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Indonesia Says Drive Against Separatists Will Not End Soon

By JANE PERLEZ

JAKARTA, Indonesia, July 8 — The Indonesian military has now declared that its tough offensive against rebels in the northern province of Aceh, originally supposed to last six months, would last much longer, maybe even 10 years.

That statement Sunday by Gen. Endriartono Sutarto to Indonesian reporters followed the first public rebuke by Washington for Indonesia's conduct of the war, and a meeting between a senior Bush administration official and President Megawati Sukarnoputri in which she was urged to end the nearly 30-year-long conflict.

Washington's public and private diplomacy — including meetings between the president and a National Security Council official, Karen Brooks, and a meeting between Ms. Brooks and General Endriartono — appear to have had little impact on the conduct of the military in Aceh.

According to estimates by the Indonesian military, tens of thousands of civilians have been forced from their homes by the army and placed in relocation camps. The number of civilians killed is estimated by the Indonesian police to be about 150. Western officials assert that the civilian death toll is considerably higher.

At a time when the power of the Indonesian military is on the rise again, the United States appears to have little influence among the officers whose cooperation it wants for the campaign against terrorism, Indonesian and Western officials said. The Indonesian police have been the most important force in rounding up suspected terrorists.

Those officials said the Army chief of staff, Gen. Ryamizard Ryacudu, argued at a recent meeting of his generals that training for Indonesian officers in the United States would be unnecessary, and even counterproductive.

According to several accounts, General Ryamizard, who is close to President Megawati and is thus considered the most powerful general in Indonesia, attributes his own success in part precisely to his lack of training in the West.

The Bush administration is trying to persuade the Indonesian military to cooperate with an F.B.I. investigation into the killing of two Americans in the eastern province of Papua last year — which was the main topic on Ms. Brooks's agenda, according to Indonesian officials. The Indonesian police have said they believe that military units were responsible for the killings.

The outcome of the investigation could determine whether Washington proceeds with plans to offer training to Indonesian military officers in the United States. Training was cut off in the mid-1990's after the Clinton administration objected to the military's human rights violations in East Timor.

The war in Aceh is popular in the rest of Indonesia. With the exception of complaints by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights, which has said the military appears to be training militia groups of the kind that acted brutally in East Timor in 1999, there have been few objections to the war. In Aceh itself, fear has silenced dissent.

Writing in The Jakarta Post today, Aboeprijadi Santoso, a radio journalist for Radio 68-H, wrote from the Acehnese capital, Banda Aceh, of how only a few villagers were still brave enough to speak out. He quoted one, Farida, as saying: "My brother was a religious teacher, nothing to do with politics. But last night he was taken by men in uniform with guns, speaking Javanese." Farida showed her brother's "brutally murdered" body to reporters before arranging a burial. "However, silence remains the mainstream," Mr. Santoso wrote.

Usman Hamid, the coordinator of Kontras, a leading human rights group, said its office in Banda Aceh closed as soon as the offensive began. The military's tactics made it "too dangerous," for his workers to go out in the field, he said.

With the exception of the State Department rebuke last week, criticism from the United States has been muted for other reasons. By grafting some of the Pentagon's tactics in Iraq onto its own campaign against the separatists, the Indonesians have insulated themselves from criticism, said Sidney Jones, an American analyst who has worked on Indonesian issues for 30 years and is now the director here of the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based nongovernmental organization.

The Indonesian government announced that it would build an internment camp for prisoners on an island off Aceh, a plan Ms. Jones likened to the detention of terror suspects at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba.

Indonesian reporters are now embedded with military units in Aceh in an arrangement copied directly from the Pentagon's own program for journalists in Iraq, American and Indonesian officials said. But the Indonesians have insisted on far more restrictive rules. Indonesian journalists are banned from writing about the rebels, and foreign reporters have effectively been banned from the province.