

Warnings of civil war in East Timor

Peter Symonds
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Tensions on East Timor continue to mount ahead of a UN-sponsored vote on the future of the island planned for August 8.

Spokesman for the pro-Indonesian Forum for Unity, Democracy and Justice (FPDK), Basilio Dias Araujo, warned that East Timor faced bitter fighting if the autonomy package being offered by the Habibie regime was rejected. “If the pro-independence vote wins,” he said. “We will divide East Timor into two parts. That is our right, otherwise the East Timorese will be killing each other”.

The FPDK, the political wing of the militia groups responsible for the killing and intimidation of pro-independence supporters, has rejected UN calls for reconciliation talks between the factions. “Now there is no time left for dialogue, there is no time left for reconciliation, let's just fight to win [the poll],” Araujo said.

An executive member of separatist National Council of the East Timor Resistance (CNRT), Leandro Isaac said: “If they don't sit down and talk there will be a civil war. I very much support the comments of Mr Annan that in an atmosphere of terror and intimidation no free or fair vote can take place.”

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan delivered a report on Monday to the UN Security Council critical of the failure of the Habibie government to clamp down on the pro-Indonesian militias. “Credible reports continue to be received of political violence, including intimidation and killings, by armed militias against unarmed pro-independence supporters,” he said.

“Furthermore, there are indications that the militias, believed by many observers to be operating with the acquiescence of elements of the army, have not only in recent weeks begun to attack pro-independence groups but are beginning to threaten moderate pro-integration supporters as well.”

The *Australian* newspaper reported on Monday that

elite Kopassus special forces troops had provided logistical support for an attack by militia groups over the weekend on the village of Deudet, 120 kilometres south-west of Dili. At least 10 people are reported to have died.

The article also cited a statement allegedly prepared by Bakin, the Indonesian military intelligence co-ordinating agency, instructing militia groups to intensify their attacks and offering arms and communications equipment. “Massacres should be carried out from village to village soon after the announcement of the ballot if pro-independence supporters win,” the statement said.

UN spokesman on East Timor, David Wimhurst, last week stated that he had witnessed Indonesian soldiers training militiamen at Atsabe, about 100 km south of Dili, while attempting to investigate the killing of at least six people in the nearby town of Atara on May 16.

The Indonesian regime has responded with a series of flat denials. Foreign Minister Ali Alatas criticised Wimhurst for his “inappropriate language” and said the UN had “no mandate” to investigate alleged human rights abuses. President Habibie challenged Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to provide “names of the people and proof” that “rogue elements” of the Indonesian military were supporting the militia.

There is no doubt that the pro-Indonesian militia are operating in East Timor with the tacit support not only of the local military and bureaucracy but of sections of the government and military in Jakarta itself. The close connections of the militias with the ruling Golkar Party were revealed by the announcement that three militia leaders—Joao Tavares, Eurico Guterres and Manuel da Souza—have been selected as its candidates for the upcoming elections for the provincial parliament.

It is also true that the UN and the major powers are using the outrages carried out by the militia in order to press for a bolstered UN-presence on the island during

and after the vote. As well as calling for Jakarta to crack down on the militias, Annan has proposed sending a team of military advisers along with contingents of police as part of the 1,000-member UN mission to supervise the poll.

The growing UN presence on East Timor is indicative of what so-called independence will mean if Jakarta's autonomy package is rejected, and if the Indonesian parliament ratifies its formal separation. The former Portuguese colony, comprising half of the island of Timor, will remain under UN administration for years. It will be completely subservient, politically and economically, to Australia, Portugal and other countries vying for influence in the region.



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