

Anti-Terror Operations Terrorize Indonesia and Southeast Asia

by Michael Billington

While more than 100 official investigators from around the world have converged on the island of Bali in Indonesia, there is still no determination of who was responsible for the bomb which killed nearly 200 tourists and workers there on Oct. 12. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, several bombings in the southern city of Zamboanga, Mindanao Province, are presumed to be the work of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist gang, but the source of a bus bomb in Manila is still a mystery. Bombs in southern Thailand targeted Buddhist temples and schools.

However, the campaign being waged against the economies and the sovereignty of Indonesia and the Philippines by the United States, Britain, and especially Australia, under the guise of “anti-terrorist” demands, may prove to be more deadly than the bloody bombings themselves. And the rest of Southeast Asia is not immune to “contagion” from the international attack on Indonesia and the Philippines. In the context of the Bush Administration’s “New Strategic Policy” of pre-emptive, unilateral warfare, the West’s demands under the rubric of counter-terrorism are the source of great concern throughout the region. The impact on the regional economies, coming in the midst of a global financial crisis, will likely prove to be more destructive than the 1997-98 speculative assault known as the “Asia crisis”—the global financial crisis which broke out in Asia—from which the region has yet to recover.

While insisting that democratic reforms of the past years be scrapped in favor of draconian “Ashcroft-style” police-state measures, the U.S., British, and Australian governments and their press outlets are also poisoning the environment for international travel and investment in the region. Within days of the bombing, Australia advised all of its citizens to leave Indonesia—a total of about 10,000 people. The United States and Britain issued similar warnings, and all three then issued a security alert for all of Southeast Asia, with the Philippines and Thailand given special notice.

A commentary in the Oct. 23 *New Straits Times* of Malaysia by Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, the editor-in-chief of the New Straits Times Group, captured the sentiment in official circles across the region. He wrote that the West is over-reacting: “Scaremongering doesn’t just frighten tourists and

expatriates, but affects investment and trade. . . . Instead of turning the entire region into a war zone, the West should rebuild confidence and encourage the political stability and economic growth that are the only antidote for the poison of extremist terrorism. [Indonesian] President Megawati Sukarnoputri should be helped, not derided.”

There is a run on currencies and equity investments across the region, in a situation where direct foreign investment had already dried up because of the global financial-economic crisis.

The ‘Decoy’

Massive international attention has been focussed on the demand that Indonesia arrest one man, the Islamic cleric Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. After the Bali bombing, the *Jakarta Post* editorialized that Ba’asyir was “a diversion, or even a decoy,” while “the real operatives, whoever they may be, were quietly plotting the attacks.” Under intense pressure, Indonesia did take steps to arrest Ba’asyir, at least for questioning, in regard to the infamous church bombings in December 2000, and other, prior acts, but *not* for the Bali bombing (despite such a claim in most Western press accounts). His arrest is based on the accusations of one Omar al-Faruq, who had been arrested in Indonesia and turned over to the United States, where, after three months of coercive interrogation, he made the accusations against Ba’asyir.

The government has also partially given in to the demand for an emergency decree, allowing warrantless arrest and detention without trial for suspected terrorists. Abdul Ghani, the Director General for Laws and Regulations, tried to reassure the population, which fears as much a return to dictatorial rule as it does the threat of terrorism: “There should be no worries that the decree will be a return to the old days—there are a lot of conditionalities imposed, including on detention and arrest.” Ba’asyir was moved from his home town (where he had been hospitalized) in Solo, near Yogyakarta, to Jakarta, for questioning and probable detention, but thousands of his students and supporters protested the move.

Ba’asyir was not arrested under the new decree, but under previously existing laws. The fact that Indonesia is unwilling to submit to the (formerly “pro-democracy”) West in its de-

mand for police-state measures, was reflected in the fact that the nation's most famous civil rights lawyer, Adnan Buyung Nasution, founder of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, who has been praised in the West for his stand against repressive laws under the Suharto regime, has joined Ba'asyir's defense team. A team of 35 lawyers have joined Nasution, including a former justice minister, a legislator, and law professors. "From the beginning, we see abnormalities in the way this case is handled. That's why we join the team without regard for religion, ethnicity, or political background," said Nasution.

