

U.S. 'Pre-emption' Aims At Indonesia in Asia

by Michael O. Billington

While world leaders insist that the United States has presented no sufficient evidence to justify an invasion of Iraq, a similar process is unfolding in Asia, in regard to the recent escalation of American accusations that Southeast Asia has become a new headquarters for al-Qaeda, with Indonesia as its center. Combined with the imperial doctrine of unilateralism and preemptive military action to meet perceived terrorist threats, such accusations regarding Asia are being taken very seriously in the region.

In fact, the global "Code Orange" terror alert declared by the Bush Administration in the days before the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks—the highest alert level declared to date—was based on reported confessions by one Omar al-Faruq, a Kuwaiti arrested in Indonesia and deported into the hands of U.S. authorities in June. Al-Faruq was the subject of a cover story in the Sept. 23 *Time*, supposedly based on leaks from the CIA and other intelligence agencies involved in his interrogation. The article claimed al-Faruq had confessed to: being al-Qaeda's senior representative in Southeast Asia; planning bombings at U.S. Embassies in seven Southeast Asian countries, and Taiwan, on the 9/11 anniversary; being responsible for the infamous Christmas 2000 church bombings in Indonesia; planning two assassination attempts against Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri; and other serious crimes.

Charge of Terrorist "Superstate"

Most importantly for future developments, al-Faruq is reported to have claimed that Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, an Islamic cleric living in Indonesia, had "authorized Faruq to use Jemaah Islamiah operatives and resources" to carry out the terrorist operation. Ba'asyir is accused by Singapore's overlord Lee Kuan Yew, and by most of the U.S. press and government agencies, of being the leader of a region-wide terrorist group (Jemaah Islamiah—Islamic Community) connected to al-Qaeda, accused of targetting Western facilities for terror attacks, and of efforts to bring about a regional "Islamic state" including Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and parts of the Philippines and Thailand. Indonesia has interrogated Ba'asyir, but has adamantly refused to arrest him merely on the basis of foreign accusations and press reports, lacking any concrete evidence to back up the accusations.

What is the truth?

There is absolutely no way to know whether or not al-Faruq in fact confessed to any of these deeds. He is being held, like all U.S. detainees on suspicion of connections to terrorism, with neither the rights to counsel and due process guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution to those placed under arrest (including non-citizens), nor the rights of prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention. If the *Time* account is to be believed, he was held by the United States in Afghanistan after his arrest and deportation in June, where he was subjected to psychological and physical torture for three months, before he "broke" on Sept. 9.

Clearly the deeds and confessions ascribed to al-Faruq conveniently facilitate the policies of the utopian war party now attempting to turn the United States into a global imperial power, contrary to the history and character of the the United States Republic.

Indonesia is not acquiescing to the attempted power play. Although President Megawati has kept silent, at least publicly, Vice President Hamzah Haz, who is also the head of a leading Islamic party, joined with the leaders of the two mass-based, moderate Islamic organizations—Ahmad Syafi'ie Maarif of the 30-million strong Muhammadiyah, and Hasyim Muzadi, head of the 40-million strong Nahdlatul Ulama—in dismissing the story of assassination attempts against President Megawati. Maarif told reporters, "I'm afraid [the report] is an attempt to divide Indonesia." Hasyim Muzadi went further, warning that "If Indonesia is continuously bothered, certain parties, including moderate elements, may take adversary actions against the U.S." He further denounced the *Time* story as "various propaganda tricks," adding, "We greatly deplore these moves because they amount to U.S. interference" in Indonesia. Muhammadiyah Deputy Chairman Din Syamsuddin accused Washington, in cooperation with certain elements within Indonesia, of "spreading a self-fulfilling prophesy—to pit Muslims against nationalists here."

Even the bomber convicted in a shopping mall bombing in July 2001, which al-Faruq reportedly says was aimed at President Megawati, dismissed the story in an interview in the Sept. 21 *Koran Tempo*, as "unimaginable."

Munir, a prominent Indonesian human rights lawyer, also dismissed the *Time* story, saying: "I think the assassination thing is a way of pressuring Megawati to be more cooperative in the so-called war on terror."

American Ambassador Escalates

Throwing oil on the fire, Matthew Daley, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, said in Hanoi on Sept. 24 that the United States may place Jemaah Islamiah on their "terrorist list," and made it clear that he meant "Ba'asyir's group." This could, of course, imply American military action under the "new" doctrine of pre-emptive military attack.

The United States, Britain, and Canada also issued a warn-

ing for their citizens travelling to the city of Yogyakarta or nearby Solo, the area of Ba'asyir's residence and his school, claiming that Westerners "may be targetted for violence in the immediate future." President Bush called President Megawati, and sent Karen Brooks, the National Security Advisor for Asian Affairs, to meet with her in Jakarta, increasing the pressure.

In response, the Sultan and Governor of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono X, who is a leading religious and political leader in the nation, has cancelled a high-profile visit to the United States which was to have begun at the end of September. Sofian Effendi, the rector of the University of Gadjah Mada, who was to accompany the Sultan on his visit, asserted that Indonesia provides adequate security for all visitors, and that the U.S. "must know that we do not like being treated like that—we have our dignity."

Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr. Hassan Wirajuda said on Sept. 23 that there was an "urgent need" for the United States to provide an explanation regarding the alleged intelligence findings, and that the claims about international terrorist networks in the country "may provoke widespread resentment against the United States and other western countries."

