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Trump's Indonesian Allies In Bed With ISIS-Backed Militia Seeking to Oust Elected President

<https://theintercept.com/2017/04/18/trumps-indonesian-allies-in-bed-with-isis-backed-militia-seeking-to-oust-elected-president/>

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Associates of Donald Trump in Indonesia have joined army officers and a vigilante street movement linked to ISIS in a campaign that ultimately aims to oust the country's president. According to Indonesian military and intelligence officials and senior figures involved in what they call "the coup," the move against President Joko Widodo (known more commonly as

Jokowi), a popular elected civilian, is being impelled from behind the scenes by active and retired generals.

Prominent supporters of the coup movement include Fadli Zon, vice speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives and Donald Trump's main political booster in the country; and Hary Tanoë, Trump's primary Indonesian business partner, who is building two Trump resorts, one in Bali and one outside Jakarta.

This account of the movement to overthrow President Jokowi is based on dozens of interviews and is supplemented by internal army, police, and intelligence documents I obtained or viewed in Indonesia, as well as by NSA intercepts obtained by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Many sources on both sides of the coup spoke on condition of anonymity. Two of them expressed apparently well-founded concerns about their safety.

The Coup Movement

On the surface, the massive street protests surrounding the April 19 gubernatorial election have arisen from opposition to Jakarta's ethnic Chinese incumbent governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok. As a result of pressure from the well-funded, well-organized demonstrations that have drawn hundreds of thousands — perhaps millions — to Jakarta's streets, Gov. Ahok is currently standing trial for religious blasphemy because of an offhand comment about a verse in the Quran. On Thursday, the day after he hears the results of the very close governor's election, he is due back in court for his blasphemy trial.

Yet in repeated, detailed conversations with me, key protest figures and officials who track them have dismissed the movement against Ahok and the charges against him as a mere pretext for a larger objective: sidelining the country's president, Jokowi, and helping the army avoid consequences for its mass killings of civilians — such as the 1965 massacres that were endorsed by the U.S. government, which armed and backed the Indonesian military.

Serving as the main face and public voice of the generals' political thrust has been a group of what Indonesians call *preman* — officially sponsored street thugs — in this case, the Islamic Defenders Front, or FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*). Originally established by the security forces — the *aparatus* — in 1998 as an Islamist front group to assault dissidents, the FPI has been implicated in violent extortion, especially of bars and sex clubs, as well as murders and attacks on mosques and churches. During the mass protests against the governor, FPI leader Habib Rizieq Shihab has openly called for Ahok to be “hanged” and “butchered.”

FPI leader Habib Rizieq Shihab openly called for Ahok to be “hanged” and “butchered.”

Joining Rizieq at the protests atop a mobile command platform have been the FPI's spokesman and militia chief, Munarman, as well as Fadli Zon, who is known for publicly praising Donald Trump and appeared with the candidate at a press conference at Trump Tower during the opening days of the presidential campaign. Fadli Zon serves as the right-hand man of the country's most notorious mass-murdering general, Prabowo Subianto, who was defeated by Jokowi in the 2014 election.

Munarman, who has been videotaped at a ceremony in which a roomful of young men swear allegiance to ISIS and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is also a corporate lawyer working for the Indonesian branch of the mining colossus Freeport McMoRan, now controlled by Carl Icahn, President Trump's friend and deregulation adviser. Although the Trump connections appear to be very important for the coup plotters, it is unknown whether Trump or Icahn have any direct knowledge of the Indonesian coup movement.

FPI spokesman and corporate lawyer Munarman, indicated with an arrow far left, at a ceremony in which young men swear allegiance to ISIS

Munarman did not respond to requests to comment for this article.

The FPI demonstrations in Jakarta, officially shunned by the country's top mainstream Muslim groups, have been endorsed in messages from Indonesian ISIS personnel in Syria. The FPI, for its part, has waved black ISIS flags at Prabowo rallies and has officially endorsed the call of Al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahri for Al Qaeda and ISIS to pursue their common fight in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

The Snowden archive contains numerous documents related to the Islamic Defenders Front, including an Australian intelligence document describing FPI as a "violent extremist group." The documents include Indonesian-language intercepts of reports by police officials complaining that the Indonesian public distrusts the police because it uses violent groups like FPI. The intercepted Indonesian police reports also note that although FPI is largely a creation of the state security apparatus, it at times escapes the state's control, particularly when fomenting mob violence, such as in a well-known case in which a man was beaten to death on videotape because he attended a mosque targeted for extermination by the FPI. In one case of murder carried out by an FPI mob, a memo states, police were unable to arrest and detain the FPI suspects because they were afraid the mob would attack and burn the police station.

