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THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF ORGANISED VIOLENCE IN POST NEW ORDER INDONESIA

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Paramilitary, vigilante and militia groups have a long and colourful history in Indonesia. Prevalent throughout the colonial period, the Indonesian national army itself was originally formed from such groups, pointing to the longstanding historical ambiguity between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ uses of violence (Cribb 1991). During the New Order, as has been well documented, the state fostered and utilized a number of quasi-official organizations such as *Pemuda Pancasila*, and *Pemuda Pancamarga* (Ryter 1998). Drawing from gangs and the criminal underworld of *preman* (thugs), these groups acted as ‘assistants’ to the regime, employing the time-proven methods of physical and psychological intimidation in carrying out what O’Rourke refers to as ‘regime maintenance’ chores (O’Rourke 2002: 11).¹ Aside from these groups, a symbiotic relationship also existed between street level *preman* and the military and political and social elites, referred to simply as *beking* (backing). *Preman* were allowed to carry out their activities, such as protection rackets and control over a particular localized sector of the economy, in return for a cut of the profits that would make its way through the various levels of the state bureaucracy. Violence and criminality were normalized as state practice.

Since the collapse of the New Order in 1998 and the beginning of ‘reformasi’, incidents of state sponsored violence have comparatively declined, however this has been accompanied by an upsurge in violence, coercion and extortion carried out by paramilitary, criminal and vigilante groups that are largely independent of state control. The fragmentation of the centralized state and the resulting rivalry between groups seeking economic and political power at the national level and control over resources at the local has been a central factor in this proliferation of violent thuggery. Groups with a variety of agendas have employed the violent mobilization of supporters as a central political strategy. Decentralization reforms initiated since 1999 have given greater economic and political autonomy at the provincial and sub-district levels. These reforms have also led to an increase in conflicts between groups trading in violence as political and civil organizations fight over ‘turf’, economic resources and constituencies that were previously the exclusive domain of the New Order.²

This article intends to outline some of the recent historical events that I will argue have played a significant role in the ‘democratization’ of violence in post New Order Indonesia, namely the impact of the state sponsored *Pamswakarsa* vigilante force mobilized in 1999, and the subsequent boom in paramilitary ‘task forces’ attached to political parties. I will then go on to examine the structure, actions and

practices of two of the many vigilante groups that have emerged post New Order. Behind the differences of their respective history, ideology and politics, all share a common set of practices based upon the use of organized violence. The first of these, the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (*Forum Betawi Rempug*) is a group claiming to represent working class members of the indigenous Betawi ethnic group of Jakarta, which combines appeals to ethnicity and class with a strategy of extortion and coercion. The second is the Defenders of Islam Front (FPI: *Front Pembela Islam*), one of a number of vigilante style groups employing the symbols of militant Islam to emerge post New Order that has conducted a street level war against 'immorality'. I intend to demonstrate that these and similar groups have emerged as a consequence of the fragmentation of state power post-1998. This case study of Indonesia also has broader implications in terms of making problematic one of the most basic assumptions regarding the state: that it has an internal monopoly over the legitimate production of violence and security. As I will show, the increasing privatization of violence that has occurred in Indonesia post New Order demonstrates that the state no longer possesses a monopoly over either its production or legitimate use. Far from the consolidation of formal institutions of power, democratisation in Indonesia has involved a more fragmented intertwining with informal constellation of power.

PARA-MILITARISING THE PUBLIC: PAMSWAKARSA AND POLITICAL 'TASK FORCES'

The roots of the growth in paramilitary and vigilante activity in Indonesia post-1998 were established during the New Order. Via the development of a corporatist state, the New Order co-opted and politicized 'youth' as a form of political capital. The military concept of 'total people's defence and security' justified the use of civilian groups as proxies by the state apparatus (Lowry 1996: 88). As Lindsay has argued, the New Order operated in a way analogous to a criminal gang, employing and normalizing violence and extortion as state practice (Lindsey 2001). The removal of Suharto in 1998 meant not the complete collapse of patrimonial networks and authoritarian structures, but rather the loss of their central focal hub, so that they loosened into decentralized and competing power centres.

An event that highlighted the extent and speed with which the strong nation-state unravelled after Suharto's departure was the *Pamswakarsa* 'self-help' civilian

guard formed by Gen. Wiranto and Gen. Kivlan Zein in late 1998. In the lead up to the special legislative session of the People's Consultative Assembly in November 1998, around 30,000 civilians were recruited by the army and mobilized around the national parliament. The rag-tag civilian security force was intended to bolster the over stretched police force and help counter widespread opposition to the Habibie presidency.³ With its public profile at an all time low, the armed forces felt compelled to resort to using proxies armed with bamboo spears to carry out the task of defending state interests. The composition of the Pamswakarsa forces revealed an alliance of largely militant Muslim groups sympathetic to Habibie, such as Furkon (Muslim Forum to Uphold the Constitution and Justice) and the Front Pembela Islam, alongside a hotchpotch of martial arts and youth groups from Banten, nationalist organizations such as Pemuda Pancasila and the ranks of the unemployed (*Tempo* 30 November 1998a). The circulation of rumours that 'anti-Islamic' forces would attempt to derail the session and overthrow the Habibie government led to other Muslim groups mobilizing forces around the MPR (*Tempo* 30 November 1998b). The presence of the Pamswakarsa further provoked an already tense situation resulting in violent clashes with student demonstrators and locals that left fatalities on both sides (*Gatra* 21 November 1998). Public outrage and political pressure soon led to its disbandment.

As a state political strategy the Pamswakarsa exercise was undeniably a failure, however it had a more lasting impact in a number of respects.⁴ Firstly, whilst being the continuation of a pattern familiar during the New Order, of the military employing civilian proxies to do its dirty business, the Pamswakarsa was on a scale not seen before. It was the largest mobilization of civilian forces by the state since the 1960s, reflecting the state's recognition that it could no longer legitimate centralized violent suppression of peaceful dissent. There was also an unintentional flow on effect. As Bouchier notes, the government's decision to form a civilian militia was partly a response to the already large and well-organized paramilitary wings of PDI-P and Nahdatul Ulama (Bouchier 1999: 165). However there was also a reverse effect; political parties, religious and civil organizations began forming and expanding their own paramilitary forces in reaction to the prevalence of state-sponsored vigilantes. The result was a spiraling in the number of both civil and state backed paramilitary

and vigilante groups. It reflected a new awareness, ‘if the state can do it, why cant we?’

Suspicion and mistrust of the army and police was also at an all-time high resulting in many people turning to local preman, paramilitary and vigilante groups for security. A new decentralized intersection between criminal and political interests established itself. During the New Order, the state had justified the mobilisation of civilian militia and thugs by reference to the constitution, which states the responsibility of citizens to defend the nation. With the weakening of state power and the ideology of collectivist nationalism, groups with a variety of political, economic and social agendas now did the same, a phenomenon referred to by some commentators as the ‘I am Indonesia’ syndrome (Munir 2003). By appealing to religious affiliation, the Pamswakarsa also legitimated a new pole for political mobilisation post New Order, lifting the taboo on invoking primordial sentiments.

The economic crisis of 1997 saw the ranks of the urban poor increase significantly and many found themselves forced into crime and violence (Nordholt 2002). A greater opening for preman and organized crime began to emerge. In the post New Order environment gangsters have become far more organized in the big cities, not just operating individually but forming organizations, often along ethnic or religious lines, that have gradually established control over public space such as bus terminals, markets and food stalls. With the patronage and protection of the New Order gone, preman were forced to seek out new patrons, or simply went ‘private’. The enforcement partnerships that existed between the state and criminal gangs fragmented and has been replaced by sets of shifting contractual arrangements with political parties, members of the political and economic elite, local officials, business people and other interest groups.

