

IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

Aiding and abetting

A proposal currently before the United States Congress could see military aid to Indonesia cut by 25 percent unless further reforms are made. But the plans have been greeted with a distinct lack of interest by the senior heads of the armed forces here.

The bill, which is due to be ratified in September this year, would see US military aid reduced from US\$8 million to US\$6 million in 2008 unless three conditions are met. These include bringing General (ret.) Wiranto to trial for human rights abuses in East Timor and evidence of serious efforts to bring military businesses under state control.

However, it seems highly unlikely these conditions will be met anytime soon. Despite a 2004 law that requires all military businesses to be handed over to the state by 2009 there has so far been little progress. According to a top-ranking military source, the government team that was set up in 2004 to officially record the thousands of military businesses was disbanded one year later after “regional commanders refused to provide information on the companies.”

In view of such non-compliance, it was then considered necessary for the president to issue a decree to give a new team more authority. “The decree has already been drafted,” Harry Prihantono, of Indonesian military watchdog Propatria, told the *Report*, “but until now it has been sitting in the State Secretariat just waiting for President Yudhoyono’s signature.”

In the meantime, it seems that moves are afoot to water down the 2004 legislation on military businesses with some fancy interpretive footwork. Defense Minister Juwono told a press conference on June 11 that only six companies had met the criteria for classification as military businesses. It is now unclear what will happen to the other 1,500 concerns earlier classified as military businesses along with the armed forces numerous money-making foundations and cooperatives.

Bringing Wiranto to trial for human rights abuses in East Timor in 1999 is even less likely. A special government team, KPP HAM, was mandated in 1999 to investigate the murder of hundreds of pro-independence East Timorese by the Indonesian military. According to one former member, the investigation, which was never made public, had Wiranto’s name at the top of the list of perpetrators. But after the list was handed over to the Attorney General’s Office, Wiranto’s name mysteriously disappeared.

“Some of us [the Commission members] questioned why Wiranto’s name had been dropped,” the source told the *Report*. “We were told that there was a ‘political deal’ involving Wiranto, President [Abdurrahman Wahid] and the Attorney General not to prosecute him if he agreed to resign from his post as coordinating minister of political and security affairs.” Wiranto resigned from his ministerial post just seven months after being appointed.

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With the process of regaining control over military businesses stalled and Wiranto seemingly untouchable, there seems little chance the Congress' conditions will be met and a cut in military aid avoided. So why are military heads here so unperturbed?

Head of the Indonesian Air Forces, Djoko Suyanto, has recently said there are plenty of other countries that could provide military aid to Indonesia. But the military establishment here also knows that, in the wake of 9/11, such moves by the US are little more than rhetoric.

Prihantono insists that US military hardware will continue to flood into Indonesia no matter what laws are passed. "When hundreds of weapons were found at Koesmayadi's house last year, many of them were from the US," he said, referring to the secret stash of weapons found in a retired general's house after his death. "They were all new weapons, which means that they were bought from US [arms dealers] even though there was a ban on the sale of military weapons to Indonesia at the time."

An International Consortium of Investigative Journalists report, "Collateral Damage: Human Rights and US Military Aid after 9/11," points out that it is virtually impossible to track all of the funds from the US government to foreign militaries because of the sheer number and range of different programmes. The research found that US aid to the Indonesian military increased by over US\$100 million in the three years after 9/11 compared with the previous three years, even though there was officially an embargo during that time.

US aid to the security forces undoubtedly helped strengthen Indonesia's ability to deal with terrorism. Although the team which recently caught two leaders of Jemaah Islamiyah is a police unit, it is heavily dependent on military intelligence. But continuing to channel military aid and ignoring widespread human rights abuses by the armed forces effectively undercuts any leverage the US has with Indonesia over military reform. This leaves a Catch-22 situation where an unchecked military contributes to the radicalization of sections of the population.

Muddy waters

As the Sidoarjo mudflow drags on, the *Report* has learned a new organisation is preparing to step into the fray. According to a reliable source, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) is preparing an investigation into claims that Lapindo misappropriated some of the money it was supposed to have paid villagers affected by the mudflow. The suspicion is that the company used a portion of the funds to silence government agencies charged with investigating the cause of the mess.

If the investigation bears fruit, it could spell the end of Lapindo's push to have the mudflow declared a national disaster, a move that would have made the government solely responsible for compensation. The Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) recently estimated that the clean-up costs could run as high as Rp 32 trillion (US\$3.5 billion).