

Those Washington Bullets Again

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Tim Shorrock, In These Times:

The Bush administration and the Pentagon are leveraging warmer post-tsunami relations with Indonesia to convince Congress to lift its restrictions on full military ties with the world's largest Muslim nation...

The administration's push began in January, when Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz visited Aceh province, where an estimated 220,000 people were killed by the tsunami. The U.S. military relief effort marked the highest level of U.S.-Indonesian cooperation since 1991, when Congress imposed a ban on U.S. training of Indonesian officers under the State Department's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Upon his return, Wolfowitz urged Congress to reevaluate the IMET restrictions. "We can have more positive influence that way," he told PBS's "Online News Hour."...

Last November, Human Rights Watch said it had "substantial evidence" that Indonesian security forces "have engaged in extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances, torture, beatings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and drastic limits on freedom of movement in Aceh."...

After her televised confirmation hearings, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Congress that the administration is "currently evaluating whether to issue the required determination." But she was unequivocal on the training funds. "IMET for Indonesia is in the U.S. interest," she said in a written response to questions posed to her by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.). IMET, she added, will "strengthen the professionalism of military officers, especially with respect to the norms of democratic civil-military relations such as transparency, civilian supremacy, public accountability and respect for human rights."

Uh, yeah. Close ties with the U.S. did wonders for "professionalism" and "norms of democratic civil-military relations" among the officer cadres of the Salvadoran Atlacatl Battalion and Honduran Bttn 3-16, who had the benefit of the "positive influence" of the School of the Americas. Especially when U.S. foreign policy is currently under the sway of humanitarians like John

Negroponete and Richard Armitage, for whom “extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances, torture, beatings, arbitrary arrests and detentions,” etc., are more a feature than a bug. Indeed, the Bush State Department is packed with purveyors of fraternal aid to death squads in the ‘80s. As Justin Raimondo wrote,

The inheritors of the death-squads franchise (Central American division) have a lot of affinity for the Bushies, considering that so many of the latter are veterans of the Iran-Contra scandal: Eliot Abrams is now doing to the Middle East what he did to Central America in the 1980s. Current Bush administration officials Richard Armitage, John Poindexter, Roger Noriega, and Otto Reich are all alumni of Death Squad U. Having perfected their course materials, they are teaching Iraqis – and American soldiers – the basics of “counter-insurgency” techniques, updated for the post-9/11 era.

Come to think of it, Indonesia itself at one time was something of a showpiece for American military assistance to Third World armed forces. The U.S. had had decidedly frosty relations with Indonesia’s Sukarno at least since the late 1950s, with a foreign policy aimed at isolating and destabilizing his regime in much the same way that Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez has been targeted in the past few years. Sukarno was a left-wing nationalist who had led Indonesia’s postwar struggle for independence from the Netherlands. But he was hardly a communist—as indicated by his suppression of the Indonesian Communist Party following independence. By the late ‘50s, however, his coalition government included communists, and (like Chavez) he continued talking to countries that the U.S. regarded as pariahs. It’s hard to avoid the strong suspicion that Sukarno’s threat to U.S. “national security” had less to do with any communist sympathies than with his economic nationalism and his leadership role in the non-aligned movement. But “communist,” in the U.S. national security community’s lexicon, usually refers to anybody who menaces the land-holdings of United Fruit Company or threatens to nationalize the oil industry. In the case of Sukarno, who nationalized the country’s oil deposits not long before the coup, the latter may have been an especially strong consideration.

In any case, in 1965 the Indonesian army overthrew Sukarno, and in the ensuing months massacred hundreds of thousands of “communists” (although the distinction between “communist” and “leftist” or even “union organizer” is rather squishy, among people of a practical bent like those involved in Suharto’s coup). What’s interesting, though, is that the helpful folks at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta provided the military with as many as 5,000 names for their roundup list. The list was “a detailed who’s-who” of the PKI (Communist Party) leadership, including “provincial, city and other local PKI committee members, and leaders of the ‘mass organizations,’ such as the PKI national labor federation, women’s and youth groups.” [Kathy Kadane, *San Francisco Examiner*, May 20, 1990]

As evidence that the U.S. leadership saw the coup and its aftermath as a payoff for American ties to the Indonesian military, consider this 1966 exchange between Bob McNamara and Senator Sparkman in hearings before the Foreign Relations Committee [Miles Wolpin, *Military Aid and Counterrevolution in the Third World* (Toronto and London: Lexington Books, 1972), p. 8]:

Senator Sparkman. At a time when Indonesia was kicking up pretty badly—when we were getting a lot of criticism for continuing military aid—at that time we could not say what that military aid was for. Is it secret any more?

