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AUSTRALIA'S RENEWAL OF TRAINING LINKS

WITH KOPASSUS: A CRITIQUE

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This paper represents the author's views alone. It has been drawn entirely from open sources, and has no official status or endorsement.

## **Abstract**

In August 2003, the Australian government reinstated training links between the Australian Army's Special Air Service (SAS) regiment and the Indonesian Army's Special Forces Command (Komando Pasukan Khusus - Kopassus). It was a move that was warmly welcomed by Indonesia but decried throughout much of Australia, following the role of Kopassus in the destruction of East Timor in 1999.

The rationale of the Australian government was that renewing links, ostensibly with Kopassus' 'counter-terrorist' unit, would assist if and when Australian citizens were taken hostage. The immediate context for this move was the 'war on terrorism' and more specifically the rise of Islamic terrorism in Indonesia. In this, the 'war on terrorism' and the role extremist Indonesian Muslims appeared to play into designs of a much larger and longer-standing agenda, namely the renewal of US military links with the Indonesian military.

This paper argues that the logic behind the renewal of links with the Indonesian military generally and Kopassus in particular is flawed, based on a false public rationale, and militates against Australia's strategic, diplomatic and domestic political interests.

# **Australia's Renewal of Training Links with Kopassus: A Critique**

*Damien Kingsbury*

## **Introduction**

In August 2003, the Australian Liberal-National government under the Prime Ministership of John Howard reinstated training links between the Australian Army's Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) and the Indonesian Army's Special Forces Command (Komando Pasukan Khussus - Kopassus). It was a move that was warmly welcomed by Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirayuda, but decried throughout much of Australia, following the role of Kopassus in the destruction of East Timor in 1999 (see, for example, McDonald et al 2002:ch5, Kingsbury 2003b:117-125), and Kopassus' history of human rights abuses before and since then (see ICG 2001). The public rationale by the Australian government for this decision was that renewing links would ostensibly be with Kopassus' 'counter-terror' (CT) unit, Detasemen 81<sup>1</sup> (Detachment 81). This link then would assist if and when Australian citizens were taken hostage by terrorists. The immediate context for this move was the 'war on terrorism' and more specifically the rise of Islamic terrorism in Indonesia. In this, the 'war on terrorism' and the role of extremist Indonesian Muslims appeared to play into designs of a much larger and longer standing agenda, which was the renewal of US military links with the Indonesian military, and to a lesser extent a particular (and demonstrably failed) understanding of how to best secure Australian-Indonesian bilateral relations. All of this was despite Indonesian-based 'terrorism' being in many cases either directed or supported by or linked to the Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia - TNI) or related intelligence agencies.

This paper argues that the renewal of links with the Indonesian military generally and Kopassus in particular is based on a false public rationale, is logically flawed, and militates against Australia's foreign and domestic political interests. Public recognition of the profound problems in this proposed arrangement led to the renewed Australian Defence Force (ADF)-Kopassus links being limited by Australian government qualifications. These politically necessary qualifications ultimately led to the collapse of the arrangement (at least for the foreseeable future).

A generally opposite argument to that here was put forward by Alan Dupont (2003), who presented a case which was very largely in line with

the position ultimately adopted by the Australian government. Dupont's argument (and ipso facto that of the government) will be addressed in this paper.

### **Defining terrorism**

In all the public discussion about terrorism and its ostensible rise ('terrorism' in the modern sense being a common feature of various political landscapes since the 1890s), very little attention has been paid to what is meant by the term. Indeed, contemporary use of the term 'terrorism' implies a pejorative, antithetical position rather than a standardised descriptive quality as such. That is, it is often less the methods employed by 'terrorists' that define them, but rather whether or not they are on 'our side'.

There is no finite definition of 'terrorism', although the term 'terror' within a political context usually means to attempt to persuade others of one's own political position by the use of exemplary violence, or the threat of violence, instilling in the audience a state of heightened or absolute fear, or terror. Terrorism can also be used to persuade others not to accept a particular political perspective but to engage in action in accordance with that perspective (eg, the release of political prisoners or the establishment of a material 'good') or to encourage a backlash that in turn supports the goals of the terrorists (eg, increased generalised repression leading to broad-based anti-repressive sentiment). The term 'terrorist' is usually applied to individual or collective non-state actors, but state or state-sponsored actors can (and often do) also comply with either the methods or the purposes of non-state terrorists. This has particularly been the case in Indonesia, most notably with Kopassus.

### **A general rationale for military to military links**

The general case for links between the militaries of respective countries is three-fold. The first case rests on the assumption that militaries that have close training or other links, due to their intimate knowledge of each other, are unlikely to engage in hostilities with each other. This, of course, assumes a relative equality between such militaries, and a consequent mutual disadvantage. The second case is that militaries may benefit from mutual engagement, in developing skills and techniques, and develop a higher level of mutual interoperability. This latter point is especially important if the respective countries have a formal military alliance. The third case is that military-to-military links demonstrate a bond of trust and close cooperation between governments, who will work diplomatically to maintain convivial relations.

