

National Interests and Mil-to-Mil Relations with Indonesia

By JOHN B. HASEMAN



Marine conducting weapons familiarization.

AP/Wide World Photo (Guntur Alpin)

The military-to-military relations pursued by the United States and Indonesia in recent years resemble a roller coaster ride. The ups and downs have reflected divergent priorities, which in turn reveal shifts in the strategic environment, international economic integration, and national politics. Issues

have ranged from Cold War policy and human rights to counterterrorism, and from political isolationism and economic disaster to a refusal to understand American imperatives.

Relations are often influenced by short-term trends and political correctness, not underlying national interests. The deliberate prioritization of single issue politics by the United States came at the expense of integrated policies toward Indonesia. Today both parties appear to be moving from a breach in

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The Indonesian Archipelago



military-to-military relations to a cautious policy of reengagement.

National Interests

Indonesia is important for a number of reasons. It is the fourth most populous nation after China, India, and the United States. In the new world environment it assumes greater significance as the largest and most moderate Muslim country. Its sheer size makes it an important market for international trade and investment. Its location between Asia and Australia and between the Pacific and Indian Oceans could create bridges or barriers to global communication. Since the downfall of Soeharto in 1998, it is struggling to become the third largest democracy in the world.

The United States is vital to Jakarta as well. It is a prime destination for exports and source of foreign investment as well as development capital, either bilaterally or through the

American role in international financial institutions.

There is also a symbolic tie between these two multiethnic nations. The United States was a champion of Indonesian independence from the Netherlands after World War II. For this reason and other factors, both countries need relations that are healthy, balanced, and mutually respectful. The military-to-military aspect of that relationship is especially critical because of the role played by the military in Indonesia as the single most effective and strongest element of society. But for over thirty years bilateral relations have risen and fallen according to short-term political priorities.

Strategic Imperatives

The United States and Indonesia had parallel though not congruent strategic imperatives in the last half of

the 1960s and most of the 1970s. Their military establishments held center stage in defining respective national interests. Military-to-military contact flourished. Other issues did not infringe on that relationship in the case of either country.

In the 1960s, the United States was fully engaged in both Vietnam and a broader policy of winning the Cold War. As part of that strategy, Washington sought advantages around the world, forging close relations with democracies and dictatorships if such links would ultimately contribute to its strategic goals. It was essential to have as many friends as possible in Southeast Asia—either through formal military agreements or relations short of formal treaties—to prevent the expansion of Soviet, Chinese, or Vietnamese power and influence.

These American goals matched Indonesian strategic imperatives. During the mid-1960s the military took center



Indonesian antiterrorism exercise.

AP/Wide World Photo (Talan Syllana)

stage after an obscure army officer, Major General Soeharto, rose to power by countering a coup by the *Partei Komunis Indonesia*, or Indonesian Communist Party. While this period remains somewhat ambiguous in light of more recent developments, at the time the situation was clear: Soeharto and the army mobilized the nation to crush the communist movement, removed the first president, and began 32 years of the New Order autocracy.

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Indonesia needed all the assistance it could get to modernize its armed forces, then largely equipped by the Soviet Union. The defeat of the largest communist party outside the Sino-Soviet bloc made Jakarta a natural candidate for military cooperation with Washington. Although Indonesia conducted its foreign affairs as a non-aligned nation, it was closely tied to the United States and the West through economic, political, and defense policies.

The partnership worked. Indonesia used Western-trained economists to repair its shattered economy. It brought about political stability through a highly-structured de facto one-party system and the overwhelming presence of security forces. The army modified its *dwi-fungsi* policy,

which gave it both a defense and social/civic mission, into a tool of control over most aspects of society. The shift from communist dominance of the largest nation in Southeast Asia and southern flank of the region to a nonaligned but pro-Western state enhanced the U.S. strategic situation.

With Soeharto entrenched as a nonaligned but friendly leader, Washington engaged a range of available security arrangements. Military assistance, foreign military sales, and excess defense articles programs provided all kinds of matériel, from uniforms and individual items of equipment to armored vehicles, ships, and planes. The international military education and training (IMET) program trained thousands of personnel from noncommissioned officers to generals.

Between 1966 and 1981, Indonesia acquired *USS Claud Jones*-class destroyers; landing ship tanks; F-5 and OV-10 aircraft; most of its fleet of C-130s; tanks, armored personnel carriers, and reconnaissance vehicles; a major communications network; and transport vehicles. From 1978 to 1981, it received more training dollars than any other nation while sending hundreds of officers to U.S. courses annually. America trained *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI)—the

Indonesian military—in the use of new weapons systems and upgraded intelligence. It was the most comprehensive period of military engagement, particularly for weapons transfers.

