

Reject the “security” pact with Indonesia

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A new “security pact” between Australia and Indonesia, to be signed on November 13 in Lombok, will strengthen Canberra’s military and economic alliance with Jakarta, at the expense of the peoples of both countries.

The Indonesia and Australia Framework for Security Co-operation will assist Indonesia to develop its stalled nuclear program; conduct joint border-protection patrols to prevent West Papuans, in particular, from reaching Australia’s shores; and expand Australian military and intelligence ties, including with the discredited Kopassus special forces troops.

The Howard government is hailing the treaty as a breakthrough in relations with the Indonesian government, strained after Canberra agreed to give asylum to 43 West Papuans earlier this year. But apart from the period around Australia’s intervention on behalf of the East Timorese in 1999, Canberra and Jakarta see eye to eye.

Since 1975, when Labor PM Gough Whitlam turned a blind eye to Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor, through to Labor PM Paul Keating’s 1995 security treaty with Indonesia that strengthened military ties with Kopassus, Indonesia has had a strong relationship with Australian governments, Labor and Coalition. This is because, for an imperial power such as Australia, business and trade with a nation of 200 million people is more important than human rights, be they in Indonesia, East Timor, Aceh or West Papua.

Popular support in Australia for East Timor’s national liberation struggle forced a temporary retreat from this bi-partisan, reactionary policy, and the Howard government has been trying to regain ground ever since. The new security treaty is part of that process.

The treaty formalises Australia’s support for Indonesia’s “territorial integrity”. That is, Canberra pledges to assist Indonesia in suppressing movements for self-determination, in West Papua and Aceh in particular. It will do this mainly through training Kopassus and other Indonesian troops and by doing all it can to prevent West Papuans, among others, from reaching Australia in a bid for asylum.

The treaty also opens the way for Australia to sell uranium to Indonesia, which plans to begin building its first nuclear power plant in 2010. Indonesia has previously toyed with this dangerous fuel to boost its energy supplies, but backed away after national and international campaigns against nuclear power plants being situated on one of the earth’s most unstable fault lines.

Since PM John Howard has now decided that Australia must expand its uranium mining, finding willing trading partners becomes necessary.

Supporting Indonesia’s brutal control over the province of West Papua is also a priority for Howard. The biggest gold-copper mine, part-owned by the Anglo-Australian company Rio Tinto, is located there.

Central to the wave of protests in West Papua this year is anger that mine operator Freeport-McMoran has been making huge profits while West Papuans receive virtually no benefit; tribal people around the mine have lost their land, and their rivers have been seriously polluted by tailings from the mine.

According to Oxfam, the mine disposes 230,000 tons of tailings into surrounding rivers each day, causing major environmental damage. This method of disposal is prohibited in most countries: only three mines in the world, all in New Guinea, still use it. The Mineral Policy Institute believes Rio Tinto prefers to operate overseas to avoid environmental regulation.

In June, the Norwegian government decided to withdraw its investment from the Freeport mine based on the company's "severe and irreversible damage to the natural environment" and "ethically unacceptable practices" in relation to its treatment of the locals. Canberra has no such scruples. The new treaty gives the tick to corporate plunder that has horrified the world.

A survey by the solidarity organisation SNUP, in cooperation with Kemitraan (Partnership on Governance Reform in Indonesia) on attitudes in West Papua towards the special autonomy law (OTSUS) found that five years after its introduction, 60% of the 323 respondents did not think that special autonomy would improve their living conditions; 76% said the law was not implemented well; 73% believed that corruption was very widespread; and 78% said that efforts at law enforcement did not conform with people's sense of justice.

Asked whether they felt proud of their Papuan identity, 96% said yes. Asked whether they identified themselves as Papuans, as members of their tribal group or as Indonesians, 52% identified themselves as Papuans, 30% as members of their tribal group and only 14% as Indonesians. These statistics, while based on a small sample, reflect that Indonesia's efforts to force West Papuans to identify as Indonesians are having little success.

The signing of this treaty, which commits Australia to support and assist Jakarta's repressive rule in West Papua and across the whole archipelago, is a retrograde step and should be opposed.

P.S.

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