SECURING SUPPORT: THE ‘TASK FORCES’ OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Political liberalization post New Order had resulted in the emergence of over 100 new political parties by the time of the 1999 general elections. On the streets of major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Bandung, the scramble by the new parties to form paramilitary forces presented itself as a golden opportunity for the ranks of preman and unemployed youth. Replete with military style uniforms and helmets, command

structures, and an aggressive ‘us against the rest’ mentality, the *satgas* paramilitary wings of the political parties reflected the reproduction of New Order style militarism within the new political culture. *Satgas* groups in themselves are not a new phenomenon, and were first established by Golkar, PPP and the PDI in the early 1980’s. However, it was with the reintroduction of multi-party competitive elections in 1999 that a ‘party arms race’ began (King 2003). Almost all political parties have some form of active paramilitary wing, as well as numerous associated ‘supporter’ groups, membership numbering in the tens, possibly hundreds of thousands. Officially, the function of *satgas* is for internal party security, such as protecting party assets and controlling the membership. The reality has been that *satgas* have been akin to private mercenary armies, intimidating opponents and critics both within and outside of the party, providing ‘muscle’ for the private sector and operating their own protection rackets alongside of other criminal activities. They have acted as a nexus between legitimate political power, and criminality. *Satgas* groups have provided a vehicle by which preman can gain legitimacy and concessions within the political system, and also a means by which politicians can establish working relations with the criminal underworld. The 1999 elections were peppered with incidents of violence and coercion, most involving *satgas* from the major parties, PDI-P, PPP, Golkar and PKB. While on the surface many of these clashes appeared to be caused by political rivalries, often the conflict was over control of local resources by preman within *satgas* ranks. By the end of the 1999 elections and into 2000-2002 paramilitary and vigilante forces had emerged as a conspicuous and intimidating presence on the streets and in public consciousness (*Panji* 2000).

Of all the political parties, the PDI-P has had perhaps the largest menagerie of paramilitary and militia style ‘supporter’ groups. The four main groups linked to the PDI-P at the national level have been the PDI-P Security Taskforce (*Satgas PDI-P*), the Indonesian Young Bulls (*Banteng Muda Indonesia*), the Defend Mbak Mega Command (*Komando Bela Mbak Mega*), and the ‘elite’ Alert One Brigade (*Brigass: Brigade Siaga Satu*), led by the former student activist Pius Lustrilanang. Of the four, only the *Satgas PDI-P* is formally incorporated within the party structure, and hence accountable to it. The Young Bulls is an informally affiliated ‘youth’ organization headed by East Timorese militia leader Eurico Guterres, whereas the Defend Mbak Mega Command is a militant Megawati loyalist group.⁵

Brigass is interesting as an example of the degree to which some previously strident critics of New Order militarism have reproduced it post-1998. It was initially conceived as the 'elite' guard of the PDI-P, consisting of around 200 highly trained 'troops' (Supriyanto 2002). Rumoured to be financed by Megawati's husband, Taufik Kiemas, Brigass was formed in 1999 in order to raise support for her unsuccessful presidential campaign.⁶ It did this by mobilising supporters around the 1999 Special Session of the MPR. Despite Megawati's failure to secure the presidency, the group did not disband, instead establishing headquarters in Bogor, West Java. Recruiting from amongst taxi-drivers, labourers and security guards, its membership quickly grew to around 3500 (Supriyanto 2002: 16). Adopting a centralised military style command structure, the group is strictly controlled by Lustrilanang, who is deferentially referred to as 'commander in chief' (*panglima*). If the PDI-P satgas are the 'foot soldiers' of the party, then Brigass is its 'special-forces', ironic considering that its leader was kidnapped along with other student activists by *Kopassus* special forces troops in the aftermath of the government orchestrated overthrow of Megawati's leadership of the PDI in 1996. Brigass has received training from ex-special forces troops, including those who were directly involved in abducting Lustrilanang.

Selection criteria for Brigass members are rigorous, and once accepted recruits undergo intensive and ongoing training in martial arts, crowd control and military type exercises, such as that provided by ex-special forces troops. Whilst PDI-P party membership is not compulsory, recruits undertake 16 hours of 'political education' and Lustrilanang ensures that all members channel their political aspirations to PDI-P (Supriyanto 2002: 18). Like many satgas groups, Brigass also offers its security services to the private sector as well as government institutions via its affiliated business, Brigass Lustrilanang Security (*Pikiran Rakyat* 2002, 2003). Despite its initial mandate as hardcore Megawati supporters, Brigass has recently developed into a largely freelance organization, independent from the internal political interests of the PDI-P. Through its private security service, and close links with government and military figures, it has come to resemble New Order period groups, such as Pemuda Pancasila, that are available for hire to the highest bidder.

Unlike Brigass, the Satgas PDI-P has been formally integrated within the PDI-P party structure as its internal security branch. At the national level it is led by

Maringan Pangaribuan and has an estimated membership at 10-50,000.⁷ Through neighbourhood command posts known as *posko* established during the campaign period of the 1999 elections, PDI-P satgas were able to establish a constant and intimidating presence at the local level. The size of Satgas PDI-P has perhaps meant that factionalism and internal conflict were inevitable. Factional loyalties between supporters of local candidates, as well as vertical conflicts between the national level party leadership and provincial branches have been frequent. Local PDI-P satgas groups have emerged as crucial players in factional fighting within regional branches of the party, usually linked to the selection of candidates for the local legislature, and the positions of mayor and regent. In Tegal, for example, PDI-P satgas went on a rampage after the head of the Tegal PDI-P lost in the election for mayor (*Sinar Harapan* 2004a). Similar instances of inter-satgas violence have occurred in Medan, Surabaya, Pematang, Tulungagung, Banyumas, Mojokerto, and Jember. Like Brigass, PDI-P satgas have also regularly worked as freelance security, including breaking up labour actions by factory workers, and acting as bodyguards for business executives (*Bernas* 2000).⁸

In PDI-P rhetoric, satgas forces consist of ‘grass roots’ supporters, and its members are largely recruited from disenfranchised urban youth, rank and file party cadre and local preman (PDI-P official 2003). With scant job prospects and with the rising cost of living, the satgas units have provided legitimacy and a sense of identity and empowerment for the ranks of unemployed youth.⁹ PDI-P specifically targeted youths, conducting recruitment drives amongst unemployed senior high school graduates unable to study at university (Supriyanto 2002: 16). As satgas membership automatically confers PDI-P party membership, it becomes an effective strategy for developing a mass base that can be quickly mobilised. Apologists within the PDI-P have argued that the training, structure and discipline involved in becoming a satgas is a means for ‘reforming’ preman, and provides them with an opportunity to become ‘useful members of society’(PDI-P official 2003). As such, the parties provide a valuable social service for a marginalised social group. The argument is a convenient and familiar one, and was used throughout the New Order to rationalise the existence of groups such as Pemuda Pancasila. On the contrary, it is the very fact that they *are* preman that makes them a valuable asset to the party. As the ICG has noted in its report on civil militias in Bali and Lombok, local political candidates have found that

the support of key criminal figures and civil militias is considered proof of political power. Consequently, rather than endeavouring to eradicate crime and vigilantism, they have sought to 'direct' them, via the incorporation of their perpetrators (International Crisis Group 2003).