Another intercept links FPI figures to an offshoot of Jemaah Islamiyah, the jihadist network implicated in the 2002 Bali bombings, and details weapons training delivered by officers of the Indonesian national police special forces to FPI Aceh members.

The NSA had no comment on the content of the intercepts. The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

As the FPI's mass protest movement has proceeded over the last six months, I received detailed information from five Indonesian internal intelligence reports. The reports were assembled by three different Indonesian agencies. Each one was confirmed by at least two current army, intelligence, or palace officials.

One intelligence report asserted that the FPI-led protest movement was being funded in part by Tommy Suharto — son of the former dictator Suharto — who once served time for having a judge who displeased him shot in the head. Tommy's financial contributions were also affirmed to me by retired Gen. Kivlan Zein. Kivlan, who helped the FPI lead a massive November protest in Jakarta, is currently facing the charge of treason (*makar*) for allegedly trying to overthrow the

government during the recent protest drive. He is also the former campaign chair for Gen. Prabowo, who was defeated by President Jokowi in the 2014 presidential election.

Another report asserted that some funds came from Donald Trump's billionaire business partner Hary Tanoe, who was repeatedly described to me by key movement figures as being among their most important supporters. Last Friday night, when I sat down with a roomful of such figures — none of whom requested anonymity — they expressed excitement about their closeness to Hary and his personal and financial relationship with President Trump, who along with his son Eric welcomed Hary to Trump Tower and the inauguration. They said they hoped Hary, who is building two Trump resorts in Indonesia, would serve as a bridge between Trump and Gen. Prabowo. Manimbang Kahariady, an executive of Prabowo's political party, said he had met with Hary three days before. He and others at the meeting were convinced that Hary is telling Trump about the need to back the movement and remove their adversaries, beginning with Ahok.

Tommy Suharto could not be reached for comment. Hary Tanoe declined repeated requests for comment.

A third report asserted that some FPI movement funds came from former president and retired general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) — information that apparently angered President Jokowi, was leaked to the public, and was in turn denied publicly by an angry SBY who asserted at once that the facts were false and that the government had tapped his phone to get them. Nonetheless, seven current or former army or intelligence officials I spoke to said that SBY had indeed given funds but had channeled them indirectly. One official, retired Adm. Soleman Ponto, who is not a supporter of the coup movement, is the former chief of military intelligence (BAIS) and currently advises the state intelligence agency (BIN). Though he declined to comment directly when I asked him about specific intelligence reports, Soleman said that it was “very clear” that SBY, whom he called a friend, helped fund the movement, “giving through a mosque, giving through a school, SBY is the source.”

More broadly, Ponto said, “almost all the retired military” and “some current military back SBY” in supporting the FPI-led protests and the coup movement. He said he knows this because — in addition to his being an intelligence man — the pro-coup generals are his colleagues and friends, many of whom correspond on the WhatsApp group known as The Old Soldier. The admiral said that for the movement's military sponsors, the Ahok issue is a mere entry point, a religious hook to draw in the masses, but “Jokowi is their final destination.”

As for the tactic of a straight army assault on the palace in a coup d'état, Ponto said that would not happen. This one would be “a coup d'état by law,” resembling in one sense the uprising that toppled Suharto in 1998, except that in this case the public would not be on the revolt's side — and the army, rather than defending the president, would be working to bring him down. The FPI-led protestors, he said, would enter the palace and congress grounds, then try to get inside and set up camp until someone made them leave.

“It would look like People Power” — the people gathered by FPI and their allies, but in this case, “with everything paid. The military would just do nothing. They only have to go to sleep” and let the president fall.

The admiral's description of the movement's strategy matched that of a dozen top officials I spoke to, some of them still active in the *aparatus* — some for the coup, some against it.

Another possible scenario was described by another large group of officials: that the FPI-led rallies would get out of hand, with Jakarta and other cities tumbling into chaos, and the army stepping in and assuming control to save the state. This second, more violent option was discussed in detail when I met in late February, on the record, with FPI movement leaders Ustad Muhammad Khattath and Haji Usamah Hisyam.

Ustad Khattath had been referred to me by the Freeport lawyer and FPI militia chief Munarman, who had declined to see me. Haji Usamah accompanied Ustad Khattath and they gave a joint interview.

