

FBI dispatched to Indonesia to deal with Freeport murders

John Roberts
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After inconclusive Indonesian investigations into an ambush near the Freeport mine in West Papua last year, a team of US FBI investigators is due to arrive this week to take part in a joint inquiry. Two American teachers and an Indonesian died in the attack and 12 others were injured. The evidence so far points to the involvement of officers of the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) in West Papua and possibly at higher levels in Jakarta.

President George Bush phoned his Indonesian counterpart, Megawati Sukarnoputri, last month to insist that Indonesian authorities bring those responsible for the Freeport attack to justice and to formally request a joint investigation. Bush reportedly told Megawati that any resumption of ties between the Pentagon and the TNI was contingent on the FBI probe.

Bush's direct involvement indicates that far more is at stake than the tracking down of the Freeport killers. The unresolved murder of two US citizens and open questions about the TNI's role threaten to become a festering sore that will undermine broader US interests. In particular, the Bush administration has been pushing for the lifting of a Congressional ban imposed on contact between the US and Indonesian military, following TNI-organised militia violence on East Timor in 1999.

The first test of the ban is an appropriations bill for \$400,000 to fund training for the Indonesian military under the International Military Education and Training Program, which Congress is due to vote on before the end of January. In arguing for the ban to be lifted, the Bush administration will no doubt point to the outcome of trials in Jakarta, which, even though a transparent whitewash, have resulted in a handful of convictions over the East Timor violence.

The dispatch of a FBI team to West Papua is to quiet

Congressional concerns over the Freeport murders. The move is not without its political risks if the investigation comes to be seen as an obvious cover-up. Former US State Department official Ed McWilliams is reported by *Asia Times Online* as warning that if the White House agrees to a "face-saving" ploy by blaming rogue army officers then "we're essentially conspiring in a cover-up to prevent full accountability by people responsible for the murder of US citizens."

The ambush took place on an isolated road near the Freeport mine on August 31. While the military blamed local separatist guerrillas for the attack, the character of the attack involving the use of automatic weapons immediately cast suspicion on the TNI. The Free Papua Movement (OPM) rarely has access to sophisticated weapons and has never carried out an attack on foreign workers in West Papua. The army, on the other hand, is notorious for its protection rackets and other illegal activities in the province.

For four months, two separate inquiries by the TNI and the national police have failed to produce a single suspect. The police claim that their inquiry has bogged down because they have been prevented from interviewing TNI officers suspected of involvement. FBI officials have visited Papua twice to check on the progress of the investigation and are preparing their own initial report.

Already, the police have evidence that implicates the TNI's Kopassus special forces in the murders.

* The TNI at first claimed to have shot dead a Papuan, Danianus Waker, who was said to have been involved in the Freeport ambush. An autopsy showed that Waker died 24 hours prior to the attack and, in any case, had a medical condition that would have prevented him walking into the area.

* Shortly afterward, police interviewed another

Papuan who had been a member of the Kopassus-operated Tenaga Bantuan Operasi militia. He said he had accompanied nine Kopassus soldiers to near the scene of the shooting. He remained with four of them while the remainder moved off toward the area of the ambush. The informant heard shooting over a mobile phone during communication between the two groups of soldiers. He told police he was sure the Kopassus soldiers had ambushed the Freeport convoy.

* In early November, the *Washington Post* and *Sydney Morning Herald* published separate articles, citing intelligence sources who claimed that the top levels of the military in Jakarta had prior knowledge of an operation against the Freeport mine. TNI chief General Endriartono Sutarto, who was among those named, denied the allegation and took legal action against the *Washington Post*.

* In late December, deputy Papuan police chief Brigadier-General Raziman Tarigan told the media that forensic tests on ammunition used in the mine ambush had come from an M-16, an SS-1 rifle and a Mauser rifle. While not claiming that the TNI's Kostrad strategic reserve division was involved, he said: "What is clear is that these weapons are used by Kostrad in the area."

There are also indications that the army may be involved in trying to intimidate witnesses and others with information about the Freeport ambush. On December 28, the day after Jakarta first foreshadowed direct FBI involvement in the inquiry, two women were seriously wounded in a gun attack on a mini-bus carrying eight people in Wutung, 50 kilometers from the border with Papua New Guinea.

One of those shot was Elsy Rumbiak Bonai, wife of the head of the Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy (IHRSA), Johannes Bonai. His group has been prominent in accusing the TNI of carrying out the Freeport ambush. Its own investigation produced the former Tenaga Bantuan Operasi witness who saw military officers in the Freeport area at the time of the August 31 attack.

Local military commander Colonel Agus Mulyadi blamed the Wutung shooting on separatist rebels. However, IHRSA deputy head, Aloysius Renwarin, said IHRSA members had received threatening phone calls and were being targeted because of its investigations into the military. Like the ambush at the

Freeport mine, the Wutung attack occurred only a short distance from a military post. Over 40 rounds were fired, indicating that the attackers were well armed.

The military has a long history of dirty work in Papua. Earlier this month, seven Kopassus soldiers charged with murdering Papuan Council Presidium chairman Theys Eluay in November 2001 went on trial. According to the military prosecutor, Eluay was killed on the orders of Lieutenant-Colonel Hartomo after the Papuan politician denounced as inadequate government proposals for limited autonomy for Papua.

The TNI has a number of motives for the Freeport attack. In Papua itself, local commanders have been involved in business operations, both legal and illegal. The military receives a reported \$11 million a year from the operators of the Freeport mine in return for protection. The attack may simply have been a timely reminder to the company to continue its payments.

It is also possible, however, that plans at the local level dovetailed with the scheming of those further up the chain of command, who were looking for a means of branding the OPM as a "terrorist organisation" and enlisting the US in suppressing separatist activity in the resource-rich province. If the OPM could be tarred with the murder of American citizens, it would provide a means, albeit a highly risky one, for achieving that end.

The FBI now enters this political minefield as part of a joint investigation. Its mission statement is clear: lay the murders to rest, without implicating the military top brass and thus complicating the reestablishment of close US-Indonesian military ties. Whether it is capable of carrying out the task, without the cover-up being too blatant, remains to be seen.



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