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WEST PAPUA



INTRODUCTION

West Papua is the easternmost part of Indonesia. It is Indonesia's largest province (with a land area twice the size of the UK's). The island containing West Papua (also known as West Irian and Irian Jaya) and Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the world's second largest island (after Greenland) and it remains one of the least explored places on earth. But the island is very rich in minerals and energy (Suter, 1997).

West Papua's status as a part of Indonesia is due to an accident of history. The Dutch established their claim to the western part of New Guinea first and this colonial connection provided the bridge over which the post-independence Indonesian Republic travelled to gain control of West Papua. If the UK in the late 19th century and early 20th century had acted more quickly in its colonial expansion, then West Papua would today either be an independent country or a part of Papua New Guinea. Such are the vagaries of the legacy of European colonization.

This chapter is in three parts. The first part provides some historical background to West Papua.

The second part deals with the current conflict in the territory. Ironically despite all the wealth in West Papua, it is the country's second poorest province (after West Nusa Tenggara). The West Papuan resentment at their poverty adds to the causes of conflict. West Papua is one of the most heavily militarised areas of Indonesia.

The final part looks in more detail at Australia's links with the territory and some of the policy implications. No two neighbours in the world are more unlike than Australia and Indonesia. They are so close geographically - and yet so distant culturally and politically. Tensions over West Papua have only added to that gulf. The tensions look likely to continue.



THE HISTORY OF WEST IRIAN



The Dutch Era

The Dutch reached Indonesia (the Netherlands Indies) in the late 16th century. They made substantial profits from it (for example, 31 per cent of Dutch national income in the 1850s) from the "cultivation system" in Java in the 19th century. But they were not liked. The extent of the weak support the Dutch enjoyed among their colonial inhabitants was shown by the relative ease with which the Japanese were able to establish control over the colonies from January 1942. Many inhabitants saw the Japanese as liberators which, eventually, they turned out to be because the War marked the effective end of Dutch control.

Independence was declared on 17 August 1945 by Indonesian nationalists. The Dutch did not recognize it and made a futile, if brutal, effort to regain control. On 27 December 1949, the Dutch surrendered sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia - except for West Papua, which was left temporarily under Dutch control until its future could be decided through international negotiations.

In 1848, the Dutch proclaimed the area west of 141 degrees east to be Dutch territory (the eastern half of the island consists of Papua New Guinea). This was done without any consultation with the inhabitants of the island. It was done so that the imperial map-makers could be sure about how Far East Dutch claims extended. But by that line on the map, hundreds of thousands of people "moved" from Melanesian New Guinea into the scope of The Netherlands and then eventually Indonesia.

West Papua was part of the Dutch East Indies but it is geologically and geographically much more closely related to Australasia than Indonesia. Much the same could be said about its vegetation. The people, too, are not related to Javanese/ Indonesians as regards their ethnic backgrounds, languages and religion. It is not predominantly Muslim society but animistic, with worship of the spirits which the people believe to inhabit their surrounding world. There is also a growing presence of Christian churches. West Papua's eventual inclusion in Indonesia was due more to political factors rather than cultural and linguistic ones - and without reference to the people themselves to explain their preference.

West Papua has been inhabited for at least 30,000 years. The indigenous people have retained many of their early forms of living. They are scattered throughout the whole territory in small clans and are kept apart by terrain, language and customs. No indigenous language has more than 150,000 speakers and some are spoken by only a few thousand. The people live mainly by subsistence farming, consuming edible roots and pigs. Little surplus food is produced because of the considerable cost of transporting it to other markets.

West Papua was part of the territory of the Sultanate of Tidore (in the Moluccas). The Dutch did not, however, devote the same attention to it as to the other parts of the East Indies. It was never more than a handful of isolated missions and trading posts. There was limited Dutch penetration beyond the coastal towns and at no time did Dutch control extend to all the colony's inhabitants. Its main purpose was as a boundary marker for the eastern end of the Dutch Empire.

✓ The New Country of Indonesia

During the 1945 there were discussions among the nationalists as to the future boundaries of the independent country. They were soon to declare independence and there had to be agreement over what would constitute the new country of Indonesia. There was some disagreement over West Papua's inclusion within the new country. There were two main points of view. One was that the new country should try to conform to some measure of cultural homogeneity and the new country should be based around Java. This would have made the new country smaller and easier to govern. This would have excluded West Papua. The other view (held by Sukarno, soon to be the country's first president) was that the new country should simply be created from the entire Dutch East Indies. This view, which prevailed, required the inclusion of West Papua into the new country.