Each case implies assumptions that may be generally correct, but can be specifically incorrect. In particular, the speed with which Australia-Indonesia military links ceased in September 1999 indicated that more than just training and other military cooperation needed to be in place if any substantial form of bond was to be formed between Australia and Indonesia. Indeed, such links could be used to engender a false sense of security on the part of one of the countries involved in such relations. Australian foreign policy, particularly from 1986 until 1996, did work actively to encourage broader links between the two countries, of which military to military links was just one aspect. However, given the important political role played by the TNI in Indonesian politics and as the primary guarantor of state cohesion, and the sensitivity in Australia over this role, in particular in relation to East Timor, maintaining strong military to military links was perhaps more symbolically important than might otherwise have been the case, because the circumstances were so much more fraught and the stakes were so much higher.

### **TNI-ADF links?**

The TNI has been privately expressing support for a renewal of formal relations with the ADF since at least February 2000, according to TNI officers at that time.<sup>2</sup> This was when the TNI and other Indonesian 'nationalists' were expressing their anger over Australian troops leading the international Peace Keeping Force (PKF) in East Timor<sup>3</sup> (Inbaraj 1999). Indeed, this was when there were still TNI supported cross-border incursions into East Timor, in which Kopassus played a key role (Tapol 1999, England 2000, Laksamana.Net 2002b, DFAT 2001, also see Kingsbury 2003a:271-2). According to these senior officers, the thinking behind the desired renewal of TNI-ADF relations at this time was, however, that if the TNI could again secure training co-operation with the ADF, it could then use this 'badge of international acceptability' to request that the United States' Congress drop its training and weapons ban to Indonesia, which had been instituted in response to the TNI's orchestration of the destruction of East Timor following the 1999 ballot, and which had been in place in various forms for most of the 1990s. The ban was already biting after six months, with senior TNI officers saying that some US-sourced military aircraft were already non-airworthy (one fighter pilot privately acknowledged to the author that his squadron had been grounded due to a lack of US-sourced spare parts).

With Bill Clinton as US president and both Congress and the Senate continuing to support the Leahy-Feingold Amendment of 1999, which ended arms sales to, and most training with, Indonesia<sup>4</sup>, the US position towards

Indonesia remained unchanged until the inauguration of George W. Bush in 2001, which signalled the formal beginning of a more assertive US foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Key to this policy was the US' intention in asserting its global authority to establish its relative position into the indefinite future. The major challenge to potential US hegemony was, at this time, perceived to be China (Rumsfeld 2001). US concerns existed primarily over the relationship between China and Taiwan, and Chinese responses to US arms sales to Taiwan, perceptions of Chinese nuclear proliferation and weapons sales program, trade issues and, to a lesser extent, concerns over China's human rights record and its one party political system.

To this end, the US administration began to conduct diplomatic talks which were widely perceived to be aimed at constructing an informal 'coalition against China', which comprised Russia to the north and west (Matuszak 2001), South Korea to the East, and South-East Asia and Australia to the south. For the South-East Asia component of this coalition to work, it required the active support of both Indonesia and Australia. According to this US administration plan, the US wanted to renew military links with Indonesia, and to achieve this the relationship between Australia and Indonesia had to change (Rumsfeld 2001, Downer 2001). However, publicly, Indonesia was still angry at Australia over the latter's continuing military presence in East Timor, and Australia's Prime Minister John Howard continued to indicate his lack of interest in visiting Indonesia at this time or otherwise initiating moves to repair the damage caused to the relationship by Australia's intervention in East Timor. In what might have otherwise been seen as a step towards more formally closer ties between Australia and Indonesia, by the time Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid visited Australia (after several earlier cancellations), he had all but completely lost authority in Indonesia, was deeply opposed by the TNI, and was just weeks away from being dumped as president.<sup>6</sup>

Just days after Wahid's successor, Megawati Sukarnoputri, had been sworn in as Indonesia's fifth president, during a regional tour in July 2001, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld visited Indonesia and Australia, encouraging both countries to re-establish military links (see Kingsbury 2002:301). Kopassus had been the primary point of military training links between the ADF and the TNI prior to 1999 and it was likely that, if such training links were to be renewed, they would be between Kopassus and the ADF's Special Air Service Regiment (SASR), at least as the initial phase of a wider engagement. As with the earlier hopes for the TNI, not least because Kopassus had been at the forefront of various claims against the TNI, this ADF-TNI cooperation would then be used to argue that Congress should drop its arms ban to Indonesia. Despite

closer military co-operation being endorsed by Australian Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, continuing domestic Australian sensitivity over the TNI's role in East Timor (which was spearheaded by Kopassus) precluded such a move at that time.

But, as Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri's senior advisor Rizal Mallarangeng called it, 'the blessing of September 11' (Klein 2003) changed all that. This change in circumstances was reinforced in Australia by the nightclub bombing in Bali on 12 October 2002, killing 88 Australians of 202 fatalities, with many more injured. This bombing belatedly raised the issue of Islamic terrorism in Indonesia, and genuinely horrified effectively all of Australia, thus allowing domestic politicians the opportunity to use this concern as the basis for putting forward 'security' policies that would probably have otherwise been unacceptable. The issue of 'terrorism' generally and Islamic terrorism in particular had been on at least part of the public agenda in Indonesia since at least late 2000, when armed members of the Laskar Jihad militia (primarily from Java) travelled to Ambon and northern Maluku to engage in fighting against Christian militias operating there against local Islamic militias. There were numerous reports at this time that the Laskar Jihad militia had been in part trained and armed by members of the TNI, including Kopassus, as well as by veterans returned from fighting against Soviet forces in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Laskar Jihad was the largest of the Islamic militias formed at around this time; others included the smaller but more highly trained Laskar Mujahidin, the Sulawesi-based Laskar Jundullah and, at this time, the almost completely unknown Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI) organisation (it now seems there were also other, smaller organisations or splinter groups around from this time). The above-named groups were represented on the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesia Holy Struggle/War Fighters' Council) under the chairmanship of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who was later claimed to be the spiritual leader of JI, which was held responsible for the 2002 Bali nightclub attacks, and other bombing attacks in Jakarta and elsewhere at different times (see ICG 2003a, 2002a).

