

How Washington builds its second line of defense

US funding for opposition groups in Indonesia

By Barry Grey
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At the same time that the American military has been training Indonesian commando units, including Suharto's presidential guard, the State Department has been doling out tens of millions of dollars to support bourgeois reform groups opposed to the regime. But any contradiction here is more apparent than real.

The US State Department's Agency for International Development (AID) has spent \$26 million since 1995 to help finance 30 nongovernmental organizations in Indonesia. One of these is the Indonesia Legal Aid Society, headed by Adnan Buyung Nasution, a leading figure in the bourgeois democratic opposition and the country's best-known civil rights lawyer.

Other groups on the US payroll include an environmental organization that is fighting a large American mining company, a coalition of journalists whose work has been banned by the Indonesian government, a women's rights group, and a consumers' rights foundation.

AID spelled out its support for these organizations in a recent budget request to the US Congress. According to a May 20 article in the *New York Times*, the agency told Congress, "AID is the largest financial supporter and the most active donor in this controversial sector."

Just two months ago the *Nation* magazine published an expose revealing that US military personnel were engaged in the training of the commando unit called Kopassus, or Red Berets, which has been deployed against street demonstrators in Jakarta, as well as another elite group known as Kostrad, which occupies central Java, and Suharto's presidential guard. These special forces units are infamous for torturing and murdering civilians. Pentagon officials confirmed that the training was ongoing, despite a congressional ban imposed in 1992 after reports of mass killings in East Timor carried out by Suharto's troops.

Aside from what it says about the hypocrisy of US policy in Indonesia, the concurrence of military support for Suharto and financial backing for bourgeois opposition elements underscores the two-pronged nature of imperialist strategy. The idea is to shore up the dictatorship, which has for more than three decades served well the interests of the international banks and transnational corporations, and continue to utilize it for suppressing the working class and the peasantry. At the same time, Washington seeks to cultivate a tame and reliable opposition that can be used to put pressure on the Suharto regime when it balks at measures demanded by the banks and transnationals, such as opening up and deregulating the Indonesian market. These forces are simultaneously being groomed to become the basis for a new pro-US, capitalist regime--complete with "democratic" credentials--if and when Suharto is no longer able to secure American interests.

This type of policy on the part of the US is by no means unique to Indonesia. The *Times* reported that over the past five years AID has created similar "human rights" programs in more than 25 missions around the world, including Guatemala, Kenya, South Africa and the Philippines.

US funding for bourgeois dissident forces is a major means of compiling intelligence on more radical elements. Given the role of the CIA and the US embassy in the 1965 coup that brought Suharto to power, when the American agencies drew up lists of Communist Party members and sympathizers, which were then used by Suharto's death squads to murder between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people, this aspect of American activity is particularly sinister.

The fact that the so-called democrats who are presently being lionized in the Western media willingly

accept payoffs from the US government underscores their lack of any independence from imperialism. They are essentially a second line of defense for the interests of international capital.

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