

war in the Middle East, 50-70,000 troops are participating in maneuvers dubbed Bright Star '99. Although these maneuvers, which began in 1981 as a U.S.-Egyptian training exercise, are held every two years, this year, Germany, Greece, Jordan, and the Netherlands joined for the first time. Others include Britain, France, Italy, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. On the sidelines, 33 nations were observing the exercises, which last until Nov. 1.

Bright Star '99 involves 18,000 U.S. soldiers, the largest number gathered in a single place anywhere outside the United States. According to reports in the Arab press, the maneuvers are aimed at testing joint military operations under various wartime scenarios, such as during field combat or in amphibious landings.

U.S. Maj. Gen. Michael Gaw is quoted saying, "All of our forces have trained and prepared extensively to ensure the success of this exercise. This is the largest employment of forces to have ever occurred since the desert war."

An unnamed Arab diplomat in Dubai was quoted in the Arabic daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, saying, "These are the biggest maneuvers of their kind in the world. They are being carried out in an ideal position for the United States, if it wanted to carry out a comprehensive invasion of an Arab country."

In addition, members of Gore's Principals' Committee, which includes Secretary of Defense William Cohen and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, have deployed to the region.

Secretary of Defense Cohen started a visit to the countries of the Persian Gulf on Oct. 18, accompanied by Central Command Chairman Gen. Anthony Zinni. He will be followed by Albright, who is expected to start her Middle East tour later in October.

In statements to the press, Cohen ruled out any scaling-back of American forces in the Gulf, and attacked Iran as "a threat to the security of the Gulf" due to Iran's pursuit of "acquiring weapons of mass destruction."

Cohen's trip is viewed by Arab observers and Iraqi officials as a prelude to renewed military operations against Iraq. The pretext for these attacks would be Iraq's refusal to accept the British proposals for a UN Security Council resolution suspending the sanctions, in exchange for bringing UN weapons inspectors back to Baghdad and putting all of Iraq's future oil revenues under Anglo-American control. Diplomats in the Gulf told *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* that Cohen's main objective is to convince Gulf leaders to stand behind a British proposal calling for Iraq to allow UN weapons inspectors' monitoring of potentially strategic military industrial sites inside Iraq, in return for increased oil exports. This proposal does not call for lifting of the sanctions, and it is not acceptable to the Iraqis.

The fear of renewed hostilities against Iraq is justified, given the fact that U.S. air strikes against Iraqi anti-aircraft defenses continue unabated.

## Is Indonesia on the rebound?

by Gail G. Billington

Finally, more than four months after Indonesia's general elections on June 7, a new Executive team has been voted in to tackle the immense challenge of restoring stability to this, the third-largest democracy in the world, and the fourth most populous nation. On Oct. 20, in the first Presidential election conducted by secret ballot in the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Abdurrahman Wahid, 59, became the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia, winning with 373 votes, to 313 votes for Megawati Sukarnoputri, 52, the eldest daughter of Indonesia's first President, Sukarno. Twenty-four hours later, Megawati was elected Vice President, defeating her only challenger, Hamzah Haz, by a vote of 396-284.

A senior Indonesian diplomat said that the vote should be seen as the triumph of pro-reform elements over the "status quo" associated with 30 years under President Suharto, and that it bolsters the hope that Indonesia will emerge on the road to recovery after two years of agony and strife, brought on by the worst economic and financial crisis since independence.

### An unanticipated result

The choice of Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, was not the winning combination that most observers had anticipated, but emerged in the 72 hours before the Oct. 20 Presidential vote, as a consequence of factors that were already apparent at the time of the June 7 general election. At first blush, the end result suggests a move by the Indonesian elites to put the welfare of the country ahead of the particular interests of political factions.

Since the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998 in the full heat of the crisis, Indonesia has undergone nothing short of a political revolution, which is still unfolding, under the severe constraints of the \$43 billion International Monetary Fund agreement, first negotiated in October 1997. The administration of B.J. Habibie, a life-long associate of President Suharto who assumed the Presidency in May 1998, undertook an overhaul of how politics is conducted in the country in the run-up to the June 1999 general election, which was moved up from 2003 to satisfy public pressure. Simultaneously, Indonesia was under increasing foreign pressure, particularly from former colonial powers, which seized on Indonesia's hardships to press the United Nations to ram through a resolution on the status of East Timor.



