



Asian Conflicts Reports

Spotlight on Obama's Re-election & the 'Pivot' to Asia

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US Pivot to Asia and Indonesian Police Reform

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The propagation of democratic values and human rights principles do not appear to be major priorities of the current US realignment to Asia strategy

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It would be beneficial for the US to further assist the Indonesian police to incorporate human rights principles and develop new ways of dealing with the populace

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There is a need for the Indonesian police to learn from the US' approach to law enforcement, which engenders healthy respect from the population it polices

The US' 'Pivot to Asia' strategy is currently being discussed extensively in academic and policy circles. The fundamental tenets of this strategy include the strengthening of US military deployments, political relationships and economic partnerships in Asia. Analysts have observed that the propagation of democratic values and the emphasis on adhering to human rights principles are not major priorities of this realignment strategy.

This does not mean that human rights principles have lost their relevance in Asia. In fact, it is argued that they are needed more than ever to shape Indonesian security sector reform. While having notable successes in terms of counter-terrorism, civil-security relations have been fraught with distrust as a result of missteps by the security forces, particularly with regard to human rights abuses. If these problematic civil-security relations are allowed to persist, the efficacy of security work would inevitably be adversely affected. Hence, it is necessary for the Indonesian security sector to incorporate human rights principles into its master plan and develop new ways of dealing with the populace.

In the post-1998 era of *Reformasi* (Reformation), Indonesian security forces have been committing themselves to helping to uphold freedom of speech and human rights principles. Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, Air Chief Marshall (Ret.) Djoko Suyanto, remarked in his speech at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies on 10 December 2012 that Indonesia's experience showed that "democracy is compatible with security and ... the two produce a much more authentic and robust stability and harmony." He noted, among other examples, how the respect for the rule of law was noticeable in the way in which the Indonesian National Police dealt with terrorism and other law enforcement activities. He also noted that from 2005 security officers could not act with impunity in relation to human rights abuses and could be easily prosecuted under Indonesian law – a fact often ignored and unreported by the press and mass media.

Despite such breakthroughs, the recent and indeed mounting attacks on the Indonesian National Police across the country raises the question of whether these attacks reflect a degeneration of civil-security relations, and if so, what should be done?

In the restive region of Papua, there has been a significant increase in the number of attacks on the police. Police officers were targeted in a series of mysterious killings blamed on separatist movements throughout 2012. For instance, a member of the police mobile brigade was shot in the mountains of Puncak Jaya on 27 January 2012. In another instance, a police brigadier was gunned down in Paniai in August. Separately, another police officer was shot by five armed men while patrolling road building works in Wamena in September. On 27 November 2012, three policemen were killed by a mob in the Pirime, and their bodies publicly burnt.

Coincidentally, the Indonesian National Body for Counterterrorism (BNPT) also reported a change in terrorist targets from individuals and groups representing the West to local targets, and in particular to the police. For example, two policemen were murdered while investigating a terrorist training camp in Poso, Central Sulawesi in October 2012. In August 2012, a policeman was shot and a grenade thrown into a guard post in Solo, Central Java.

Attacks on the police are not solely conducted by terrorists and separatists. Members of Indonesian civil society have begun to move against the police as well. A 2012 International Crisis Group (ICG) report documents that in 2012, residents of Buol in Central Sulawesi rioted against the police in protest against the death of a local who was believed to have been tortured to death while in custody. Also, in February 2011, residents of Kampar, Riau, attacked a police building following the incarceration of a man who was believed to have been framed by the police.

Moreover, when dealing with crime, suspects are often subjected to mob justice rather than being handed over to the police. Petty criminals like pickpockets are known to have been publicly executed, while other criminals have reportedly been helped by the police to escape angry mobs demanding restitution. Such incidents suggest that civil-police relations are mired with distrust.



Indonesia could benefit from policing models from other democracies such as the US. US training and learning models are already proving beneficial for the Indonesian anti-terror squad, Detachment 88. There is space for further international exchange on policing reform that improves civilian-police relations. For one, there could be exchange on ways to improve the curriculum in the Indonesian national police academy and provincial police schools in terms of the role of officers in the society. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that there is a need to change the “culture of superiority” as well as corporate punishments that could be transferred to the community within the Indonesian police training institutes. There is a need to forbid hazing in training recruits, for instance. The Medford police chief, Leo Sacco, for example, had condemned allegations of hazing in the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Police Academy and pulled out the recruit involved.

The ICG also noted the need for the Indonesian police academies to establish better training for non-lethal methods of crowd control and develop guidelines for dealing with anarchic behavior. The Vancouver police, for example, established a ‘meet-and-greet’ approach to policing crowds. Officers try to proactively build a relationship with the crowd by shaking hands with the people, asking about their concerns, and trying to convince them that the police are there to keep them safe. Thus, platforms could be built for international exchanges on policing reform that improve the image of the police in the eyes of the Indonesian civilians.

One of the most popular images in the US social media in 2012 was that of a policeman who bought a pair of boots for a homeless man during the cold New York winter. In contrast, there is a long way to go before Indonesian law enforcement agencies achieve such a positive image. There is a need for the Indonesian police to learn from the US approach to law enforcement, which engenders healthy respect from the population it polices. Given the renewed interest of the Obama administration in the Southeast Asian region in the light of his re-election, it is an opportune time to model conduct of the security sector on principles of respect for human rights, while respecting Indonesia’s sovereignty. ●