

Indonesian military implicated in Freeport mine murder

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An Australian mining project manager was killed earlier this month when he was fired on with military-style weapons in a premeditated attack near the Freeport McMoRan mine in Indonesian-controlled West Papua where he worked.

Drew Grant, a 29-year-old builder from Melbourne, died in what police described as a planned ambush early on July 11 as he was driving with four others in a PT Freeport vehicle between Tembagapura and Timika. According to police, he was shot five times in the neck, chest and stomach from a distance of 25 metres. Another Australian national was in the car at the time, but neither he nor the other three passengers were hurt.

The next day a Freeport security guard was shot dead near the same location. Markus Rattealo died when he and another guard working at the mine came under gunfire while driving. After the ambush, police fought a gun battle with the attackers in which a policeman was killed and several others injured. The deputy spokesman for Indonesia's National Police, Brigadier General Sulistio Ishak, said that the wounded men were members of the Densus 88 anti-terrorism unit, which was established after the Bali bombings with Australia's support.

Indonesia has sent investigators and elite counter-terror police to guard the mine area after the shootings. Two officers from the Australian Federal Police have joined the Indonesian investigators.

International media reports immediately speculated that the ambush which killed Grant was carried out by members of the separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM). However, according to Papua police chief Bagus Ekodanto, the attackers were using weapons belonging to the police or the military. The poorly-armed OPM rarely has access to sophisticated weapons and has never carried out an attack on foreign workers in West Papua. It promptly denied any responsibility for killing Grant.

The Indonesian army (TNI) is notorious for its protection rackets and other illegal activities in the province. The US-

based company, which owns and operates the Freeport mine, has previously admitted relying on the Indonesian military and police for security over its workforce of about 18,000. The military receives a reported \$11 million a year in return for protection.

An Australian source from within Freeport who has worked with security services at the mine told ABC Radio's "AM" program that some degree of military or police involvement in the violence is widely suspected. The source pointed out that the security role at the mine of Indonesia's mobile police brigade, known as Brimob, is under threat as the company is considering replacing them with private security contractors. The killings could have been ordered to generate a crisis and pre-empt attempts by the company to have security handed over to the private company.

Further reports have emerged in the Australian media of suspected interference with the corpse. Doctor Abdul Munim Idris who conducted the autopsy on Grant's body claimed bullets may have been removed from the corpse after it was taken to Jakarta and before he could examine it. The doctor told the ABC that the bullets had metal casings, which would be consistent with bullets of a military grade. He also contradicted previous police accounts of five bullets, saying four bullets were fired at Grant, with two hitting him in the neck and two in the chest. There were no exit wounds or whole bullets, just fragmentation, the ABC report said.

There is a long history of dirty activities by the Indonesian military in Papua, particularly in its fight against the rebel OPM. The region, which has been part of Indonesia since 1963, contains considerable natural resources including oil, gas, gold and copper. The Indonesian government has tens of thousands of troops deployed in the province. The military presence includes an air force base, a naval base and 1,000 Kopasus special commandos which were notorious for some of the Suharto regime's worst crimes, including arbitrary arrests and the killing of political opponents.

The Freeport mining operation has been a long-standing focus

of opposition from local Papuans, angry over the outflow of profit to foreign investors. With reserves valued at \$40 billion, the Freeport project is the largest single gold deposit in the world and the third largest open-cut copper mine. The US owners and their British and Australian partners have extracted billions of dollars in gold from the mine. In return for giving the ruling Suharto family and associates a share in the profits, Freeport also obtained generous tax concessions and virtual free rein over the tracts of land it mined, occupied and polluted.

Under a Contract of Work signed in 1967, Freeport was given rights to more than 100,000 hectares on the traditional lands in the southern part of West Papua. Despite protests, the rights of the local people were denied and their interests trampled on. Since then, some 2,000 villagers have been forcibly removed to make way for mining, waste dumping and the construction of townships, roads, airfields and military posts.

The fresh round of killings provides evidence that previous international tensions over the role of the Indonesian military have far from been resolved, and may well re-erupt.

In 2002, two American teachers and an Indonesian colleague who worked at the mine were shot dead in an ambush near the facility, while 12 others were injured. Again, while US and Indonesian investigators were quick to blame the OPM, substantial evidence pointed to the involvement of TNI officers in West Papua and even at higher levels in Jakarta.

The character of the attack, which also involved the use of military-style automatic weapons, cast suspicion on the TNI. A preliminary police-investigation document obtained by *TIME* magazine cited a string of evidence implicating the military. The report concluded that it was “very possible” there was military involvement in the attack.

In January 2003 a team of US FBI investigators was dispatched to take part in a joint inquiry at the instigation of President George Bush. Bush reportedly told his Indonesian counterpart, Megawati Sukarnoputri, that any resumption of ties between the Pentagon and the TNI was contingent on the FBI probe. According to a March 2004 AAP report, US officials had also come to believe local army commanders ordered the ambush.

While US officials had little doubt about the TNI’s responsibility, any finding against the military threatened to jeopardise the Bush administration’s desire to restore US-Indonesian military ties, which were suspended after the massacre of pro-independence protestors in East Timor in 1991. The Bush administration regarded Indonesia—the world’s most populous Muslim nation—as its key South East Asian ally in the “war on terror” and vital to its own long-held ambitions to

secure a dominant position in the region, where Washington has substantial economic and strategic interests.

The Republican-controlled Congress had initially backed an initiative to restore military ties, voting in 2002 to approve a resumption of the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program after a decade-long hiatus. But renewed doubts set in after the ambush and lawmakers reinstated the ban until the State Department determined the Indonesian government is helping with the FBI probe.

In June 2004, US Attorney General John Ashcroft finally indicted alleged OPM rebel Anthonius Wamang for the murders, without, however, answering any of the outstanding questions surrounding the incident. The OPM issued a statement denying any role in the ambush. By blaming the attack on Papuan separatists, Ashcroft paved the way for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to readmit Indonesia to the Pentagon’s IMET military training program, which was regarded as key to normalising military-to-military relations.

With the affair buried, the US set about re-establishing relations with Indonesia. The current regime under President Yudhoyono, which came to power in 2004, has gained significant backing in ruling circles in Indonesia and internationally as a result of his free market agenda. However, while the local and international media now promote the new “democracy” in Indonesia, the regime is dominated by the direct beneficiaries and descendants of the right-wing parties and political figures that operated under the Suharto dictatorship. While he attempts to maintain a democratic façade, Yudhoyono retains intimate ties to the TNI.



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