Mutual Interests

Indonesia started to have second thoughts about close military ties with the United States. Its leaders counseled restraint, and its army strongman instituted a policy that amounted to learn, but don't copy. General Leonardus Benyamin ("Benny") Moerdani was one of the most powerful, charismatic, and influential officers in the military. In the 1960s, he jumped into West Irian to harass Dutch forces; his advance to the top of ABRI appeared preordained. By the 1980s he controlled the intelligence apparatus, and leadership of the Armed Forces Strategic Intelligence Agency (BAIS) made him second only to President Soeharto. But Moerdani was wary of the close ties with Washington and counseled backing away from the United States.

His influence held sway throughout the 1980s, when he served as head of BAIS and then as ABRI commander in chief. For ten years, contact between the U.S. and Indonesian militaries declined precipitously compared to the previous 15 years. Virtually all mobile training teams were directly related to major weapons purchases. Navy visits were almost unknown.

The 1980s also witnessed change in the IMET program. Student selection policy, which American officers close to Indonesia felt was the most critical component of the military-to-military relationship, was modified. Many students had been selected for their ability and achievement, assuring that the best and brightest future leaders went to the United States. Under Moerdani, the emphasis changed to comparative study, by which officers who graduated from Indonesian schools attended American courses to determine their content and applicability for professional military education in Indonesia. This policy took the best and brightest out of consideration for U.S. schooling because promising officers did not want to forego career-advancing assignments. Thus the typical student changed from being a

Briefing on P-3 capabilities.



U.S. Navy (Paul Lagios)

front-runner for leadership to a professional educator—an important contact, but hardly a way to get to know the future leaders of the armed forces of another country.

This new policy was designed to isolate Indonesian officers from the frustration and envy of exposure to sophisticated weaponry which they could not afford. It recognized that American doctrine and strategy were inappropriate but revealed a lack of faith in the ability of officers to filter out unneeded information while improving ABRI professionalization. Many analysts suggested that Moerdani did not want young officers exposed to concepts like civilian control of the military and democracy in a culturally diverse society.

Though personal military-to-military contact declined in the 1980s, the overall relationship remained good. Free and low cost equipment under the military assistance program had ended, but a booming economy provided funding for the acquisition of major systems such as F-16 fighters, which entered the ABRI inventory in 1989 after several years of planning and negotiation.

Indonesians were frustrated by limitations imposed on them. Many mid-level officers who trained in the United States during the heyday of IMET between 1975 and 1981 bided their time and awaited advancement in rank for an opportunity to exert influence on military policy.

Americans also chafed under restrictions enacted during the Moerdani era. As its economy developed, Indonesia became more important as a regional power. Its strategic location, markets, investment potential, and moderate voice in a growing non-aligned movement made it a major target of American influence, including by the U.S. military. But the 1980s was a decade of little contact with few potential Indonesian leaders attending military schools in the United States, no in-country training teams or exercises, and no naval visits.

Changing Perceptions

Military relations became a priority in 1990. Moerdani had been unceremoniously removed from his position

for criticizing the family of President Soeharto. Mid-ranking Indonesian officers whose contact with the U.S. military had been restricted in the 1980s began assuming top posts in the armed forces. They quickly implemented a long-repressed ABRI desire for more contact with America. And, as promised, they began making changes.

U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) was also anxious to revive professional ties with ABRI. After the loss of naval and air facilities in the Philippines, the command policy of places-not-bases put a high priority on Indonesia.

From 1990 to 1992 the United States and Indonesia conducted dozens of exercises, visits, and other exchanges between their senior military leaders. Every service was involved in areas of mutual interest from computerized gaming for the Indonesian army command and staff school to free-fall parachuting. Americans reveled in the chance to train in a new environment. Indonesians gained confidence when they found they could train as well as their counterparts.

Ship visits expanded, and Indonesia opened its shipyard in Surabaya for en route repairs to American vessels. Senior officers visited headquarters, combat units, schools, and academies. On the strategic level, when Jakarta volunteered the largest national con-

U.S. Pacific Command policy of places-not-bases put a high priority on Indonesia

tingent for U.N. peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, the U.S. Air Force moved one of its armored cavalry units to Cambodia. Both Indonesians and Americans expressed pleasure at the broadly developing relationship, which improved the professionalism and contributed to national and regional objectives in the process.