The Netherlands opposed West Papua's inclusion into the young Republic of Indonesia. It thought that West Papua was potentially rich in minerals and so it could make a contribution to the Dutch economy. It thought, wrongly as it turned out, that it would need an Asian territory for persons not wishing to live in Indonesia and not willing, or not able, to come home to The Netherlands. There was also a need to placate domestic conservative Dutch opposition to granting independence to Indonesia by retaining, in effect, a separate Dutch colony.

In the Round Table negotiations at The Hague which led to Indonesian independence, it was agreed that a decision on West Papua's fate would be postponed until a later date. After 1949, the Dutch undertook, for the only time in their control of the territory, a programme of economic development with the main impact being felt in the coastal areas. The Netherlands hoped to show that the land could prosper far more than the rest of its former colony, then in the grips of the problems of the post-independence era.

But, even with the realization that West Papua's economic potential was going to take longer to come to fruition than anticipated, the Netherlands still found it unable to give in to Indonesian pressure to transfer it to Jakarta. Holland was faced with domestic conservative Dutch opposition to such an act. So it tried to brazen it out, attempting to follow a policy which was inadequate but which was politically less damaging than unconditional surrender to Indonesia. It was not motivated by a desire to follow the wishes of the West Papuans, who were not consulted about their fate. Their opinions simply did not count for the Dutch. In the highlands of West

Papua, which had experienced little benefit from Dutch economic policies, people were probably unaware of the whole issue.

✓ The “Act of Free Choice”

Gradually Dutch policy began to erode. Other imperial powers in Western Europe (with the exception of Portugal) were divesting themselves of their colonies: these now being seen as liabilities rather than assets. Given its isolation from the Netherlands, the Dutch knew it would be difficult to provide military assistance to West Papua in the event of an outright Indonesian invasion. At the same time, Holland could count on little military assistance from its NATO allies, which were in the process of divesting themselves of their remaining colonial possessions. Moreover, continued Dutch control gave the Sukarno Government an excuse to acquire Dutch property in Indonesia and to expel Dutch citizens.

The Dutch were also losing the larger political battle, especially at the UN. The growing Third World bloc opposed Dutch rule and sided with Indonesia, one of the bloc's leaders. The United States wanted to remain on good terms with Indonesia (not least because of its influence in the Third World bloc) and so it did not side with the Netherlands over West Papua. Australia was the only major western country to support the Netherlands. This was due to Australian fears of an Indonesian-dominated West Papua on the border of its New Guinea Trust Territory and its Papua colony, both of which Australia wanted to retain essentially for strategic reasons.

To save Dutch prestige, West Papua was handed over temporarily to the UN. In August 1962, the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed that the Dutch would leave West Papua and transfer sovereignty to the UN Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) for a period of six years until a territory-wide referendum could be held to determine the political preference of the West Papuans, whether that be for independence or integration into Indonesia. But by May 1963, Indonesia had taken over the UNTEA and so it failed to operate as intended.

The 1969 "Act of Free Choice" was a farce. It was supervised by Fernando Ortiz Sanz, as representative of the UN Secretary-General, supported by 16 staff. There was no plebiscite as such but a sample of pro-Indonesian drawn opinions from 1025 tribal leaders selected by the Indonesian Government, all of whom supported integration into Indonesia. They may well have coerced into doing so. Theys Eluay, one of the 1025, said years later that “If we had not voted for integration (with Indonesia) our houses would have been burned and our families slaughtered” (Wareham, 2001).

By this time, Sukarno was out of power and Indonesia was run by pro-Western generals, led by Suharto (who stayed in power until May 1998). Indonesia had stopped its tilt towards communism and was now set on a path of western style capitalism (albeit under

government control). It had become far more welcoming to western financial interests, such as mining companies.

Australia, though unhappy about the Act's implications for the eastern half of the island, decided to turn a blind eye to the farce rather than campaign at the UN against it. This would in any case, have been futile, given the prevailing majority Third World opinion supporting Indonesia, as well as the US support. The UN General Assembly "took note" of the outcome in November 1969 in Resolution 2504 (XXIV), adopted with 30 abstentions but no negative votes.

West Papua was renamed Irian Jaya ("Victorious Irian") in 1973 by President Suharto in an attempt to add a gloss on the manner of its incorporation into the Republic. The indigenous movement rejected this name and identify themselves as West Papuans. Unlike East Timor (whose incorporation into Indonesia was not recognized by the UN and most countries), West Papua is recognized internationally as a province of Indonesia.

