know from declassified files that I reproduced in the book that many of the mainstream media knew that they were being lied to, and they decided to reproduce the lies because they thought it was a good cause.

**AM:** I mean, yeah, Operation Mockingbird. There were definitely overt tentacles of the CIA being fed into the mainstream institutional media, absolutely. But it does feel like there are echoes of that still today. I don't know if it's just the doctrine of anti-communism that is kind of the unofficial religion that carries on. It's kind of like you have to believe in capitalism and US imperialism in order to kind of rise in the ranks of these institutions. But it does seem like it is very difficult to believe what is being written about US foreign policy today from the corporate media.

**VB:** I think that Noam Chomsky points to a dynamic that is very important in his book, Manufacturing Consent. Even though it came out a long time ago it's more true now that as journalists have less resources we rely upon big, well-funded organisations to do the basic work of fact collecting and sort of pass that off to us, or whether it's NGOs or governments or

corporations. Those are the types of institutions that tend to have the resources to do basic fact collecting, which we can't really do anymore. And then I think there are sets of subtle consequences for people that get in the way of what is perceived by owners and advertisers as the US national interest. But I think it is precisely because of the subtlety at work in the 21st century that you do see the reproduction of a certain ideology in mainstream English language journalism. I still think it's much better to have good mainstream journalism than not to have it. I've spent my whole life working in this tradition, and everything that I do in The Jakarta Method is really just sort of an application of almost in an intentionally naive way being really serious about objectivity. Let's take seriously the idea that we're supposed to tell the whole truth and let's just do it and see what happens in this case of Indonesia. And it happens to contradict a lot of the stories that we tell about ourselves. But if we're going to do real serious journalism, this is what comes out of it. And I've always worked in that tradition. But the 1950s, 1960s method of just calling up the publication and telling them to be different, I don't think happens, at least I don't have evidence for that happening in the way that it used to. But you still don't see a change in the way that we speak about U.S. foreign policy. I do think that the same sort of ideology is reproduced but through a wider, more subtle and I think as a result, more effective set of mechanisms.

**AM:** This is also constructed through the rehabilitation of the CIA and kind of the retransformation of how the CIA does its operations around the world. It's much more overt in the era that we're talking about. But even in 1991, you had the co-founder of the National Endowment for Democracy, Allen Weinstein, saying we do a lot of the things that the CIA used to do 25 years ago today with the NGOs that we implement in these regions of the world. And now you have, you know, the post-9-11 era, which has completely rehabilitated the image of the CIA, where now they go out there almost, dare I say, progressively saying, you know, we really care about these marginalised communities. It's fascinating because I hear this all the time as I'm sure you do that no, the CIA doesn't do that anymore. Yeah, that was a really dark, sinister past but that chapter's closed and now it's a completely new agency that actually does good in the world.

**VB:** It has been strange to watch everybody sort of know that the US government does bad things and then just to have that be forgotten about when it comes to nowadays. Because if there was a moment when the United States government got together and said, we're not going to do any more of the things that we used to do, and we can prove to you that that's true I missed it, right? This book is based on declassified information, things that we can really prove about what happened in the fifties and sixties and seventies and eighties. I can't make the same kind of claims with the same certainty about recent years. But I never saw a big conference where they dissolved all of the parts of the US government that used to be doing those things and declared in a credible way that we're not going to do them again. And again, just as I said that the mass murder in Indonesia was necessary for the construction of the regime that came later, a lot of the things that the CIA did in the 20th century worked. If you have a particular set of ideas about what the United States should be, if you want to make

possible the accumulation of capital on a global scale, certain things that we, the United States government did in the 20th century were effective. I don't see any reason why rational actors in the US State would throw those in the trash. I think that they prefer other mechanisms which are more subtle, which are less obvious, but I don't see any method ever being discarded, including the what I call the Jakarta method, the mass murder of leftists or people accused of being leftists being thrown away forever, if it worked. And that's why I think it makes sense to be sceptical of a government that lied in the past and lied recently when they speak in the present.

**AM:** Especially when we know that there were death squads in Afghanistan as well. And I mean the operations being carried out today still are implementing this kind of global economic injustice, I would say. I want to address lastly the ramifications of this program, because sometimes I just sit back, as I'm sure you do, and just wonder, what could the world have been like? Hundreds of millions of people were robbed of their futures, their sovereignty, of their lives, of their families, of their friends. It's very overwhelming to think about the possibilities if this did not happen. 45 years, 22 countries. I mean, just the sheer horror and terror campaign and trauma of the victims, the lasting ramifications of the political and economic impacts of this campaign.

**VB:** And this was some of the most emotional territory that I covered while speaking to the people that lived through these mass murder programs, the people that lived through the Third World Movement and how it was ultimately crushed. Because when I would ask them about the Third World Movement and what they believed in the fifties and sixties that the world would be like now, their eyes would light up and they would tell you the story about what they believed to be natural and obvious that, okay well, formal colonisation is over. We're going to take our rightful place alongside the first world, we're going to create a new global order, which is more, just more based on solidarity, less exploitative. We're no longer even going to be a country that just ships natural resources for rich people in the Global North to use and throw in the trash. And they really believed it. And it was clear that this was something they believed. You could see them get excited just thinking about it again. And so that is, I think, what is most important about this investigation, what I try to drive home in the book is that lots of other worlds were possible. The people that were building those worlds believed that they were coming, and it was through a very specific type of intervention that these movements were crushed. And I also say the Third World Movement was trying to do something very, very difficult. There were going to be problems. There were going to be internal contradictions. It was going to be difficult to reformulate the global system in this way. It certainly did not help to have the most powerful country in human history violently crushing what you were trying to do. And because of that particular method, because that type of state formation was employed to create the global system that we now occupy, I believe it is in its very essence. And it also means that other global systems are possible, which are not built through anti-democratic violence, which are not built through crushing movements which seek to build alliances across the Global South and (to) build a more just

global order.

**END**