

Commonwealth's Imperial Crowd Targets Indonesia

by Mike Billington

The utopian war faction within the Bush Administration may see their scenarios of war in Iraq and Korea slipping away under international pressure and factional battles at home; but the old Anglo-American imperialist guard has nonetheless unleashed a barrage of public diatribes calling for a return to Empire. While declarations of an "American Empire" have been prominent in the pages of the *New York Times* and the commentaries of National Public Radio in the United States, the granddaddy of imperial foreign policy think tanks, London's Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), issued a call for the re-colonization of Southeast Asia. RIIA particularly targetted Indonesia, once the most profitable colony in the Anglo-Dutch empire.

In an article called "Costly Delusion, The Bali Bomb and Australian Policy" in the RIIA journal *The World Today* in January, two Commonwealth academics, David Martin Jones of the University of Tasmania and Michael L. Smith of the War Studies Department of King's College, London, call for Australia to return to its white, Anglo-Saxon, "Christian roots," take action against the threat on its borders with Southeast Asia, dismiss the "increasingly vacuous idea of Asian engagement, and take upon itself, Indonesia's "security problem."

The problem emanates, according to these pundits, with the renegade regime of Prime Minister Paul Keating in Australia between 1991 and 1996, who dared to "redefine the country as an Australasian nation." To achieve this betrayal of race purity, Keating supposedly portrayed Indonesia "as a benign, cooperative neighbor within a stable and prosperous Southeast Asian region," and promoted the idea that Australia should "enmesh itself with the attractively diverse and economically booming region to the north." This "denial," as they call it, of the Indonesian and Southeast Asian "danger," was based on the "delusion" that the region was "one of increased domestic tranquillity and regional order."

Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

This racist diatribe is not original to Jones and Smith. Harvard utopian Samuel Huntington, in a 1993 article in the *Foreign Affairs* journal of the New York Council on Foreign Relations (CFR, the American stepson of the RIIA), in formulating his imperial thesis of an inevitable "Clash of Civilizations" between the Anglo-Saxon West and the Islamic and

Confucian cultures of the world, claimed that Prime Minister Keating had committed the grievous crime of a "civilizational shift," defecting from the West and joining the "East Asian bloc," by attempting to orient towards a policy of cooperation with Australia's Asian neighbors. To Huntington, this was a "major marker in the decline of the West."

The difference between 1993 and today, is that the Clash of Civilizations is now operational policy—at least to the Anglo-American utopian policy faction. The attempt to use the "war on terrorism" to achieve the Huntington "war on Islam and China" is abundantly clear in the Jones/Smith RIIA article, but it is even more apparent in a companion piece by one Rohan Gunaratna, the author of the new flash best-seller *Inside al-Qaeda*. Gunaratna's book is a rant against Islam which essentially compiles press clippings on terrorism from around the world, spins a web of connections between them all centered on al-Qaeda, and ascribes terrorist intent to every mildly militant Islamic institution. Gunaratna, a Sri Lankan who is now a fellow at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St. Andrew's, Scotland, and honorary fellow at the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel, has unabashedly promoted the recent imperial declaration by the current Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, calling for preemptive military actions across Southeast Asia.

Howard has not been shy about his distaste for "that region" to the north. On Dec. 1, in a national TV address, he called for a "new and distinct doctrine of pre-emptive action to avert a threat." Although this was clearly tailing after the new Bush Administration policy of pre-emptive strike, the Howard declaration meant that the nations of Southeast Asia could no longer imagine that the threat of pre-emptive attacks was only intended for "rogue nations" defined by Washington. Howard was openly targeting the Islamic populations of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

In an article titled "Crush Them Before They Kill Again" in *The Australian* of Jan. 8, Gunaratna wrote that "many Australians and Southeast Asians have not understood the true meaning of the policy of Pre-emption articulated by Prime Minister John Howard last month. . . . Pre-emption means countries such as Australia maintaining a forward presence in theaters such as southern Thailand, the southern Philippines and Indonesia, where terrorists are active. Such a policy will enable Australia to better understand and effectively respond to the developing threat. In the first place, it can be invisible, but a substantial intelligence, diplomatic and law-enforcement presence, primarily in support of Australia's neighbors. If the situation requires a more robust presence, light forces can be deployed in aid of the affected government. And if the situation deteriorates, heavy forces can be deployed."