✓ WEST PAPUA IN REBELLION

Indonesian control over West Papua was contested from the outset by some of the indigenous people who were aware of the deal being made between the UN, the Netherlands and Indonesia. The main political and guerrilla force opposed to Indonesian rule is the Organises Papua Merdeka (OPM), the Free Papua Movement, formed in 1963. Its roots go back to the closing stages of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, when, in the period leading up to the Republic's formal independence, some sporadic acts of violence took place as a way of ensuring West Papua's inclusion in the young Republic. It was initially pro-Indonesian nationalist, but Jakarta's racist attitudes helped turn opinion against it. Given the difficulty of assessing West Irianese opinion, it is impossible to gauge accurately the extent of indigenous support for either Indonesian rule or national independence. Thousands of people have been killed on both sides but the figures are contested because they are not subject to any international verification. Nancy Jouwe (a West Papuan refugee) puts the figure at at least 150,000 West Papuans (Jouwe, 1998, 59).

But it would seem that West Papuan opposition to the Indonesian control will continue because Jakarta's presence runs counter to indigenous values. First, the people do not feel that they belong in Indonesia, experiencing more affinity with the people in the east (Papua New Guinea and the rest of Melanesia) than the people in Indonesia to the west. Second, Indonesian policies of coercing the indigenous people into being "Indonesian" have fuelled anti-Indonesian feelings in the territory. Third, respect for the land is very important to West Papuans and this value is being assaulted by the government's "transmigration" and economic development policies.

✓ Guerrilla War

The OPM probably stand little chance of throwing the Indonesians out of West Papua, but they will be difficult to beat. They are fighting one of the world's longest-running wars. The military wing is called Tentara Pembebasan Nasional ("national liberation army"). It is one of the world's most resilient resistance movements because – despite being unable to achieve any major operational victories – it has been able to maintain its campaign and its morale over the decades. The history of guerrilla warfare in recent decades is that a force can lose battle after win and still win because the invader is exhausted and goes home.

First, a well organized guerrilla group with high morale, fighting on a terrain it knows well and enjoying the support of the local people, is almost impossible to beat. The United States discovered this in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and the Portuguese in their African colonies (those wars triggered a military rebellion and the overthrow of the fascist government).

Second, the conditions which have stimulated local support for the OPM are far from improving and, in fact they are getting steadily worse. The more people Indonesia moves people into West Papua and the more economic development which takes place without benefit to the local people, the more support goes to the OPM. But the economic potential of West Papua is so great that Indonesia cannot resist the temptation to accelerate its economic development. Meanwhile, troop morale is low because their living conditions are crowded and isolated. They alienate the indigenous people by assaulting women and stealing animals.

Third, the Indonesian defence forces have a poor military record. They play a crucial political role in Indonesia but their military skills are decidedly poor - as evidenced also in East Timor. West Papua is a rugged territory and it is not a popular posting for the troops.

Fourth, guerrillas can lose every battle and yet still win a war. This was illustrated in both Vietnam and Afghanistan, where there was a steady erosion of the morale of the conventional forces deployed against them. The OPM guerrillas are fighting for their own land; they have nowhere else to go and nothing else to do; they have all the time in the world. But the conventional forces are there simply because they were sent there and would probably prefer to be elsewhere.

Fifth, defence officers may not like the West Papua posting but it is useful for career purposes. Being stationed in West Papua is regarded as a path to military promotion (that is where Suharto began his climb to power) and more desirable deployments. Officers like to get a name for them for hunting down "OPM" guerrillas. Just how many people are killed and whether they are actually OPM members is difficult to assess because there is little external scrutiny of their interrogation and combat activities. These activities disrupt the lives of indigenous people and further alienate them from the Jakarta government.

One of the most well known victims was Theys Eluay, who on 10 November 2001 was murdered by Indonesian officials. A military court on 21 April 2003 found seven Kopassus special force soldiers guilty of involvement in his death but they only received light sentences (ranging from two to three and a half years), The light sentences sent a message to West Papuans that they can receive no justice under Indonesian rule and that the military have few restrictions on their use of force in West Papua.

Sixth, West Papua presents its own geographical problems. This is the world's most rugged terrain, with some of the world's heaviest rain falls. These features reduce the anticipated advantages of modern military equipment. Additionally, mine sites are spread over large areas, with long perimeter fences. There is plenty of scope for infiltration and sabotage through the fences and then to disrupt the site. For example, in 1977 the OPM sabotaged the slurry pipelines and cost Freeport mining company millions of dollars - and helped remind the world that OPM were still active.

To conclude, the OPM will not be able to force the Indonesians out of West Papua in the near future, but it will be difficult for Jakarta to defeat the OPM. In the meantime, foreign investors may become anxious about the territory's stability both because of the OPM's sporadic raids and the way in which Jakarta tacitly acknowledges the instability because of the necessity for a large force deployment.

✓ Transmigration

The total population of West Papua is about 2.5 million. Papuans now make up less than 1.5 million of the population. The rest are mainly migrants brought into the territory under Jakarta's "transmigration" policy. About 10,000 families per year arrive in West Papua as "sponsored" migrants, with an unknown number arriving of their own accord in search of work. The present rate of transmigration makes West Papua's population growth rates one of the fastest in Indonesia. It will also eventually make the indigenous people a minority within their own territory.

