

Obama supports civilian killing, 'Balibo 5' murderers -- Kopassus!

by Allan Nairn via tembak aja - CommonDreams *Monday, Mar 22 2010, 7:10am*

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According to senior Indonesian officials, Indonesian police and details from government files, the US-backed Indonesian armed forces (TNI), now due for fresh American aid, assassinated a series of civilian activists during 2009. The killings were part of a secret government program, authorized from Jakarta, and were coordinated in part by an active-duty, US-trained Kopassus special forces General who has just acknowledged on the record that his TNI men had a role in the killings.

The news comes as US President Barack Obama is reportedly due to announce that he is reversing longstanding US policy - imposed by Congress in response to grassroots pressure - of restricting categories of US assistance to TNI, a force which, during its years of US training, has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

The revelation could prove problematic for Obama since his rationale for restoring the aid has been the claim that TNI no longer murders civilians. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Congress that the the issue is whether there is a "resumption" of atrocities, but, in fact, they have not stopped: TNI still practices political murder.

A senior Indonesian official who meets frequently with top commanders and with the President of Indonesia says that the assassinations were authorized by "higher ups in Jakarta." He provided detailed accounts of certain aspects of the program, including the names of victims, the methods, and the names of some perpetrators.

The details cited in this piece were verified by other officials, including senior members of POLRI, the Indonesian national police. Some were also verified by the Kopassus General who helped run the killings.

The senior official spoke because he said he disagreed with the assassinations. He declined to be quoted by name out of fear for his position and personal safety.

Verified details that are known so far concern a series of assassinations and bombings in Aceh -- on Indonesia's western tip -- where local elections were being contested by the historically pro-independence Partai Aceh (PA), a descendant of the old pro-independence GAM (Free Aceh) rebel movement.

At least eight PA activists were assassinated in the run-up to the April elections. The killings were, according to the officials with knowledge of the program an attempt to disorient PA supporters and pressure the party to not discuss independence -- an act regarded as proscribed speech, not just in Aceh but across Indonesia under edicts from the country's president, Gen. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

One of the PA activists, Tumijan, age 35, a palm oil worker from Nagan Raya, was abducted and found two days later in a sewage ditch. His throat was slit, his body mutilated and bound with electrical wire. His corpse appeared near an army outpost. Some of his family blamed the security

forces, and, as has happened frequently in such cases, started receiving anonymous death threats.

Another PA activist, Dedi Novandi, age 33, known as Abu Karim, was sitting in his car outside his house with the drivers' side window cracked open when a plainclothes man strolled up with a pistol and put two bullets in his head. A POLRI official with detailed knowledge of the crime called it a professional killing, employing lookouts and advance surveillance of the movements of Abu Karim.

As it happened, hours earlier, Karim had sat down with a member of a World Bank - sponsored delegation and expressed his worry about the pre-election killings of PA people as well as a skein of arson and grenade attacks on PA offices.

Soon after, the BBC came to the scene of the Abu Karim murder. Their correspondent, Lucy Williamson quoted one of the neighbors as saying that she "thinks it strange the police have not found the people who killed [Abu Karim]. 'Maybe it's because there were no witnesses,' she said. 'And I think it's weird that there were no witnesses but what can I say? Everyone said they didn't see anything.' "

"Inside the house," Williamson continued, "Abu Karim's wife, Cut Dede, watches nervously over her four-year-old son. Like many people here she is in no doubt this was a political killing."

In fact, according to the senior official and the others who confirmed him, the Tumijan and Abu Karim murders were part of the TNI assassination program coordinated on the provincial level at that time by General Sunarko, the PANGDAM Aceh (chief of TNI forces in the region).

Sunarko had recently been sent to Aceh by the President, Gen. Susilo, after having been the nationwide commander of Kopassus, the TNI Special Forces. Prior to that, Gen. Sunarko had been the chief of staff of Kostrad, the TNI army's huge Strategic Reserve Command that operates across the archipelago and is headquartered in Jakarta near the presidential palace.

Sunarko had been elevated to these key posts after overseeing militias in occupied Timor. He was a Kopassus intelligence chief there during the 1999 TNI terror, an operation that included mass arson and assassinations and was launched while the East Timorese were preparing to -- and ultimately did -- vote for independence.

The '09 PA killings occurred across Aceh. The Abu Karim murder, in Bireuen, was said by the officials to have been managed for Gen. Sunarko by Lt. Col. R. Suharto, the local TNI army commander, using troops aided by civilians from the old military-sponsored FORKAB and PETA militias.

