

# Indonesia's President Wahid Embraces The Dog That Bit Him

by Michael O. Billington

Indonesia's besieged President Abdurrahman Wahid, facing probable impeachment proceedings in August, has reached out for help to precisely those international institutions and British Commonwealth nations which have driven Indonesia into the current economic and social crisis.

Apparently believing that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will come to his aid if he capitulates to its demands, in June Wahid removed his leading economics minister, Rizal Ramli, who had been waging a rear-guard defense of the nation's sovereignty against the IMF, replacing him with a former IMF employee, who promptly agreed to all IMF conditionalities at issue. At the same time, Wahid announced that he would travel to Australia and New Zealand—a trip that has been planned, but postponed several times, because of the fierce resentment within Indonesia over New Zealand and Australia's role in the separation of East Timor, and their continued support for subversive movements in other parts of the country, especially Irian Jaya. If Wahid believes that Indonesia will benefit from asking for protection from the same forces that nearly destroyed the country over the past three years, his near physical blindness has been overshadowed by his political blindness.

## A Changed Military

Wahid's biggest internal problem comes from the fact that he tried, but failed, to get the military to approve a declaration of emergency. The President contends that the impeachment process, as it is being conducted, is unconstitutional, warranting such a declaration of emergency, which would allow him to dismiss the Parliament and end the impeachment process. The constitutional issues are, in fact, quite complex. However, in a sign of the dramatic transformation which has taken place within the military itself, the military chiefs refused to take advantage of an opportunity to assert military control, and informed the President that the constitutional process must be carried out through the Parliament and the courts, not by emergency rule. The unity and patriotism of the military have served to hold the nation together in the face of the unconscionable policies coming from Washington, which are leaving this nation of more than 200 million people dangling in the wind through an effective economic and mili-



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tary boycott. It also set the stage for Wahid's desperate turn toward the IMF and the British Commonwealth.

Not only is Indonesia facing economic dissolution in the unfolding global depression, but there is a growing military threat as well. The Australian government last year confirmed its role as the local gendarme for the Anglo-American financial institutions, by ordering a reorganization of its military forces, to prepare for more operations like that of the invasion and occupation of the Indonesian province of East Timor in 1999, under the auspices of the United Nations. That this military reorganization is a threat to Indonesia's very existence was confirmed in late June, when a report was published in the *Contemporary Journal of Southeast Asia* by David Dickens, the head of New Zealand's Center for Strategic Studies.

Dickens revealed that the entire Australian Defense Force had been on full alert throughout the East Timor operation, supposedly because of "harassment" by the Indonesian Navy and Air Force, which was observing the invasion force in an "aggressive" manner. Dickens reports that Australia prepared its long-range F-111 bomber force to hit Indonesian targets across the country, including the capital of Jakarta. Such a revelation at this time is read in Indonesia as an announcement that Australia is fully prepared for further military interventions into their country, up to and including a "Gulf War"-style assault.

## The U.S. Role

The United States, rather than providing protection against any such threat, has encouraged it. The legacy of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is felt deeply in Indonesia, since the United States cut off most military assistance in the mid-1990s, and further tightened the screws after the East Timor fiasco. Former longtime U.S. Defense Attaché to Indonesia, Col. John Haseman (ret.), told a June seminar at the U.S.-Indonesia Society in Washington, that the

United States had shot itself in the foot with the aid boycott, because, unlike the current military leadership, none of the up-and-coming generals had received training in the United States, and therefore they were largely unknown to the U.S. diplomatic corps. Haseman said that, contrary to Western press accounts of the situation in Indonesia, the current military leadership is showing considerable responsibility and professionalism, and that this is the primary institution that can hold the nation together through the current crisis. Asked by his contacts in Indonesia if the Bush Administration would take a more supportive posture toward their country, Haseman said that there was virtually no chance. In fact, the Bush Administration publicly asserted in February that it was looking to Australia to take the point in regard to the Indonesian crisis.

Further, the Bush Administration, while rushing headlong into provoking war in the Middle East and the Balkans, is also precipitating a confrontation with China and chaos in Indonesia. The new U.S. unilateral belligerence has led even America's closest allies in Europe to publicly warn of the danger of the Bush Administration's recklessness.

In keeping with the new military doctrine being formulated at the White House, Gen. Charles Robertson, Chief of the U.S. Mobility Command, called the situation in Indonesia a "new challenge," and recommended an expanded U.S. military presence in Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Indian Ocean. He also announced that a planned security summit between the United States and Australia has been moved up to late July or early August. At the same time, Singapore and Australia held a Joint Ministerial Meeting, which concluded that Indonesia is their number-one concern for the near term. Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister Professor Jayakumar also reiterated Singapore's earlier offer to the United States to use Singapore as a military base.

The emerging nationalist leaders in Indonesia will require their own international connections to counter this IMF/military campaign against their sovereignty and development. The newly established Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which embraces China, Russia, and four Central Asian nations, is already discussing the possibilities of alliances with the nations of South, Southeast, and East Asia, uniting much of the Eurasian continent for both military and economic development and cooperation. Thai Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was in China in late June, to discuss precisely that. At the same time, the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, together with China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN-Plus-3), are now collaborating in defending their currencies against speculative attacks, and are discussing the formation of an Asian Monetary Fund, independent of the IMF, to finance real development.

While the internal crisis rages within Indonesia, its national leaders are also celebrating the 100th birthday of their great founding father, Sukarno, who was committed to internationalism as a necessary part of true sovereignty—a lesson more true today than ever before.

## Thailand Works for Development Across Asia

by Ron Castonguay

Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra recently made diplomatic visits to neighboring Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, succeeding in his intent to reduce tensions, and increasing economic cooperation among these nations of continental Southeast Asia. This "engagement" policy with nations often attacked abroad as "human rights violators," represents a clear recognition that only economic development and collaboration can create the conditions required for advances in social justice. Thaksin combined mutually beneficial economic incentives with straightforward, but respectful, diplomatic discussion to accomplish his mission.

Thaksin's visits had a common theme, exemplified by plans for the east-west, cross-Southeast Asia highway, which will run from Da Nang, Vietnam, through Laos and Thailand, to Myanmar's capital, Yangon. His first stop, in Laos, also resulted in agreements on tariff reductions for 40 Laotian products, and he discussed plans for the anti-drug summit of the "Golden Triangle" nations to be hosted soon by China in Kunming. The Thai Prime Minister, however, was not able to satisfy the request for Thailand to purchase more power from a new hydroelectric plant in Laos; Thai electric power consumption is still below the levels of the pre-1997 "boom" period.

A similar but wider range of agreements was made with Cambodia, including tariff reductions on 23 products, common work on border infrastructure, and Thai assistance to remove landmines on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Important progress was made in resolving the long-simmering disputes about territorial claims between Cambodia and Thailand in the Gulf of Thailand. Resolution of these claims is expected to lead immediately to cooperative joint exploitation of these waters, both in terms of fisheries and underwater hydrocarbon deposits. Inland, progress was achieved in firming up the development plans for the Mekong Summit (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, later China), to improve tourism, and more importantly, infrastructure, on this vast river basin.

### Improving Ties With Myanmar

Relations with Thailand's western neighbor, Myanmar, have been extremely strained. Since the administration of Premier Chuan Leekpai, who never deigned, on human rights grounds, to visit Myanmar, Thai-Myanmar relations have