

Impunity in Indonesia

By Russell Feingold

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Last month this newspaper printed a powerful article by Dana Priest relating the story of an ambush last summer in Indonesia that left three dead, including two American schoolteachers. Although police reports indicated that the Indonesian military was very likely involved in the attack, the investigation was turned over to that same military. Not surprisingly, the Indonesian military proved unwilling to implicate itself and unwilling to cooperate with the FBI. The Priest article quoted Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Daley as saying that "the preponderance of evidence indicates to us that members of the Indonesian army were responsible for the murders in Papua."

It also tells the story of one of the ambush victims, Patsy Spier, who lost her husband, Rick, in that attack of Aug. 31, 2002, and who was seriously wounded herself. I have met with Patsy Spier and have heard her story and her plea that the U.S. government deny Indonesia access to a small military assistance program known as IMET -- International Military Education and Training -- until the United States gets full cooperation in investigating these murders, and until those responsible are held accountable for their actions. This request, which has been echoed by other survivors, is a modest one.

Indonesia has not received IMET assistance for a decade, because its military has a long history of abusive practices. But IMET is an extraordinarily popular program within the Pentagon, and over time the conditions for resumption of assistance have been weakened or abandoned.

IMET is not intended to deliver any benefits to our national security today. It is always explained as a program intended to create bonds that will be useful years later, when officers who were exposed to American training at early stages of their careers rise to positions of authority with a special understanding of the United States. In fact, justifications for IMET often suggest that we are hoping to develop a cadre of future leaders who will "be on the other end of the phone" in times of crisis. This may be true. But it is hard to forget that when East Timor burned in 1999, Indonesia's senior military officials, including alumni of the decades-long U.S. IMET effort in Indonesia, weren't terribly interested in taking our calls.

There appears to be no interest in meaningful reform within the Indonesian military. At this point, commitment at the highest levels is what it takes to turn this relationship around.

In May I offered an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Authorization Act when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee took up this important bill. My amendment stated that no taxpayer dollars would be used to provide IMET to Indonesia in 2004 until the president had determined that the government of Indonesia and the Indonesian armed

forces had begun taking effective measures, including cooperation with the FBI, to bring to justice those responsible for the August ambush. Because I appreciate the complexity of our bilateral relationship, I took care to ensure that nothing in the amendment would restrict ongoing counterterrorism training or any other element of our extensive training and military contacts with the Indonesian armed forces.

My amendment met with no opposition in committee, and the House of Representatives recently approved a similar amendment, authored by Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.). But now the administration is taking precisely the opposite approach and apparently intends to release IMET assistance to Indonesia for the current year.

There must be real consequences for the murder of American citizens.

Frankly, the IMET program, worth \$400,000 in 2003, is insignificant in comparison with the magnitude of this outrage. I believe that this issue should trigger a top-to-bottom review of our bilateral relationship with Indonesia and a fundamental change in approach. But at the very least, we should start with a clear and unambiguous signal. The administration's signal is clear -- but it is the wrong one. It is poised to signal that the United States is willing to conduct "business as usual" with forces that may have conspired to murder Americans, and "business as usual" with forces that have obstructed the U.S. investigation into those murders. I fail to see how such a signal could possibly make Americans more secure.

The writer is a Democratic senator from Wisconsin.

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