By the end of 1991 the relationship was progressing on a high level. Although the pace of acquisition had declined because of Indonesian funding constraints and phase-out of military grant aid by the United States, a steady series of mobile training teams, subject matter expert exchanges, ship



visits, and enrollment in respective staff colleges provided ample opportunities for personal and professional contact between the two countries.

East Timor

Indonesia opened East Timor to the outside in 1988, believing it had sufficiently repressed the decades-long Fretilin insurgency and could withstand domestic and international scrutiny. On November 12, 1991 troops fired on unarmed demonstrators at a cemetery in Dili. Hundreds were killed or wounded, and the tragedy was filmed by Western journalists.

The so-called Dili incident became the primary cause for a decline in the bilateral military relationship and in 1999 led to the East Timorese largely voting to seek independence rather than regional autonomy.

A government investigation contradicted the initial military announcement of 19 fatalities in Dili, estimating that fifty had died, while the East Timorese and foreign human rights organizations put the number at more than two hundred. The army appointed an honor council to investigate. For the

first time, ABRI probed the chain of command in East Timor and punished or forced into early retirement five levels of officers, including the military regional commander and a two-star general who had freed a hijacked Garuda Indonesian airliner in Bangkok a decade earlier.

However, the military refused to confirm the number of casualties at Santa Cruz cemetery. The damage to its credibility became an irritant in country-to-country relations. Muted international criticism of the military role in East Timor, which Foreign Minister Ali Alatas had once described as "a pebble in Indonesia's shoe," turned into loud and persistent condemnation of the human rights record in the former Portuguese colony.

Congress halted IMET funding in 1993, ending perhaps the most effective way to influence Indonesian officers on the role of the military in society, civilian control of the armed forces, and professionalism (no IMET alumni were implicated in the Dili incident). Although limited funding continued for several years, the long history of U.S. training and education was on the wane.

Using operational funds not constrained by Congress, PACOM maintained programs that yielded reduced but key contacts. American officers

U.S. readiness training
in East Java.



AP/Wide World Photo (Guntur Alphin)

visited Indonesia and their opposite numbers attended seminars in Hawaii and met with the PACOM leadership. Training enabled the command to keep in touch with counterparts through the 1990s. But the curtailment of education and training was profound, ending attendance at courses in the United States by future ABRI leaders.

But the worst was yet to come. After the events surrounding the fall of President Soeharto, whose rule began in economic turmoil and ended amid economic and political turmoil, the quixotic vice president-turned-president, B.J. Habibie, made a snap decision to give a choice to East Timor of regional autonomy or independence. It was a bad decision, reached without consulting most of his government

and based on years of faulty intelligence that predicted that the Timorese would not exchange their heavily subsidized status for independent penury.

the ill-conceived operation to frighten East Timor ended half a century of fruitful contact

In August 1999, despite months of harassment by military-backed militia, 80 percent chose independence.

There ensued a scorched-earth campaign that was even more brutal than activities waged by militias before the voting. Carefully planned, it featured standard tactics used in black operations over the years. But by then

U.N. personnel and foreign observers with cameras and camcorders, cellular phones, and the internet, as well as a willingness to speak out, revealed the callousness of the campaign and support of the armed forces. International condemnation was swift. Denials were met with open disbelief, and disrepute enveloped the military establishment.

Congress immediately canceled the IMET program, the President halted military sales, and PACOM ended training. Except for diplomatic contact in Jakarta, military-to-military relations stopped. The ill-conceived operation to frighten East Timor into remaining part of Indonesia, and the out-of-control vengeance that followed, ended half a century of fruitful contact.

Single-Issue Policy

The violence perpetrated in East Timor during 1999 had smaller versions elsewhere. The troubled province of Aceh in far northwestern Sumatra has been convulsed by separatists bent on independence and a military determined to maintain national unity, particularly after the loss of East Timor. Sectarian and ethnic violence flared in many areas where pent-up emotions constrained by Soeharto were vented in tragic ways. Civilian casualties numbered in the thousands. The military, smarting from domestic criticism for past human rights abuses, was criticized both for failing to act strongly enough against perpetrators of violence and for being too fierce when it did act.

Meanwhile, Indonesia was dealing with political and economic challenges in its transition from autocracy to democracy. Poised to become the third-largest democracy in the world, Jakarta was receiving U.S. assistance to help its institutions assume a more effective role. Help flowed to

most groups except the military. Widely seen as the most powerful, disciplined, and organized of the nation's elites, the armed forces received virtually no tangible encouragement.