Outgoing Indonesian President B.J. Habibie, shown here when he was Minister of Science and Technology.

With fits and starts, warts and all, the June 7 vote was universally seen as the most open and fair election since 1955. Five out of 48 parties swept the polls: 33.7% of the vote was captured by Megawati's PDI-P (a split-off from the Indonesian Democratic Party); 22% by Suharto and Habibie's Golkar; 12.6% by Gus Dur's National Awakening Party (PKB); 10.7% by the United Development Party (PPP); and 7.2% by Amien Rais's National Mandate Party (PAN). The contest was about, in part, who would claim the "reform" mantle.

In the months that followed, Megawati, the unquestionably popular chairman of PDI-P, was accused of adopting an uncompromising, arrogant, and aloof posture, which seemed to assume that 33.7% of the vote entitled her party to the Presidency. Mistakenly or not, in a country where 90% of the population is Muslim, the fact that 66% of PDI-P's legislative candidates were reportedly non-Muslim, was interpreted as insensitivity to the majority. To foreign interests, intent on pushing a "Project Democracy" agenda on Indonesia, Megawati's adherence to maintaining the "dual function" of the military, and her strong support for maintaining the "unitary" state—thus, her opposition to separation for East Timor, or other provinces—cast doubt on her "reform" credentials.

President Abdurrahman Wahid is a moderate Muslim cleric, the third generation of his family to head the largest Muslim social organization, the more than 30 million-member Nadlatul Ulama. This organization served as a relatively independent political base during Suharto's rule. Wahid is outspoken against sectarian politics, and has engaged in forums at home and abroad to foster dialogue across religions and cultural and ethnic differences. During the darkest hours

of the end of the Suharto government, Wahid attempted to bridge the gap among and between the President, the military, and the "reformers." But, up until the Presidential vote on Oct. 20, Wahid was not a leading contender, largely due to poor health. He has suffered two strokes and is almost totally blind.

Wahid's election as President became possible by a process of elimination, and compromise, egged on by demonstrations in Jakarta and around the country which demanded the Presidency—by mob rule, not constitutional vote—for Megawati. The unexpected opened up in the Presidential race, when President Habibie's Oct. 14 "accountability" speech was rejected by the People's Consultative Assembly by a margin of 33 votes. This was the first time since President Sukarno's speech was rejected, and he was forced to resign, in

the 1960s, that this has happened. That vote revealed a major split within the Golkar party itself, with reports of 30-35 Golkar "reformists" voting to reject the speech of the party's Presidential candidate, Habibie. Habibie dropped his candidacy; Golkar declined to name a substitute, leaving Gus Dur and Megawati as Presidential contenders. Gus Dur won the election thanks to support from Golkar, his own PKB (which had earlier pledged to back Megawati), and, according to the *Jakarta Post*, the votes of 27 of 38 military representatives in the MPR. Wahid expressed his profound thanks and support for "sister" Megawati.

### The interests of the nation come first

A second consensus among the elites ensured Megawati's election as Vice President. Shortly before the vote on Oct. 21, the Commander in Chief of the military, General Wiranto, and Golkar party Chairman Akbar Tandjung, withdrew from the race, leaving only Megawati and Hamzah Haz, Chairman of the United Development Party. In withdrawing, both men issued very similar statements, putting the interests of the nation ahead of their own, very much echoing the short, inaugural speech of the new President. Golkar executive Slamet Effendy Yusuf told the *Jakarta Post* that 70% of Golkar delegates had agreed to vote for Megawati.

The Indonesian elites have taken a step in the right direction, and the result has been widely and gladly received in capitals around the world. Early indications that the cabinet may reflect the same spirit are encouraging. President Gus Dur is well known for his love of telling jokes. He will need a good sense of humor. May it serve him and his Vice President well to bring Indonesia back to good health.