



Illegal arms sales, internal displacement and a 'new approach' in West Papua

Introduction

This briefing looks at reports of illegal sales of weaponry by the security forces, continuing internal displacement and the military's claimed new approach. It looks especially at the reasons behind these developments, and the lack of coherent action on the part of the Government. An underlying reason for arms dealing is pervasive militarism in West Papua, where security force operations are leading to violence and causing the displacement of civilians. Arms dealing has been taking place as the security forces try to control the narrative on its role in West Papua, first justifying the terrorism classification of TPNPB by declaring that it is protecting civilians, then later stating that it is implementing a 'new approach' in West Papua, which looks a lot like the old approach. As this has been happening, the number of internally displaced people has increased and displaced people are receiving little recorded state assistance.

Weapons thefts and raids

For many years, there has been an illegal small arms trade in West Papua, with weaponry sold by the security forces to the TPNPB.

One outcome of this situation is that civilians have been accused of helping TPNPB to acquire arms. TPNPB have also stolen weapons during attacks on the security forces. The criminalisation of civilians in connection to these arms sales has led to incidents of torture and extrajudicial killings. For example, in Puncak regency, on February 28 2022, near Tapalunik Sinak airport, six children were accused of stealing a soldier's weapon which had reportedly been left unattended while the owner was playing a game of cards at a security guards' post. The children had been watching television at the post when the weapon went missing. The children were tortured, and some were treated for wounds in hospital. One boy, Makilon Tabuni, died from torture. His body was cremated outside the Sinak police sector (polsek) command by his family. An Advocacy Team for Human Rights in Papua has demanded that the state conduct an independent investigation into the crime.¹

Another area where there have been reported thefts of security force arms is in Pegunungan Bintang regency, which borders Papua New Guinea. In an attack on a Brimob police station in Oksamol on 28 May 2021, the deputy head of the police was reportedly killed, with unknown assailants taking three police rifles.²

¹ Advocacy Team for Human Rights in Papua (Tim Advokasi HAM untuk Papua), 'The Torture of Children in Puncak Papua is Evidence that the State is Not Serious About Protecting Children in Papua', 1 March 2022.

² antaranews.com, '[Polisi temukan 2 senpi Polsubsektor Oksamol yang dicuri KKB](#)', 3 June 2021.

Security force sales of small arms

Thefts of unattended weapons carry great risks. A more common method for acquiring weapons is to purchase them from security forces or government officials. This is also risky for arms dealers: in 2020, a soldier was tried and convicted in a military court of supplying arms and sentenced to life in prison.³ In several cases from November 2020 to November 2021, the authorities claim to have thwarted illegal small arms trading. A local government employee was accused of smuggling four machine guns from Biak to Intan Jaya in late-2020;⁴ two police and four civilians were accused in Ambon of intending to supply guns and ammunition to armed groups in March 2021;⁵ a local government employee was accused of possessing ammunition in Yahukimo in September 2021;⁶ and security force personnel were arrested in Nabire and Pulau Yapen in late-2021, accused of selling arms to TPNPB.⁷ In the Nabire and Yapen case, politicians in the national parliament encouraged the authorities to "thoroughly investigate" the incidents, but have not commented on why illegal arms sales may be happening to begin with.

Another feature of these cases is that security forces have accused civilians of involvement in illegal arms sales before formally bringing charges against them. Indonesian journalists have also reported police versions of events without cross-checking the accusations. For example, reports were published stating that an individual was stopped and arrested at Mulia airport, Puncak Jaya on the way to Timika. He was alleged by the police to be in possession of 370 million rupiah to buy guns and ammunition. The police said that a total amount of 600 million rupiah had been provided by an elected local government (DPRD) official in Puncak.⁸ But the police were also challenged to provide evidence for their claims and the elected official categorically denied that he had supplied funds.⁹

The security forces have also claimed that members of pro-independence political organisations such as KNPB have been involved in arms sales and attacks on the military.¹⁰ In the border area of Pegunungan Bintang, the military claim that they intercepted and arrested alleged KNPB members who had smuggled weapons across the border from Papua New Guinea.¹¹ The military also claimed that, in reaction to these arrests, local KNPB leaders carried out attacks against health clinic workers with support from TPNPB in September 2021. But national media quoted local sources that said the attacks may have been instead carried out by local political factions in competition with one another. The commander for the Cenderawasih military command (covering Papua province) also

³ lines.id, '[Anggota TNI di Papua Jual Senjata ke KKB, Divonis Hukuman Seumur Hidup](#)', 14 March 2020.