C4 Plastic Explosive

The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) has several dozen agents in Indonesia working on the Bali bombing. Although Indonesia has welcomed the assistance from foreign intelligence agencies, they have insisted (with only partial success) that Indonesian police remain in overall charge of the investigation. When the *Australian Financial Review* announced on Oct. 22 that ASIO would be setting up a permanent office in Indonesia to beef up regional anti-terror operations following the Bali bombing, the Indonesian government immediately rejected the move. Marty Natalegawa, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that it would be impossible for any foreign country to open an independent intelligence office in Indonesia, and that, at most, a liaison officer could be posted to the Australian Embassy.

The prominent role of Australia, the United States, and Britain in the investigation warrants careful scrutiny. For example, Indonesian investigators reported soon after the bombing that the plastic explosive C4 had been used, and noted that C4 is not produced in Indonesia, nor is it used by the Indonesian military. An Arab intelligence source with excellent connections in Indonesia told *EIR* that Indonesian officials had traced the C4 to Israeli production. But on Oct. 22 the Australian investigators reported that the explosive was not C4, but ammonium nitrate. This fits nicely with the Australian and American effort to pin the bombing on Jemaah Islamiah (the generic name given to the Southeast Asian groups that are involved or accused of involvement in the recent terror wave, supposedly with ties to al-Qaeda), because individuals associated with Jemaah Islamiah in the Philippines and in Malaysia were reported to have purchased ammonium nitrate last year. Western intelligence agencies have attempted to pin the blame on Jemaah Islamiah from the moment of the Bali explosion.

In keeping with this presumption, the Australians and the United States succeeded in placing Jemaah Islamiah on the UN's list of terrorist organizations, while the United States and Australia added it to their own lists. It is impossible to miss the similarity between the presumption of Jemaah Islamiah's responsibility for Bali, and the presumption following 9/11 that al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden were fully responsi-

ble for the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks—a presumption which has severely hampered the investigation.

Australia tried to go even further on Oct. 24, when Defense Minister Robert Hill told the press that Australian military forces may be deployed "to tackle this joint enemy" in Indonesia, much the way that U.S. troops have been deployed into the Philippines. Indonesia quickly rejected any such potential. Proud of having won a revolutionary war against Dutch occupation in the 1940s, the Indonesians have repeatedly stressed that the ongoing U.S. military operations in the Philippines will not be repeated in Indonesia, neither by the United States nor by its "deputy sheriff" in Asia, Australia.

On the sidelines of the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Mexico on Oct. 28, U.S. State Department thug Richard Armitage removed any doubt that some elements within the American government "war party" were itching to get U.S. or Australian troops into Indonesia. "Until Indonesia is a safe place for citizens of my country to go about official and unofficial business, we're going to be hectoring the government of Indonesia to step up to their responsibilities. At the same time, we are willing to provide any assistance they might request." Armitage said that President George Bush told President Megawati Sukarnoputri, in a private meeting, "You've got a tough job coming," which Armitage translated into: "We've got to rip these terrorists out, root and branch. Got to grab them by their throat, and rip them out of society. Our society, Indonesian society, and any societies in which they live. And all of us have got a lot more to do. Having a general policy against terrorism is one thing. Actually realizing that the problem exists in your society and that it's very virulent, and that you have to, as I say, rip it out root and branch, is another thing."

Armitage encouraged the "ramboism" of Australian Prime Minister John Howard, the only head of government at APEC who has allied with the United States for a unilateral attack on Iraq. Armitage encouraged the Australians not to accept any geographical limits to their participation in "great global endeavors." He concluded his tirade: "They're still alive and out there. . . . So, my own view is you'd better strap on your chin strap and get ready for this."

Prime Minister Howard is more than willing to accept the assignment. He has used the Bali atrocity as justification for ramming through police-state measures, allowing the Australian government to charge anyone associated with Ba'asyir—despite the fact that Ba'asyir has not been convicted of any crimes—with severe penalties, including life imprisonment. In the same fascist mold, Howard took steps toward declaring colonial-style extraterritoriality in Indonesia. *The Age* reported on Oct. 25 that Howard "has taken direct control of counter-terrorism measures, announcing a new law to enable the Bali bombing culprits and other overseas terrorists to be tried in Australia." The legislation will operate retroactively from Oct. 1.