Indonesia was reluctant to be drawn too closely into the US 'war on terrorism', at least in its international guise, as it was widely perceived to be less a war against 'terrorists' as such and more a war against Islam. As the world's largest Islamic state (approximately 88 per cent of its 220-plus million people) and with political parties either explicitly Islamic or informed by Islam comprising 44 per cent of the 1999 vote, there was a great deal of sensitivity about this 'war'. However, the 'war' provided a rationalisation for a series of moves that would have been politically unacceptable in a less threatened political environment. After Afghanistan, the 'blessing of September 11' helped rationalise the US' bid for control of Iraq, suppression

of trade unionists in the Philippines, a renewed war by the TNI against separatists in Aceh, and increased intelligence and detention measures in Australia. With the continuing threat of terrorism emanating from Indonesia, this 'blessing' also allowed the Australian government to push through parliament the renewal of links with Kopassus. However, as a consequence of pressure brought to bear in Australia's parliament by the Opposition foreign affairs spokesman, Kevin Rudd, links with Kopassus were to explicitly only be with the 'counter-terror' section (Detasemen 81) and, according to Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, precluding those members who were known to have abused human rights. Within days, the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage endorsed the renewal of Kopassus-ADF links (Millett, Wilkinson and Moore 2003).

The argument put by the Australian government (and by Dupont in 2003) for the renewal of training links was that, should Australian citizens be taken hostage by terrorists in Indonesia, only Detasemen 81 had the capacity to free them. There was an implicit assumption that Australia would not be allowed to send in its own CT groups in the event of such a kidnapping, even though this is precisely what Indonesia had done in Thailand in 1981, which led to the establishment of Detasemen 81 (hence the '81' of the name<sup>8</sup>, see Conboy 2003a:292). That renewed links between the ADF and Kopassus would only be with the 'counter-terror' Detasemen 81 was, however, disingenuous. All members of Detasemen 81 were and still are drawn from Kopassus 'dirty tricks' Detasemen Sandhi Yudha (Den Sandha - Covert War Detachment).<sup>9</sup> Den Sandha engages in such activities as assassination (eg, Papuan independence leader Theys Eluay), kidnapping, 'terror' (according to its training manual) and so on (TNI MB 1999). Beyond Detasemen 81 members being drawn from Den Sandha, there is also a rotation of staff between groups, especially Groups III, Den Sandha and Detasemen 81, and a high level of overlap of functions in the field, despite the formal separation of tasks between the groups. Group III and Den Sandha members are in turn drawn from other Kopassus units, and there is a high degree of interchange between the functions of the groups.

The history of Kopassus' various 'groups' terrorising Indonesian citizens, not to mention its links with Laskar Jihad and other militias, is both long and, at the time of writing, substantially unchanged. For example, Kopassus was directly implicated in the murder of West Papuan independence leader Theys Eluay and this order to lower Kopassus ranks was reported in Indonesia to have come from a Kopassus Den Sandha captain, who in turn had passed on the order from a lieutenant-colonel before which it had come from an intelligence body operating outside the formal Kopassus command

structure, claimed to be Badan Intelijen Negara (BIN – State Intelligence Agency) (Ardi and Hadriani 2002, Maha et al 2002). However, if this order had come from within BIN via Badan ABRI Intelijen Strategis (BAIS – Armed Forces Strategic Intelligence Agency), this would have put Kopassus within the formal chain of command, even though such orders would still almost certainly have been informal. Nine Kopassus members, including two officers, ended up being charged over the murder. Seven were subsequently convicted, receiving sentences of between two and three and a half years (indicating the corruption of the legal system rather than the unimportance of the charges). Given Kopassus’ intelligence function, its historical links with intelligence agencies<sup>10</sup> and the senior positions occupied by some former Kopassus officers (eg, the head of the National Intelligence Agency – Badan Intelijen Negara – is General Abdullah Mahmud Hendropriyono, who is a former Kopassus and intelligence officer<sup>11</sup>), receiving an order to kill Eluay was in keeping with Kopassus’ sometimes unconventional ‘chain of command’.

