# Further indications of Indonesian military involvement in Papuan mine murders

**John Roberts**
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In the six weeks since the murder of two American teachers and one Indonesian employee of the international school at the US-owned Freeport gold and copper mine in the Indonesian province of Papua, further evidence has emerged pointing to the involvement of the Indonesian military (TNI).

The attack on August 31, which also wounded 10 others, occurred on a misty mountain road about 20 kilometres from the mine and only a few hundred metres from an army security post. Gunmen armed with M-16 rifles opened fire on three four-wheel drive vehicles early in the afternoon. The ambush was immediately denounced by the US Embassy in Jakarta as an "outrageous act of terrorism". Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents have flown to Papua after interviewing injured survivors in Australia as part of a US inquiry into the incident.

Indonesian authorities at first blamed local villagers or separatist guerrillas fighting for the separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM). Later they accused two OPM splinter groups of being responsible. The TNI commander in Papua, Major General Mahidin Simbolon, continues to maintain that the OPM carried out the attack.

From the start, the TNI's claims have been questioned. No OPM group was operating close to the site of the ambush, nor does the organisation have any history of attacking foreigners. The OPM is not well-armed and has been forced in the past to resort to bows and arrows. One of the security personnel investigating the ambush told Reuters that even an initial investigation virtually ruled out the poorly-equipped separatists: "If we look at OPM, it's not possible, because from the assault some 200 bullets hit the vehicles."

Local Papuan organisations and human rights groups have rejected claims of OPM involvement. They have accused the TNI of attempting to paint the OPM as "terrorist", as part of a stepped-up military campaign against the organisation over the last year.

The case against the OPM was so tenuous that in early September the local police informed the media they had begun investigating possible military involvement. The TNI has a history of using security incidents to extract money from foreign-based companies for providing protection for their enterprises. After major riots against the mine's operations in 1996, the Indonesian military pressured the mine's operators, Freeport-McMoran, to build a new base for the TNI, at a cost of $US37 million.

New facts, reported over the past few weeks in the *Washington Post*, cast further suspicion on the TNI. On September 1, the day after the incident, the military claimed to have killed a Papuan guerrilla in a confrontation near the scene. This appeared to give credence to the TNI's claim that an armed group was operating near the ambush site.

According to the Papua-based Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy, however, relatives identified the dead man as 24-year-old Danianus Waker. He had been employed by the Indonesian Special Forces (Kopassus) as an informer.

An autopsy raised even more questions. Regional police chief I. Made Pastika told the press that the examination found Waker had had a chronic disease for at least a year, which produced a massive enlargement of the testicles. It would have been physically impossible for him to carry out guerrilla activity or trek the 100 kilometres from his tribal area without transport.

The autopsy found that the bullet wounds in Waker's body had occurred at least 24 hours prior to when the military claim he was shot. Pastika also reported that soldiers had deliberately smudged fingerprints and moved bodies on August 31 at the scene of the ambush, thus corrupting crucial evidence.

On September 27, the *Washington Post* reported the allegations of a 23-year-old Papuan who said that on the day of the incident he was ordered by a Kopassus

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commander to accompany his squad of nine soldiers from the town of Timika to Tembagapura, a town near the Freeport mine. He was left with four soldiers on the outskirts of the town, while the others continued on.

The informant told the *Washington Post* that the soldiers started to ply him with whisky and beer and all five became drunk. He claims to have overheard a mobile phone call from the commander telling his men to get ready, followed by audible gunfire. When the other squad members returned, the vehicle was driven by the commander, who ordered them to get in quickly as they had to leave the area.

The man told the newspaper that he was "100 percent sure" that the Kopassus soldiers had ambushed the Freeport convoy. The journalists were told by a former senior US Embassy official not to discount the man's story because of drunkenness as the TNI "would often use drugs or alcohol to get people in a pliable mood, to counter the possibility of any resistance at the last minute to what they want them to do."

Police chief Pastika said that the informant had come forward as he feared for his life and was now under police protection in the provincial capital Jayapura. He had been a member of the Kopassus-trained Tenaga Bantuan Operasi militia for 11 years and had previously participated in several Kopassus operations. The informant has been interviewed by human rights activists who found his account credible.

While the police claim there are discrepancies between the militiaman's account and what was found at the scene, they are now questioning 19 soldiers from the Kopassus 515 battalion who were stationed in the area at the time of the ambush. At this stage the case seems to be broadly similar to the assassination of pro-independence Papua Presidium Council president Theys Eluay last November. After accusing Papuans of the murder, the authorities eventually charged the local Kopassus commander and 11 of his men.

If the TNI was responsible, it has no lack of motives. The Indonesian military is currently the subject of US congressional bans on assistance. Both the Indonesian government and the Bush administration have been pushing for these to be lifted so that the US and the TNI can collaborate more closely in a crackdown on alleged Muslim extremists in South East Asia. An attack on US citizens would reinforce the argument for cooperation—if it could be sheeted home to the OPM.

The TNI would also be able to push for the OPM to be included on the US list of "terrorist" organisations, giving a green light for escalating military repression in Papua. The military played a major role in ousting former president Abdurrahman Wahid last year, after he attempted to reach a compromise with separatists in West Papua and Aceh. When Megawati Sukarnoputri assumed the presidency, she signalled a tougher stance against the Papuan separatists by appointing Major General Simbolon, a former commander in East Timor, as the TNI chief in Papua.

Police chief Pastika indicated that elements of the army were disgruntled over Freeport's remuneration arrangements for providing security at the mine. The money is vital for both the police and TNI as the state budget provides less than half the funds required. For decades, the TNI has been engaged in legal business operations and is widely accused of being involved in illegal rackets including extracting protection money, drug-running and prostitution.

Under Suharto, the police were part of the military but, following his fall in 1998, have been established as an autonomous body. There are signs of increasingly bitter rivalry over state funding and other sources of money. On September 29, TNI soldiers attacked a police station in Binjai on the island of Sumatra after police refused to release a soldier charged with drug dealing. Animosity between the two arms of the Indonesian state may well be a factor in the willingness of the police to push for an investigation of the military's role in the Freeport ambush.

Whatever happened on the mountain road in Papua on August 31, the least likely explanation is that provided by the military—those responsible for providing security at the Freeport mine. The weight of evidence is increasingly pointing to their involvement.

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