The transmigration policy is aimed at reducing the number of people on the islands of Java, Bali and Sulawesi. It is one of the most controversial of the Government's social policies. Many people do not want to move. For example, they may follow ancestor-worship and so they need to be on the land of their ancestors and not on some distant island.

Similarly, some of the receiving islands are not keen on accepting the migrants. The new people are often ethnically different from the indigenous population into whose midst they are settled. They may compete with the local population for work. Additionally, land may have to be taken from the local population to be cleared and then built upon as a residential area for the new settlers. Indonesia does not recognize "land rights" in the context of the need to respect a local

indigenous population's traditional ownership of land. The national interest, based on modernization and economic development, takes precedence over local traditions. Finally, although the eastern provinces such as West Papua are comparatively sparsely populated, the land is less fertile and the wet season shorter, meaning that the environment cannot support large numbers of people.

From an Indonesian social planning point of view, these disruptions have great benefits. To achieve "unity in diversity", it is helpful to erode some of the distinctiveness of the "diversity" by upsetting the fixed ways of people. There are at least 250 main languages spoken by the indigenous people of West Papua. Jakarta's long-term policy is that everyone should speak Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of the country. The intermingling of peoples encourages them to use Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate their communication and so get them out of their local language groups.

In 1990, the Indonesian Government launched its "Go East" development programme to encourage migrants to live in West Papua and other transmigration provinces. It promised them plenty of work and wealth if they did. The mining and logging projects that are now underway in West Papua make it the site of one of the greatest resource bonanzas in Asia.

There is an international non-governmental campaign to re-open the validity of the "Act of Free Choice". There is a sense of urgency because the longer a fresh referendum is delayed, the fewer (in percentage terms) will be the number of indigenous West Papuans to vote.

✓ Mining

West Papua has the world's richest gold mine and second largest open cut copper mine: at Grasberg. This is one of the largest excavations on earth. The mine contains the world's largest proven gold deposit (valued at US\$40 billion). The company operating the mine - Freeport McMoRan - is Indonesia's largest tax payer. But little of that wealth returns to West Papua. Of the 18,000 employees only 5,500 are West Papuans. 80,000 of the 110,000 now living around the mine are not from West Papua.

The company has been operating in West Papua since 1969, being the first foreign company to be granted a mining licence under the New Order government of President Suharto. It used to enjoy exceptionally good links with the Indonesian Government. The links are not quite so good under recent Indonesian leaders but its sheer size means that Jakarta has to accord the mine a high degree of priority.

Unfortunately for Freeport McMoRan and the people of West Papua, mining is a dirty business at the best of times because of the process of extraction and milling. The processes in West Papua are even more difficult because of the island's climatic features. The milling plant

uses more than 1 billion litres of water a month and the mine dumps almost 120,000 tonnes of ore tailings into the Ajikwa River system per day. The river system has become toxic and silt laden, killing most flora, including the sago palm which is the staple food of the local people.

The mine has also had extensive adverse social consequences. This mining operation has necessitated the creation of a whole new dormitory town at Tembagapura to house its workforce. This has disrupted the lives of the local people, the Amungme, who are prohibited from Tembagapura and have been relocated to the Freeport-run port town of Timika. The mining began in 1972 and since then between 3,000 and 5,000 Amungme indigenous people have been displaced. These disruptions add to the local support for OPM.

✓ Logging

Logging is also financially very important in West Papua. The forested area is second only to the Amazon Basin in size. West Papua's forested area is about 24 per cent of Indonesia's total forested area. The entire island is one of the most biologically diverse in the world. For example, West Irian contains three of the world's eight surviving equatorial glaciers, all of which have been shrinking because of global warming. Therefore, it is a territory of immense interest to scientists.

Logging also comes at considerable social cost to the indigenous people who derive little benefit from the logging operations. When a concession is granted, local people are generally not consulted and no compensation is paid. The Indonesian Ministry of Forestry even refuses to recognize tribal rights to forest lands. Indeed, after a concession has been granted, tribal people who enter lands in order to hunt or gather firewood can be charged with trespassing.

Logging also comes at a large environmental cost. The roots of trees hold the soil in place. As trees are cut down, so the thin layer of top soil is exposed and, when the rains fall, the soil is washed into streams. This, in turn, makes the rivers silt up and increases the risk of flooding. The loss of trees also means a loss of wildlife.

In West Papua, rainforests are teeming with life but the soil is often unsuitable for long-term farming. Rainforests are, therefore, highly complex environments; at once so full of life and yet also so vulnerable to ecological damage. Once the land has been cleared, the remaining soil (namely, that which is not washed into streams) is exhausted after a few years and so fresh areas need to be cleared for a new round of cultivation to begin by transmigrants.

