

Indonesian generals bid for a major role in next government

By Peter Symonds
26 July 1999

A feature article in last week's edition of the US-based *BusinessWeek* magazine revealed details of a concerted push by the Indonesian military for a major public role in the new government to be formed later in the year, including either the presidency or vice-presidency for the present Defence Minister and Armed Forces Chief General Wiranto.

Wiranto convened a meeting of top military commanders on July 7 and 8 at the Indonesia's Armed Forces Headquarters on the outskirts of Jakarta to discuss their political strategy following the national election held on June 7. The gathering included five senior generals based in Jakarta as well as several provincial commanders but excluded the main leaders of the military's "green" or Islamic faction.

According to *BusinessWeek*: "Wiranto's muscular men in green uniforms deliberated for two days, then granted their commander full support to put together a coalition government—and whatever role in it he chooses. The most likely lineup expected to be announced in the next few weeks: popular opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri as President, and Wiranto himself as the truly powerful Vice-President. And current President Habibie? He's out at the end of his term."

As the magazine admitted: "It's not exactly democracy. It will surely disgust many voters." However, reflecting the sentiments of ruling circles in Jakarta and Washington, it concluded: "But with the military an always-omnipotent force in Indonesian politics, having the most powerful general in the country emerge at the helm could result in the most stable government Indonesia could hope for. After all, the economy has embarked on the first stages of a recovery that needs a stable environment to thrive."

No deal has yet been struck with Megawati but

neither has she ruled out such a possibility. Indeed, Megawati has recruited a layer of former generals to her party, the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) and has sought to forge an alliance with sections of the military. Recently PDI-P secretary-general Alex Litaay announced that the PDI-P would not push for any change to the army's formal role in politics—its so-called dual function—for at least five years.

Megawati recently launched an attack on Habibie in an article written for the major Japanese newspaper, *Yomiri Shimbun*, in which she accused him of being linked to the manipulative and corrupt practices of Suharto. She also hit back at Islamic organisations and parties opposing her candidacy for president on the grounds that a woman should not hold the post or that that too many PDI-P representatives were non-Islamic.

These manoeuvres reveal just how little has changed since Suharto resigned just over a year ago. In the face of widespread and growing opposition, Suharto was compelled to step down as president but the regime that originated in the 1965-66 military coup remained intact, with the armed forces still "an omnipotent force". Whatever its exact composition, the next government will be compelled to rely heavily on the military to crack down on any opposition as it implements the International Monetary Fund's economic restructuring agenda and presides over growing levels of unemployment and poverty.

Wiranto himself has close connections with Suharto, who recruited him as his aide-de-camp in 1989 and rapidly promoted him up the ranks—eventually to the position of armed forces chief early last year. Wiranto played a key role in the closed-door negotiations that led to Suharto's resignation, guaranteeing that the former military strongman, his family and their vast

assets would be protected.

According to *BusinessWeek*, Wiranto sought Suharto's personal permission before embarking on negotiations to form a government with Megawati. “[A]t their meeting on July 8, Suharto gave Wiranto his blessing to proceed. In return, Wiranto gave Suharto a tacit assurance that he would be pardoned and may not even stand trial, for the three decades of corruption under his rule. Wiranto and Suharto, with the studied calm and low voices characteristic of the Javanese elite, also reached an understanding that no vigorous attempts to uncover Suharto's billions would be made, according to an army officer familiar with the discussion.”

Discussions between the PDI-P and the top generals are only one element of the backroom wheeling and dealing taking place between all the political parties in preparation for the convening of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in November to choose the next president and vice-president. None of the parties have emerged from the elections with an absolute majority, nor could they because 238 of the 700 MPR members will be appointed, not elected, by the military, provincial governments and the state apparatus.

More than a month after the election, vote counting has finally been completed with the PDI-P as the party with the most seats—154—followed by the ruling Golkar party with 120 seats. The United Development Party (PPP), an Islamic-based party—one of the three officially recognised under Suharto's rule—won 58. The National Awakening Party (PKB) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) headed by the opposition leaders Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais, have 51 and 35 seats respectively. The remaining seats went to smaller parties including two Islamic parties—the Crescent Star Party (14 seats) and the Justice Party (six seats)—and the Justice and Unity Party (PKP), a breakaway from the Golkar Party headed by two former generals (six seats).

The results, however, are still provisional and their ratification by the General Election Commission (KPU) has itself become a political issue. The KPU is composed of one representative from each of the 48 officially recognised parties as well as five government appointees. A two-thirds majority is required to ratify the results but as many as 22 of the parties have raised

objections to the election procedures and made allegations of vote rigging and buying. Only 16 parties have indicated that they will validate the vote due to take place today.

Extraordinary pressures have been applied to ensure that parties rubberstamp the results. According to the *Indonesian Observer* newspaper, KPU member Djuhad Mahya, the PPP representative, called for legal action to be taken against those who rejected the vote. “If they reject signing the election result without valid reason, not only will this be ignored by the Election Monitoring Body, but those who reject signing it also face a jail term of up to three months,” he said.

Justice Minister Muladi has threatened to take the matter out of the hands of the KPU altogether. “President [Habibie] will take over the election commission's responsibility to sign the election results if the election commission refuses to do it,” he said last Friday. He urged the KPU members to validate the results “for the sake of the nation's interests”.

This concern over the possibility that the vote could be rejected as undemocratic highlights the stakes riding on the outcome for the ruling elite in Indonesia and internationally. The elections were orchestrated with the assistance of opposition leaders like Megawati and Rais to provide the democratic façade for what remains a regime largely dominated by the military and the state apparatus. The fear in ruling circles is that any puncturing of that thin veneer will lead to further political and social instability as the aspirations and expectations of tens of millions of voters are shattered.

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