⁴ antaranews.com, '[Papua's Intan Jaya Civil Servant detained for arms police trade](#)', 11 November 2020.

⁵ surabaya.tribunenews.com, '[Kabar Terbaru Kasus Bripka MRA dan SAP, Oknum Polisi yang Jual Amunisi dan Senjata ke KKB Papua](#)', 28 March 2021.

⁶ A. Dirgantara, '[Diduga Pasok Senpi ke KKB Papua, Oknum ASN Yahukimo Ditangkap](#)', 22 September 2021.

⁷ jpnn.com, '[Brigadir JO dan Bripda AS Jual Amunisi ke KKB, Pangeran: Usut Tuntas Jaringan Pengkhianatan Ini](#)', 1 November 2021.

⁸ jpnn.com, '[Anggota KKB Bawa Duit Rp 370 Juta, Katanya dari Seseorang, Buat Beli Senpi dan Amunisi](#)', 16 June 2021; A. Santoso, '[Pemasok Senjata KKB Papua Simpan Catatan Bantuan Uang dari Pemda Puncak](#)', 15 June 2021.

⁹ J. Ramdhani, '[NasDem Minta Polri Buktikan Dugaan Ketua DPRD Tolikara Danai KKB Beli Senpi](#)', 16 June 2021; J. Ramdhani, '[3 Bantahan Ketua DPRD Tolikara soal Danai Pemasok Senpi KKB Papua](#)', 16 June 2021.

¹⁰ I. Khalid, '[2 Kali Lolos, Buron Pemasok Senpi-Amunisi untuk KKB Intan Jaya Ditangkap!](#)', 5 January 2021.

¹¹ The military claim to have intercepted two people smuggling weapons from PNG in the Oksib-Mongham river who they allege were KNPB members. '[Penampakan 5 Senapan Serbu Dibawa 2 Anggota KKB dari Arah Papua Nugini](#)', 9 September 2021.

told journalists that the military had not done thorough research into the local political situation.¹² So military claims that the KNPB were involved in the attacks appear to be baseless.

The problem in these cases is that members of the KNPB are regularly criminalised by the security forces, with its leaders even previously having been assassinated by the police.¹³ Added to this, there is an absence of normal democratic safeguards such as objective media reporting on West Papua. The court system has convicted people of treason for much lesser offences than selling arms. But while the penalties for those accused and convicted of involvement in arms sales are very severe, in many parts of Papua, security forces face little scrutiny of their conduct or claims. In remote areas, the security forces are often more powerful than civilian authorities.

The impacts of militarism

Illegal arms dealing needs the possibility of funds, a prevalence of security force personnel and bases, and willingness to do arms deals. Possibility - because arms sales need the availability of funds, with untold sums misappropriated from infrastructure, special autonomy and development funds by security force personnel and other state officials since 2001.¹⁴ And certain areas where arms are allegedly traded have long coastlines or are in border areas, allowing potentially easier transit than in other areas. Prevalence - because there are many soldiers and police in West Papua in increasing numbers of bases, with many weapons at their disposal. Willingness - because illegal arms sales need buyers from armed groups and security force personnel willing to sell weapons. Security force personnel may sell arms because they receive low pay, have low morale or there is a black market in which senior security force personnel are also involved.