(The material in this section is attributed to “they” and presented without quotation marks, because since our interview, Ustad Khattath has been arrested and charged with *makar* (treason), a legal concept that I view as being unjust and repressive and have denounced when it has been used before.)

Barely mentioning religious questions, they said Indonesia's problem was New-Style Communism, and the army must be able to step in and guide the situation because Indonesia is not mature, not ready for democracy. Jokowi, they charged, was providing a space for communism, and the only strong organization that can face up to that is the army.

As to their street protest movement, they said, we civilians must be backed by the military, something they said was indeed happening secretly because now under *reformasi* the military can't engage in politics. According to Haji Usamah, “It's an intelligence operation by military personnel, but the army can't be out front. They give the strategic view and direction. The army doesn't like the communists.”

They said there are communists in the legislature and the executive branch. They must be targeted. For the street movement, the key strategic and tactical guidance was given to them by an anti-communist general who works with them. The army can only step in if there is chaos. If there is peace, they can't do anything.

Ustad Khattath and Pak Usamah told me that they don't want blood, they want peaceful revolution, but also insisted that not long from now there will be a revolution by the *ummaat*, several weeks in the future. The palace is afraid, they said, they are afraid Jokowi will fall. They said the upcoming street actions would all be with revolutionary steps because peace has not yet brought down Ahok.

Ustad Khattath and Pak Usamah told me that if the president does not accede to their demands, there will be more massive action, using a stronger style of pressure, and added that their direct destination will be the president.

They saw the revolution beginning with days-long occupations of the congress and the palace and noted that if the people are hurt by being rebuffed, they will take the shortcut outside the

law. Anything could happen. There could be millions that take the law into their own hands. Their position was, remind the president not to break the law by failing to jail Ahok or the people will get mad and out of control. It's a disorderly situation, one that they felt would resolve itself by the army stepping in.

After Ustad Khattath was arrested by police and charged with treason, Usamah texted me to say he had now taken command of the street actions, just as Ustad Khattath had done after FPI leader Rizieq was brought up on pornography and other charges.

1965 Again

Soon after our interview, I received an army document from an officer inside the *aparatus* that could be seen as providing the template for Khattath's and Usamah's remarks about the street actions.

Titled "Analyzing the Threats Posed by the New-Style Communism in Indonesia," it is a series of PowerPoint slides used for ideological training at army bases nationwide.

New-Style Communism, or *Komunisme Gaya Baru*, abbreviated "KGB," is a concept whose menace is framed with sketches of Stalin, Pol Pot, and Hitler — and appears to be broadly enough defined to include any critic of the army anywhere.

Referring to such purportedly communist policies as "free health care and education programs," the document denounces "idealizing pluralism and diversity in the social system" as a specific "KGB" threat now rising in Indonesia. Using threat assessment techniques drawn from Western intelligence doctrine and texts — excerpts from which are used, sometimes in English — the document warns of the communist enemy "separating the army from people" and "using human rights and democracy issues while positioning oneself as victim to gain sympathy."

The statement about human rights victims is an apparent reference to figures such as the brilliant social justice advocate Munir Said Thalib, my friend, who was assassinated in 2004 with a massive dose of arsenic that caused him to vomit to death on a flight to Amsterdam, or the victims of the 1965 slaughter of perhaps a million civilians, carried out by the army with U.S. backing in order to consolidate power after an attempted coup.

The 1965 massacre came up when I sat down with retired Gen. Kivlan Zein, who said that if Jokowi refused to accede to the army's wishes, similar tactics could be deployed again.

Like many officials I spoke with, Kivlan said that the current army-backed street movement and crisis began as a result of the Symposium, a 2016 forum organized by the Jokowi government that allowed survivors and descendants of '65 to publicly describe what had happened to them and to discuss how their loved ones died. For much of the army, the Symposium was an intolerable outrage and in itself justified the coup movement. One general told me that what most outraged his colleagues was that "it made the victims feel good." The Symposium, of course, had nothing to do with Gov. Ahok or with religious questions of any kind. It was about the army and its crimes.

“If not for the Symposium, there wouldn’t be a movement now,” Kivlan told me. “Now the communists are on the rise again,” Kivlan complained. “They want to establish a new communist party. The victims of ’65, they all blame us. ... Maybe we’ll fight them again, like ’65.”

I was taken aback by that and wanted to make sure I had heard correctly.

“It could happen, ’65 could be repeated all over again,” he repeated.

And the reason?

“They are seeking redress.”