Kopassus’ links to Indonesia’s intelligence agencies raises the further issue of both Kopassus and the intelligence agencies’ relationships with several of Indonesia’s militia organisations, in particular Laskar Jihad and Jema’ah Islamiyah. It has been relatively common knowledge that the State Intelligence Agency (Badan Intelijen Negara – BIN) and its predecessor, Bakin, had infiltrated radical Islamic organisations such as Jema’ah Islamiyah and its predecessors (including Komando Jihad and Dar’ul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia (NII)), (see Laksamana.Net 2002a, Conboy 2003b:ch9) as a means of being aware of their activities and using them for other political purposes, such as ‘sting’ operations. For example, in what amounted to a ‘sting’ operation in the mid to late 1970s, the Indonesian covert operations unit Opsus (Operasi Khussus - Special Operations<sup>12</sup>) encouraged a number of radical Muslims who had links to the Dar’ul Islam/NII movement to again press for an Islamic state (Laksamana.Net 2002b). The intention by Opsus was to both further legitimise the New Order government’s authoritarian capacity, and to discredit radical Islam, which it viewed as a potential threat to state order and security. This group, dubbed ‘Komando Jihad’ by the Indonesian government<sup>13</sup>, or activists closely linked to it, in 1981 hijacked a Garuda aircraft to Bangkok and in 1985 bombed the Borobudur Buddhist temple in Central Java. The 1981 hijacking was ended by a group from Kopassandha (Komando Pasukan Sandhi Yudha, or Covert War Force Command – a previous name for Kopassus), who boarded the plane and killed three of the hijackers (one of whom was shot dead while being escorted from the plane), the other two being killed on the return flight

to Jakarta (Conboy 2003a:ch19). It was from this operation – Operasi Woyla – that Detasemen 81 was founded. Remaining members of this Islamic group were arrested and jailed, disappeared, or fled into exile (a number doing so after they were released from jail). It was from this group, according to court documents from the 1980s, that members of Komando Jihad referred to the establishment of an organisation, continuing on from Dar'ul Islam, known as Jema'ah Islamiyah (ICJ 2002:8, 12). Military intelligence, of which Kopassus remains an integral part, retained links with and operatives within DI/NII and its off-shoots, which in part explains the success of Kopassus' involvement in tracking down those responsible for the 2002 nightclub attacks in Bali.

Apart from the Bangkok aircraft hijack, Kopassus has only undertaken two other hostage rescues. The first was an aborted and hence unsuccessful mission into Papua New Guinea in pursuit of Free Papua Organisation (Organisasi Papua Merdeka – OPM) guerrillas and 22 hostages (36 had earlier been rescued by ordinary Territorial infantry) in May 1982. The second hostage rescue mission was when Kopassus was involved in attempting to rescue European and Indonesian hostages held by members of the OPM in West Papua for over four months in 1996.<sup>14</sup> Not only did Kopassus fail to track down the hostage-takers, despite being within a couple of kilometres of them on a number of occasions, but despite taking the credit for rescuing them, the hostages were actually released by their captors, with two Indonesians being killed. The hostages found their own way to a local TNI territorial patrol (Start 1997:ch22). Such success that Kopassus was able to claim, from at least pressuring the OPM into releasing the hostages, can in large part be attributed to South African mercenaries (from Executive Outcomes) who were working with Kopassus members on that operation.

Beyond one successful operation and two failed operations<sup>15</sup>, Kopassus has also been implicated in a large number of criminal and anti-civilian activities. For example, Kopassus was implicated in the murder of one Indonesian and two US school teachers and the wounding of several others in an ambush near Timika, West Papua, in September 2002, and was involved in the formation and training of anti-independence militias in West Papua (see Davies 2001:pt5, Martinkus 2003) and Aceh (Robinson 2001:230<sup>16</sup>). This is not to mention Kopassus' involvement in 'off-line' units such as Tim Mawar (Rose Team)<sup>17</sup>, which kidnapped at least nine student activists<sup>18</sup> between December 1997 and May 1998, its long history of political assassination, bombing the Jakarta Stock Exchange on 13 September 2000 (killing 15 people, for which two Kopassus members were convicted) and

other covert activities (such as the attack at Batugade, Portuguese Timor, on 7 October 1975, and the attack at Balibo, Portuguese Timor, on 11 November 1975, in which 5 resident Australian journalists were summarily killed<sup>19</sup>). Despite this history Kopassus members have rarely been held accountable for their crimes. As Rabasa and Haseman note: ‘... up to the present time, Kopassus personnel have effectively been protected from investigation and prosecution for wrongdoing.’ (2002:17) When Kopassus chief Major-General Sriyanto Muntasram went to court charged with murder in 2003, Kopassus members formed a sort of ‘honour guard’ for him and crammed the court, and members charged with or convicted of crimes such as murder have been honoured as heroes by their colleagues.