Lt. Col. Suharto has long worked with the TNI's BAIS intelligence unit, which played an integral role in these assassinations and others nationwide, and is famous for its killings and torture in formerly occupied Timor and, currently, in de facto occupied Papua.

When I asked knowledgeable POLRI officials about Lt. Col. Suharto and the killing of Abu Karim, they became as nervous as the neighbors cited in the BBC report.

They reluctantly discussed his role, but privately. We then went on the record and I asked whether Lt. Col. Suharto had in fact run the Abu Karim and other assassinations, and further asked whether he was among those still running "black operations." The key POLRI official did not deny anything but instead said "I cannot comment on that," and then insisted that his name not be attached to even that remark.

On Friday, around 10:30 pm Western Indonesia Time, I called Lt. Col. Suharto's cell phone.

There was no answer so I sent a text message and he replied by text asking who it was. I told him and we began a text message exchange that lasted until after midnight. In the midst of the texts I tried to call him five times, but each time he merely let the phone ring.

By text, Lt. Col Suharto asked me where I was, and then, how I'd gotten his number. He asked me why I wanted to speak to him. I replied, to discuss the PA assassinations, including that of Abu Karim. Suharto wrote back that that was a police matter. I asked him if TNI did the killings. Lt. Col. Suharto replied no, so then I asked by text "So, does that mean you know who the killers are?" He said no to that too, so then I asked him "So how can you know TNI wasn't involved?"

At that point, Lt. Col. Suharto disconnected his cell phone. I tried to call but got a phone company recording. I then sent a text message asking whether he, Lt. Col. Suharto, was "involved in the murder of Abu Karim, or the murders of other PA activists." Phone company signaling indicates that that message was delivered, but as of now, more than 51 hours later, Lt. Col. Suharto has not replied.

Militia members have said that Lt. Col Suharto's men also burnt and threw grenades at the PA offices.

But all this was apparently only one small part of the operation.

In Nagan Raya, in another part of Aceh, the snatching and assassination of Tumijan was carried out by another TNI team, also working under Gen. Sunarko. This is according to numerous officials, including some from POLRI, and, in part, according to Gen. Sunarko himself.

In the Tumijan murder the evidence includes not just statements by inside officials, but also a complex series of actions including the unpublicized detention of some of the low-level hit men who were subordinates of Gen. Sunarko.

The senior Indonesian official who first spoke of the assassination program said that Tumijan had been taken and finished by a group of young Kopassus and other soldiers who, as in the Abu Karim case, also used civilians from TNI's old militias.

He gave the names of some of them, the soldiers Capt. Wahyu and Oktavianus, and the civilian TNI-run militia followers Muhyari, Supardi, Kadir, Herwan, M. Yasin, Suprayogi, Tahmid, and Suparno. He then made the remarkable claim that though no outsider yet knew it, these lower-ranking killers of Tumijan had been secretly detained and held for many months as part of a sensitive political deal involving POLRI, TNI, and officials who had unexpectedly gotten wind of certain aspects of the still-secret TNI assassination program.

POLRI, he, said, agreed to take the militiamen, the military police handled two of the soldiers, and the officials who had stumbled upon the operation agreed to not discuss it publicly, as did the POLRI which never announced the detentions or attempted to charge the men.

Most importantly, the detentions were confined to street operatives in just one of the murders. The more senior officers were left untouched to continue the operation.

POLRI officials I spoke to confirmed the senior official's account. But they did so with evident reluctance, even fear. They made it clear that they had no intention of going after the "higher ups in

Jakarta," or Gen. Sunarko, -- or even Lt. Col. Suharto, who is a mere local commander.

POLRI also kills and tortures civilians, and mounts joint task forces with TNI, but they are fierce institutional rivals, wrestling for money, power, and extortion turf, and though POLRI has recently ascended somewhat, TNI still has more guns and cash, and they lack POLRI's political burden of having to claim that they're enforcing the murder laws.

On Thursday, I reached the Aceh POLRI commander, Police Gen. Aditya, on his cell phone, and though he first said he would only speak privately, face to face, and then tried to end the conversation, he did confirm -- for the first time publicly -- that the lower level hit men in the Tumijan assassination had indeed been detained.

When I asked him if it was true that TNI Gen. Sunarko had in fact supervised assassinations of activists, Police Gen. Aditya replied "It is not in my capacity to disclose that information," and abruptly hung up the phone.

On Friday, I reached Gen. Sunarko on his cell phone and asked him about the assassinations, and Sunarko acknowledged that his TNI men had a role in the killings.