The worldwide experience is that indigenous people are well aware of the peculiar characteristics of their rainforests which is why indigenous people worldwide oppose rainforest logging. Jakarta has been unwilling to heed the warnings of indigenous people and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the dangers of extensive logging.

✓ **THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA**

What does all this mean for Australia? Overall the situation does not look good for Australia. This final part looks at five implications: Australia's strategy of standing by Indonesia includes its defence of Jakarta's behaviour in West Papua in the face of mounting criticism from NGOs and others; Australia is providing military training for Indonesian forces (some of whom may be involved in West Papua); there is (ironically) a suspicion in some Indonesian quarters that Australia is supporting West Papuan secession; there are the implications for Papua New Guinea (and therefore Australia) of the West Papuan violence spilling over the border; and the question of whether Australia could ever be some form of intermediary in the distant future between an increasingly successful secessionist movement and Jakarta (as happened in East Timor). In short, West Papua will be on the Australian foreign policy radar screen for decades to come.

✓ **Australian Defence of Indonesia over West Papua**

Australia defends Indonesia over its actions in West Papua. For example, it does not support international NGO initiatives to re-open the validity of the "Act of Free Choice" or to call a fresh referendum, and it does not approve of West Papuan independence movement representatives attending the Pacific Islands Forum. There are five motives for Australia's strategy (which has remained consistent irrespective of the political party in power in Canberra)

First, Indonesia consists of almost 14,000 islands. It is much more practical for Canberra to deal politically and economically with one government than with a multitude of governments of a multitude of island states. Australia does not support the "Balkanization" of Indonesia, with local movements becoming independent and running their own entities. Such a development (Canberra evidently fears) would increase the risk of localized island-to-island conflicts (in much the same way as European powers feared the competing nationalistic rivalries of the Balkan peoples). In November 2000, the Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said: "...the Balkanization of Indonesia, if that were to happen, would create enormous regional instability. "

✓ **Downer also commented:**

“The clear position we have is that Irian Jaya should remain part of Indonesia. The best way for Indonesia to handle that is across the negotiating table and in an inclusive way with the Papuan people and not through confrontation with the military”. (Sydney Morning Herald, 6/11/00)

Politically and economically island states small would be more vulnerable to external pressures and interventions. For example, in 1975 Australia supported the Indonesian takeover of East Timor for fear that an independent East Timor could become sympathetic to Soviet or Chinese communist interests (a “Cuba” immediately to Australia’s north). In short, it is much more administratively convenient for Canberra to support Jakarta’s rule over West Papua than to have an independent West Papua.

Second, Canberra can claim that it is bound by international law not to support West Papuan secessionist movements. Such support could be seen as interference in the internal affairs of another country. Since the creation of the 1945 United Nations Charter and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there has been an erosion of what constitutes the ban on interference in the internal affairs of another country. For example, in the 1930s NGOs called on the UK and France to criticise Hitler’s treatment of the Jews in Germany but the governments claimed that they could not do so because such a criticism would be interference in Germany’s internal affairs. Few governments would make that argument today. There has been a “human rights revolution” (Suter, 2002, 283-298). But, even so, there remains an international reluctance to criticise the internal affairs of one’s allies. Once a pattern of such interference is created, there is no knowing where it could lead or where it would stop.

Third, supporters of the West Papuan independence movement claim that West Papua has yet to exercise its right of self-determination because the 1969 “Act of Free Choice” was flawed. Leaving aside the allegations surrounding the 1969 events, there is a lack of international agreement over how “self-determination” should be determined. The phrase received international salience during World War I, when US President Woodrow Wilson said that the peoples of the old Austro-Hungarian empire should be given the right to self-determination (such as in the Balkans) and should be allowed to decide their own future. The concept of self-determination is now recognized in international law but there is a lack of agreement over it (Dahlitz, 2003). Indeed, former US Defence Secretary and World Bank President Robert McNamara has even referred to self-determination as “Wilson’s ghost” that continues to haunt international relations almost a century after the president started popularizing the phrase (McNamara and Blight, 2003). Therefore, Australia can claim that it is justified in not supporting the West Papuan independent movement because it is not clear that it has international law on its side.

Fourth, the Australian Government is aware that Indonesia cannot afford to have West Papua leave Indonesia. This is not just a matter of the province's immense wealth because there is also wealth elsewhere in the country. Indeed, in the confrontation between Indonesia and The Netherlands over West Papua it is likely that neither country knew just wealthy West Papua could be. Instead the issue is more political. If West Papua were to pull out of Indonesia then it would create a precedent for other parts of the country to breakaway. Javanese rule is not liked in many parts of the country and so there are other contenders (such as Aceh) for independence. Jakarta has to stand firm over West Papua for fear that a successful secession will have a knock-on effect. It would be particularly difficult for President Megawati Sukarnoputri, a staunch nationalist, to accept the exit of West Papua from Indonesia because her father wrested control of West Papua from the Dutch in 1963.