Even Dupont notes that Kopassus ‘has also been accused of banditry, warlordism and a multitude of nefarious criminal practices ranging from illicit timber felling, to sabotage, contract killings and drug running’. Dupont continues: ‘While some of these accusations are undoubtedly true, it would be a mistake to think of Kopassus only, or even primarily, in these terms.’ (2003:2) While it would be incorrect to think of Kopassus ‘only’ in these terms, given its specialist military and intelligence function, that Kopassus has only ever acted against Indonesian citizens and has been widely viewed within Indonesia as a type of praetorian guard, first for Suharto and then for conservative senior army officers, it is difficult to conceptualise Kopassus as other than a deeply and fundamentally flawed organisation. Even Dupont acknowledges that Kopassus was used as a ‘kind of praetorian guard’ in the mid-1990s, but attributes the debasement of the organisation to ‘venal politicians and ambitious career officers who have manipulated the unit for personal gain’ (2003:2). Two problems arise here, the first being that Kopassus members very often act in their own specific interests as well as for perceived wider interests, including an intense, narrowly defined and absolute sense of nationalism, as well as under the (in)direct orders of superior officers and others. The second problem is that, even if Kopassus members were simply cats’ paws for unscrupulous politicians and officers (which is hard to sustain alone), Indonesian politicians and military officers have demonstrated time and again in the post-Suharto era that little if anything of substance has changed either with that organisation or with their relations to it. That is, the uses to which Kopassus have been put by various ‘venal’ elements have not desisted. Indeed, one could legitimately argue that Kopassus is the most pure expression of the TNI, which is in turn a symbiotic element – almost certainly the most important – of an incoherent, corrupt, exploitative, fractured and often predatory state (see Evans 1995, Kingsbury 2003:ch6).

In those societies that correspond to a type of Weberian rational-legal political structure, any organisation that even remotely corresponded to Kopassus' history would be (and in many cases has been) called into disrepute, resulting in either total disbanding or radical restructuring. The very substantial flaws in Kopassus are in part institutional and cultural, and in part structural and organisational, yet it has undergone neither disbandment nor radical restructuring. This in turn can be attributed to the larger organisation of which Kopassus is an exemplary part, the TNI, and its own refusal to be radically – or even meaningfully – reformed.

In that the TNI – and Kopassus – was supposed to have undergone a 'reform' process in line with Indonesia's democratisation in the post-Suharto era, this process appears to have touched it very lightly, apart from limiting (with the intention of ultimately removing) the military's legislative representation. Indeed, the prevailing view among most observers of the TNI is that its reform process, under the rubric of the 'New Paradigm' (*paradim baru*), stalled by 2000 (see Kingsbury 2003b:chs 4, 6, Honna 2003:178, 184-94, Fabiola 2003, Dupont 2003:3, ICG 2002b, 2003b, The Editors 2000) and, by 2003 and the renewing of military operations in Aceh in May and the passing of the new armed forces bill<sup>20</sup>, had gone backwards (Riefqi 2004). Based on evidence of its activities in Aceh, West Papua and elsewhere, there is no evidence to support any claim that reform had touched on Kopassus at all.<sup>21</sup>

Given this lack of reform and the interchanging of Kopassus unit roles<sup>22</sup>, it was therefore not surprising that Detasemen 81 members – those who supposedly have an exclusive 'counter-terror' function – had been (and presumably continued to be) involved in combat operations against GAM guerrillas in Aceh. The involvement of Detasemen 81 members in combat operations in Aceh is known because in August 2003 there was a public report of a Detasemen 81 member<sup>23</sup> being killed in North Aceh, interestingly enough in an area with perhaps the highest incidence to that time of human rights abuses in a campaign marked by such abuses. Other Kopassus units retained a high profile in the Aceh conflict, and were frequently claimed by GAM members and NGOs to be involved in kidnappings, disappearances and assassinations of GAM members, suspected GAM sympathisers, and uninvolved civilians.

### **An Australian initiative?**

Despite the TNI's generally poor reputation and the Kopassus' reputation for being at the more offensive end of the TNI's less palatable activities, the idea of renewing military links between Australia and Indonesia had been

discussed within Australian government departments as early as the beginning of 2002. Privately, and months prior to the Bali bombings in October 2002, a senior official in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said that the Australian government even then wanted to renew ADF-TNI links, but would do so very gradually, to avoid a domestic backlash. This official suggested that such links initially be introduced through 'benign' academic training programs. Such programs could then be 'broadened' to include less academic and more conventional forms of training, in particular that of special forces and, within that, of counter-terrorist branches. The purpose of this proposed renewal of training was suggested to be a part of rebuilding Australia-Indonesia bilateral relations. There was no mention at this meeting of involving the US.

The Bali bombings, however, removed the coyness from what was beginning to look like flirtatious glances again in Indonesia's way, allowing pro-engagement supporters in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence, and in the Australian National University to propose renewing training links. With a little more prompting from the United States, Australia was ready to publicly renew links with the TNI, playing on a sense of domestic insecurity and the argument that 'September 11 (or in Australia's case, October 12) changed everything'. It did not, of course, but it was an exceptionally effective political ploy in other areas, and may have conceivably worked in this. However, the proviso agreed to by the government due to political pressure as a consequence of Kopassus' appalling human rights record meant that a list of names of unwelcome Kopassus members was eventually forwarded to the Indonesian government and then to the TNI.

