

Jakarta pours troops into Papua amid signs of intensified repression

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Even as Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono postures as a “democrat”, his government has given the go-ahead for the dispatch of an additional 15,000 troops from the military’s Strategic Reserve Forces (Kostrad) to the province of Papua. Like the huge operation launched in Aceh in mid-2003, the build up of Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) units in Papua is aimed at intimidating the local population and crushing separatist groups.

Kostrad commander Lieutenant-General Hadi Waluyo announced the troop reinforcement on March 16. When complete, the total number of security personnel in the province will be 50,000 for a population of just 2.1 million, of whom 1.3 million are ethnic Papuans.

Waluyo claimed that the troop movement “was based on considerations about the direction of threats to Indonesia’s defence”. But the only countries immediately adjacent to the province are Papua New Guinea (PNG), which has a tiny military, and Australia, which has publicly declared it will not back separatists in Aceh and Papua. The only apparent external “threats” are isolated border incidents involving villagers crossing the land border from PNG.

A further indication that the troops will be used for internal repression is the establishment of a new territorial command in the Papuan town of Merauke, one of 22 such commands throughout Indonesia. The territorial command system, set up under the former Suharto dictatorship, involves the TNI directly at all levels of administration from the provincial down to the village. The UK-based human rights group Tapol alleges that the decision is bound up with plans to partition Papua, placing its resource-rich areas more firmly under the control of Jakarta and the military.

The military presence is not simply directed against the separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM). Its loosely organised and poorly equipped guerrilla fighters have

been waging a sporadic war against the TNI since the late 1960s, when under US pressure, the UN ceded the former Dutch colony to Indonesia. The OPM has proven ineffective in challenging the TNI and has not launched any significant attacks recently.

The military reinforcements are aimed primarily at stamping out any expression of dissent and tightening Jakarta’s grip over the province. Despite a ban on journalists entering the province, reports have emerged indicating a new round of violent repression that parallels the methods used under the Suharto dictatorship.

A *Dateline* program on Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television on March 16 provided evidence of TNI violence. It was based on information, including videos and photographs, provided in part by human rights investigators and Papuan sources, as well as comments by a Papuan Baptist minister in Australia.

Photos showed the aftermath of a TNI attack on the highland village of Wunin in February in which schools and churches were burned to the ground and elderly villagers murdered. Citing Papuan sources, the program claimed that violence by the military had forced 15,000 to 20,000 people to flee their homes. Many refugees are living in appalling conditions. *Dateline* showed an eleven-month-old baby girl who had died of malnutrition.

Several informants insisted that the TNI was building up militia, including the Islamic-based Laskar Jihad, as it had done in East Timor. One of those interviewed had infiltrated one of the militia and confirmed that the military was preparing to use such groups to intimidate the local population. Baptist minister Sofyan Yoman claimed that, in order to fund its operations, the military had siphoned off two and a half billion rupiah in funds intended for implementing schemes under the 2001 Special Autonomy Law.

Decades of military repression along with ongoing economic backwardness and social deprivation have

fueled deep-going hostility to Jakarta and enlivened demands for independence. *Dateline* showed footage of a large demonstration in Manikwaru in February at which Papuan leaders repeated their demands for end to what they called ethnic cleansing and for UN intervention.

The SBS program comes on top of earlier reports by human rights groups of repression in the remote Puncak Jaya regency of the Central Highlands. In August, Indonesian authorities seized traditional land from the Tabuni tribe for an airstrip and road, provoking a series of clashes that continued into December.

John Rumbiak, the Australia-based spokesman for the Papuan human rights group ELSHAM, stated that, as of mid-December, at least 23 Puncak Jaya villagers, mostly children, had died of starvation after being forced away from their food sources. The military closed off the area, preventing relief efforts by Papuan humanitarian organisations.

ELSHAM, the Sydney University Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and the Uniting Church of Australia issued a joint statement on November 18 dismissing Indonesian claims that the military was responding to OPM attacks. It pointed to evidence of the TNI's involvement in an incident on November 12 in which a police officer was killed and two government officials badly wounded. One of the wounded officials, the head of the Puncak Jaya finance department, had reported the TNI for extorting \$A250,000 in development funds.

According to Rumbiak, Meky Wenda, a native Papuan policeman who was wounded on the same spot on December 17, said both ambushes took place just 500 metres from a TNI post. Rumbiak told the media: "It is likely that Papuans have been used to carry out this [November] attack by the army special forces, Kopassus, who have been using local groups in Papua in the same way they manipulated East Timorese to fight their own people...."

The stepped-up repression has not been limited to remote areas. Human rights groups have cited eyewitness accounts of police opening fire on a pro-independence rally on December 1 in the provincial capital of Jayapura. Eight demonstrators were shot and another 18 arrested at the Trikora soccer field in the suburb of Adeputra.

For the TNI leadership, the stakes are high in resource-rich provinces such as Aceh and Papua. In early December, TNI chief General Endriartono Sutarto told the parliamentary defence commission that 70 percent of the TNI budget came from its business enterprises. As well as supplementing operational budgets, the officer caste has

used the TNI's nationwide business enterprises to enrich itself.

Papua is one of the most lucrative areas for TNI business activity, including legal and illegal logging operations and extortion. Management at the giant US-operated Freeport gold and copper mine admitted that it had been paying \$US5.6 million annually for "protection" to the TNI, in addition to providing \$37 million to build a new military base.

In 2004, the Indonesian parliament passed a law requiring the TNI to end all business activities within five years. On December 8, however, Yudhoyono's defence minister Juwono Sudarsono announced, apparently in defiance of the law, that the government would take over only those military businesses worth \$US550,000 or more. Others would remain in TNI hands "to help fulfill the soldiers' needs".

Clear signs that Washington and Canberra are reforging ties to the TNI, despite its continuing abuses, are emboldening the military in Papua. On February 26, the US State Department announced the end of a ban on Indonesian participation in the International Military Education and Training program (IMET). In doing so, the Bush administration has brushed aside evidence of the TNI's involvement in an ambush on Freeport employees in August 2002, which resulted in the deaths of two US citizens and an Indonesian.

During his visit last week to Australia, Yudhoyono and Australian Prime Minister John Howard agreed a broad economic and security framework that paves the way for a defence pact. Howard was at pains to reassure the Indonesian president that Australia respected "Indonesia's integrity". Australia and the US will no doubt turn a blind eye to the TNI's escalation of violence in Papua, as they have in Aceh for nearly two years.

Significantly, the TNI's decision to dispatch 15,000 more troops to Papua came just over two weeks after Washington announced the lifting of its IMET ban. The Yudhoyono administration and the TNI clearly interpreted the decision as the green light to assert control in Papua and other areas using the old methods of the Suharto junta.



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