

Despite "peace" talks, killings continue in East Timor

Mike Head
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Pro-Indonesian militias in East Timor are continuing to kill and threaten independence supporters and stage intimidatory armed rallies, despite Indonesian government-staged "peace" talks on the island and an Indonesian-Portuguese deal in New York to hold a UN-backed "consultation" on autonomy.

Aid and legal rights agencies reported that militias killed as many as 40 people in the town of Suai, 200 km south-west of the capital Dili, in four days of terror from last Monday. Other reports, including one from former East Timorese governor, Mario Carrascalao, indicated a death toll of up to 100. A Roman Catholic priest backed Carrascalao's remarks, confirming sightings of eight bodies.

There are reports from other areas of threats of violence issued against householders who do not display the red and white Indonesian flag, and public servants who do not show allegiance to Jakarta. Most independence activists have gone into hiding, fearing for their lives.

The Suai killings followed the murder of at least 12 secessionist supporters in the capital of Dili 10 days ago in the wake of a militia parade staged outside the Indonesian Governor's residence, and the earlier killing of 25 people in Liquica, 30 km west of Dili. Kontras, a non-government agency investigating the disappearance of victims of violence, says it has identified 90 people who have been murdered since January, not counting the Dili, Liquica and Suai killings.

Militia leaders have made little effort to conceal their activities or their plans for further violence. Eurico Guterres, the militia leader who led the Dili parade last week, where he issued a general order to kill independence activists, has threatened civil war if Jakarta's autonomy package is rejected in the July consultation.

Guterres declared that his Aitarak (Thorn) forces, which he said numbered 50,000, would resist to the death Australian peace-keeping troops were they sent to supervise a transition to independence. He also spoke of partitioning the small territory should the consultation reject the autonomy plan, with pro-Indonesian forces occupying the western half.

His threats came in an interview conducted at his militia headquarters in a two-storey former tourist resort owned by Indonesia's armed forces (ABRI). It is only 50 metres from the home of a leading independence figure, Manuel Carrascalao, whose compound was stormed by Indonesian-backed militias last week. Carrascalao is now in police custody, for "safekeeping". Numerous witnesses said military personnel aided the Dili killings

by supplying food, water and transport to the militias.

Militia leaders have announced rallies next week in various places, including Balibo and Amera. Balibo has particular significance because Indonesian troops killed five Australian-based journalists there in October 1975 to hide evidence of the initial stage in the Indonesian invasion, which was completed in December 1975. Senior local government officials and military officers, as well as militia commanders such as Guterres attended a rally in the town of Gleno, south-west of Dili, on Monday. Militia leaders told reporters that members of the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) had either been forced to join a new pro-integration group or had fled to the jungles.

In addition, ABRI troops have reportedly begun major offensives against the secessionist guerillas of Falintil, the CNRT's armed wing, in the districts of Aileu and Manatuto. A local Falintil commander said some 1,200 troops from ABRI's Battalion 301 had attacked Falintil bases, just a day after ABRI committed itself to halting all violence in the territory.

These reports make a mockery of ABRI chief General Wiranto's pledges to disarm the militias. Wiranto last week supervised the signing of a "peace" deal between pro-Indonesian and pro-independence figures in Dili. ABRI sources have since emphasised that the militiamen will be permitted to retain "legal" weapons, that is, those given to them as members of the official civilian guard.

Continued military-backed militia terror also undermines any claim that the UN consultation agreed to in New York late last week will provide any genuine measure of the wishes and aspirations of the East Timorese people. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan hailed the agreement struck between Indonesia and Portugal but its terms have not been released.

Under the package, the Indonesian administration has reportedly undertaken to recommend the removal of obstacles to East Timorese secession if its autonomy proposal is rejected. Yet the critical issues of how to "consult" the East Timorese people and the security arrangements for the ballot have not been finalised. No date has been set for the process, no voter registration has been indicated and no polling stations have been named.

Moreover, the arrangements may still be rejected by the Jakarta regime before the agreement is due to be ratified on May 5. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said he needed further discussion with fellow cabinet members on the voting method and the security arrangements. One thing is clear. Habibie's

administration has rejected any suggestion of an international agency or force conducting the ballot, insisting that only a limited number of civilian observers will be permitted.

