

Indonesian military steps up repression in West Papua

John Roberts
8 June 2002

A number of recent reports indicate that the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) is preparing to intensify the crackdown on independence supporters in the remote eastern province of West Papua. Pro-independence and human rights groups claim that additional special forces troops and Islamic militia groups are being moved into the province.

Australian academic Dr Greg Polgrain, who visited West Papua in May, told the *Sydney Morning Herald* this month that large groups of Laskar Jihad members were entering Papua every week among the thousands of transmigrants from other areas of Indonesia. "This is being overseen and organised by the Indonesian army. They are nearly all young men, not transmigration families... Laskar Jihad are training with arms and that is pretty serious," he said.

Laskar Jihad is one of the Islamic fundamentalist groups that have been heavily involved in communal fighting in both the Malukus and Sulawesi, which has cost thousands of lives over the past two years. Close ties exist between the militia groups and sections of the Indonesian military and police. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that an additional 150 Kopassus special forces troops had just been moved from Sumatra to bolster the army presence in Papua.

The TNI, with the backing of President Megawati Sukarnoputri, has resorted to increasingly repressive methods over the past 18 months to harass and intimidate opponents of continued Indonesian rule over the province. The military and police maintain a de facto curfew. Arbitrary arrest and detention is common and the armed forces are directly implicated in several murders.

Martin Luther Wanma, a pastor from Sorong, stated in a letter that a senior police officer had threatened to arrest him. "The main reason for my imminent arrest is

my objection to the Laskar Jihad coming to West Papua," he declared. According to the Papuan human rights group Elsham, one man died in custody after police rounded up and questioned people in Wamena who attended meetings held by Amnesty International and the European Union in January and March respectively.

The most blatant example was the killing of prominent independence leader Theys Eluay last year. Eluay was chairman of the Papua Presidium, which was formed in June 2000 after a government-sponsored meeting of tribal leaders rejected Jakarta's proposals for greater autonomy and called for full independence. He and other Presidium leaders were charged with "subversion" in late 2000 but later released.

Eluay was murdered on the night of November 11 after dining at the home of local Kopassus chief Colonel Hartomo, near the provincial capital of Jayapura. His driver disappeared and has not been seen since. Kopassus special forces were notorious during the Suharto period for political murders and brutal operations against separatist movements in East Timor and Aceh as well as West Papua.

Such was the outrage over Eluay's murder that the government was compelled to launch a formal investigation. Last month an 11-man commission of inquiry brought down a report that pointed to the involvement of Kopassus and led to the arrest of six men, including Hartomo and his deputy Major Donny Hutabarat. The trial is due to begin in two months.

The six, however, are simply convenient scapegoats. Given the political implications of Eluay's murder, it is highly unlikely that Hartomo and Hutabarat would have acted without the direct sanction of the army top brass. Phil Erari, one of the two native Papuans on the inquiry, has already denounced the findings as a cover-

up for those who ordered the murder.

At the time, military officers brushed aside the murder, claiming Eluay's death was an accident or "a heart attack". Now the involvement of Kopassus has been established, military commanders are seeking to distance themselves from the six. Commenting on the arrests, TNI spokesman Major General Syafrie Syamsuddin insisted that the motive for the murder was not yet clear—the implication being that it was not political.

Neither the investigation nor the arrests have stopped the army thuggery. According to a report in the *Christian Science Monitor* on May 10, a key witness in the upcoming trial who attended the same dinner as Eluay at Hartomo's home, was attacked and narrowly escaped death. The Papuan rights group Elsham said the attacker was Kopassus Sergeant Yani.

Two factors have contributed to the more aggressive role of the Indonesian military, not only in West Papua but also against the separatist movement in Aceh and throughout the country.

The first was the ousting of President Abdurrahman Wahid and the installation of Megawati Sukarnoputri last year after a protracted political brawl in which the generals played the role of kingmaker. The TNI top brass now feels that it has an administration that is not only beholden to it but supports its repression of separatist movements. One of the main criticisms of Wahid was that his negotiations with independence groups were paving the way for more East Timors and the breakup of Indonesia.

The second is the US administration's determination to reestablish close ties with the Indonesian military. In 1999, in the aftermath of the TNI's involvement in atrocities in East Timor, the US Congress imposed a ban on any links between the US and Indonesian armed forces until such time as those responsible were brought to justice. The Bush administration, however, has repeatedly stated its intention to restore the ties with the TNI, which, for more than three decades under Suharto, served Washington's interests in Indonesia and throughout the region.

A trial is currently underway in Jakarta of 18 soldiers and civilians alleged to have been involved in the East Timor violence. The legal process is a farce with the TNI top brass attending the court and making public statements of support for the accused in a crude attempt

to intimidate the judges. As in the case of Eluay's murder, none of the top generals have been called to account. Yet, the Bush administration has seized on the trial to argue that, as US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld declared recently, Indonesia was dealing with "human rights issues in an orderly, democratic way".

At an Asian security conference in Singapore in late May, Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, expressed the hope: "I'd like to figure out ways in which we wouldn't always use, as the means of expressing displeasure, isolating the Indonesian military from contacts with the West and the United States." Answering criticisms that Indonesia was slow in supporting the US "war against terrorism," he pointed out that the two countries already have close security ties. "The cooperation is really very good, both with the CIA and FBI," he stated.

The Bush administration has all but openly repudiated the Congressional ban. Since the terror attacks on New York on September 11, the US has resumed "non-lethal" military sales to Indonesia, obtained Congressional approval for an \$US18 million anti-terrorist training program mainly for Indonesia, and resumed regular contacts between US and Indonesian military officials.

In a particularly sinister development, the Bush administration has asked Congress for \$8 million to train a security force for "peacekeeping" operations inside Indonesia. In other words, a special military force is to be established, outside the control of the police, to suppress internal opposition, including in West Papua.

These US moves will only encourage the TNI to take a more aggressive stance and to dispense with the cosmetic "reforms" instituted since the fall of the Suharto dictatorship.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact