

“I think in many ways this is the outcome of a very racist mentality which is the result of decades of unquestioned occupation, where they always not only blame the victim, but tell him what he has to say and how to say it and when.”

Zionists and Fundamentalists

The high-point of the press conference came in response to a question from this author, who noted that very little happens in Israeli politics without the influence of certain circles in the United States, notably, certain Jewish financial networks that help fund the settlements, and the Protestant fundamentalists who are much of the base of the Bush Administration. Ashrawi began by discussing the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. She described AIPAC as a “key player in the American domestic scene in terms of campaign funds and in terms of campaign votes,” which has its own agenda, “and probably played a major role, particularly through its arm, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy—that has been very active in formulating American policy adopted by the State Department.”

She also described the activities of California bingo billionaire Irving Moskowitz, who “has singlehandedly funded settlements in and around Jerusalem. . . . He has single-handedly defied also, Israeli government decisions not to build in certain areas and not to support the extremist fundamentalist elements in Israel . . . and he has always supported the campaigns of right-wing extremists within Israel.”

Ashrawi then pinpointed the alliance between the Israeli right wing and Protestant fundamentalists. This alliance, she said, “was most visibly expressed by [then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu himself, who, whenever he was faced with any kind of pressure or criticism by the U.S. and by Clinton, would sort of threaten to go over the heads of the Administration to his own constituency, and he went and met with the Falwells and others, here, in order to forge this unholy alliance between extremists.” Clearly, what Ashrawi had in mind was Netanyahu’s Jan. 19, 1998 appearance at a Washington, D.C. rally organized by Rev. Jerry Falwell, just three days after the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke in the press. As *EIR* documented, President Clinton was pressuring Netanyahu to live up to the Oslo Accords, but Netanyahu, with the backing of Falwell and the Christian Coalition’s Pat Robertson, refused to make any concessions.

Ashrawi noted that the more extreme elements of the Christian fundamentalists are even more “ardent” Zionists than many Zionists. She spoke of the “Christian Embassy” in Jerusalem. “One person from the Christian Embassy, told me I had no right to exist, we as Palestinians, because we’re standing in the way of prophecy. And I said, it doesn’t sound very Christian to advocate genocide.”

Ashrawi said, “I think there’s a corrective force within the U.S., and I think the U.S. should work within—and public opinion, should try to rectify this in a way as to not subjugate foreign policy to . . . special interest groups.”

Crises in Indonesia, and the Philippines Strike ASEAN Unity

by Michael Billington

Only days after the overthrow of the Philippines government on Jan. 20, the political crisis in Indonesia escalated into a showdown between President Abdurrahman Wahid and the various opposition parties, with street demonstrations on both sides threatening the nation with violence and chaos. In both nations, the instability is being fuelled by outside interests, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the U.S. State Department, whose declared intentions are to destabilize the growing momentum toward the creation of a new Asian monetary regime independent of the IMF, as has been put forward by the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN-Plus-3).

According to a high-level Indonesian source, the U.S.-backed military coup in the Philippines which ousted President Joseph Estrada (poorly disguised as a “people’s power” campaign) is not likely to be repeated in the same way in Indonesia, in part because of the strong sentiment in most leading Indonesian circles toward following constitutional procedures, mindful of the past 35 years of strong-man rule under General Suharto.

The Feb. 1 vote in the House of Representatives to censure President Wahid over possible involvement in two minor financial scandals, was supported by eight of the ten political party factions, and set in motion a Constitutional process that could bring about an impeachment in four months. When some opposition leaders, led by Amien Rais, the Speaker of the People’s Consultative Assembly (and a leading figure in bringing down General Suharto in 1998), tried to bypass the four-month waiting period and move straight to impeachment, both Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri and House Speaker Akbar Tandjung, head of Suharto’s former party, the Golkar, instructed their party members that Constitutional procedures must be strictly followed.

The military faction within the House, although voting for the censure, announced that they would not support impeachment, and reasserted their loyalty to Wahid as the “legitimately and constitutionally” elected President. It is widely recognized in Indonesia that the Philippines military’s withdrawal of support from President Estrada was unconstitutional, and could not have been carried out without approval from Washington.

Nonetheless, the danger of mass violence escalated in mid-February, when thousands of Wahid's supporters from the 30-40 million-strong Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), attacked and set aflame the offices of Golkar in nine cities in Eastern Java, and attacked schools associated with the rival Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah, formerly headed by impeachment-advocate Amien Rais. Wahid, like his father and grandfather before him, once headed the NU. In an effort to stop the violence, Wahid travelled to East Java, instructing the NU youth to remain peaceful in their protest, while indicating that there was evidence that the violence may have been the work of provocateurs "funded by foreign NGOs [non-governmental organizations]." Even the head of Muhammadiyah in the region, Rahim Nur, who was forced to take refuge in the local police station, told the press that he did not believe the NU had initiated the violence, but that it "looks more like the work of provocateurs who want to set up NU against Muhammadiyah."

President Wahid is adamantly refusing to resign. At one point, he suggested that he may dismiss the Parliament and call elections, and even discussed with government and military leaders the possibility of imposing martial law, but he has since pulled back from both measures. Defense Minister Mohammed Mahfud, however, openly warned that either a severe failure of leadership, or uncontrolled chaos and anarchy, would justify direct intervention by the military.

The IMF Squeeze Is On

In a manner which mirrors the IMF's subversive role in orchestrating the downfall of President Suharto in 1998, the IMF and the World Bank have moved to squeeze the Indonesian economy, at a time that such actions will do the maximum damage to Indonesian stability. The IMF has withheld a \$400 million tranche scheduled for last year, while the World Bank has just slashed its commitment by two-thirds, both claiming that the government has not done enough to meet IMF conditionalities demanding austerity, privatization, and deregulation.

There is also deep concern in Indonesia over the statements by both U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that the Bush Administration will support the increased military role of Australia in the region, based on Australia's supposedly exemplary role in the UN's East Timor fiasco over the past two years. With Indonesia facing continued economic decay and poverty brought on by the speculative raids in 1997 and the IMF conditionalities thereafter, and facing several separatist movements being supported from abroad, the nation's leadership has good reason to be wary of such promotion of foreign military preparations.

The Philippines Crisis Deepens

The successful military coup which brought down the Philippines government on Jan. 20 has not brought any stabil-

ity to that troubled nation. The deposed President, Joseph Estrada, has not left the country, and continues to insist that he has only granted his Vice President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, temporary status as "acting President," while trying to regain his position in court, arguing that the coup was unconstitutional. Since the military coup-leaders have openly bragged about their long-term plot to bring down the Constitutionally elected government, Estrada is not without grounds. The opposition to the new government, which is not necessarily limited to efforts to bring Estrada back, has formed a coalition of forces to contend in the May elections for Congress, and appears to have a good chance to win a majority.

The actual controller of the new administration, former President Fidel Ramos, and his cohorts who staged the military operations in January, are now consolidating their positions, including a move to remove Army Chief of Staff Gen. Angelo Reyes, who only reluctantly joined the coup plotters under threat of military civil war.

Further instability has been engendered by the professional assassination of leftist labor leader Filimon "Popoy" Lagman on Feb. 6, who was one of the leaders of the coalition of forces which were demanding the resignation of President Estrada, but who was equally dedicated to removing Macapagal-Arroyo and her military backers. Tens of thousands of labor union members boycotted work on Feb. 12 to march in protest to the murder, and to demand justice. With rumors concerning the source of the assassination pointing in all directions on the political landscape, the possibility of opportunistic "retaliatory" strikes has dramatically heightened tensions in the country.

Indicative of the direction to be taken by the Ramos circle running the new administration, is the rush to pass a bill to privatize the state power company, Napocor, despite Macapagal-Arroyo's initial personal opposition to the bill, and despite the obvious signal from California that privatization and deregulation are a blueprint for disaster. As in Indonesia, the IMF is escalating its demands on the weakened nation, with the included purpose of slowing down any move toward regional collaboration toward a new Asian monetary institution by the ASEAN-Plus-3.

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