

East Timor atrocities report threatens to deepen rift in Indonesian government

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Next Monday's release of a report by Indonesia's Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations in East Timor (KPP HAM) will rapidly bring to a head the simmering tensions between President Abdurrahman Wahid and the top leadership of the country's Armed Forces (TNI).

The report is expected to contain evidence of the TNI leadership's involvement in the rampage by pro-Indonesian militia in East Timor following the referendum on August 30 on the future of the territory. KPP HAM member and human rights activist Munir told the *Jakarta Post* last Saturday: "It seems that military officers at almost all levels of command will be held responsible for the violence although there will be varying degrees of responsibility."

The commission has interviewed a number of generals and officers in recent weeks and returned on Wednesday from a visit to East Timor. In an interim report last November, the inquiry found that the military had been involved in human rights violations and a systematic campaign of destruction in East Timor.

On Thursday, KPP HAM member Asmara Nababan indicated for the first time that the inquiry would name Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs General Wiranto. "The report implicates Wiranto and other generals in the violence. In all, about 200 people have been implicated. The government told us it will prosecute everyone we implicated within three months of us handing over our report," he said but gave no details.

There is no doubt that Wiranto, who was TNI chief until last October, and the generals were closely involved in the widespread militia violence last year. For 25 years, the military was involved in a campaign of terror and intimidation ever since Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975, and has close links with the militia leaders.

The Commission of Inquiry, however, has nothing to do with meting out justice to those responsible for the killings and destruction following the August vote in East Timor. One of the purposes of establishing KPP HAM was to deflect demands for an international inquiry into the East Timor events. Just prior to Christmas, Wahid bluntly stated that he would not allow Indonesia's generals to be tried before an international tribunal saying Indonesia was capable of investigating any atrocities

itself.

A preliminary report to the UN General Assembly released on December 22 concluded that human rights violations had been committed "on a scale that is widespread or systematic or both... They include murder, torture, sexual violence, forcible transfer of population and other persecution and inhumane acts, including destruction of property." It recommended the establishment of an international criminal tribunal unless the steps taken by the Indonesian government "to investigate (army) involvement in the past year's atrocities bear fruit."

The US, in particular, has brought considerable pressure to bear on the Wahid government to press ahead with the investigation. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told visiting Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab last week that Jakarta had time to investigate alleged atrocities in East Timor but warned "the US will be watching very carefully, as the whole world will be watching." Her remarks followed comments by US Ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke warning the military to cooperate with the KPP HAM or face pressure for an international tribunal.

Alwi was in the US to argue against the establishment of an international inquiry. "It would be counterproductive because it would trigger a xenophobic response and allow the violators to wrap themselves in the flag in an excessive spirit of nationalism," he said in a speech at John Hopkins University. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is currently examining a report from a special UN inquiry, which is also due for release on Monday.

There is a definite political agenda behind both the establishment of the KPP HAM and the US threat to press for an international tribunal. Wahid has been locked in a struggle with Wiranto after refusing the TNI's demands for the declaration of a state of emergency in the troubled provinces of Aceh in northern Sumatra and the Maluku in the country's east. He recently replaced key army officers including the TNI spokesman and the military intelligence head.

Wahid has been seeking to play down talk of a military coup but his remarks indicate the bitterness of the behind-the-scenes wrangling. Referring to his opponents in the military, he said on Thursday: "In fact they are cowards. There is no reason to worry. In front of me they say that they are loyal but behind my

back their tone is different.”

Reflecting the views of Wahid's supporters, an article in this week's issue of *AsiaWeek* noted: “According to insiders, the military is trying to stage a ‘creeping’ coup: Wiranto's game plan, they say, is to create so much trouble around the country that the people lose faith in Wahid and support a motion of no-confidence against his government. Army elements are suspected of being behind the religious unrest in the Maluku; sources also say the military is cooperating with the Muslim parties to put further pressure on Wahid.”

There is every indication that Wahid will move quickly to dismiss Wiranto from his cabinet after the KPP HAM report is presented to the Attorney General. On Thursday, after more than a week of press speculation, Wahid announced he had signed a decree retiring Wiranto and three other serving officers in his cabinet from the military. In an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, he said he would ask Wiranto to resign his ministerial post if he is implicated in human rights abuses in East Timor.

While the struggle between Wahid and Wiranto takes the form of a dispute over Aceh and the Maluku, it has deeper roots. For 32 years following the US-sponsored military coup in 1965-66, the Suharto dictatorship ruled the Indonesian archipelago in the most brutal fashion, with extensive military control of political life reaching right down into the villages. The military's domination enabled its extensive involvement in the economy through the control of state-owned enterprises, the granting of monopolies and contracts, and close relations with private entrepreneurs. The Suharto family's multi-billion dollar business empire was the most obvious example.

In early 1998, the US administration in league with the International Monetary Fund seized on the mounting social and political crisis in Indonesia sparked by the Asian financial meltdown to press Suharto for the complete dismantling of “crony capitalism”. When Suharto prevaricated, the US gave the green light for his removal. Wiranto, a protégé and close confidante of Suharto, played a key role in orchestrating the backroom deals that led to the installation of B.J. Habibie.

Suharto's removal was only the first step. Behind US pressure for an investigation of the military role in East Timor is its insistence that the Wahid government remove all previous barriers to the unfettered operation of the market and the requirements of international investors for the free flow of capital and profits. The Indonesian military, which served the interests of US imperialism so well for decades, has to be refashioned to meet new economic and political needs, with those elements most closely connected with Suharto removed.

The utterly hypocritical nature of the concerns over human rights displayed by both the Wahid government, the US and other powers is revealed by the extremely narrow scope of the inquiries—both Indonesia's KPP HAM and the proposed international tribunal. No-one has even hinted that the terms of reference should be broadened to include an investigation of the

Indonesian military's long record of repression over 25 years in East Timor including the 1991 Dili massacre, not to mention the atrocities perpetrated by the Suharto regime throughout Indonesia since 1965.

The most glaring omission in the entire public debate is the lack of any reference to the genocide carried out by Suharto and his generals in the immediate aftermath of the 1965 coup. Between 500,000 and one million workers, peasants and members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) were systematically murdered by the military working with gangs of thugs from Islamic organisations and the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI).

The silence is not accidental. Any serious investigation into what constitutes one of the great crimes of the 20th century would inevitably implicate the US and those Indonesian parties so prominently trumpeted in the media as “reformers” and “democrats”. During 1965-66 massacre, the CIA supplied the Indonesian military with lists of PKI members to be arrested, tortured and killed. President Wahid is head of the Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama, whose youth organisation Ansor played a prominent role in the genocide in East Java. Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri is the leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), whose forerunner, the PNI, was closely involved in the murders in Bali.

Whatever the contents of the KPP HAM report, any action against the military will be handled with the greatest of care. The last thing that the US and the Wahid government want is for an embittered Wiranto to begin to spill the beans on the activities of the Indonesian military for the last three decades. The British-based human rights organisation TAPOL recently warned that draft Indonesian legislation to establish a human rights court may effectively exonerate the military by preventing any retroactive trials and thus an examination not only of the East Timor atrocities but all the previous crimes of the military junta.



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