### **The unravelling**

It was not surprising, given the ethical complexities of the situation, that the practical component of the renewal of links between the ADF and Kopassus came undone before it had even started. The head of Kopassus, Major-General Sriyanto Muntasram, and 10 other Kopassus members, were invited to Australia in October 2003 by the Australian government ostensibly to look at security for the World Rugby Cup then about to be staged.<sup>24</sup> This was to have been the first official, and low-key, broaching of the renewed relationship. However, the ADF officially pointed out that Sriyanto was at that time awaiting trial on a charge of murder, for ordering his troops to open fire in what is known as the Tanjung Priok massacre of 12 September 1984, in which soldiers shot unarmed Muslim protesters in a north Jakarta port-side neighbourhood, killing at least 33 and wounding at least 55 others. The Australian government, aware of the likely protests, media coverage

and political embarrassment that Sriyanto's visit could therefore cause in Australia, quickly backed away from the invitation. The Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, told ABC Radio's 'World Today' program that: '... it's inappropriate for the Australian Defence Force to be involved in training with people in the Indonesian military, or for that matter in the Indonesian system generally, who have been involved in, and in some cases charged with, egregious human rights abuses.' (Downer 2003). Several other Kopassus members from the visiting party were also barred by Australia (Moore 2003). In response, the TNI objected to Australia vetting its members, with Sriyanto saying it was not appropriate for 'a best friend' to impose conditions on such a visit. The visit by Sriyanto and other Kopassus members was thereby cancelled and a subsequent joint-counter-terrorism exercise for late 2003 was put on hold and eventually abandoned.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that Kopassus has been an organisation that has frequently if not exclusively operated in an illegal manner, and that it has a substantial and serious history of human rights abuses, even by Indonesia's own somewhat flexible standards. Based on evidence since 1998, it appears that Kopassus has not altered its methods of operation to bring them more into line with wider (if sometimes failed) political reform processes, and that indeed the organisation of which it is a part, the TNI, has itself only undergone the most cursory reforms. That is, the reasons why Australia regarded it as appropriate to end its links with the TNI generally and Kopassus specifically have not abated, and have in fact been reconfirmed by a range of events, in particular in East Timor, West Papua, Aceh and elsewhere, not to mention Kopassus' still ambiguous relationship with Indonesia's radical Islamic militia organisations and the link between its intelligence function and the genealogy of terrorist groups including Jema'ah Islamiyah.

The argument that Australia needs to re-engage with Kopassus, and in particular its counter-terror unit, as a consequence of the increased risk of terrorism therefore fails on a number of grounds. Initially, by any meaningful definition, even recognising that it does have other roles, Kopassus has been and remains a (state) terrorist organisation, and has had (and most likely retains) close links with, or with members of, other terrorist organisations. Kopassus' counter-terrorist unit, Detasemen 81, has a high degree of inter-operability with other Kopassus units, and is drawn from such units, including 'bayonet' units and the 'dirty tricks' Den Sandha. That is, Detasemen 81 is not exclusively a counter-terror unit, and most of

its operations have not been related to hostage release or terrorism in any conventionally defined sense. Where Detasemen 81 has a history of hostage release, apart from the foray from which the unit was created, it has not had a history of success. Given its sometimes haphazard approach to operations, such as a botched helicopter exercise near Lhokseumawe, Aceh on 4 October 2003 in which eight Detasemen 81 members were killed, there is no certainty that any future operation by Kopassus would be any more successful.

Beyond issues relating to Kopassus as such, the argument that the ADF should renew links in response to combating a rise in regional terrorism is spurious. Regional terrorism has only on one occasion affected Australian citizens, and on this occasion the Indonesian government and in particular its intelligence agencies, including Kopassus, were well aware of the development of organisations both directly and indirectly linked to that event, yet did not act to thwart them. Indeed, the 'rise of terrorism' has worked in favour of the TNI, especially in helping justify renewed operations against separatists in Aceh, and in favour of Kopassus in particular by focusing on the heightened necessity for its 'counter-terror' function. As importantly, the argument that the ADF should renew links with Kopassus does not accurately reflect a potential for hostage release situations, noting that, with the exception of the hijacking of the aircraft *Woyla* to Bangkok in 1981, Islamic terrorists to date have used bombs rather than taking hostages. Rather, the resumption of SASR-Kopassus links is designed to fit in with a broader plan for renewed ADF-TNI links. This in turn reflects both the desire of the TNI as a means of persuading the US Congress to lift its arms ban, and by the US Administration for building a global coalition of allies as a part of a variously defined global agenda (previously China, then 'terrorism').

Where there is a need to further develop security cooperation with Indonesia, as the United States has lately recognised, this should be undertaken with the appropriate civilian body, the police; in this case the Satgas Gegana bomb disposal/counter-terrorist unit of the National Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob).<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that Indonesia's police are not brutal, corrupt, especially well trained or that they do not function in many cases in exactly the same manner as the army. The police tend to fail on each of these counts. However, unlike the TNI generally and Kopassus in particular, the police are largely under civilian control, and the division between the police and the military on 1 April 1999 has increasingly recognised that internal security is, or should be, primarily the responsibility of the police. That the Indonesian police worked so closely and successfully with Australian Federal Police in investigating the 2002 Bali bombings

indicates that this civilian-controlled relationship has considerable counter-terror potential if, in fact, counter-terrorism is genuinely Australia's prime concern.

More probable, though, beyond addressing both the TNI's and the US Administration's interests, and returning to previous Australian practice, links with Kopassus and hence the TNI are seen by certain members of Australia's foreign affairs elite as central to restoring relations with the Indonesian government, based on the principle that the TNI remains a, and probably the, key actor in the state. This latter point, however, is underpinned by a narrow understanding of 'realism' in International Relations theory, which assumes that the internal affairs of a state do not influence its external relations. On this final point, as the downfall of Suharto showed, and the continuing chaos over Indonesia's process of democratisation attests (best exemplified by the departure of East Timor from the state), Indonesia's internal dynamics have a profound impact on its external relations. So too do Australia's domestic politics impact directly on its external relations (exemplified by the ban on certain Kopassus members).

