

***The Armed Forces of Indonesia.* By Robert Lowry.** St Leonards, New South Wales, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996. 282pp.

Former Indonesian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief General Benny Moerdani, in his Foreword to *The Armed Forces of Indonesia*, writes, "... this study of ABRI and Indonesian society is a most welcome addition to the literature on Indonesia in general and its armed forces in particular, and hopefully it will provide a more comprehensive portrait of ABRI to its readers".

Indeed, Robert Lowry has provided an impressive service in this detailed study of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI). Not only has he outlined the expected details on the organization and equipment of the structure and formations of ABRI but he has skilfully woven ABRI into the complex fabric of Indonesian society. It is this latter accomplishment that particularly characterizes this book.

As a long-time observer of ABRI and Indonesia myself, I note that Indonesia's armed forces establishment cannot be properly studied or appreciated in isolation. Perhaps more than in most countries, the armed forces in Indonesia is reflective of the complex society of which it is a part. As the most powerful and most prominent single component of that society, and a major player in the political, social and economic development of Indonesia since independence, ABRI will continue to be a principal actor on the national stage. Lieutenant Colonel Lowry's goal, stated early in the Introduction, is "... to show how ABRI fulfills its three functions: defence, internal security and regime maintenance". He admirably meets this goal in a logically presented work that is both informative and interesting to read.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Lowry's book is one of the first in the publisher's series "The Armed Forces of Asia". To most of the world, Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country and, geographically, one of the largest, as well. To Australia, obviously, Indonesia is far more an oft-misunderstood and mistrusted near neighbour which through geography is fated always to play a major role in both domestic and defence planning considerations.

The book is well organized. The author examines first the broad strategic concepts of Indonesian defence policy and strategy and their effects on national-level planning and resource allocation. He then narrows the focus to the details of organization, structure, command and control, personnel, and equipment, examined in three concise chapters. Finally, he looks at those characteristics of ABRI that set it apart from other military forces: its role in Indonesian society, the unique *dwifungsi* doctrine that establishes both a social and a defence mission for the armed forces, and the widespread and closely-guarded

business and funding arrangements that characterize the Indonesian military establishment.

Throughout the book, the author ties what might be dry and statistical data to current political and social considerations that guide both Indonesian and outside domestic and international policy considerations. The surprising success of the New Order government under President Soeharto, for example, and the complex and pivotal succession that is an inevitable part of any serious discussion of Indonesian affairs, is well covered and explained in layman's terms. The role of *dwifungsi* in both social and military planning is outlined particularly well, and helps illustrate the uniqueness of the Indonesian army within Indonesian society.

This book is an important contribution to the literature for its coverage of the "purely military" aspects of the Indonesian Armed Forces, but even more importantly, for the cogent manner in which the author brings together the political, developmental, and social aspects of Indonesian society with the role played by the armed forces. In so doing, the author has made it possible for the reader to better understand the complex society of Indonesia and the critical role played by the armed forces in that society.

It is important to note the differences among societies and their supporting armed forces structures. Indonesia is certainly the least-known of the more important countries in the world today. Historically, Indonesia has not told its story well to the outside world. The country is one of the world's great success stories in national development. Its move from economic and social devastation that characterized the last years of the Soekarno era of the early 1960s to the robust economic regional power status it has achieved today is nothing less than extraordinary.

Yet Indonesia's important accomplishments tend to be overshadowed by publicity generated by its poorly-managed annexation of East Timor and by excesses of zeal in internal security and human rights issues. Lowry rightly covers these problems in a straightforward manner, which also places these controversial issues within their political and social contexts. Readers may not all support the policy decision and implementation involved, but the facts are presented in a responsible and unemotional context.

In fact, one of Lowry's most important contributions is to outline Indonesia's human rights problems in the context of the historical times in which they began and within the political, policy, and developmental framework in which events have unfolded. His straightforward examination of the importance to Indonesia of internal stability to the country's economic development, in consideration of

Indonesia's extraordinary ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, is very well drawn indeed.

It is clear that internal instability is the greatest threat to Indonesia and its economic and social development; and that therefore the armed forces will take all steps necessary to preserve security and domestic harmony. Indeed, events of the past two years have shown this to be exactly the case, as a series of public disorders reflecting political, economic, religious and ethnic tensions have challenged the country.

Lowry's book is an important and well-written contribution to the literature on modern Asian developments.

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