Clashes in October 2003 in Bali between rival supporters of the PDI-P and Golkar left two dead, and renewed fears that the 2004 elections would be marred by more conflict sparked by rival paramilitary and supporter groups (*Republika* 2004b). Yet, as it turned out the elections passed with a notable absence of violence, and the feared satgas groups were conspicuously absent from the streets. This was partly due to the last minute introduction of regulation from the Indonesian Electoral Commission that imposed restrictions on the mobilization of satgas forces during campaigning, with the threat of sanctions against parties that failed to control their supporters (Indonesian Electoral Commission 2004). Since early 1999 moves had been made to introduce similar regulations, most notably from the police and armed forces, whom by that stage had already grown increasingly alarmed at the threat posed to their legitimacy by satgas. In 2002 Indonesia's military chief Endriartono Sutarto called for the disbanding of all 'extremist and militia groups', including those affiliated with political parties and religious organizations (*Sriwijaya Post* 2002). In March 2003 the Minister for Defence, Matori Abdul Djalil also called for the disbanding of civil militias, especially those that used military style uniforms and symbols, and the curtailing of party satgas that used a 'paramilitary approach', stating that they were 'inappropriate in a democratic system' (*Sinar Harapan* 2003). The response from political parties however, particularly the PDI-P, was blunt: the military could no longer interfere in party affairs, and satgas were an internal party issue (*Sriwijaya Post* 2002).

It appears that the primary reason behind satgas being sent 'back to the barracks' in 2004 was the changed political climate. Compared to the high emotions and enthusiasm surrounding the 1999 elections, the 2004 election year was surrounded by an atmosphere of marked indifference on the part of the voting public. A deepening cynicism towards the political process saw lacklustre turnouts to mass rallies. Voters enthusiastically exercised their new voting rights, however with ambivalence towards the available candidates. 'Traditional' methods of mobilising support no longer guaranteed success. Vote buying was still rampant throughout the

2004 campaign, but it proved far less effective, for how successful can bribery be when it cannot be backed up with at least the implied threat of repercussions? The possibility of voter backlash, coupled with the risk of reprisals from rival groups, outweighed the potential gains that were to be made by mobilising satgas. What this points to at the national level is that Indonesia's new system of electoral democracy may have reduced the effectiveness of the mobilisation of satgas violence as a political strategy. As Tilly has argued, the value of the use or threat of force is determined in proportion to the value of the potential damage, be it financial or political that may be caused in the absence of either protection or patronage from a particular group (Tilly 1985). When the 'market' in violence comprises many players operating with similar resources, in this case the satgas forces of the major parties, the stakes involved in violent action increase dramatically which can act as a strong disincentive for its use. The voting public have emerged as the most effective deterrent.

THE NEW VIGILANTISM

While the political role of party satgas may have declined, other groups trading in violence and coercion have continued to make their presence felt on the streets. As has been discussed, the end of the New Order has seen a rapid increase in civil organizations representing a variety of social, cultural, political and economic interests and agendas that incorporate extensive and well trained paramilitary style militias and 'security wings'. With burgeoning levels of crime vigilantism has also become widespread. The ineffectiveness of the weakened state in maintaining order has led to the establishment in many communities of vigilante groups ostensibly aimed at combating the symptoms of social and economic collapse, such as 'premanism' and 'vice' (*kemaksiatan*). These non-state initiatives were at first welcomed in official quarters (International Crisis Group 2003: 1). Vigilantes were considered to be filling a space created by the separation of the police and military by providing policing and security at the community level. However in many instances, it was preman themselves that either established or infiltrated these groups in order to establish a new legitimacy, often with official backing, both financial and moral. The post New Order state has attempted to resolve the argument against the previous centralised patronage network via the introduction of decentralisation reforms in

1999. In theory, this devolving of power would help foster local leadership and autonomy. To an extent this has been the case, however it has also given a new quasi-legality to long-standing patron-client relations, and allowed local interests to consolidate control over resources and markets without institutional checks or rule of law. The new vigilantes combine the pragmatic self-interest and reliance on violence of the preman with a justificatory moral ideology. In the following examples, the Betawi Brotherhood Forum and the Defenders of Islam Front, this ideology is one of defending the interests of an imagined ethnic and religious community.

The Betawi Brotherhood Forum

The FBR was formally established on 27 July 2001, the anniversary of the 1996 overthrow of Megawati's leadership of the PDI. The date was not mere coincidence: FBR's head, Fadloli el-Muhir, was himself a former chair of the Jakarta branch of the anti-Megawati faction of the PDI. More recently, he served as a member of the Indonesian Supreme Advisory Council (*Dewan Pertimbangan Agung*). Fadloli conceived of the FBR as a forum for reclaiming Jakarta for middle and lower class members of the indigenous Betawi ethnic group. Ostensibly aimed at gaining employment for its largely blue-collar, unemployed and preman membership, FBR currently has around 10,000 members throughout Jakarta.¹⁰ In the words of Fadloli:

Our aim is for Betawi people to become *jawara* in their own neighbourhood. As the indigenous people of Jakarta, we should be enjoying the fruits of its growth. Unfortunately, many businesses do not employ local people, and don't contribute to the community in any significant way (el-Muhir 2003).

According to Fadloli, throughout the New Order the Betawi were culturally and politically marginalised. This marginalisation has been compounded by 'globalisation' and has led to a loss of ethnic and cultural identity: 'The first step we need to take post New Order is to raise our heads, to stop cowering and take pride in our ethnicity' (el-Muhir 2002). There is a large number of groups representing the ethnic Betawi in Jakarta, 67 of whom are affiliated with the umbrella organisation the Betawi Consultative Body (*Bamus Betawi*) led by Abdul Syukur. FBR however refused to join *Bamus Betawi*, considering it as only representing the interests of the 'elite' and not those of poor and working class Betawi (el-Muhir 2003). FBR strongly identifies itself as a voice for the Betawi underclass.

In and around its headquarters in the Ziyadatul Muslim boarding school situated in Cakung, East Jakarta, FBR has a firm hold over the informal economy. For example, on becoming a member of FBR, local *ojek* motorbike chauffeurs are provided with interest free loans to assist them in buying their own motorbike. The organisation runs a number of other local economic initiatives for its members, such as screen printing workshops and food stall cooperatives, similar to those employed by NGO's working with the urban poor. However FBR's concern for the poor apparently extends only to its own membership, and its control of the informal sector has not occurred without conflict. A dispute in 2002 over control of the lucrative parking market in Cakung between Maduranese preman and FBR members soon escalated into a riot. In its aftermath, there was one fatality and several seriously injured (*Suara Merdeka* 2002b). FBR claimed that the incident was a product of ethnic tensions resulting from uncontrolled migration into the capital. Indigenous Betawi and not migrant ethnic groups such as the Maduranese should control the sectors of the informal local economy such as parking (FBR official 2003). Social ills such as prostitution and gambling are also attributed to non-Jakartans. Several bars and cafes in Cakung run by non-Betawi have been attacked by FBR on the grounds of eliminating 'immorality'. Perceiving the social, moral and economic cohesion of the ethnic community as under threat, FBR considers its use of violence as a legitimate act of self-defence.