That is to say, Kopassus has not changed and is not likely to change, and a substantial proportion of Kopassus' role will therefore continue to be understood in Australia (and elsewhere, such as the United States) as profoundly inappropriate and morally and legally unacceptable. Dupont says: 'Moral foreign policies are fine in principle but fraught with practical difficulties.' (2003:3) Yet, as has been demonstrated, political decisions that ignore prevailing moral standards are even less sustainable, leaving aside the nexus between public morality, ethics and law, issues of universal human rights and various global covenants on war crimes and genocide. Dupont also claims that renewing ADF-Kopassus links will encourage military reform in Indonesia (2003:7). In asserting this, he appears to miss the fact that many years of such links had absolutely no impact on military reform in Indonesia, and that the main Australian proponent of the argument that it would have such an impact, former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, has since admitted this assertion was wrong (Evans 2001).

While Australia (and other countries) retain a deeply ingrained abhorrence of the activities of organisations such as Kopassus, and such organisations in turn refuse to (or are structurally incapable of) reform, any attempt at 'normalising' relations will, as they have to date, founder on a fundamental mutual incompatibility. How to constructively address this issue, however, is not the purpose of this particular paper.<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dupont refers to Detasemen 81 as Satuan Gulangan 81. There is no word in standard Bahasa Indonesia or Javanese that equates with 'Gulangan' (although 'gulungan', originally from Javanese, means 'roll up' as in carpet or cigarette). The correct alternative nomenclature for Detasemen 81 is 'Penanggulangan Teror' ('Gultor'), or 'Counter-Terror'. The root word for 'penanggulangan' ('tackling', 'crime prevention') is 'tanggulang' ('sluice-gate'). However, most references to the unit are by its formal and more widely attributed title, 'Detachment/Detasemen 81' (eg. Conboy 2003:292).
- <sup>2</sup> These discussions were conducted after a lecture by the author on Australia-Indonesia relations at Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, which was attended by a number of senior officers from the TNI's Staff Training and Command School (SESKO).
- <sup>3</sup> Australia-Indonesia military cooperation links and the Australia-Indonesia Security Agreement, signed in December 1995, were cancelled by Indonesia in September 1999.
- <sup>4</sup> The first US ban on military links (International Military Education and Training funds - IMET) was in 1992 in response to the Santa Cruz massacre of unarmed civilians by Indonesian soldiers in Dili, East Timor, the previous year. Military links were restored in 1993 under the Joint Combined Exchange and Training program (JCET), but the sale of light weapons was stopped in 1994, and expanded in 1995 and 1996 to include heavy weapons and equipment. IMET was restored in 1996 and 1997, but cancelled in mid-1997 by President Suharto following US criticism of Indonesia's human rights record. In 1999 military training and equipment transfers were banned, with the exception of very limited training in combined exercises, and later the sale of some spare parts for military transport aircraft (C-130 and CN-235). The attack on school teachers at Timika, West Papua, has since acted as a major impediment to the restoration of arms supplies and training (although there was a joint amphibious exercise between army, navy and marines corps of both countries in mid-2002, ostensibly to practise for humanitarian evacuation). A Regional Defense Counter-terrorism Fellowship program was also introduced in 2002 for the two-week non-lethal classroom training of military officers in counter-terrorism measures. Indonesian officers were not excluded from the program.
- <sup>5</sup> The Leahy-Feingold Amendment continued in place at the time of writing as a consequence of Congressional intransigence towards US Administration requests to withdraw it as law.
- <sup>6</sup> The removal of Wahid from office was actively supported by senior officers in the TNI who were angry with him over his attempts to rein in military power, institute military reform from outside, and to investigate military business activities. See Kingsbury 2003b:182-5.
- <sup>7</sup> The officer, whose name was most regularly mentioned in connection with militia training, was former commander of Kostrad, Lieutenant-General Djadja Suparman. Suparman's role was believed to be in the provision and coordination of training, funding and logistics. Suparman publicly argued with 'reformist'

(then) Brigadier-General Agus Wirahadikusumah over the future direction of the TNI. Wirahadikusumah was appointed to succeed Suparman as commander of Kostrad by President Wahid and, while in that position, uncovered the unexplained loss of US\$22 million from Kostrad's business accounts. It was understood most of this money was used to help fund Laskar Jihad, even though this same amount was repaid by Suparman after its loss was exposed. Dupont claims support for Laskar Jihad came from pro-Islamic officers (2003:3). However, the chain of directives and support for Laskar Jihad actually point to General Wiranto and his allies, such as Suparman, some of whom had also earlier been Prabowo loyalists and hence identified with the (supposedly Islamic) 'Green Faction' of the TNI. Fawthrop noted that Christian militia members claimed they had also been trained and funded by Kopassus (2002).