Nonetheless, the governments of the United States and Australia welcomed both the Dili pact and the New York agreement. US State Department spokesman James Rubin said: "We applaud the (Dili) agreement's call to end all forms of 'hostility, intimidation, terror and violence' and activation of a Peace and Stability Commission with participation by all signatory parties." Rubin added one note of warning, calling on the Indonesian military to take "immediate steps" to disarm all groups, "an action that could be advanced by immediately permitting an international presence in East Timor".

The Peace and Stability Commission is a vehicle through which Indonesia will supervise the UN consultation process in conjunction with the CNRT leadership and some observers from the US, Japan, the Philippines, Germany and Australia. Real control will remain in the hands of Wiranto and the military--the same forces that have not only armed the militias but also killed an estimated 200,000 East Timorese over the past 24 years.

Australian Defence Minister John Moore said General Wiranto, in whom he had "personal confidence," had made a "commendable start" to reinforcing law and order. Prime Minister John Howard echoed Moore's favourable comments on Wiranto on the eve of a summit with Indonesian President Habibie in Bali today. The Howard government is stepping up its military preparations to intervene in East Timor, while emphasising its anxiety to maintain close relations with the Jakarta regime, especially the military generals.

It immediately greeted the UN agreement by announcing, for the first time, that it will send monitors to observe the planned UN ballot and will dispatch troops, as part of a UN peace-keeping force, in the event that the autonomy package is rejected. In addition to stationing 3,000 Rapid Deployment Force troops in the northern city of Darwin, it has purchased a large high-speed catamaran capable of ferrying hundreds of troops from Darwin to Dili in a day.

At the same time, Canberra has sought to protect the Habibie regime and its generals. This was highlighted by the leaked release last week of a briefing from the Australian Defence Intelligence Organisation. Dated March 4, the briefing cited evidence that ABRI was arming and backing the militias. It said: "ABRI in East Timor are clearly protecting, and in some instances operating with, militants who have threatened Australian lives." Later it stated: "ABRI could apprehend or easily control pro-Indonesia militias but has chosen not to." In one passage, it said Wiranto had failed to take vigorous action to rein in his soldiers in East Timor, implying "that he is at least turning a blind eye" to the killings.

Howard and his Foreign Minister Alexander Downer have continued to claim that only "rogue elements" of ABRI are involved. Downer also immediately dismissed the latest reports of atrocities, insisting that: "There are I believe around five people who are missing at Suai." Canberra has consistently downplayed accounts of massacres and direct military involvement in the death squads.

Downer has also attempted to discredit a former Australian

government aid worker in East Timor who has stated that he had warned Australian embassy officials from July last year that ABRI was arming and training the militias. Lansell Taudevin, the leader of a team working on a water and sanitation project funded by AusAID, said the worst of the recent bloodshed could have been avoided if his warning had been heeded.

Taudevin has given the Melbourne *Age* newspaper copies of e-mail messages that he sent to the Australian embassy in Jakarta that included details of Indonesian troop arrivals, reports of political executions, warnings that violence was growing and the likelihood of "something like civil war" increasing daily. Taudevin said officials in the Jakarta embassy had asked him to supply such security reports. Downer's spokesman said it was "completely nonsensical" for Taudevin to suggest that he had been asked to spy for Australia.

Howard summed up his government's cynicism with regard to the fate of the East Timorese people just before he left for his meeting in Bali with Habibie. Speaking after an Anzac Day war memorial service, Howard said the human rights of the people of East Timor must be considered in the light of Australia's own national interests. Australians had to recognise that Indonesia had held sovereignty over East Timor for 25 years. By "national interests" Howard means the commercial and strategic interests of corporate Australia, which has substantial investments across Indonesia and is also looking to exploit Timor's resources of oil and natural gas, coffee and timber, as well as its tourist potential.

Portugal, the colonial power in East Timor for four centuries, is continuing to push for a more aggressive UN presence on the island before the consultation process. It has also accepted what is reported to be a substantially watered-down Indonesian autonomy proposal, calculating that it will increase the chances of the package being rejected. Under the New York agreement, the territory would revert to Portuguese sovereignty for a number of years, with the acquiescence of the CNRT leadership.



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