FBR's organisational structure consists of a central governing board that mirrors a mini-government, with separate 'departments' for culture, economy, law and security. The emphasis however is firmly upon 'security'. FBR security personnel are called *dedengkot*, a colloquial Betawi term for 'big shot'. The security wing employs a hierarchical structure similar to those found in local *pencak silat* martial arts associations, from where many of its members are recruited (Wilson 2002). The head of the security wing is referred to as a *jawara*. In Betawi culture, a *jawara* is both a figure of reverence and fear who is believed to have martial and magical powers.¹¹ The second in command following *jawara* is *pendekar*, traditionally an honorary title given to an esteemed master of *pencak silat*. Under the command of each *pendekar* are several hundred regular members known as *pitung*, named after Si Pitung, the robin hood-type social bandit of Betawi folk legend.¹² The FBR also has an 'elite' group of security personnel considered to have advanced martial ability and supernatural skills. In Cakung FBR has 115 security posts, known as *gardu*, that are

coordinated by the central board. Ostensibly in order to 'fill the void' left by the understaffed and underpaid police, the *gardu* are an adaptation of the *siskamling* local security/surveillance system established during the New Order. Aside from conducting neighbourhood patrols, *gardu* also organise various 'cultural' services, such as performances of Betawi arts, traditional weddings, etc, which provide an opportunity for drawing in new members. When I visited FBR's headquarters in 2003, the street was filled with around 70 well-built men wearing black and camouflage military style uniforms emblazoned with the FBR logo waiting to go on 'patrol' of the neighbourhood, some armed with wooden batons and barely concealed machetes. The group also has its own intelligence agents who 'collect information' on suspected drug dealers, petty criminals, gambling operators and potential 'trouble-makers' (Van Tillen 1995).¹³ FBR are a conspicuous and intimidating presence in the area.

According to Fadli, since the establishment of the *gardu*, crime rates in surrounding areas have dropped. At the same time, FBR membership has grown. The perhaps unintentional suggestion was that crime dropped *because* its perpetrators now wore FBR uniforms, for intimidation and extortion is only illegitimate and hence criminal when it is done by those who do not have a 'right' to do so. Businesses and street traders operating in FBR territory are expected to make regular 'contributions' to their local *gardu*. In the Pulo Gadung industrial area, FBR tax trucks a 1000 rupiah entrance fee. In early 2002 an alleged extortion letter from FBR sent to businesses in Pulo Gadung and Cakung surfaced in the press. In the letter, signed by both Fadli and the group's secretary, FBR requested monthly donations to cover group 'operational costs' and as a sign of support for ethnic Betawi, threatening retribution against those who refused (*Kompas* 2002b, 2002c). Whilst questioning the authenticity of the letter, Fadli defended it in principle, saying that businesses that benefited from the security the *gardu* provided should contribute. Business also has a 'moral obligation' to assist the indigenous population FBR claims to represent (el-Muhir 2003). The FBR has regularly demonstrated, picketed and intimidated businesses and shopping malls that have refused to employ its members (*Kompas* 2003a, 2004a).

The group first gained public notoriety in March 2002 when members attacked peaceful demonstrators outside the Indonesian Human Rights Commission. The demonstrators, members of the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), had just left a meeting with the Indonesian Human Rights Commission in which they sought its support in

the upholding of a decision of the Jakarta district court that the Jakarta administration led by Sutiyoso had unlawfully evicted and arrested Pedi cab drivers, buskers, street vendors and street children.¹⁴ The vicious attack, in which men, women and children were beaten and hit with wooden clubs, resulted in 17 being hospitalised. Wardah Hafidz, the coordinator of UPC, had a machete held to her throat. Two weeks earlier FBR members had also attacked flood victims demanding government assistance at the Jakarta City Hall. Why would FBR so violently oppose a peaceful demonstration in support of the rights of the urban poor? According to Fadloli, the UPC and other NGO's 'provoke and manipulate the poor for their own agenda ... what's more they ignore the FBR' (el-Muhir 2003). Considering the territorial nature of the group, perhaps it considered the UPC a rival for its main constituency. Commentators in the media however, along with Wardah Hafidz, saw the action as evidence that the FBR was on the pay-roll of Jakarta's governor Sutiyoso, who as the administrative head of Jakarta was the object of the UPC protest (Hafidz 2003).¹⁵

The relationship between Fadloli and Sutiyoso extends back to at least 1996 and the New Order orchestrated storming of the PDI headquarters in Jakarta. At the time Sutiyoso was Jakarta Military Commander, and has been implicated in helping to co-ordinate the thugs involved in the attack. He is said to have been promoted to governor in 1997 as a reward from Suharto for his successful handling of the takeover (*Jakarta Post* 2002). As mentioned, Fadloli at that time was prominent in the Suharto backed faction of the PDI from which Megawati had split. The FBR was also established just two months after Sutiyoso officially declared his 2001 'war on thugs' campaign (*Jakarta Post* 2001; *Gamma* 2001). Around 73 areas of preman activity were identified throughout the city, and a budget of 12 billion rupiah was allocated for the operation. Ostensibly aimed at addressing public concern over rising levels of street crime, in practice the campaign largely targeted street vendors and the homeless. Prior to the campaign, Sutiyoso consulted with preman groups such as the Betawi dominated Family of Tanah Abang Association (*IKBT: Ikatan Keluarga Besar Tanah Abang*) on strategies for dealing with the 'preman problem'.¹⁶ The IKBT proposed that the Jakarta police give month long training programs for the unemployed in order to 'prevent them from becoming thugs' (*Kompas* 2001a). Those who completed the training would be employed as security guards for shops and businesses in their local district. Sutiyoso took to the idea. In order to carry out his 'cleansing' program Sutiyoso deployed around 1900 civilian police assistants

(*Banpol: Bantuan Polisi*) in addition to the 800 regular police already assigned. The irony was that the Banpol were largely recruited from the ranks of the very preman that the program was supposedly aimed at eliminating (*Gamma* 2001). Not surprisingly then, when amongst great media fanfare Sutiyoso took to the streets of Tanah Abang, there were no preman insight, except for those now wearing Banpol uniforms. The following day however it was business as usual, with preman collecting entrance fees and ‘security’ money from taxi, bus and *ojek* drivers. It was only later that government officials revealed that preman were not the sole target of the operation, but that it also included the pedicab drivers, buskers and street vendors and others who ‘disturbed public order’.¹⁷ In effect, Sutiyoso recruited preman to ‘eliminate’ themselves. Seeing the opportunity available to Betawi preman to work with the Jakarta administration, it was a politically opportune time to establish a new preman organisation. In this respect Fadloli’s choice of the 27 July as FBR’s founding day can be interpreted as a signal to Sutiyoso that, like IKBT, the FBR was available for hire. Considering that he faced re-election the following year, the move was politically a risky one for Sutiyoso. Weighing up the possibility of public backlash against the political benefits of gaining access to Betawi preman, Sutiyoso chose the latter. The ‘war on thugs’ campaign prompted several protest and strike actions by street vendors and bus drivers around Tanah Abang, however the issue quickly faded from public consciousness.

It wasn’t until negative publicity emerged over FBR’s attack on the UPC that Sutiyoso was forced to publicly deny involvement with it and similar groups. He went even further, claiming to have never met Fadloli before (*Republika* 2002). Despite his refutation, several days later Sutiyoso attended a FBR gathering at which Fadloli supported his re-election as governor for 2002-2007 (*Liputan6.com* 2002a). Fadloli stated that, while in principle the FBR preferred a native of Jakarta as governor, it could accept a non-Betawi such as Sutiyoso as he had proven his commitment to improving the conditions of the indigenous population. Fadloli’s choice of political pragmatism over principle did not find unanimous support within FBR ranks. A significant faction in the group publicly backed the bid of former minister for women’s affairs, Tutty Alawiyah, on the grounds that she was ethnic Betawi (FBR member 2003). It appeared as if tensions had emerged between the political opportunism of FBR’s leadership and the ethnically driven ideology that motivated many rank-and-file members. The split was diffused uneventfully when Alawiyah

unexpectedly died of natural causes prior to the election. If Fadloli thought his support for Sutiyoso would secure special treatment for FBR he was soon to be disappointed. In May 2003 FBR leaders met with Sutiyoso to request that the Jakarta administration provide facilities for a 'skills training centre' for unemployed FBR members as part of its obligation to assist ethnic Betawi (*Kompas* 2003b). Sutiyoso politely denied the request. Having secured his re-election, Sutiyoso no longer needed to court the controversial FBR.

FBR's other flirtation with those in power has been with former police chief Noegroho Djajoesman. Three months prior to the April 2004 legislative elections Noegroho established the 'Save Indonesia Alliance' (API: *Aliansi Penyelamat Indonesia*). The API was a curious mix of former activists and human rights advocates such as Hariman Siregar and Buyung Nasution, together with preman dominated groups such as FBR and the Muslim Workers Brotherhood. Fadloli was appointed deputy head of the alliance. Founded on an 'anti-corruption' platform, API supported the election of former military candidates, such as Wiranto and Yudhoyono. Mirroring the prediction of armed forces chief Sutarto, Noegroho threateningly suggested that the elections would fail, in which case API was ready to 'take action' in ensuring a smooth transition to a stable government (*Sinar Harapan* 2004b). In March 2004 FBR held its own rally, attended by presidential candidate Wiranto, in which the group affirmed its willingness to provide security for the upcoming elections, and 'hammer anyone who makes trouble' (el-Muhir 2003). However by the time of the second round of presidential elections in October, FBR had emerged as a vocal supporter of Megawati, a position contradicting their involvement with the anti-Megawati API. FBR hosted a public show of support for Megawati, who attended the event, in which Fadloli declared that she had made improvements in 'every aspect of national life' (*Liputan6.com* 2004a). Three days later hundreds of FBR members held a noisy demonstration outside the Indonesian Electoral Commission, protesting over the campaign leaflets produced by her rival Bambang Yudhoyono, claiming that it played upon religious sentiment (*Liputan6.com* 2004b). The seeming contradictions of FBR's shifting political allegiances are justified by Fadloli as evidence of the group's neutrality. Rather than seeking out patronage, Fadloli insists that 'currently we are like a pretty girl, everyone is flirting with us!' (el-Muhir 2003).

The Defenders of Islam Front

The Defenders of Islam Front (*FPI: Front Pembela Islam*) was one of the groups that emerged as part of the pro-Habibie 1998 Panswakarsa forces. On 24 September 1998, a month after its founding, FPI made its first public appearance, attacking student activists at the Christian Atmajaya University on the pretext of challenging ‘left wing and Christian students who are paid by American Jews’ (*Radio Nederland Wereldomroep* 2000). One month later FPI was involved in a bloody pitched battle with Christian Ambonese security guards in Ketapang, Central Jakarta. In the aftermath 14 were dead and an indelible image was left in the public’s mind; of white robed and turbaned young men angrily wielding machetes and swords in the name of Islam (Gunawan and Patria 2000).

The FPI was founded by Misbahul Alam, a Nahdatul Ulama educated preacher, and Habib Rizieq a *habib* preacher of mixed Arab-Betawi descent.¹⁸ It was one of a number of ‘radical’ Islamic organisations to emerge post New Order, such as Laskar Jihad and the Hizbut Tahrir. According to a report in *Tajuk* magazine, the FPI was originally planned as a nation wide support base for the Muslim United Development Party (*PPP: Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*) of Hamzah Haz, and modelled along the lines of the Banser paramilitary wing of Nahdatul Ulama (*Tajuk* 1999). The emergence of the PPP aligned Ka’abah Youth Movement and the initial failure of FPI to create strong support bases outside of Jakarta saw it redefine itself as a street level ‘anti-vice’ movement.¹⁹ While its leadership consists of scholars from *habib* circles alongside several seasoned Muslim radicals of the New Order period, rank and file members are drawn mainly from the poor urban youth in districts of Jakarta, such as Tanah Abang and Depok. FPI’s uniform, consisting of long white robes and turbans, invokes popular representations of the ‘*wali songo*’, the nine Muslim saints believed to have spread Islam throughout Java (Gunawan and Patria 2000). This romantic image drawn from popular myth, combined with the focus upon vigilante actions, religious instruction, martial arts training, and vehement attacks on US foreign policy, have proved irresistible to many disenfranchised urban youth. By August 1999, Rizieq claimed to have up to three million militia members who were ‘ready to fight’, with a total FPI membership of 13 million (*Gatra* 1999). While this figure is greatly exaggerated, FPI’s membership did grow quickly. By 2003 it was

estimated to have around one hundred thousand members with branches in 22 provinces.²⁰

Like the FBR, the FPI has a formal leadership hierarchy. A supreme advisory council reports directly to Habib Rizieq. The FPI secretariat is subdivided into six 'council fronts', such as those for 'anti-sinful practices' and recruitment. The 'investigation council front' is the group's intelligence unit, which is believed to have coordinated the infiltration of FPI operatives into student organisations considered to be 'communist'.²¹ This is supplemented by numerous government style departments, covering issues from foreign relations, national defence and education to women's affairs and food distribution. The paramilitary wing used by FPI in its raids is known as the Laskar Pembela Islam. The Laskar hierarchy mirrors the territorial command structure of the Indonesian armed forces, with a chain of command and semi-autonomous territorial units extending from the national down to the sub-district level. Recruits are given martial arts and 'inner power' training, such as physical invulnerability.

FPI's ideology centres upon two central themes. The first of these is the necessity for the insertion of the 'Jakarta Charter' into the Indonesian constitution. The Jakarta Charter, which obliges the application of Shari'a law to all Muslims, was proposed for inclusion in the original version of the 1945 Constitution by Islamic political parties, however was later dropped after objections from Christian nationalists. Since the end of the New Order, who outlawed discussion of the amendment, its re-inclusion has become a rallying point for a variety of Muslim groups and political parties. Unlike Laskar Jihad and Hizbut Tahrir, the FPI stops short of openly rejecting democracy. Somewhat reservedly, Misbahul Alam stated that 'the voice of the people is the voice of God, however Islam is not a democratic religion even though it does respect democracy'.²² According to Rizieq, the Prophet Muhammad never discussed the specifics of an Islamic state and was concerned only with the creation of a society based upon Shari'a law (Rizieq 2005). Consequently FPI's agenda was to reform public morality rather than directly challenge the nation-state. In the opinion of Rizieq, 'if the morals and character are not reformed then it would be useless to talk about reform in economy, political affairs, and law' (*Asia Times* 2004a). This leads to the second theme fundamental to FPI's ideology, the Qur'anic edict of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, to lead people towards good and away from evil. It is this principle that has provided the rationale for FPI's ongoing attacks

on Jakarta nightspots. The FPI worldview sees the Islamic community in Indonesia as under serious attack from western decadence and immorality. The spread of free-market capitalism has manifested in the uncontrolled spread of businesses ‘peddling in vice’, such as discos, bars, entertainment centres etc (Alam 2004). While FPI considers it the responsibility of government to uphold morality, it recognises it as limited both by its administrative capacity as well as the presence of corrupt officials within its ranks. Hence, devout citizens have a right and obligation to defend their community, with violence if necessary.

FPI activity has been most vigorous during the fasting month of Ramadan, the one most steeped in the symbolism of purification and cleansing for the Islamic community. In December 1999, around 4000 FPI members blockaded and occupied the office of the Jakarta regional government for over 10 hours, demanding that governor Sutiyoso close down all nightlife spots during Ramadan (*Kompas* 1999). After a lengthy meeting with Sutiyoso and police chief Noegroho Djajoesman, the governor issued a statement that he agreed with FPI’s demands, and would work with them to ensure that new regulations regarding opening hours were enforced. The protest was an unexpected strategic success for FPI, they gained concessions from the government and were essentially given a mandate to act in its absence. Between 1999 up until its ‘de-activation’ in late 2002 FPI’s paramilitary wing carried out dozens of raids on nightspots, billiard halls, brothels, gambling dens and other places of ‘sinful’ activity throughout Jakarta (See *Laksamana.net* 2003).²³ Initially the raids were confined to the fasting month, but soon extended beyond it. It became apparent that FPI had a larger agenda to purge vice from the capital full stop. In some instances the raids involved little more than smashing signs and overturning tables. In others patrons, staff and local residents were attacked with clubs and machetes, buildings were burned down and FPI members clashed with local security and police. In at least one case FPI militia killed a local resident. Throughout the early attacks the response from the police had been non-committal. Routinely late to the scene, they made only a small number of arrests and released ambiguous statements that called upon the FPI to not break the law while simultaneously defending its democratic right to protest. Without a mandate or legal basis to act against the group as a whole, the police were confined to arrests of individual members proven to have committed criminal damage or assault. Rizieq’s attitude towards the police was far less ambiguous. Although rhetorically insisting that the FPI ‘didn’t dream of replacing the police’, he regularly

launched scathing and threatening verbal attacks, accusing the police of profiting from gambling and prostitution syndicates (*Liputan6.com* 2002b).

By early 2001 relations between the police and FPI had grown increasingly tense. Under pressure from the entertainment industry, Sutiyoso revised the 1999 regulations regarding opening hours during Ramadan, allowing businesses to operate in the evenings. Furious at the changes, FPI threatened to enforce a total ban during Ramadan. The police responded by counter threatening to crack down harshly on the group. The two had clashed violently in previous months, including an FPI attack on a police station, and an incident in which police fired shots into a van carrying FPI militia (*Gatra* 2003). In September 2001 FPI leaders and the police met and agreed to a 'truce' in confrontations *Tempo* (2001b). It did not last for long. While its anti-vice raids usually involved at most several hundred members, after the 11 September attacks in the US the FPI began to mobilise far larger actions, drawing on widespread opposition to the 'war on terror'. In October 2001, at a demonstration against the pending invasion of Afghanistan by US forces, an estimated 10,000 FPI supporters rallied in front of the national parliament in what was the group's largest mobilisation to date. In his oration to the crowd, Rizieq demanded that the government sever all ties with the US and threatened to do 'sweeping operations' to remove its citizens in Indonesia (*Asia Times Online* 2001). Fearful the demonstration would spiral out of control, the police moved in. The situation quickly deteriorated into a series of bloody pitched battles. The following day police raided FPI headquarters in Tanah Abang. Rizieq was detained on charges of inciting hatred over the demonstration, but later released.

It wasn't until after the Bali bombing on 12 October 2002 that more decisive action was taken against the group. The bombing signalled the end of the government's tolerance towards groups employing the symbolism of militant Islam such as FPI and Laskar Jihad. With international pressure on the Indonesian government to be seen as tackling radical Islam, militant groups were now a political liability. Rizieq was arrested four days after the bombing on charges of spreading hatred against the government and inciting public unrest in relation to FPI attacks on a pool hall and nightclub in Glodok on 4 October. Even while charging Rizieq the state was still conciliatory, reflected in the reduction of the penalty for the offences by the state prosecutor from the maximum of seven years to seven months on the grounds that Rizieq had 'merely intended to improve the morality of Indonesian society'

(*Laksamana.net* 2003c). After a brief period in custody Rizieq was released and placed under house arrest on the condition that FPI would stop its raids. The following day the laskar wing of the group suspended its activities indefinitely (*Tempo* 2002). However the imminent US led invasion of Iraq saw FPI back in the spotlight, as it threatened 'sweeping' actions against westerners in Indonesia. At its headquarters in Tanah Abang, recruitment desks were set up for 'jihad fighters' to go to Iraq, with over 500 signing up (*Far Eastern Economic Review* 2003).²⁴ Rizieq broke the conditions of his house arrest, making a 'humanitarian' visit to Iraq in April, apparently with the Red Crescent. On his return on 20 April 2003 he was immediately arrested and taken back into custody.²⁵

Rizieq was confined to Salemba prison until November 2003. During his incarceration FPI continued to operate as an organisation, however the activities of its paramilitary wing continued to be suspended. Soon after Rizieq's release FPI held a national congress to 'reconsolidate' its internal leadership, refocus its mission and formulate strategies for cleaning up its rank-and-file membership. Rizieq and Misbahul Alam both admitted that the group had 'grown too fast' and as a consequence had allowed what they termed 'uncontrollable and undesirable elements' to slip into its ranks (Alam 2004). Aside from unrepentant preman, this was also believed to include infiltrators linked to the police and businesses involved in gambling and prostitution (Alam 2004). Since its first raids, FPI had faced accusations that it was little more than a band of criminal extortionists in religious garb. Patrons of raided bars claimed to have been robbed, and nightspot owners accused FPI of extortion and collusion with the police. The allegations were taken seriously by Rizieq, who saw them as undermining the moral platform they claimed to stand upon. It was apparent that a gap had emerged between the short-term material self-interest of the ordinary membership and the ideological objectives of the leadership. In order to address the problem a number of measures were introduced. Membership criteria were tightened. Potential recruits now had to undergo a stringent screening process and entrance test, and once accepted undertake intensive training coordinated by FPI headquarters. Rather than acting as semi-autonomous units, laskar militia activities were coordinated centrally. If Rizieq's imprisonment had the intention of undermining the group, the opposite was the case. FPI responded by tightening its ranks, centralising control over its component units, and upgrading the discipline and training of its recruits, moving it from an unruly bunch of thugs in religious garb to a

far more disciplined and ideologically motivated paramilitary force. During Ramadan 2004 the FPI once more took to the streets, targeting cafes and bars in the Kemang district of South Jakarta (*Asia Times Online* 2004). As in previous years, the police threatened to act however failed to do so. Faced with continued police inaction, Kemang locals formed their own vigilante force to guard against possible repeat attacks, perpetuating the cycle of vigilantism. The moral justification for organised violence used by the FPI has apparently rendered the state reluctant to treat the actions as purely criminal. It has been loathe to support it, but also failed to act against it in any systematic way.

The devastating tsunami that hit the war ravaged province of Aceh on 26 December 2004 created a new arena for the FPI. Within two days of the tragedy several hundred volunteers FPI along with Habib Rizieq had arrived in Banda Aceh, their transportation provided by the government. Other paramilitary and militant groups such as Pemuda Panca Marga, Pemuda Pancasila and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council also flooded in en masse, ostensibly as part of relief efforts (*Aljazeera.net* 2005).²⁶ For predatory groups, post-tsunami Aceh was new 'territory', and offered a host of both political and economic opportunities. Reports soon emerged of extortion rackets and the siphoning of aid supplies. The leadership of the Free Aceh Movement (*GAM; Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) was quick to issue a statement calling the FPI a 'criminal organisation' and stating that its purpose in Aceh was to act on behalf of the Indonesian military.²⁷ However, while not renowned for its humanitarian relief work, the FPI soon made a name for itself for its dedication to the grisly task of recovering and burying the dead.²⁸ At the same time however it issued terse cautions to foreigners to respect the form of Islamic law practiced in the province, with Rizieq further warning of the possibility of 'Christianisation' by religion based aid agencies and an East Timor style intervention by foreign troops. Strategically, post-Tsunami Aceh is a perfect recruiting ground for the FPI. Its relief work has already won it guarded praise from locals, whilst its links to the military and open opposition to Acehnese independence ensures it government support. It's particular brand of Islamic-nationalism fits well with the government's autonomy package for the region, designed as an alternative to independence, and could see the FPI emerge as a significant player in the politics of post-tsunami Aceh.