- 8 Detasemen 81 was originally known as this, but its name was changed to Group V under the leadership of Major-General Prabowo Subianto (President Suharto's son-in-law), to bring it more formally into line with the other groups of Kopassus. The name was changed back in 2003 to Detasemen 81 to differentiate it from its overtly political function of the group under Prabowo and to indicate that it had otherwise been reformed. In fact, there had been no functional or normative change to the group, or to Kopassus, except for the usual rotation of staff and this name change.
- 9 Den Sandha was known until early 2000 as Grup IV/Group 4. As an administrative structure, Group 4 was returned to Group 3 and re-named its former generic sub-unit title 'Den Sandha' (Detasemen Sandhi Yudha). By way of identification, former Group 4 battalions changed their numerical prefix from 4 to 3, eg, 'Yon 41' to 'Yon 31'.
- 10 As with other special forces, these links had always existed, explicitly through deployed 'Intelligence Taskforce' (SGI/Satgas Intel/Satuan Tugas Intelijen - Intelligence Task Force) which operates under the aegis of BAIS (and its predecessor Badan Intelijen ABRI - BIA), as well as Group III and Den Sandha's overt intelligence functions. The appointment of former Kopassus officer and deputy chief of Bakin, Benny Murdani, as head of the armed forces strengthened this link.
- 11 Hendropriyono had extensive service in Kopassus' 'training ground' of East Timor, and earned the moniker 'The Butcher of Lampung' for his involvement, as colonel, in leading troops against the residents of the 'Islamic' village of Talangsari, Lampung, South Sumatra on 7 February 1989, in response to the earlier death of an army officer. Up to 300 men, women and children were killed in the massacre.
- 12 Opsus was developed by Suharto in 1962 as an executive agency of Operation Mandala to secure West Papua under Indonesian rule. After 1966 it was technically a unit of Bakin, (Badan Intelijen Koordinasi Negara - State Intelligence Coordination Agency) although generally operating with specialist army units, usually on projects specified by Suharto.
- 13 There are also some claims that Komando Jihad members also used this title.
- 14 There were actually two kidnappings in early January 1996, with around 10 of possibly 25 or 26 hostages being quickly released and two soon after. The total number of hostages held thereafter was around 14 (different reports cite slightly different numbers of hostages taken and released).

- <sup>15</sup> Kopassus has been involved in a much larger number of operations involving hostages, including recent operations in Aceh. However, none of these have been 'hostage rescue' as such, and have involved large numbers of other troops, all of whom have acted in more or less conventional combat roles.
- <sup>16</sup> This was also supported by personal interviews undertaken in Aceh in September 2001 and September 2002 with local residents in the Pase district, pro-referendum activists in Banda Aceh and Lokseumawe, and with Pase district GAM commander Teuku Jamaika, September 2001. See also Kingsbury 2003b:123, 228.
- <sup>17</sup> There have been numerous such teams and single operatives, which are generically referred to as 'milsus', or 'militer khussus' (special military). Such 'milsus' are said, by various private sources, to be former Kopassus members who come back on a 'freelance' – and hence deniable – basis.
- <sup>18</sup> It was believed 23 were kidnapped, but 11 Kopassus members were charged with the kidnapping of only nine. Of the other 14, one was found dead and 13 remain missing. Claims of torture of the nine by Kopassus members did not result in charges.
- <sup>19</sup> Kopassus was then known as the Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat (RPKAD) – Army Para Regiment Command.
- <sup>20</sup> Article 19 of the bill states that the chief of defence can deploy troops without permission from the president, as well as limiting auditing of the military budget and transparency of sources of income (Riefqi 2004).
- <sup>21</sup> Kilcullen suggests that Kopassus even continues to use tactics and strategies devised for counter-insurgency in the 1950s (Kilcullen 2002).
- <sup>22</sup> Kopassus members can move between Group 3, Den Sandha and Detasemen 81, but almost never back to Groups 1 and 2 unless in promoted positions, or attached on operations as in Aceh in 2003. In this latter case, Detasemen 81 troops deployed with Group 1 and 2 units nominally as part of the respective sub-units. Kopassus members also frequently operate in 'combined' military groupings ('yongab' – 'batalyon gabungan' – joint battalion) (this term was formally discontinued in 2002) and later as 'denkul' (detasemen pemukul – 'strike detachment'), as well as under police guise in nominally police coordinated BKO units ('bawah kendali operasi' – under operational control), which are often combined with Kostrad (Strategic Reserve) or Brimob (Police paramilitary Mobile Brigade) members.
- <sup>23</sup> Detasemen 81 members were being used with Kopassus Group I and II units, operating as independent mobile forces. The Detasemen 81 member killed in Darulassam village, Tanah Luas district, was Private 2nd class Purwanto, who was attached to 'Sri Gunting I', a Kopassus company element of Satgas Mobile (Satuan Tugas Mobile/Mobile Duty Unit).
- <sup>24</sup> They were to have 'looked at rugby security' by visiting the SASR base at Swanbourne, Perth, Western Australia.
- <sup>25</sup> The new, 300 man, specifically counter-terror unit has also been denominated as 'Task Force 88 Anti-Terror' (Casey 2003). It is worth noting here that the Australian government has implicitly ignored the fact that Indonesia's Air Force, Navy and

Police claim their own counter-terror capabilities, in Detasemen Bravo 90 and Detasemen Jaka as well as Stagas 88.

<sup>26</sup> This matter was addressed in Kingsbury 2003c.

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