The turn towards Empire is far from universally accepted in Australia. The *Australian Financial Review* of Jan. 9 pub-

lished an article by Howard Dick, the Director of the Centre of International Business at the University of Melbourne, which lambasted Prime Minister Howard's pledge to serve as the American "deputy sheriff" in Asia, and his threat of pre-emptive strikes. This policy, wrote Dick, "portrays us as part of a defiant axis of rich, white, Christian, English-speaking nations. . . . Our high-risk 'strategy' is to turn our back on Asia; to arm Fortress Australia against our neighbours at immense cost; and to cultivate economic and political ties with America and Europe, as if we were in the North Atlantic. The more sensible strategy would be intelligent internationalism: seizing the opportunities to live prosperously and harmoniously in our own region. Asia's economies have recovered unevenly, but still represent the world's best long-term prospects for rapid growth."

The Bali Bombers

The justification for these recurring, overt declarations of imperial intent rests on the idea that international terrorism is running amuck across Southeast Asia—and especially in Indonesia. From the moment of the Oct. 12 bombing of a Bali nightclub frequented by foreign tourists, which killed close to 200 people (including many Indonesians), the name "al-Qaeda," or at least "organizations associated with al-Qaeda," has appeared in nearly every Western press report and "expert" analysis, such as those of Gunaratna. And yet, the extensive and highly successful Indonesian investigation into the bombing has demonstrated that the people who perpetrated this bloody act of terror were all Indonesian, had financed the operation largely through petty robberies of local retail stores, and were acting in the tradition of a small faction of Islamic militants endemic in Indonesia since the founding of the Republic in the 1940s, but who have come to the fore (along with several regional and ethnic separatist organizations) as a result of the economic crisis brought on by the speculative attacks on the Asian economies in 1997-98.

National Police Chief Gen. Da'i Bachtiar has repeatedly reported that the investigation has found no evidence of a link between al-Qaeda and the Indonesian terrorists. A few—but only a few—Western observers have been honest in acknowledging this fact, notably including the International Crisis Group (ICG), whose report "Indonesian Backrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates," traces the network back to earlier Islamic and separatist movements in Indonesia; and the dean of American Indonesia scholars, Cornell's Benedict Anderson, who states outright that al-Qaeda is not involved.

It is true that several of the individuals with connections to the Indonesian terrorists operations of the past years have traveled throughout Southeast Asia, and some have received training in Afghanistan. But it would be wise to remember that the United States and Britain dispensed huge amounts of money around the world in the 1980s to recruit militant

Muslims to join the U.S.-funded irregular warfare operations against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. To now declare that this qualifies such individuals as international terrorists, subject to intervention in breach of national sovereignty, is the height of hypocrisy.

The blatant prejudice and incompetence of Rohan Gunaratna's work is cause for concern in regard to the announcement on Jan. 8 that a new terrorism research institute, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, is being set up under Gunaratna's direction in Singapore, under the auspices of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies. Tentatively called the Regional Centre for Terrorism and Political Violence, the institute is intended to provide training for intelligence officers, diplomats, and others.

Anti-ASEAN

RIIA "experts" Jones and Smith have expressed their geopolitical prejudices in earlier articles which displayed their visceral hatred for the institution of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In a piece titled "The Strange Death of the ASEAN Way," published in the *Australian Financial Review* of April 12, 2002, the duo raged against what they describe as ASEAN's "rigid adherence to the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states." This dedication to "non-interference," honoring the sovereignty of fellow nation-states, dates back to the famous 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African Nations in Indonesia, which gave birth to the alliance which became known as the Non-Aligned Movement. The "Spirit of Bandung" was initiated by Sukarno, the Father of the Indonesian Republic (as well as the father of Indonesia's current President, Megawati Sukarnoputri), in cooperation with other leaders of Asia and Africa, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhao Enlai. The Bandung Conference rejection of Empire, be it Eastern or Western, and respect for national sovereignty, was the nemesis of the imperial ideologues of their time, and continuing today.

There is now a new wave of optimism spreading across Asia, drawing on the Bandung tradition, based on the idea that the nations of Eurasia can build among themselves the mutual economic and political strength to resist the dictates of the bankrupt international financial institutions and the would-be new imperialists. The blustering of the RIIA and the CFR can not be allowed to subvert that process.

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