Finally, Australia does not see any parallel between West Papua and East Timor. East Timor was invaded by Indonesia and it was criticized by the UN, called on to withdraw, most governments (except Australia) did not recognize the conquest, and there was a continuing (and ultimately successful) international campaign for an independent East Timor. By contrast, West Papua did have an "Act of Free Choice" that was recognized by the UN. The matter is settled. West Papua was removed for the list of non-self-governing territories with the UN Decolonization Committee. There are few governments pressing to have the matter re-opened. The international caucus that supported East Timor does not exist for West Papua.

Unfortunately, for Canberra the West Papuan crisis cannot be so neatly shelved. As this chapter has examined, there are various issues that attract international NGO attention, such as the human rights and environmental plight of the West Papuan. There are many "coat pegs" on which activists can hang their campaigns. If anything, the list of issues gets longer rather than shorter. For example, there have been allegations of Indonesian Islamic "warriors" arriving in West Papua to intimidate the West Papuans (including the Christians and so there is now increased attention from Christian NGOs to West Papuan affairs). Eurico Guterres was sentenced to 10 years jail in November 2002 for instigating attacks on pro-independence leaders in the August 1999 East Timor referendum. He was released pending an appeal – which could take years – and formed the Laskar Merah Putih ("Red and White" warriors). He is now based in the West Papuan mining town of Timika.

Additionally in late 2003, the United States criticised the appointment of a controversial police general to head the police force in West Papua. Timbul Silean has been indicted by UN prosecutors for his alleged role in the violence that marred East Timor's 1999 vote for independence. (Of course, it could be Jakarta's explicit intention to put such a notorious figure in power to intimidate West Papuans – his record of violence in East Timor should deter them). To sum up, as much as Canberra might like the West Papuan crisis to disappear, it is likely to continue to be an issue for it. There are no easy answers.

✓ Australian Training of Indonesian Officials

Australian support for Jakarta in West Papua presents it with the dilemma of what it should do about the level of official assistance to Jakarta (if any) and what form such assistance should take. If Australia disapproved of the Indonesian presence in West Papua then it could simply decide not to provide any civilian or military aid. But since it does approve of the presence and it sees Indonesia as an important local ally, then Canberra is expected by Jakarta to provide assistance.

One of the most controversial areas of such assistance is military training. On the one hand, Canberra could argue that it benefits the ordinary Indonesian if its officials (military or civilian) are trained to respect human right (which is also the Australian argument for its “human rights training” conducted in Burma/ Myanmar). On the other hand, Indonesians trained by Australia could be involved in the violation of human rights and so all that Australian has done is make more efficient killers (Brown, 2003). Additionally, it would seem that the Indonesian military’s policy of repression in West Papua (and East Timor in Aceh) only serves to stimulate greater civilian resistance to Jakarta’s rule. Therefore, the military are not so much part of the solution as part of the problem.

This issue has become even more acute since 2001 and the “war on terrorism”. The Clinton Administration and the US Congress imposed a ban on US military assistance to Indonesia in the wake of Indonesian violence in East Timor (Hallinan, 2002). The US supplied Indonesia with 90 per cent of its military hardware over the previous 30 years. The Bush Administration has been anxious to reopen all the old ties to arm Indonesia for the “war on terrorism”.

The problem is that, going on the Indonesian military’s past record, there will be acts of violence against civilians in West Papua (and elsewhere in the country) and these will draw adverse international media attention to Jakarta’s rule and foster separatist sentiments. It will also increase NGO and international media criticism of Australia’s policy of assisting Jakarta.

✓ Indonesian Suspicions of Australia

Ironically, some Indonesians are suspicious of Australia’s motives over West Papua. Australian strategist Hugh White in 2002 did a survey of potential risks to Australia and in the context of Australian-Indonesian relations speculated:

“...a deterioration of the situation in a place likes Irian Jaya. Indonesian suspicions of Australia’s motives and intentions concerning Irian Jaya are completely ill-founded, but they are already strong; and there is potential for Australian public opinion to mobilize in opposition to repressive policies from Jakarta. We could find ourselves, reluctantly, back in an East Timor situation all over again, with a significantly heightened risk of conflict.” (White, 2002, 260)

Australian journalist Lindsay Murdoch in 2000 commented:

“Despite repeated assurances by the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr Downer, and the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, that Australia supports Indonesia’s rule of West Papua, many of Indonesia’s political and military elite, still smarting from the loss of East Timor last year, believe Australia is secretly plotting to see the province break away. The Indonesian Government was particularly upset by recent comments by the president of the ACTU Greg Sword – also national president of the ALP – who said West Papuans should be able to hold a referendum on whether they wished to remain part of Indonesia. Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab, earlier this year accused unnamed Australian non-governmental organizations of inciting violence in Papua”. (Sydney Morning Herald 4/12/00)

It seems hard to imagine, given the criticism that Canberra has sustained from NGOs sympathetic to West Papuan independence, that these Indonesian suspicions are justified. But in international relations appearance is reality. First, the Australia Government has long had close relations with the Melanesian peoples through PNG. It is also an active player in South Pacific affairs. Second (according to this view), Australia has already contributed to the breakaway of East Timor from Indonesia and so West Papua is next. Australia’s 1999 involvement in ending Indonesia’s illegal occupation was (in my view) long overdue and in fact Australia actually has little credit in its history of dealings with East Timor (Suter, 1978/ 1999, 181-200). But, there are some Indonesians who evidently see the Australia Government over the years in a different light.

Third, it is true that there are various NGOs on Australian soil that are supporting West Papuan independence. These NGOs are not, by definition, part of the Australian Government, though some may receive some funding from it (such as foreign aid from AusAid and welfare funding for church welfare programmes in Australia, such as the Uniting Church in Australia). West Papua is not a major issue in Australian politics but the issue is found on the agenda of a variety of Australian NGOs, such as those specifically concerned with West Papuan independence, environmental and human rights NGOs, and some Christian churches. It is also on the agenda of the Pacific Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

Fourth, some West Papuan figures are allowed to enter Australia to speak at meetings and do media interviews. Australia has also accepted some refugees from West Papua, such as the late Samuel Ayamiseba, who was a founding member of the Protestant Church of West Papua and chair of the Papuan People’s Assembly in the lead up to the 1969 “Act of Free Choice”. He was a critic of the Indonesian takeover and was eventually smuggled out of West Papua in 1979. In 1988 he was accepted as a refugee to Australia, where he continued to criticise the Indonesian occupation of West Papua. He was buried in Canberra in September 2003. His family have pledged to return his body to West Papua when it becomes independent.

To sum up, Indonesian suspicions over Canberra’s motives are unfounded. But, then, for suspicious Indonesians, my claim carries no weight or reassurance either, given that I am a

critic of Jakarta's rule over West Papua (and was banned from Indonesia in the Suharto era because of my views on Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor). My claim could be seen by suspicious Indonesians as part of a smoke screen to disguise the true intentions of the Australian Government.

This is an example of the problem that West Papua creates for Canberra. Little that Canberra does will ease the suspicions of some Indonesians, who are ready always to believe the worst about Canberra's actions. Meanwhile, Canberra will be criticised by supporters of West Papuan independence for actually not doing enough to assist West Papuan independence.

✓ The Implications for PNG

The West Papua/ PNG border was simply a political convenience. The Netherlands had to draw a line somewhere along the eastern end of its colonies. There is no physical characteristic identifying the boundary. Indeed, it runs down through a mountain range and it is not possible for a person to know when they have crossed the boundary from just looking at the ground. The peoples in the area have moved back and forth across the line for generations.

There are three implications for PNG (all of which create problems for its former colonial master and major aid donor, Australia). First, some West Papuans have lived just over the border in PNG since 1984. The Indonesian military launched a campaign against an OPM uprising and some West Papuans fled into PNG. About 10,000 people were housed in refugee camps in PNG, in the country's poorest province. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees was given access to the camps. In December 1984, the Australian Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) published its first report on the camps, which among other things recommended to the PNG Government that it not send the refugees back against their will. The Government ignored that recommendation and some were sent back, whereupon they were punished by the Indonesians. Following an international outcry, the PNG Government halted the repatriation. The refugees have stayed in the camps. The total involved may now be around 15,000 (about one per cent of the province's indigenous population). In January 2003, the ICJ sent another team to the camps. The situation remains poor (International Commission of Jurists, 2003). They are basically stateless: they cannot return to West Papua and they have not been given PNG citizenship and they have no right of travel.

Second, there is the risk of "hot pursuit" raids into PNG. These would arise from the Indonesian military chasing OPM guerrillas over the border. Most of the military actions seem to be occurring in the western part of West Papua (unfortunately getting in and out of West Papua for a foreign observer is very difficult and so it is impossible to give an accurate picture of the conflict). There is always a risk that the violence could increase on the eastern end of the province and some of the guerrillas will flee into PNG. There have been some instances of this over the

years. The PNG defence force is not efficient. It is not able to stop OPM guerrillas from entering the country or to stop Indonesian forces from chasing them.

