

Fighting Terrorism, Undermining Democracy in Indonesia

By John Gershman

An early beneficiary of the new pre-eminence given by the Bush administration to its war against terrorism could be the Indonesian military, the same military behind the ravaging of East Timor in 1999 and continuing grave human rights abuses in West Papua, Aceh, and elsewhere in the archipelago. That possibility emerged from talks this past week at the White House between Indonesian President Megawati and Bush, whose main goal was to enlist Indonesia, host to the world's largest Muslim population, in the fight against terrorism.

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri met this week with President George W. Bush, one of the first heads of state to visit the U.S. since the terrorist attacks on September 11. President Bush had invited Megawati in late July after she assumed office, following the dismissal of Abdurrahman Wahid.

The meeting revealed much about how the Bush administration is going to try to consolidate the emerging international coalition against terrorism, especially among developing countries. Indonesia is a critical component of the effort because of its position as the world's most populous Muslim democracy and the growing political role of Islamist organizations within Indonesia since the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. There are also allegations that some radical Islamist groups in Indonesia are connected with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization.

The Bush strategy appears to be a mixture of aid and trade initiatives combined with a strengthening of bilateral military-military ties. President Bush's economic commitments to Indonesia include: at least \$130 million in bilateral assistance for fiscal 2002 (mostly for judicial reform), \$10 million for assistance to

internally displaced peoples, \$5 million for reconciliation and reconstruction efforts in the strife-torn province of Aceh, \$2 million to assist in refugee repatriation in West Timor, and \$10 million for police training. In addition, the Bush administration will make available \$100 million in additional benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) by enabling 11 additional products to be allowed duty-free access to the U.S. market. Finally, President Bush announced that the three U.S. trade finance agencies—the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency—have developed a joint trade and finance initiative to help promote economic development in Indonesia. The three agencies will undertake to provide up to a combined \$400 million to promote trade and investment within Indonesia, especially in the Indonesian oil and gas sector.

The economic initiatives are relatively small, and Indonesia's macroeconomic policy remains firmly under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund. The emphasis on judicial reform is at least aimed at an important target. A recent *Survey Report on Citizens' Perceptions Of The Indonesian Justice Sector* from the Asia Foundation and AC Nielsen (<http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/IndoLaw.pdf>) revealed some unsettling findings in a country attempting to institutionalize a fragile democracy. More than half of the country's adults can't provide a single example of a right to which they are entitled. More than 60% of respondents said police were apt to demand a bribe to take action over anything, while 30%-35% thought the courts were only for the wealthy and were "risky" places to seek justice. The danger, however, is that efforts to promote the rule

of law, judicial reform, and respect for human rights will be undermined by the administration's increasing support for and ties with Indonesia's military.

The major issue on the U.S. agenda for the meeting was the issue of bilateral military ties. Recent reports from the Council on Foreign Relations and the Rand Corporation, both issued well before the tragedies of last week, advocated that the Bush administration strengthen ties with Indonesia in general and the Indonesian military in particular. The recommendation was aimed at combating the growing influence of radical Islamic groups, as well as providing a means of forging a strong bulwark against China in the region. The Council on Foreign Relations report, *The United States and Southeast Asia: A Policy Agenda for the New Administration*, was notable because it was drafted by Dov Zakheim, a Reagan-era Pentagon planner currently serving in the Pentagon.

Indonesian military complicity with the human rights violations associated with the widespread carnage in East Timor in the aftermath of its referendum on independence in 1999 had led the U.S. Congress to strengthen already existing limits on bilateral military ties. The new legislation restricted arms sales and military training until a number of criteria were met, including increased civilian control over the military, greater transparency in military spending, and accountability for military officers complicit in committing human rights violations. The Bush administration's own State Department officials acknowledge that the Indonesian military has yet to meet those basic criteria, and in some ways, the situation is worsening. For example, several officers who

held command positions in East Timor in 1999 have not only not been tried, but have received promotions. There is also a severe problem with transparency of the military's revenues. Experts estimate that only 25-30% of the military's funding comes from the government budget, with the rest coming from "taxes" on natural resource extraction, bribes, and other forms of "informal" financing. Human rights violations have increased in Aceh and West Papua, regions where secessionist movements are strong.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration announced yesterday some easing of restrictions on bilateral military ties. While the administration has not requested that Congress lift restrictions on weapons sales and training, it has some discretion in other areas that it has chosen to exercise, despite the continuing evidence of a military able to act with impunity. Presidents Bush and Megawati agreed to:

- expand modest contacts and resume regular meetings between the U.S. and Indonesian militaries to support Indonesia's efforts at military reform and professionalization. Such activities include Indonesian participation in a variety of conferences, multilateral exercises, subject matter exchanges on issues such as military reform, military law, investigations, budgeting and budget transparency, as well as humanitarian assistance and joint relief operations.
- establish a bilateral Security Dialogue under the supervision of the two countries' respective civilian ministers of defense in order to promote "increased civilian participation in Indonesian defense and security issues."
- ask Congress for \$400,000 to educate Indonesian civilians on

defense matters through the Expanded International Military Education and Training.

- lift the embargo on commercial sales of nonlethal defense articles for Indonesia, with individual applications to be reviewed on a case by case basis, in line with standard practice in America.

The common justification for increased engagement is described by the Rand Corporation, which argues that "engagement with the Indonesian military would improve the ability of the United States to promote a democratic model of military professionalism in Indonesia." This claim is clearly problematic—if U.S. engagement with the Indonesian military is so conducive to professionalism, what was the result of three decades of engagement under Suharto's New Order regime? As the International Crisis Group noted in a July 2001 report, "the bilateral military relationship has not been effective to date in producing an Indonesian military that meets the standards of a modern, professional force under civilian control or promoting long-term stability in Indonesia."

Megawati's own human rights record is weak. A staunch nationalist, she opposed the referendum in East Timor that led to its independence, and is closely allied with the military, bringing four retired military officers into her cabinet. She has taken some initial steps to address the demands for self-determination on the part of inhabitants of Aceh and West Papua. One of the first laws signed by Megawati as president was the Special Autonomy Law for Aceh, while a similar law for West Papua is still being considered by the Indonesian parliament. Both proposals are widely viewed as inadequate in their

regions, however, and repression has increased in those regions since Megawati assumed office.

Prior to September 11 at least, moves toward strengthening U.S.-Indonesian military ties were opposed by key Congressional leaders and human rights groups because of ongoing human rights violations by the Indonesian military, and the con-

tinuing impunity of high-ranking Indonesian military officials for their complicity in human rights violations in East Timor and in various parts of Indonesia. The question now is whether the spirit of bipartisanship that has characterized the period since the terrorist attacks will extend to the Bush administration's efforts to strengthen militaries that can under-

mine the very values of freedom and democracy for which the new war on terrorism is allegedly being waged.

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Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

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