

Indonesian presidential decree hands more power to military in Papua

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A study issued last month by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) highlighted a little reported decree issued by Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri in January mandating the division of Papua into three separate provinces.

Entitled *Dividing Papua: How not to do it*, the report warns that the new regulations will heighten conflicts within the province and increase tensions between Jakarta and the region. By carving the existing province into three, the decree effectively rules out any compromise with the Papuan independence movement and sets the stage for a potentially explosive confrontation.

If fully implemented, Megawati's decree will effectively reverse the limited concessions made under a 2001 special autonomy law, which provided increased powers to the provincial administration. According to the ICG report, the Papuan Governor Jaap Solossa was not even consulted before the decision was announced and its suddenness "created shock waves".

Megawati's decree reverts to an Indonesian law, passed in September 1999, which provided for the subdivision of what was then called Irian Jaya. Enacted at the height of the conflict in East Timor, the law reflected the prevailing sentiment in Jakarta's political and military circles that a crackdown on separatist movements in Papua and Aceh was needed to prevent Indonesia from breaking up.

Just months before, in February 1999, a 100-strong delegation of Papuan leaders met with Indonesian President B. J. Habibie as part of his much-vaunted "national dialogue". Much to Jakarta's dismay, the delegation demanded the separation of Papua from Indonesia and the setting up of a transitional government under UN control.

When Abdurrahman Wahid replaced Habibie as

president in October 1999, he changed tack. While firmly ruling out any steps towards independence in Papua and Aceh, Wahid attempted to appease local elites by offering token concessions and increased provincial powers. He promised to allow Irian Jaya's name to be changed to Papua and to permit Papuans to fly the Morning Star flag—a symbol of the independence movement.

Wahid's stance brought him into sharp conflict with the armed forces (TNI) whose hostility to the separatist movements was bound up with their heavy financial reliance on commercial operations, both legal and illegal, particularly in resource-rich provinces such as Papua and Aceh. The issue was central to the TNI's decision to throw its weight behind Megawati in the protracted impeachment process that eventually led to Wahid's ouster in July 2001.

Despite Megawati's tougher stance against separatist movements, the parliament passed Wahid's special autonomy law in October 2001. The new law was based on the assumption of a single province and, therefore, effectively superseded the 1999 proposed carve-up of Papua.

The special autonomy law provided for a much greater share of the revenue from natural resources to remain in Papua: 70 percent from oil and gas and 80 percent from mining. Papua contains the world's largest gold and copper mine at Grasberg and BP has launched a new natural gas project in western Papua, Tangguh LNG, that promises to generate \$US32 billion in revenue between 2006 and 2030.

The law also provided for the establishment of a Papuan People's Council (MRP) of ethnic Papuans, as an advisory body to the provincial parliament. Article 76 required that any future re-division of the province be approved by the provincial legislature and the local

MRP. Sections of the law recognised native Papuan traditions and formally changed the province's name to "Papua".

Megawati's decision to resurrect the 1999 law is a further symptom of the growing political ascendancy of the generals; who have never accepted even the limited constraints placed on their power following the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998. Her decree provides the military with the means to limit the power and resources of local Papuan elites, play them off against each other and crack down on any opposition.

The ICG report noted that various Indonesian and local Papuan officials have been pressing for the carve-up of the province as a means for securing control of the revenues from resource projects. It noted that one of the most hotly contested posts in provincial politics is currently that of administrator of Bintuni Bay—the site of the Tangguh LNG development.

The report concluded, however, that the main driving force behind Megawati's decree was the powerful National Intelligence Agency (BIN). If true, it indicates that the Indonesian president is allying herself with the most ruthless sections of the military top brass. According to the ICG, she failed to even consult with her own top security minister, retired general Bambang Susilo Yudhoyono, over the decision.

BIN chief Abdullah Mahmud Hendropriyono has denied allegations by the speaker of the Papuan parliament, John Ibo, that BIN was behind Megawati's decree. Hendropriyono insisted that it had been drawn up in the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. But as the ICG noted, there is evidence that as early as July 2002 Hendropriyono was involved in discussions with local political figure Jimmy Ijie who opposed the special autonomy law saying it would encourage Papuan separatism.

Hendropriyono is a central figure in the security apparatus who has extensive business connections and has never hesitated to use the most brutal methods. He was an officer in the notorious Kopassus (special forces) and in 1989 he was accused of involvement in the massacre of Muslim villagers in Talangsari, Lampung. As Transmigration Minister in Habibie's cabinet, Hendropriyono is alleged to have played a key role in fomenting the militia violence in East Timor in 1999. In all likelihood, he has also had a hand in the recent build up of pro-Jakarta militia groups in Papua.

Significantly, under Hendropriyono's direction, BIN has been the Indonesian intelligence agency that has forged the closest ties with Washington and the CIA through the Bush administration's so-called global war on terrorism.

The brutal character of the military's ongoing operations in Papua is evidenced by the recent conviction of six Kopassus soldiers for the murder of Papuan Presidium chairman Theys Eluay in November 2001—three weeks after the passage of the special autonomy law. While the prosecutors attempted to portray the killing as a local affair, it is virtually inconceivable that the six soldiers could have murdered such a prominent political figure without high level authorisation.

TNI involvement is also widely suspected in an ambush last August that resulted in the deaths of two Americans and an Indonesian working as teachers at the Grasberg mine. It appears that the attack was meant as a reminder to the mine's operators, the US based Freeport McMoRan corporation, to keep up payments on its protection money to the Indonesian military.

Megawati's decree will only further encourage the military to intensify its repression in Papua as it seeks to claw back the privileged position that it held under Suharto. It is a warning of the methods that will be used elsewhere in Indonesia—whether against other separatist movements in Aceh and elsewhere or opposition to the country's deteriorating social and economic conditions.



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