The forces of the largest and most moderate Muslim country became an important player in the global war on

terrorism after 9/11. Counterterrorist cooperation began to trump human rights in the formulation of American policy toward Indonesia. Once again effective military-to-military relations became important to U.S. objectives.

Plans disclosed by the Bush administration in August 2002 and legislation approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee reveal that the United States is planning to provide \$50 million to the Indonesian police and armed forces between 2002 and 2006. Almost all the funding will go to the national police to upgrade their ability to combat terrorism through better intelligence, education and training, and equipment and facilities. The largest amount of approved funding, \$12 million, is earmarked for a counterterrorism unit. Another \$4 million in 2002 funds is intended for training and \$31 million will be provided in FY03 and FY04 for training and modernization.

Although the police were a fourth branch of the armed forces prior to 1999, legislation and policy prevented using military assistance programs for constabularies, a reaction to human rights atrocities in Latin America. Undertrained, underfunded, and undermanned, the national police are woefully unprepared to assume an internal security mission.

The assistance for the police stands in stark comparison to programs for *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI)—Indonesian National Defense Forces.¹ A compromise has been forged between senior administration officials seeking a full restoration of military ties and a gradual approach that respects human rights. Yet the level of assistance is modest and reflects continuing discontent with a lack of progress on human rights accountability and military behavior in Indonesia.

In a visit to the region in August 2002, the Secretary of State said that the United States is:

starting down a path to a more normal relationship with respect to military-to-military [cooperation with Indonesia]. We are not there yet but we are starting. [Congress] is watching carefully and expecting action to be taken with respect to past abuses. . . . Much more will have to

happen in the months ahead as we watch the performance of the TNI and as we make sure that problems that appeared in the past, where accountability has still yet to be placed, will be dealt with. We will measure this and this will assist us in taking the case for further support to our Congress.

Legislation before Congress includes revised conditions to be met prior to restoring military ties. Whereas the Leahy amendment had eight conditions, the new act contains three that must be satisfied before sales of weaponry and full military assistance funding is extended.

The conditions remain focused on accountability for past human rights abuses. If enacted by the Senate and House, the legislation requires the President to certify that progress is being made in three areas. First, the Minister of Defense must suspend military personnel regardless of rank who were “credibly alleged” to have committed, or aided militia groups that committed, gross human rights violations. That has never happened, although some personnel were forced from the military after judicial proceedings or internal investigations.

The government, with the cooperation of the military, must prosecute and punish the guilty parties in order to meet the second condition. This stipulation was clearly made with an eye toward ongoing human rights proceedings in Jakarta. Unfortunately, prosecuting the most egregious cases has been extraordinarily and perhaps deliberately inept. The first trials found the former governor of East Timor guilty of not controlling subordinates but found all military and police defendants not guilty. These results bode ill for future military assistance.

A third condition calls upon the Minister of Defense to make the TNI budget—including its huge business empire—open to public scrutiny. Although the military is making its internal budget process more transparent, the details of its business dealings are closely guarded secrets.

The administration has provided \$4 million (out of a total of \$17 million) in fellowships for counterterrorism training and education. These

funds have been approved by Congress and are not subject to Leahy amendment restrictions. The first five participants will attend a 15-month course at the Naval Postgraduate School. The training fits the challenging domestic security environment faced by Indonesia, which includes separatist movements in Aceh and Irian Jaya and a profusion of religious and ethnic conflicts across the archipelago. The proposed legislation would make up to \$400,000 available for IMET participation. This will be the first time since 1999 that Indonesia is receiving funds for this program.

Washington apparently hopes that a major assistance program for the Indonesian police and the possibility of a similar program for the armed forces, together with resumption of international education and training and counterterrorism fellowships, a lowered barrier in budget reforms, and accountability for past human rights abuses, will encourage the military to continue reforms. Then the two countries can normalize military-to-military relations including arms sales. The Indonesian navy and air force are in a very precarious state because of an inability to procure spare parts.

It remains to be seen whether human rights trials can meet congressional requirements and a more transparent TNI budget system can be implemented. But repairing the military-to-military relationship between the United States and Indonesia sooner rather than later will serve the interests of both countries. **JFQ**

NOTE

¹ Beginning in the 1960s, the armed forces were called Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI). After the downfall of Soeharto, the national police were removed and the military was symbolically renamed *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI). Both abbreviations are used here depending on the period.