Secretary McNamara. I think, in retrospect, that the aid was well justified.

Senator Sparkman. You think it paid dividends?

Secretary McNamara. I do, sir.

My goodness, what drollery! What's that, Mr. Bones, you think it paid dividends? Yes indeed, yes indeed, I surely do! Hyuk, hyuk, hyuk!

Indonesia was far from the only case in which the U.S. maintained close ties to the military forces of a country whose political leadership it regarded as an enemy. In Chile, for example, the American government's attitude toward the civilian government was expressed in Ambassador's warning that "Not a nut or bolt shall reach Chile under Allende. Once Allende comes to power we shall do all within our power to condemn Chile and all Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty." And the aim of the Nixon administration, once Allende came to power, was expressed in more colorful terms: "make the economy scream." [Holly Sklar, "Overview, in Sklar, ed., *Tri-lateralism* (Boston: South End Press, 1980), pp. 28–29] But meanwhile, U.S. military aid to the Chilean armed forces continued unabated. And we all know how *that* turned out.

U.S. aid to Third World military forces, as its advocates have made clear for decades, is predicated on a "clear distinction between building up or cultivating the friendship of an army, on one hand, and supporting that army's government." [Wolpin, p. 20] For example, as DOD Undersecretary Nutter explained to Representative Fraser in 1971 hearings [Ibid. pp. 17–18], assistance to foreign military forces did not always aim at increasing the internal security of the countries involved:

Mr. Fraser. In some of those countries, we are providing assistance to the side that has seized the power.

Secretary Nutter... We feel it is extremely important to maintain our relations with the people who are in positions of influence in those countries so we can help influence the course of events in those countries...

Mr. Fraser. In your judgment, [national security of the United States] means internal stability in those countries, is that right?

Secretary Nutter. Not always. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it does not. It means maintaining our influence in some areas of the world that are critical to our security. It means helping to promote, as best we can, the developments that are most in our national interest, but that does not necessarily mean providing for the internal security of those countries.

The NSC paper "Overseas Internal Defense Policy" (August 1962) stated [Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 133]:

A change brought about through force by non-communist elements may be preferable to prolonged deterioration of governmental effectiveness... It is U.S. policy, when it is in the U.S. interest, to make the local military and police advocates of democracy and agents for carrying forward the development process.

See, the military and police, in their capacity as “advocates of democracy,” are to bring about change through force—no doubt planned in the Ministry of Love. So we should keep in mind that when people like Dr. Rice refer to “norms of democratic civil-military relations,” they may be using those terms with connotations we’re not entirely accustomed to.

In context, it becomes quite clear that “national security” had (and continues to have) more to do with economic control over resources and markets, and their integration into a transnational corporate political-economic framework, than with defense against a military threat. Consider the following list of political targets of the Military Assistance Program, compiled by Miles Wolpin from U.S. national security community’s literature [p. 19]:

...neutrality; leftist revolution; forces of disruption; nationalism; radical African states; home-grown insurgents; preventing or eliminating insurgencies inimical to U.S. interests; political instability; extremist elements; political dissidents; insurgents and their allies, other extremists, radical elements; militant radicals; revolutions; Arab nationalism; revolutionary ideas; leftist, ultranationalist, anti-American, Nasser-type group.

And Methodists!

The central enemy was not “communism” or a potential strategic alliance with the Soviet bloc, but “obstructive nationalism” that threatened the “free world’s” control of resources needed for its “security.” [Ibid. p. 22]

Robert Porter, Southern Command CINCPAC, in 1968 described the Military Assistance Program as an insurance policy for private investments in Latin America. In an address to the Pan-American Society in New York City, he said [Ibid. p. 23]:

Many of you gentlemen are leaders and policy makers in the businesses and industries that account for the huge American private investment in Latin America... You can help produce a climate conducive to more investment and more progressive American involvement in the hemisphere...

As a final thought, consider the small amount of U.S. public funds that have gone for military assistance and for AID public safety projects as a very modest insurance policy protecting our vast private investment in an area of tremendous trade and strategic value to our country.

As McNamara (or Rice) might put it, it pays dividends.

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