A visitor walks pass a picture of Suharto at the Suharto museum on May 6, 2016, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Photo: Ulet Ifansasti/Getty Images

In other words, Kivlan was raising the specter of new mass slaughter if the old victims did not learn to forget. Kivlan then went on to detail why the ’65 coup was justified. He said that the ousted president, Sukarno, who was by then the army’s virtual captive, had given an order for the army to take over. The army “was handed power” by the congress.

Could that happen again now, I asked?

“It could,” the general said. “The army could move again now, like Suharto in that era.”

The general told me that last July, Jokowi had visited armed forces headquarters in the aftermath of the Symposium and had told the assembled generals that “he was not going to apologize to the PKI [communist party].”

“If Jokowi sticks with that” — the no-apology stance — “he won’t be overthrown. He will save himself. But if he apologizes, [he is] finished, over,” Kivlan said.

I again wanted to be sure he was really saying the army would take action, like ’65 again.

“Yes, it will secure the situation, including like in ’65.”

“No say surrender,” he concluded in English.

Though Kivlan is regarded as being among the more ideological of the generals, it’s worth noting that many of his colleagues have been toying with ousting Jokowi even if he doesn’t apologize. In that sense, Kivlan belongs to the movement’s moderate wing. Remarkably, the idea of a mere apology to the army’s victims is enough to motivate generals to move to overthrow the president.

Kivlan is often credited with helping to create the FPI, after Suharto's fall. In our conversation he denied to me that he was responsible for setting up the FPI but went on to discuss in detail how the group was just one example of the broader army and police strategy of creating civilian front groups, sometimes Islamist, sometimes not, that could be used to attack dissidents while keeping the *aparat*'s own hands clean.

He said that days before the massive Jakarta demonstration of November 4 last year, he received a text message from retired Major Gen. Budi Sugiana asking him "to join and take over the 411 [November 4] movement."

The mission, he said, was "to save Indonesia," by joining FPI leader Habib Rizieq on the mobile stage at the demonstration, because "they need someone if [Rizieq] is shot and dead to take over the mass" outside the palace.

In December, Kivlan was arrested by the police for trying to overthrow Jokowi, but as we spoke in late February he remained free and had been traveling outside the country. Indeed, he told me he had been carrying out missions for Gen. Gatot Nurmantyo, the current armed forces commander, attempting to release Indonesian hostages held in the Philippines.

On the question of who privately backs the movement and who precisely the "communists" are, Kivlan spoke both on and off the record, and both precisely and generally. His characterization of his fellow generals' stances meshes closely with what the other *aparat* people said, but, unlike most of them, he said it on the record.

"So many retired military — and in the military — are with the FPI. ... Because the goal of the FPI is also against the communists."

After his discourse to me about ousting Jokowi and taking actions like '65, I asked him: Does Gen. Gatot — the current armed forces commander — agree?

"He agrees!"

But he noted that as a younger, still-active officer, Gatot has to "be very careful" in his public stances.

Kivlan's on-the-record remarks about Gatot's role are consistent with those of other generals and coup people, as well as with the purported remarks of President Jokowi himself. When I asked an official with regular access to the president about a claim that Jokowi had said that "Gatot is the main factor in the coup," the official replied, yes, the president said it, privately. Gatot did not respond to requests for comment.

As for his old boss Gen. Prabowo, Kivlan also echoed what others said: "Prabowo doesn't want to be close, but he does it through Fadli Zon." If he were openly close to the movement, it would be difficult for him, so Fadli Zon is the front. Regarding Gen. Ryamizard, the current minister of defense, Kivlan claimed that "his heart agrees. He agrees with our goal," but he can't "speak candidly."

Kivlan praised the stance of Gen. Wiranto, saying “Wiranto is good.” Kivlan said Wiranto “wants to build harmony” with the movement, often pressing its case from his current post as coordinating minister for politics, law, and security. It was under Wiranto’s command that the FPI was first created. When Wiranto received the FPI’s Rizieq during the demonstrations, he described him as “an old friend.”

Kivlan added that Wiranto, who is himself under indictment for East Timor war crimes, has a “good plan” on the army’s pivotal issue. He is pressing Jokowi for “no human rights trials.”

The strategic elegance of the army push for a coup is that the army wins even if it loses. Even if Jokowi stays in office, the generals will be safer than ever — they think — from human rights trials, since in order to stave off one group of killers, the president has embraced another group of equally murderous generals who have exacted a price.