Like the FBR, FPI has been largely transparent in its flirtations with elite figures. Throughout its brief history the group has enjoyed the support of Habibie,

Wiranto, vice-president Hamzah Haz, and Amien Rais. According to Rizieq, ‘we do not object to being used by others, and we will use others in order to uphold morality and eliminate vice’ (Asgart 2003). Neither the FBR nor FPI are state proxies, for this presumes the existence of the state as a unified entity. The relationship between vigilante groups and the post New Order state could be characterised more as one of strategic partial-patronage. At times the support of vigilante thugs has been beneficial to particular figures within the fragmented and competing elites. At the same time temporary patronage has allowed vigilante groups to operate with impunity and gain a degree of political leverage for agendas divergent from official state interests. The groups have undoubtedly served as a vehicle for the political opportunism of their leadership, yet this does not explain why both groups have been able to gain significant support bases amongst the urban poor. In the case of FBR, the material benefits of membership are tangible. With the FPI, especially post-reconsolidation, the primary motivation for involvement appears more ideological, and draws part of its appeal from the broader global discourse of Muslim radicalism and opposition to the west.

A *PREMAN* STATE?

As Hadiz has noted, political gangsters and vigilantes have been major beneficiaries of the introduction of reforms leading to a decentralized system of power in Indonesia (Hadiz 2003). This new system, that has given greater autonomy and power to regional and local government, has seen paramilitary groups and political gangsters become a valuable form of political capital, and influential power brokers in their own right, like their ancestors the *jago* of the colonial period. Some have aspired to more direct political power. In August 2003 the ‘granddaddy’ of preman/paramilitary groups, Pemuda Pancasila, formally registered its own political party, the Pancasila Patriot Party.²⁹ Disillusioned with the lack of rewards for its long standing loyalty to Golkar, the head of Pemuda Pancasila, Yapto Soerjo Soermano, stated that ‘rather than choose a party who doesn’t care about us, its better we form our own party’ (*Kompas* 2003d). The organisations large membership networks enabled it to easily fulfil the necessary criteria, and it competed in the April 2004 general elections. While being far more established than other similar organisations, is it possible that other groups may eventually take the path of Pemuda Pancasila? The presence of a

'preman party' as a registered, albeit unsuccessful, competitor in the general election could be seen as eroding the legitimacy of the existing party system. Despite its poor showing in the elections, with just under one percent of the votes, the Patriot Party represents a self-proclaimed preman voice within the party system.

If the patronage of political parties is no longer sufficient or too unpredictable, will satgas and vigilante groups seek to establish a more stable role for themselves as 'security agencies', akin to the transition made by Brigass, or will demobilised rank and file satgas simply return to the streets to join the increasing ranks of street thugs? Rather than resulting in a decrease in violent thuggery, the temporary demobilisation of political paramilitary forces has seen an analogous increase in the emergence of violence as a commodity in the private sector. One example of this has been the labour sector. No longer able to rely solely on the police and military, factory owners have turned to gangs of hired thugs who specialise in intimidating workers and breaking up strikes.³⁰ Thugs acting on behalf of powerful clients have also regularly targeted journalists and the media.³¹ In an attempt to establish a reputation as legitimate 'businessmen', some infamous gangland figures have even turned to the courts, seeking compensation from media outlets that have referred to them as 'thugs'.³²

Criminal gangs, vigilante groups and individual preman have established a lucrative yet unstable control over public space, such as markets, terminals and parking lots, creating further hardship for those living on the margins of the informal economy. Preman based organizations are both a product of poverty and unemployment, and a factor further exacerbating it. Without the protection of the authorities that they once enjoyed under the territorial stand-over racket system, preman have now become vulnerable to attacks from rivals, as well as from a public that can no longer stand the burden of what amounts to an informal taxation system running in parallel to that of the state. A review of media reports over the last 18 months indicates that there has been a steady increase in the number of retaliatory attacks and vigilante 'street justice' against preman. During the New Order, such attacks by the public were practically unheard of. The character of such extra-legal violence however is self-justificatory and hence cyclic in nature.

Schulte Nordholt has suggested that on its current trajectory Indonesia is heading towards what he refers to as a '*preman state*', similar to that of post-Communist Russia (Nordholt 2002). The comparison with Russia is an intriguing one.

Vadim Volkov, in his study of Russian gangsters, has shown how criminal networks and thugs trafficking in violence have played a pivotal role in the making of Russian capitalism whilst simultaneously rendering the Russian state in functional disarray (Volkov 2002). After a period of fierce rivalry between criminal gangs in the mid-1990s, stronger 'violent entrepreneurs' have gradually established semi-legitimate monopolies, becoming recognised guarantors of business transactions. Over time private security companies with closer links to government, often run by former KGB and military officers have commandeered these monopolies leading to the legalisation of private protection. Privatised sections of the state coercive apparatus have also become more independent market actors (Volkov 1999). Faced with myriad autonomous groups employing violence, the Russian state has lost 'unconditional priority in those very areas that constitute it: protection, taxation and law enforcement' (Volkov 2002: 752). Looking to the future, Volkov speculates that one possible scenario is a gradual appropriation of those private protection agencies with state links, leading to a re-centralisation of state control, albeit in a more dynamic form. This process entails not just controlling crime, but a fundamental rebuilding of the state. The logic of the market, where intensive violence is simply unprofitable, could also emerge as a mediating factor (Volkov 2002: 753).

Comparing the conditions in contemporary Indonesia, there are significant parallels. Like Russia, the semi-autonomous nature of the armed forces and its diverse business interests is a major hurdle towards the restoration of state control over organised violence. Curbing of satgas violence has come less from state intervention than from its political redundancy, the voting public can no longer be simply coerced into giving support. While groups such as FBR and FPI have connections to figures within the political elite, the current situation is far more fragmented than during the New Order; allegiances are largely tactical and for the achievement of short-term goals, hence they shift rapidly. Attempts to incorporate such groups within state structures could only be temporary, and would further erode public trust leading to more vigilantism. While it is perhaps easy to dismiss such groups as self-serving thugs, an understanding of the role played by ideology is crucial. With the breakdown in civic nationalism post New Order, appeals to local identity, ethnicity and religion have become a persuasive justification and motivating factor behind the use of violence that both intersects with and transcends material self-interest. At issue, then,

are not just particular configurations of political and economic power, but also more fundamental questions regarding what constitutes 'Indonesia' post New Order.

