

Indonesian police gun down alleged terrorists

John Roberts
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Indonesian counter-terrorism police shot dead seven alleged terrorists on January 4 and 5. The special police unit involved, Detachment 88 (Densus 88), has now killed at least 70 suspects since it was formed after the 2002 Bali bombings, with 40 of the shootings occurring since 2010.

Police claimed that the men were shot because they posed immediate threats. But even the sketchy accounts of the events provided by the police suggest their justifications for the killings were fabricated.

Two alleged militants were gunned down outside Makassar's Wahidin Hospital in South Sulawesi as they were about to enter a mosque. They fired no shots at police and it is not clear even if they were armed.

Another five were killed, in two separate police attacks during operations against alleged terrorist training camps in the Bima and Dompu districts of West Nusa Tenggara.

Police say that two of these men were shot dead while walking down from high ground from a camp in Dompu, which indicates that the police were ready and waiting. The other three were killed the next day when police raided the camp. Police claimed they were attempting to detonate explosives.

Son Hadi, spokesman for the Jammah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT) Islamist group, accused the police of unlawful killing. His organisation, which police have linked to those killed, and blamed for attacks on police in the area, called for an independent inquiry. JAT was founded by jailed cleric Abu Bakar Bashir.

Police spokesmen flatly defended the killings, and denied any violations of human rights. They insisted that the shootings were in accordance with protocols for dealing with armed groups. To justify the operation, they claimed that the terrorists involved were planning to bomb tourism facilities, and said police had seized small amounts of explosives.

However, Indonesian Commission for Missing

Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) chairman Haris Azhar said it appeared the men were victims of a form of "extra-judicial killing." He pointed out that there had never been an examination of Densus 88 operations, which he said were contributing to the growth of terrorism.

The Densus 88 unit, which receives training and assistance from the US and Australia, has been associated with repression orchestrated by the Indonesian government, including in the Papuan provinces. According to a report last month in the Australian-based *Age* newspaper, Densus 88 is suspected of involvement in the deaths of 22 members of the West Papua National Committee (KNPB) and the disappearance of three others during 2012.

In one of these killings, the Asian Human Rights Commission has evidence that on December 16 KNPB activist Hubertus Mabel was lured to a meeting with plainclothes police, who immediately shot him in the legs.

Within two days of the latest shootings, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono unveiled plans to further boost the police and military apparatus. He presided over a special cabinet meeting at the Bogor Palace on January 7, attended by security ministers and the chiefs of the National Police, the Indonesian military and the National Intelligence Agency.

After the meeting, Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Djoko Suyanto warned of "an escalation in the years ahead" of tensions and security disturbances. In order to meet this "serious challenge," Suyanto said the president had ordered the development of a nationally coordinated plan designed to prevent communal conflicts.

According to the *Jakarta Post* report of the meeting, Yudhoyono said his office was preparing a new decree that would allow "for more drastic measures to deal with security problems throughout the country."

The public statements reported after the Bogor meeting emphasised “communal conflicts” as the main source of tensions. But the government is facing more widespread social discontent as it seeks to impose fuel subsidy cuts on the working class amid renewed demands for wage rises.

After millions of workers went on strike last year in Indonesia over low pay and cost of living increases, the government lifted wage rates and backed away from plans to reduce fuel subsidies.

During 2012, the government spent 300 trillion rupiah (\$US310 million) on the subsidies, designed to keep petrol prices among the lowest in South East Asia, far exceeding the budget provision of 225 trillion rupiah. Premium petrol is priced at 4,500 rupiah per litre (US46 cents).

With the consumption of subsidised fuel predicted to soar in 2013, investors and international financial institutions are demanding that the subsidies be reduced, in order to finance infrastructure projects to meet the needs of foreign investors.

Responding to this pressure last month, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Jero Wacik bluntly stated that the government had yet to consider raising fuel prices, because it wanted to avoid social unrest.

After last year’s strikes and rallies, the government promised substantial increases in the minimum wage—up to 44 percent, to 2.2 million rupiah (\$228) a month, in Greater Jakarta, which accounts for the bulk of Indonesia’s manufacturing and services. So far, 25 of the country’s 33 provinces have approved wage rises but the increases have averaged only 15 percent, and discontent is spreading.

On January 8, Indonesian Forestry and Allied Workers Union president Khoirul Anam warned employers in the palm oil sector that strikes could occur at any time, outside the union’s control, if employers responded to higher wage demands with sackings or reduced benefits.

This week, workers at a Nike-contracted shoe factory in west Java city of Sukabumi said the management had paid military personnel to intimidate them into signing agreements to work for less than the minimum wage. At least six Nike-contracted factories have applied to be exempt from paying the increased rate.

The government’s boosting of the security apparatus is in preparation for the inevitable social unrest that will

follow from deteriorating living standards. The police gunning down of alleged terrorists is a warning to workers of the ruthless methods that will be used to deal with any resistance to austerity measures.



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