Foremost among them is Gen. A.M. Hendropriyono, the former BIN chief and CIA asset, who has been implicated in the Munir assassination and a series of other major crimes. Throughout the coup crisis, it has been Hendro’s men — army, intel, police, civilian — who have been leading the anti-coup defense of Jokowi against their colleagues. It is mainly Hendro’s people who have organized the treason arrests and hobbled Habib Rizieq Shihab with pornography charges, as well as charging movement financiers with ISIS money laundering.

In exchange, Hendro and his allies have received what they view as guarantees of immunity from prosecution. And under prevailing *aparatus* rules, if they’re safe, everyone else is as well, since there’s a tacit agreement to reject prosecution of colleagues, even if they’re bitter enemies.

In February, under palace pressure, a Jakarta administrative court declared that the Jokowi administration could duck its legal obligation to officially release a government fact-finding report that openly addressed Hendro’s responsibility for the Munir assassination. Munir’s widow Suciwati and Haris Azhar of Munir’s human rights group, KontraS, denounced that verdict as “legalizing criminality.”

In similar fashion, the coup movement has also been helpful for Freeport. Since last year, the Jokowi government, after decades of state quiescence, has been trying to rewrite the state contract with Freeport and has been dialing back their export rights. At the same time, the government has been shaken by the movement led in part by a lawyer associated with the company.

In early April, after the movement launched the first of what the police claimed were four planned attempts to seize congress and the palace, the Jokowi administration shocked Indonesia’s political world by unexpectedly giving in to Freeport and green lighting new copper exports. The sudden retreat didn’t end the dispute — deep, long-term contract issues remain — but it suggested, as Jokowi officials later told me, that the government now felt its position had been weakened.

In a story with the droll headline “Freeport gets red-carpet treatment, again,” the pro-U.S. and pro-business English-language Jakarta Post observed: “The government has defended its

decision, even though there is no legal basis that backs [it]. ... Freeport is seen as having dodged the bullet again.”

On April 20, Vice President Mike Pence is due in Indonesia. Jokowi administration officials have been saying privately that they expect Freeport’s demands to be at the top of his wish list. At the meeting of movement figures last Friday, one of them looked at me and exclaimed: “Pence will threaten Jokowi on Freeport!”

Freeport Indonesia did not respond to requests for comment.

Blasphemy as Pretext

Although privately movement leaders and their sponsors spoke incessantly of the army, evading justice, and seizing power, on the streets outside the theme was decidedly religious. Walking among the huge crowd at one action at the Istiqlal mosque near the palace, it was clear to me that although the protest movement was fronted by the FPI, it had drawn a wide swath of people, many of whom were demonstrating simply because they were conservative or felt aggrieved.

The proximate cause of that grievance was Ahok and his alleged blasphemy in suggesting that non-Muslims could lead Muslims. (Ahok is also justly criticized for his evictions of the poor.) It was therefore quite illuminating to hear the leaders of the coup movement privately minimize those themes.

Kivlan surprised me when he remarked offhandedly that Ahok had given the movement a “gift” with his “slip of the tongue” regarding the Quran.

The required public stance of movement leaders was to claim to be forever wounded by Ahok’s remark asking people not to be deceived by rivals trying to use a Quranic verse against him. But here was one of them — with a small smile — acknowledging that strategically Ahok’s statement was welcome, because it had enabled the FPI and its sponsors to shift the balance of power inside the state, elevate themselves from street killers to theologians, and alter the cultural climate to boot. And here he was, accepting that the fateful remark was a “slip of the tongue.”

With that, he not only appeared to be conceding that the blasphemy criminal case against Ahok was bogus — as we spoke, Ahok’s lawyers were arguing in court precisely that he had just spoken loosely, intending no offense — but also that the coup movement’s sole big public issue was something that, in private, they did not take seriously.

Beyond that, when I sat with Usamah and the movement leaders whom he half-joking called his politbureau, they casually contradicted their position that non-Muslims cannot lead Muslims. They did so while discussing Hary Tanoë, who they all effusively praised as their movement’s top supporter — through direct aid and by means of his TV stations, which were admonished by Indonesia’s broadcast commission for unseemly pro-movement political bias and inaccuracy — and their perceived lifeline to President Donald Trump.

Those in the room all agreed they wanted a Prabowo-Hary Tanoe government, perhaps with Hary as president and Prabowo as vice president, or the reverse, depending on the polling.

The catch, which didn't seem to bother them, is that Hary, like Ahok, is an ethnic Chinese Christian, which if they believed in their own standards should disqualify him from leading Jakarta, let alone Indonesia.