The proliferation of paramilitary and vigilante groups post-1998 has seen the decentralisation of violence as a political, social and economic strategy with the state losing control as its sole legitimate source and patron. If we define the state in Weber's terms, as the territorial monopoly over legitimate violence, then such groups appear to present a major challenge to restoring public confidence in state institutions and the judicial system. In the case of the FBR and FPI, violence and extortion is legitimised by recourse to ideological frameworks in which they conceptualise themselves as acting on behalf, or in lieu of, the lapsed state. Violence is justified as an act of necessary rectification rather than direct opposition, in a situation where the state has failed to provide staples such as security, justice and employment (Sung 2004). This would appear to offer an opening to the state to engage with valid grievances whilst simultaneously enforcing the rule of law. So far, it has failed to do either. There have been various attempts by local governments to either 'eliminate' violent elements without elite backing, via shootings and mass arrests of individual preman by the police, or to incorporate them by employing preman as assistant police or public order officers, such as Sutiyoso's 'war on thugs' (*Detik* 2004; *Kompas* 2001). The rationale behind the recruitment is identical to that given by paramilitary and vigilante groups themselves, that with discipline and direction preman can be 'reformed' and transformed into law-abiding and productive citizens. The message sent out is a contradictory one, and an indication of the functional disarray of state institutions. If this remains the extent of the state's response it leaves the public caught between two distinct types of 'thugs in uniform', those with state backing, and those without. What may be required is a more broad ranging reconfiguring of the state, and an endeavour to address the deep-rooted social and economic causes of violence, something far more complex and ambitious than merely 'tackling crime'. Similarly, the implications of this for further research on post New Order Indonesia include the importance of focusing upon informal constellations of power and their ramifications for the ongoing process of state building.

NOTES

¹ These included intimidating and attacking critics of the government, organising pro-government rallies, and ‘procuring’ funds via state sanctioned criminal activities such as standover rackets (O’Rourke 2002: 11).

² For more on the impact of decentralization reforms see the various contributors in Aspinall and Fealy (2003).

³ Publicly, Wiranto denied coordinating and funding the vigilante forces, claiming that they were a ‘spontaneous act of the people’. Pamswakarsa leaders themselves however named Wiranto as the architect of the force. See *Tempo* (1999a, 1999b).

⁴ In 2004 the Pamswakarsa affair came back to haunt Wiranto’s campaign for the presidency. Kivlan Zein accused Wiranto of still owing him nearly 5 billion rupiah (Aus\$ 750,000) that Zein claimed to have paid out of his own pocket to fund the vigilante force. See *Jakarta Post* (2004).

⁵ The Young Bulls came to public attention after 200 members were involved in an attack on the office of *Tempo* magazine in March 2003, after it ran a report implying that business tycoon Tommy Winata, a business associate of Taufik Kiemas, was behind a fire that destroyed the Tanah Abang market in Jakarta. Winata recently won a libel against *Tempo* over the accusation. The Komando Bela Mbak Mega was established in August 2001, the product of a split with the Komite Bela Mega (Defend Mega Committee), a Megawati supporter group set up in 1996. According to KBMM’s chairman Herdy Mas, the group’s loyalty is ‘to Mega alone, not to the PDI-P’ (*Kompas* 2002).

⁶ Kiemas has fostered close relations with numerous underworld figures, including Yapto Suryosumarno, head of Pemuda Pancasila. During demonstrations over rising fuel prices, Kiemas deployed Satgas PDI-P to guard his petrol stations, fuelling the perception that the role of satgas and party militia was merely to protect the business interests of the first family (*Laksamana.net* 2001).

⁷ Pangaribuan is also a legislative candidate. In January 2004 he was accused of extorting 1.3 billion rupiah from the Jakarta Public Works Department. See *Republika* (2004).

⁸ The PDI-P in Central Java prohibited its satgas to work as security for local businesses or as bodyguards, however this policy was not adopted by the national leadership.

⁹ The average wage for a PDI-P satgas can be anywhere between 5000 to 50,000 rupiah per week.

¹⁰ This number is based on various Indonesian media reports. The group itself claims to have up to 150,000 active members.

¹¹ During colonial times *jawara* and *jago* acted as powerbrokers for the colonial and indigenous elite. On the relationship between the *jago* and the colonial state, see Nordholt (1991: 74-91).

¹² As Margareet Van Tillen discovered in her study on Si Pitung, the bandits’ relationship with the poor was largely predatory. (Van Tillen 1995).

¹³ ‘Intelligence agents’ are a common part of many political and social organisations in the post New Order environment.

¹⁴ A chronology of the FBR attack can be found on the UPC website at <http://urbanpoor.or.id/28.23.0.0.1.0.phtml>.

¹⁵ Seven FBR members were arrested over the attacks, however Fadloli himself as a then member of the DPA, could not be arrested without the formal permission of President Megawati. The DPA itself severely reprimanded Fadloli, however Megawati made no comment on the incident. INFID (2002); *Suara Merdeka* (2002a).

¹⁶ The IGBT started in 1998 as the product of a truce between rival ethnic gangs in Tanah Abang negotiated by the mayor of central Jakarta. Led by a renowned Betawi thug, the group splintered after 18 months along ethnic lines.

¹⁷ Later in June at a ceremony celebrating Jakarta's anniversary, Sutiyoso symbolically 'shot' a statue meant to represent the 'preman problem'. Horned and with eight arms, each holding a weapon, the statue also wore a tie, prompting some onlookers to suggest that it looked more like a politician than a preman (*Tempo* 2001a).

¹⁸ *Habib* are Arab-Indonesians claiming familial descent from the prophet Muhammad. FPI's founding committee also consisted several of seasoned Islamic radicals such as Habib Husein Al-Habsyi, who was jailed for the bombing of the 1985 Borobudur temple.

¹⁹ The Front Pembela Islam Surakarta (FPIS) based in central Java is estimated to have around 12,000 members, however its leadership operates independently of FPI.

²⁰ This figure is derived from media reports in Indonesia.

²¹ FPI accused several student organizations such as the People's Democratic Party, of being the basis for a resurgence of communism in Indonesia.

²² In interview, Misbahul Alam said that he had held discussions with four generals where the possibility of armed Iranian type insurrection in Indonesia in order to achieve a state governed by *shari'a* law was discussed. He declined to name them, however it is documented that FPI has enjoyed the patronage of former generals Djaja Suparman and Wiranto. See *Laksamana.net* (2003b); Alam (2003).

²³ The Indonesian Human Rights Commission was also attacked in 2000 in anger over a report playing down the massacre of Muslims by the military in Tanjung Priok in 1984.

²⁴ Plans to send fighters were prevented by a lack of funds as well as the obvious logistical problems of getting fighters into the country. More recently Rizieq has threatened to send FPI militia to southern Thailand as well as Falluja in Iraq (*Tempo* 2004).

²⁵ After his arrest, FPI supporters helped Rizieq escape from the public prosecutors office, however he surrendered to police the next day.

²⁶ In 2003 Pemuda Panca Marga members attacked and ransacked the offices of the local NGO Committee for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) after it criticised the imposition of martial law in Aceh.

²⁷ The full statement can be read on a GAM affiliated website; http://www.aceh-eye.org/data_files/english_format/asnlf/asnlf_statements_data-eng/asnlf_statements_data-eng_025_09jan2005.html.

²⁸ In one instance FPI claims that GAM itself requested that they remove corpses from a conflict zone in order to avoid a confrontation between GAM and the TNI (*Indo Pos* 2005).

²⁹ Around 400 Pemuda Pancasila members already occupy seats in parliament throughout Indonesia, primarily as representatives of Golkar. After initially declaring it forbidden for PP members to be involved in political parties aside from the Pancasila Patriot Party, this was later changed; members are now free to do so, but will be labelled 'failed cadre... not a cadre of the nation'. See *Kompas* (2003c) and *Suara Merdeka* (2003).

³⁰ One recent example of this is the beating and intimidation of workers from the Shamrock textile factory in Medan. See *Wapada* (2004) and *Kompas* (2004b).

³¹ For documentation of attacks on the Indonesian press see Suwarso, Solahudin and Aditjondro (2002).

³² This includes Hercules, the former gangland leader from Tanah Abang, Pemuda Panca Marga, as well as underworld figure and business tycoon Tommy Winata, who recently won a libel case against *Tempo* magazine.

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