None of these conditions would be possible without militarism, a situation where war and security force activities and operations become seen as 'normal'. This is the situation in the central highlands region and in West Papua province. In this sense, illegal arms sales are a symptom of militarism. Another symptom of militarism is internal displacement. Internal displacement has become complex in the central highlands and West Papua province because IDPs who flee security force operations lack government or humanitarian agency support and fear returning home.¹⁵

Based on independent observers' reports, the UN estimated in February 2022 that there were between 60,000-100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout West Papua.¹⁶ Most have fled conflict between the Indonesian security forces and TPNPB since late-2018. The government does not allow humanitarian relief agencies to provide support to IDPs in West Papua, and its own efforts have been uncoordinated and inadequate.¹⁷ On occasions when the UN and Special

¹² W. Siagian, '[KKB Lecehkan dan Bunuh Nakes di Papua, TNI Sebut KNPB Terlibat](#)', 9 September 2021; R. Rikang, '[The Indonesian Military's Attack on the Papua's District of Kiwirok](#)' 14 November 2021.

¹³ BBCIndonesia.com '[Pegiat HAM protes kasus penembakan aktivis Papua](#)', 15 June 2012.

¹⁴ TAPOL, '[Entrenched militarism, the 'prosperity' approach and governance by exception in West Papua](#)', 8 December 2020; and TAPOL, '[The Indonesian military and counter-terrorism: new business, same old ways](#)', 5 October 2021.

¹⁵ OHCHR, 'Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons', Ref.: AL IDN 11/2021. December 27th 2021.

¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 'Indonesia: UN experts sound alarm on serious Papua abuses, call for urgent aid', 1 March 2022. As a result of fleeing violence, a small number of people have crossed the land border into Papua New Guinea.

¹⁷ Attempted deliveries of small amounts of rice by local churches were blocked by police who insisted they were not to personally visit IDPs. OHCHR, 'Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous

Rapporteurs have raised specific problems of internal displacement and security force conduct with the Government of Indonesia's representative to the United Nations, their questions were ignored or deflected.¹⁸

In May 2021, local authorities estimated that there were as many as 19,000 IDPs in Puncak regency. Other observers put the number much higher, at around 35,000.¹⁹ Displaced civilians are highly vulnerable, and in February 2022, several children were tortured and one killed in the area. IDPs are often based near or within the grounds of churches. Nine churches have been hit by security force gunfire and other villages have been hit by shooting, including from military helicopters.

A growing problem of internal displacement exists in the border region of Pegunungan Bintang, Papua province, where the security forces are planning to build a new district command (Kodim), which is likely to exacerbate the issue. As of late October 2021, there were an estimated 2,000 IDPs from Kiwirok district, following fighting between the security forces and TPNPB in September 2021. The military are alleged to have targeted villagers suspected of providing support to TPNPB in the region, by conducting air raids. Some IDPs have spent long periods in forested areas without proper shelter, while others have fled across the border to Papua New Guinea.

In Yahukimo, bordering Pegunungan Bintang, the security forces reportedly conducted extrajudicial executions of three civilians in June 2021. In a separate incident, a two-year old child was killed by a bullet, which is likely to have been fired by the security forces, also injuring his six-year-old brother. Yahukimo also saw increasing internal displacement since November 2021, when 5,000 people fled from security force operations.²⁰

As TAPOL reported in February 2022, the situation of internal displacement in Maybrat regency has become increasingly exacerbated by security force operations. When the military commander in Maybrat was asked by the Catholic Diocese in Sorong to ensure the safe return of IDPs, the Diocese received no answer.²¹

'Normal' war?

The military and central Government announced a putative "new approach" for West Papua in November 2021. The Coordinating Minister for Politics Law and Security, Mahfud MD, claimed that this new approach would see change from 'combat operations' to 'territorial operations'. General Andika Perkasa, the Commander of the Armed Forces said that "the bottom line is that the Papua

peoples, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons', Ref.: AL IDN 11/2021. December 27th 2021, p.4.

¹⁸ OHCHR, 'Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons', Ref.: AL IDN 1/2020, 8 June 2020.

¹⁹ OHCHR, 'Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons', Ref.: AL IDN 11/2021. December 27th 2021, p.4.

²⁰ OHCHR, 'Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons', Ref.: AL IDN 11/2021. December 27th 2021, p.6.