Third, the really worrying development would be a dramatic escalation in the level of violence in West Papua and there was a large exodus of people into PNG. PNG, which has immense economic and social problems of its own, could not cope with such a crisis. The escalation could also bring on a head on confrontation between Indonesia and PNG because the Indonesia military are suspicious that some OPM receive assistance from PNG citizens on the border and that some OPM bases are in PNG (especially near the town of Vanimo). There could also be the risk of the Islamic warriors conducting the “hot pursuit” raids.

PNG’s plight is a good example of how the decisions made in Europe well over a century ago continue to haunt the country – well after most people in The Netherlands have long since forgotten about their country’s imperial past. As with the other observations in this chapter, there are no easy answers. The International Commission of Jurists (of which I am the NSW Chair) has recommended that the West Papuans be allowed to stay and settle down in PNG. But even that recommendation has its own problems, not least the resentment that would be felt by the poorer PNG citizens in that region that the West Papuans were getting better treatment than they enjoy. In the longer term, there is the far worse risk of PNG’s being drawn into an enlarged war in West Papua if the violence spills over the border.

✓ Australia as an Intermediary?

Australia’s West Papuan strategy is one of keeping West Papua inside Indonesia in the hope of reducing West Papua’s risk of disruption. According to this reasoning, a West Papua inside Indonesia is safer for Australia than an independent one. Besides, given the current state of international law and the importance of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, there is little else that Australia could do. Inertia becomes a virtue.

But this chapter has argued that this complacency may not be a sensible policy. There is no guarantee that Jakarta will handle West Papua smoothly and so find a way of channelling independent sentiments into an acceptance of greater autonomy within Indonesia. Jakarta’s hope is that the province’s increasing wealth will gradually trickle down to the average West Papuan and so there would be a grudging acceptance that he or she would be better off under Jakarta’s direct rule rather than risking independence under their own inexperienced and poorly co-ordinated OPM. But there is little in Indonesian policy so far to justify that degree of optimism. For example, some of the heat in the conflicts plaguing Indonesia could be removed by Indonesia becoming a federation and allowing a high degree of provincial self-rule. But while there has been some talk of local autonomy, this is not going nearly far enough. Also (it has to be admitted) getting federations to work is very difficult (almost all of those created by the UK when it pulled out its colonies after 1945 fell apart within a few years).

In which case, what is the Australian contingency plan for a worsening situation in West Papua? It is hard to see Australia sending forces into the PNG/ West Papuan border region to stop the fighting. But, then, Australian intervention in the Solomon Islands also seemed unlikely a few years ago (Suter, 2003, 72-76).

What would happen if the refugees started fleeing into northern Australia – amid extensive media coverage? Indonesia does not have good standing in Australia and so it would take little to whip up anti-Indonesian feeling in Australia and a demand for strong Australian action. Additionally, Indonesia no longer enjoys the high international standing that it did in the early 1960s as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (which is itself now almost defunct anyway). The Cold War is over and so the United States no longer has to worry about wooing Indonesia into the western camp. Russia and China now have other priorities and they little interest in wooing Indonesia, either.

West Papua's affairs are not necessarily merely "internal" Indonesian ones. There is a risk that West Papua's problems could spill over into PNG and Australia (or north into the Philippines). It is therefore in Australia's long-term interests that it takes a more pro-active stand on West Papua's affairs to nip problems in the bud.

Among some of the issues it could raise on a continuous basis with Jakarta are:

- the need for Indonesia to create a federal structure (and the willingness of Australia to provide some advice on how to do it, after all Australia is one of the world's longest lasting federations);
- enabling West Papua to have a high degree of local autonomy;
- stopping the policy of transmigration into West Papua;
- ensuring that the rule of law is respected in West Papua, including the punishment of military and law enforcement officials for breaking the law;
- ensuring that more of the province's wealth is spent back in the province on the indigenous peoples;
- ensuring a greater role for indigenous peoples in running the province;
- learning from NGOs in other countries how the process of reconciliation can be carried out and then implementing a reconciliation programme in West Papua;
- encouraging foreign NGOs to work with local NGOs to create a civil society in West Papua;

- allowing international observers into the province to see how West Papua is developing.

These recommendations side-step the issue of re-opening the “Act of Free Choice”. If Jakarta does not satisfy the aspirations of West Papuans, then having another “Act of Free Choice” is irrelevant. Events will create their own momentum. The level of violence and disruption in the province would drive Jakarta out of the province (or into an even greater state of internal chaos across the country). After all, the occupation of East Timor was illegal and commentators such as me called on Jakarta to withdraw. But at the end of the day, the legal arguments did not apply. Jakarta was simply driven out. The OPM can lose battle after battle and still win. Australia needs to encourage Jakarta to learn from history.

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