Foreign Minister Hassan spoke with *EIR* after a diplomatic dinner in Washington on Sept. 12. In regard to the pressure on Indonesia to round up radical Muslim leaders as terrorist suspects, he said: "We have questioned Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the Jemaah Islamiyah leader. But our police have not found evidence even sufficient to arrest him. Unlike Malaysia and Singapore, we do not have an equivalent Internal Security act. We *did* have such a law, under Suharto, which was used in suppressing anyone who had any aspirations toward Islamic state concepts, or applications of Islamic *sharia* law. But now, in our democratic setting, our people are free to express, to have an open debate, even on sensitive issues such as Islamic state concepts and application of *sharia*."

In his speech to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 18, Foreign Minister Hassan addressed his nation's serious concerns regarding U.S. unilateralism and pre-emptive intentions, and the double standard regarding Israel. "Nowhere is the necessity for multilateralism more glaring," he said, "than in our response to the scourge of our time: international terrorism. And nowhere else is the role of the United Nations more vital. . . . Multilateral affirmative action can also bring about peace where for many years there has only been violence and bloodshed. In the Middle East, the powers that wield great influence on the region are called upon to adopt a just and balanced approach to the issue of Palestine. They can, if they wish, persuade Israel to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories and to cease settlement activities in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolution."

Target: China

The targetting of Indonesia must be seen in the context of the broader goal of the war party—confronting China, as

spelled out in the July Congressional and Pentagon reports on the Chinese military (see *EIR*, Aug. 9, 2002). To see this clearly, we must look at the dire state of the Indonesian economy, which could be given the "Argentina/Brazil treatment" at any time by the International Monetary Fund, and counterpose to that the crucial economic and political relations developing between China and Southeast Asia, and Indonesia in particular. Note also the great strides over the past weeks toward peace on the Korean peninsula (in which Indonesia, with many others, played a significant role), which is viewed as a challenge to the promoters of the infantile, but dangerous, "axis of evil" doctrine.

Indonesia, with the world's fourth-largest population, was ravaged by the 1997-98 speculative assault on its currency, the rupiah, and by the subsequent IMF conditionalities imposed to roll over a foreign debt of \$210 billion, whose debt service requirements simply can not be paid. A debt moratorium on it, principle and interest, was granted on a yearly basis. Indonesia's domestic debt was created by the forced bailout of the banking system after the destruction of the currency in 1997-98; it must be paid, to keep the domestic economy afloat. But it is the foreign debt which gives the IMF and its Anglo-American controllers the power to play the "Argentina" card any time they so choose.

Other aspects of economic relations with the West are even more grim. Foreign direct investment dropped by a huge 42% for the first six months of this year, while capital flight continues unabated. Some \$8.2 billion was pulled out of the country in 2001, after losing over \$13 billion in 1998 and nearly \$10 billion in 1999 and 2000. Among the major nations of Southeast Asia, only Indonesia has continued to suffer this severe drain on its capital.

Without writing off this debt, in the context of a New Bretton Woods world financial system, Indonesia can not survive. Asked by *EIR* about the failure of the world community to create a new world financial architecture after the 1997-98 crisis, Foreign Minister Hassan said, "We would not expect much from countries outside our region. . . . But at least we are trying within our own region—in particular the ASEAN+3 process—we have been talking about the future of the East Asian community. In fact, ASEAN has been somewhat insisting, because we want to have this process. . . . In fact, we have concrete projects, road and railway networks connecting our region east-west and north-south; human resources, telecommunications, and the energy sector." He added that "we knew from the beginning that the big powers are not too happy for Asia to have their own financial arrangements."

China's Crucial Role

Asked about China's role, he said: "They have offered us important assistance, in particular for a bridge connecting Sumatra to Java, and one from Java to Bali." Although these mega-projects are still in the planning stage, the government announced that China will be building a bridge connecting

Surabaya, the capital of East Java, to the island of Madura, a 5.43-kilometer span, to begin construction in February. Also, on Sept. 26, China signed six agreements for major energy projects in Indonesia, including oil, mining, and power development; while on Sept. 27 the two nations signed a huge, \$8.4 billion contract for the supply of liquified natural gas from a new facility in the Indonesian Province of Papua, to supply the Chinese Province of Fujian.

Making the point even clearer, Indonesian Army Chief Gen. Endriartono Sutarto announced Sept. 19 that Indonesia was seeking alternatives to the United States as the nation's arms supplier. Following a meeting with Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Chi Haotian in Jakarta, General Endriartono said that Indonesia could not continue to be dependent on one source, since that source has been disrupted by embargos based on political considerations. He named China as one likely new source.

The National Strategy Report released by the U.S. White House on Sept. 20 includes the following passage on China: "Yet, a quarter century after beginning the process of shedding the worst features of the Communist legacy, China's leaders have not yet made the next series of fundamental choices about the character of their state. In pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region, China is following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness. In time, China will find that social and political freedom is the only source of that greatness."

This is the same document in which President Bush put his signature to the following utopian doctrine, endorsing preemptive military action against perceived threats: "As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. So we must be prepared to defeat our enemies' plans, using the best intelligence and proceeding with deliberation. History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action."

The future of Indonesia, of China, of Asia, depends absolutely on the global effort to end both this utopian war policy, and the unfolding financial collapse, while building the necessary alliance of sovereign nations to create a new world economic structure.

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