
the part of Haitian citizens. Moreover, it would have been a serious embarrassment to a country hoping to regain acceptance in the Hemisphere after years of unconstitutional government and international sanctions. The ambassador was skeptical that Washington would permit him to give an “ultimatum” to the Haitians, although he agreed it was the correct way to proceed.

In the end, Ambassador Carney followed the advice of his economic section and courageously made the unpopular decision to give the ultimatum. In his meeting with President Preval, Carney announced a fixed but reasonable date when the FAA would come to make a final inspection. Upon hearing about the ambassador’s meeting, officials in Washington “gulped” but ultimately agreed that change was needed.

Security at the airport improved almost immediately. Within three months all the objectionable officials were removed, a procedures manual was created, and a strict ID system implemented. At the final inspection, FAA representatives pronounced the turnaround miraculous. Years later, the Port-au-Prince airport remains one of the most secure in the region and U.S. citizens and airlines continue to fly to and from Haiti without incident.

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The Fall of Suharto

INDONESIA, 1998

By Shawn Dorman

By the spring of 1998, few Indonesians were holding on to the old Javanese belief that President Suharto — in power for over 30 years — had a “mandate from heaven” to rule Indonesia. Indonesia was on the edge of disaster. The Asian financial crisis had exposed the rot of corruption that was the underpinning of the Indonesian boom economy of the 1990s. Frustration with the repressive Suharto regime was reaching new heights. Students had joined forces around the nation to call for Suharto’s resignation. Violent rioting and looting on May 14 — widely believed to have been sparked by forces in the military — left hundreds dead and parts of Jakarta gutted. Dangerous factions had evolved in the military, and no one was sure which way the military machine would turn: against the people, against the government, or against itself.

As the junior political officer at Embassy Jakarta, I had been working on the student and youth portfolio since my arrival in 1996. For several decades, the students had been quiet, forced by law to keep activities confined to campus and to limit political activity. I had already established good contacts within most of the key student and youth groups before many of them began publicly criticizing the government in 1997. Student leaders from radical Islamic as well as pro-democracy groups were always glad to meet, to help educate

me on their vision for Indonesia. A number of prominent student and youth organizations formed an inter-religious coalition to push for “demokrasi” and “reformasi” and began issuing public statements criticizing the Suharto regime. They kept me informed of their growing dissatisfaction, always appreciative of the attention from “the U.S. government.” The political section sent frequent reports to Washington about the growing student movement.

By early May, student demonstrations had grown larger and the calls for Suharto to resign more explicit. Daily demonstrations numbered in the thousands of students, but they were mostly confined to the campuses, with the military guarding the gates outside to ensure they stayed put. Then the calls for Suharto’s ouster grew louder, and demonstrations grew larger and began to move off campuses. When four students were shot and killed by snipers (almost certainly from the security forces) on campus at Trisakti University in Jakarta on May 13, the endgame began.

The embassy’s emergency action team had been meeting frequently to plan what to do if the situation got out of hand. The situation did get out of hand on May 14, as riots erupted in many parts of Jakarta. The starting point was a demonstration at Trisakti University responding to the killings of the students. Security forces strangely disappeared just before mobs formed in many areas of the city, burning cars and stores, looting, and (we later learned) raping Chinese-Indonesian women. Chinatown was destroyed, as the long-pent-up resentment of local Chinese wealth was released. Hundreds of people died.

During this black day in Indonesia’s history, every political officer was out on the street. Sometimes, the most that we can do is just be there, to bear witness.

We were in frequent contact with the Operations Center at the State Department, which by then had set up a 24-hour Indonesia Task Force. The May 14 riots were the catalyst that started the evacuation wheels at the embassy rolling. The following morning, an embassy-wide meeting was held to discuss the evacuation that would begin that night with planes flying into a military airport in Jakarta to carry out all family members and non-emergency employees, as well as any private Americans in Jakarta who wanted to go. I remained behind as my husband and 2-year-old son left home at midnight and, after a chaotic night at the airport, got on the 5 a.m. flight to Bangkok. Evacuees were greeted upon arrival in Bangkok and Singapore by the U.S. ambassadors in both countries, and embassy staff helped the exhausted evacuees with onward travel arrangements.

On May 18, students began to gather at the main parliament compound. Over the next two days, thousands came by bus from different universities and different cities, and now they were joined by their professors. They took over the compound, demanding that Suharto step down. The students were highly organized. They set up their own security system to detect provocateurs, those who might seek to turn the peaceful protest into something else. The military massed, heavily armed, outside the gates, but did not enter. The few of us still left in the political section — Political Counselor Ed McWilliams, Jim Seevers and I — took turns going to the compound, talking to students, gathering information.

The students were well-provisioned with food and water; clearly there were unseen supporters bankrolling this movement. As always in the land of the shadow puppet, there was much going on behind the scenes.

For days, there had been calls from many groups for “the people” to march to the presidential palace on May 20. The Indonesian government in Jakarta prepared for war with its own people. On May 20, the city was in total lockdown, an armed camp. Every street in central Jakarta was blocked by armed military personnel. There were tanks on street corners and barbed wire blocking intersections. I had slept at the home of the USAID mission director because everyone left at the embassy was living in consolidated housing for security. It was just as well: demonstrations had been blocking the only route home for several days. Because our vehicle had diplomatic plates, we were allowed through the roadblocks by the soldiers and went to work.

In the end, the Jakarta mass rally was called off — too dangerous — and thousands went instead to join those already encamped inside parliament. In other cities throughout Indonesia, thousands demonstrated. In Jogjakarta, the sultan led almost a million people in a street demonstration. To everyone’s relief, the day was peaceful. But the message was clear: it was time for Suharto to go.

Suharto resigned the next morning, on May 21. That night, there was a festival atmosphere at the parliament compound. Even groups of soldiers broke into song and dance. The celebrating would end soon, however, as Indonesians would realize it is easier to tear something down than to build something new. The real work was just beginning in Indonesia’s transformation to a democratic state.

Shawn Dorman was a political officer in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 1996 to 1998. Her other Foreign Service postings were to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the State Department Operations Center in Washington, D.C. She resigned from the Foreign Service in 2000 and now works for the Foreign Service Journal at AFSA.

Play Ball!

UKRAINE, 1991

By Carol Fajardo

My husband, Ed, and I were among the first Americans assigned to Kiev, then part of the USSR, to open a consulate. Soon after our arrival, the Soviet Union fell, Ukraine became an independent country, and our consulate became an embassy. I was our post’s first administrative officer and Ed was the first consular official.

Everything was hard there: we had to book telephone calls in advance through the operator, our living room served as our office, and gasoline was scarce. Actually, almost everything was scarce. English was not widely spoken in Kiev, so our language skills improved quickly. As the administrative officer, my hands were full. There were always crises to solve and there never seemed to be enough resources to solve them.