But he said that assassinations by TNI officers and men should not necessarily be classified as being official acts of TNI "as an institution." Gen. Sunarko was remarkably calm.

Though it was not yet public, he knew about the detention of his subordinates for the Tumijan murder (Gen. Sunarko raised the matter before I mentioned it), but the General indicated that he was not worried about any follow-up action by POLRI or other authorities.

Gen. Sunarko seemed familiar with the Tumijan killing, and said that Capt. Wahyu and Oktavianus, two of those detained, had worked for his, Sunarko's, then-headquarters in Aceh, the Iskandar Muda regional KODAM (the command covering all of Aceh).

When I asked specifically if he, Gen. Sunarko, was involved in the assassinations, he responded lightheartedly: "That would be the work of a crazy person," he said, "and I am not yet crazy."

When I asked Gen. Sunarko about his subordinate, Lt. Col. Suharto, he said that he knew him well, but when I asked him if Lt. Col. Suharto had run the killing of Abu Karim, Gen. Sunarko replied "I don't know," but then added: "If that had happened, I'd know."

General Sunarko also said, before I broached the matter of the assassinations, that he was an enthusiastic supporter of President Obama's plan to boost aid to Kopassus and to TNI generally.

Sunarko said that the US and TNI had had a long, close partnership that had "raised the capacity of TNI," and that Obama's restoration of aid would make for "a still more intimate ("akrab") collaboration."

The general said that he was himself was a longtime colleague and admirer of US forces, having received US training at various sites in Indonesia "many times" since the 1980s.

Using the English-language names of some of the courses and of the US units that gave them, he said that US Army instructors in Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) from the Pentagon's Pacific Command (PACOM, in Hawaii) had trained him in "Jungle Warfare" and "Logistics" as well as in other subjects that he did not name. He said that his US training included special exercises in 1994

and 1998, and that his fellow TNI trainees included other Kopassus and Kostrad men. Gen. Sunarko said his most recent US training was in 2006, when he was the chief of staff of Kostrad, soon to become the Kopassus commander.

The general also suggested that the training was good for the Americans too, since it enabled TNI and the US military to "learn lessons from each other," and best situated the US to "get what it needs" from TNI.

President Obama had been due to leave for Indonesia today, but the visit has been postponed. Still on the table is a big aid package for TNI, negotiated over recent months, the political centerpiece of which is an apparent renewal of open aid for Kopassus.

Though most every unit of TNI (and POLRI) has been implicated in mass atrocities, those of Kopassus are the most celebrated, and, as their former commander, the US-trained Gen. Prabowo, once told me, they have historically been the unit most closely identified with Washington. It was thus especially galling to TNI when US activists -- myself included -- were able to successfully press Congress to interrupt US aid to Kopassus in the 1990s .

Obama's planned give-back of aid to Kopassus is now awaited by TNI as sweet vindication, and by many of the survivors of TNI terror as America's green light for more.

But, as with most of the other atrocities by TNI, the assassination program reported in this piece involves multiple TNI components beyond Kopassus: Kopassus, but also BAIS intelligence and the mainline regional and local commands, KODAM, KOREM, and KODIM, all of them, most importantly, reporting ultimately to the national TNI commanders and other "higher ups in Jakarta."

And regardless of whether the US restores the aid for Kopassus, TNI as a whole already has the green light.

2,800 TNI men are now reportedly being trained in the US (this according to Indonesia's Defense Minister; see Olivia Rondonuwu and Ed Davies, "Interview -- Indonesia Sees U.S. Lifting Military Training Ban ", Reuters, March 4, 2010) and Obama's Pentagon is pushing weapons and equipment sales and US loans that would further empower TNI overall.

That being said, Kopassus does indeed have a special swagger and symbolic potency.

During the recent Obama - TNI aid negotiations in anticipation of his trip, the Kopassus commanding general came to Washington and was welcomed by the Obama team. Back in Indonesia, also during the talks, a Kopassus man felt confident enough to attempt to board a commercial flight out of Aceh while carrying a pistol fitted with a silencer -- a classic assassination weapon. This was of interest to the Indonesian official who described the incident, because one victim in Aceh had apparently been executed with a silenced pistol, at night (The victim's roommate didn't awaken).

An airport security man affiliated with the air force took the Kopassus man's pistol away.

But later, a Kopassus delegation arrived and made him give it back.

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[Australians are still waiting for 'braveheart' PM Kevin Rudd to demand the surrender of the (former Kopassus) murderers of the 'Balibo 5' in East Timor in '75, whether they're Obama's new mates or

not!]

<http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2010/03/22-3>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-1919.html>