²¹ TAPOL, '[Militarisation, Conflict and Injustice in Maybrat Regency, West Papua](#)', 17 February 2022.

approach is developing comprehensive and synergistic prosperity...meaning the approach in Papua is not weapons but prosperity".²²

This is not a new approach, however: President Yudhoyono who left office in 2014 talked up a 'prosperity' approach for West Papua. From the passing of the Special Autonomy law in 2001 and further infrastructure and development funds to 2020, successive governments spent US\$7.4 billion, while cracking down on political rights, especially in the last four years.²³ Almost five months after the military and Government announcement, the 'new approach' in West Papua is still about weapons and war, manifested in illegal arms sales, a failure to end the IDP crisis, and as some sources have stated, 76,227 military and police personnel were deployed cumulatively between 2013 and 2021.²⁴

Initially, General Andika Perkasa did not "make the detail clear" of what this new approach would be, and since then, little further detail has appeared.²⁵ Much is simply recycled from before the classification of the TPNPB as a terrorist group, after which the military took a lead role in operations. Now the security forces will again do joint operations, but with "better intelligence" to coordinate during operations.²⁶ Even the messaging is the same: the security forces are saying that the new approach is about 'protecting' civilians from TPNPB, used as an excuse for the terrorist classification.²⁷

Messaging seems to play a very important role in how the security forces presents itself. Indeed, this rather than any actual change of strategy is what has happened. One pro-Government think tank has said that stronger "social communication" and "positive propaganda" are key parts of General Andika's approach. Singling out illegal arms sales, they suggest that positive propaganda may help troops to have better "integrity, awareness and obedience of the law".²⁸ It is difficult to find any statements by officials or the Indonesian media however which put illegal arms down to poor pay, conditions and morale among personnel.

Conclusion

Arms deals between the Indonesian security forces and armed groups have a long history but there are increasing reports that they are taking place. In other areas of Indonesia where the security forces have a significant presence, the sale of weaponry is said to be "directly correlated" with levels of violence.²⁹ Funds must be available, security force personnel must have willingness to sell arms through a network of contacts, perhaps because of poor pay, morale and oversight, there must be demand from armed groups, and there must be a prevalence of security force personnel. These deals do not depend on personal motivations or money alone, but militarism, where security force activity comes to be seen as normal. This is the situation in West Papua as of today, as the military

²² BBC Indonesia, '[Papua: 'Pendekatan baru' penyelesaian konflik bersenjata, antara harapan penurunan kekerasan dan tuduhan janji 'hampa'](#)', 26 November 2021.

²³ A. Malik, '[Indonesia to evaluate special funds for Papua: Why \\$7.4bn since 2002 hasn't solved problem](#)', Theconversation.com, 22 February 2020.

²⁴ S. Sucahyo '[Tolak Wacana Pemekaran Papua, Demo Meletus di Beberapa Tempat](#)' 10 May 2022,

²⁵ BBC Indonesia, '[Papua: 'Pendekatan baru' penyelesaian konflik bersenjata](#)', 26 November 2021.

²⁶ L.S. Rahayu, '[KSAD Dudung Bicara Rangkul KKB, Ini PR Pengamanan di Papua](#)', 25 November 2021.

²⁷ TAPOL, '[The Indonesian military and counterterrorism: New Business, Same Old Ways](#)', 5 October 2021.

²⁸ L.S. Rahayu '[KSAD Dudung Bicara Rangkul KKB, Ini PR Pengamanan di Papua](#)', 25 November 2021.

²⁹ Sangaji, 'The security forces and regional violence in Poso' in G. van Klinken and H. Schulte Nordholt, *Renegotiating Boundaries. Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, KITLV, 2007, p. 276.

and police are putting on a public relations display in an attempt to persuade onlookers that West Papua is 'normal' and no longer subject to combat operations. The story is very different for the people living in areas where operations are being carried out, where there continues to be displacement and targeting of villagers who are suspected of assisting the TPNPB. These issues will not go away without addressing the problems of internal displacement, legal and illegal funds made available to the security forces and the growing militarisation of West Papua.

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