

US to train Indonesian police in riot control

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In the next several days, a team of American police commanders will be sent to Indonesia as a part of a program to train the Indonesian police force in riot-control techniques. Besides instruction in how to deal with crowds of anti-government demonstrators, the US delegation will discuss relations between the police and news organizations and opposition political parties.

The training program has been offered by the Clinton administration in the guise of an effort to democratize the Indonesian military dictatorship in the run-up to national elections now scheduled for June 7. The real content of the program, however, is demonstrated by the enthusiastic approval given to it by the government of Indonesian President B.J. Habibie. Habibie is the hand-picked successor who took office a year ago after longtime military dictator Suharto was compelled to leave office in the face of mass demonstrations.

The dispatch of the US delegation was made public within days of the anniversary of the shooting of students in Jakarta by Suharto's troops and police, the incident which led to his enforced retirement from office and the installation of Habibie.

An earlier team from the Justice Department and State Department, which consisted of a private human rights lawyer and a deputy sheriff of the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department (Los Angeles is listed as one of the cities where the most abuse and human rights violations are taking place in America) was sent to Indonesia to determine whether the training will help in the control of street violence in Indonesia's major cities.

Its report has produced a recommendation for the training which "could well reduce violence" in the period surrounding the national election. It said, "Training A.S.A.P. [the Indonesian police] could well reduce violence during the period following the elections, when there is expected to be considerable political violence initiated by political parties--or their

thugs--that are dissatisfied with the election results."

The Washington director of Human Rights Watch Asia, Mike Jendrzeczyk, suggested that the US training mission might prevent such atrocities in the future. He said: "If Indonesian police officers trained by the US end up mishandling crowd-control situations, there could be a real backlash, especially from Congress. On the other hand, it may be worth taking the risk if the level of official violence can be reduced."

This reveals a willful blindness about the role of both the Indonesian and the American police. Social tensions in Indonesia have been exacerbated by two years of economic crisis and have repeatedly exploded into violence. Only a week ago army troops killed dozens in Aceh province on the island of Sumatra, and paramilitary forces backed by the regime have carried out a reign of terror against independence supporters in East Timor.

The American government has been a fervent supporter of repressive measures in Indonesia, going back to the 1965 CIA-backed military coup in which Suharto's troops and paramilitary gangs slaughtered more than 1 million people.

As for the claim that an American police delegation will help "reform" this brutal regime, this would be believed only by the most credulous. What commitment to human rights would such a delegation bring to Indonesia?

On October 6, 1998, Amnesty International released its report "United States of America--Rights for All" which painted a chilling picture of American society including police brutality, abuse of children, prisoners, asylum-seekers and others, and the use of high-tech tools of repression and torture.

According to the Amnesty International report: "There is a widespread and persistent problem of police brutality across the USA. Thousands of individual complaints about police abuse are reported each year

and local authorities pay out millions of dollars to victims in damages after lawsuits. Police officers have beaten and shot unresisting suspects; they have misused batons, chemical sprays and electro-shock weapons; they have injured or killed people by placing them in dangerous restraint holds."

The report stated that most of the abuse is carried out in the country's largest police departments--New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit and Atlanta.

A report by Human Rights Watch on America declares: "Mistreatment by law enforcement officers in the U.S. continued in 1998, remaining one of the most serious and divisive human rights violations in the country. The violations persisted nationwide, in rural, suburban, and urban areas of the country, committed by various law enforcement personnel including local and state police, sheriff's departments, and federal agents. Police engaged in unjustified shootings, severe beatings, fatal chokings, and unnecessarily rough treatment."

The notion that American cops have anything to teach Indonesian cops about democracy is a bad joke. Perhaps they will share with their Indonesian counterparts the methods employed against Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Tyisha Miller and other victims of police murder and brutality in the United States.



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