

UN Timor ballot delayed as military violence continues

Mike Head
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Widespread military-organised violence has caused the United Nations to delay its proposed ballot on East Timorese secession from Indonesia from August 8 to August 21. Tensions between the UN and the Habibie regime in Jakarta have, moreover, thrown the entire balloting process into doubt, with Habibie declaring that he will not allow any further postponement.

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan announced the ballot delay based on a report that said anti-independence militias continued to have “a constricting effect on political freedom, silencing pro-independence activists and their supporters and forcing them into hiding”. It noted that many observers believed the militias were operating with the “acquiescence” of elements of the Indonesian military.

An adviser to Indonesian President B.J. Habibie criticised the UN move, initially claiming that the UN did not consult Habibie. Dewi Fortuna Anwar said that if the vote was not completed by August 21, Habibie's government would not accept it. She claimed that a later vote would not give Habibie time to prepare his accountability speech to the upcoming general session of the Peoples Consultative Assembly.

One English-language Indonesian newspaper, the *Jakarta Post*, observed that the conflict over the postponement could foreshadow an open breach. “Should the referendum in East Timor be delayed or go as scheduled?” it asked in an editorial on June 25. “This controversy, minor though it may seem on the surface—after all, what difference does a delay of a mere two weeks make—could the first open indication of the disparate positions which Indonesia and the United Nations are taking with regard to the question of granting the people of East Timor their right to self-determination.”

Concerns have been expressed by media commentators in East Timor and Australia that the delay will encourage the Indonesian generals and their militia supporters to step up their killings, abductions and intimidation with a view to aborting the UN vote. Pro-Indonesia elements within East Timor have already called for the removal of David Wimhurst, the UN spokesman in the former Portuguese colony, accusing him of one-sidedly blaming the militias and local authorities for the problems in the territory. Moreover, the Indonesian-appointed Peace and Stability Commission for East Timor has accused UN-uniformed police of exceeding their authority by participating in house searches for weapons.

Numerous reports have documented systematic military and

militia violence, in what has been dubbed the military's “dirty war” to retain control of the tiny but resource-rich half-island.

There were at least 308 violations perpetrated against civilians in April, according to the report of an Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) delegation. It found a “pervasive climate of intimidation and human rights violations”. Up to 5 percent of the population had been forced from their homes and were living under direct militia control, it said.

“There are between 40-50,000 internally displaced people living in appalling conditions. Many are in ‘camps’ controlled by the militias. Humanitarian organisations are facing extreme difficulties in reaching these people as local authorities and militias frequently deny their existence or refuse access to them. They are in urgent need of food and medical care and it is imperative that the UN maintain intense pressure on those denying access to them to grant it.”

The ACFOA reported that civil servants are being forced to sign forms pledging to vote against independence; pro-independence officials are experiencing severe intimidation; health needs are acute; and the security situation is preventing the harvesting of coffee, as well as subsistence crops, so that nutritional problems are likely to worsen.

Amnesty International delegates referred to 38 killings and documented a well-organised campaign to threaten and intimidate the population into supporting the Habibie regime's plan for limited East Timorese autonomy. “Pro-independence activists, students and civil servants are the main targets of this campaign with hundreds being arbitrarily arrested, tortured and ill-treated, ‘disappeared’ or killed by civilian militias, operating with the support and at times direct involvement of the Indonesian security forces,” Amnesty stated.

In a petition to the UN, the East Timor International Support Centre, based in Darwin, Australia, said hundreds of independence supporters had been killed. Many more had been tortured, raped and abducted; entire villages had been attacked, with villagers forced to flee their burning houses. The petition reported death threats to aid workers, journalists, church people and UN staff, as well as militia roadblocks cutting off transport and communications. The military was training, arming and paying the militias. In addition, 7,000 residents of West Timor had been given false ID cards to vote in the ballot.

TAPOL, the Indonesian Human Rights Campaign, gave details of the personal involvement of high-ranking Indonesian officers in

massacres at Liquisa, Maubara, Maliana, Ermera and the remote village of Talimoro. It named Brigadier General Mahidin Simbolon, a veteran of seven tours of duty in East Timor and a former head of intelligence of Kopassus, the elite army commandos; Major General Adam Damiri; Lieutenant Colonel Asep Kuswani; Lieutenant Colonel Burhanuddin Siagian; and Lieutenant Colonel Muhamad Nur.

International journalists have corroborated many of these reports. In a dispatch from Liquisa, for example, Michael Richardson of the *International Herald Tribune* wrote:

“In the sun-scorched hills not far from this town, a group of officials from the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross witnessed uniformed soldiers with guns accompanied by armed irregulars moving recently through a village, beating and driving people from their homes, as smoke rose from the ruins.”

In the same article, Richardson noted that the Indonesian government task force appointed to coordinate with the UN mission in East Timor includes as its senior security advisers Major General Zacky Anwar Makarim, a special forces officer who until recently headed Indonesia's military intelligence agency, and Brigadier General Glenny Kairupan, both of whom had previously served in East Timor. They report directly to the armed forces commander, General Wiranto, who is also Habibie's Defence Minister.

A report in the *Jakarta Post* on May 4 demonstrated that Wiranto is personally following the progress of the military's dirty war. He gave a report to the Habibie cabinet boasting that the secessionist movement, the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT), had lost its support in 10 of the province's 13 regencies.

The agreement signed by Indonesia and Portugal at the UN last month to authorise the ballot does not require the withdrawal of Indonesian troops, merely their “redeployment” and the transfer of front-line authority to another section of Wiranto's command, the police force. According to some estimates, some 18,000 Indonesian troops remain in East Timor, supplemented by 3,600 militias.

Despite the ongoing terror, the UN's special envoy for East Timor, Jamsheed Marker praised the Indonesian government's “excellent cooperation” when he arrived in Dili, the territory's capital, on Thursday.

The jailed independence leader, Xanana Gusmao, and his deputy, Jose Ramos Horta, are working to keep their supporters tied to the UN operation as a vehicle for intervention by Western powers, including Portugal, the US and Australia. On Thursday, Gusmao welcomed the UN voting delay, saying he had “full confidence” in the UN's evaluation of the situation.

He also hailed the prospect of Dialogue and Reconciliation meetings being convened by the Habibie regime and church leaders in Jakarta last weekend. Gusmao thanked the Indonesian government for facilitating the dialogue. Jakarta then dropped its previous ban on Horta's return to Indonesia and gave him a visa to participate in the weekend talks, which will be attended by pro- and anti-independence leaders, as well as Roman Catholic bishops.

These talks are discussing a so-called power-sharing

arrangement, whereby Gusmao, Horta and other CNRT leaders would form a joint transitional government with the same Indonesian-backed militia leaders who have been orchestrating the killings and intimidation.

The talks are also expected to place further demands on the CNRT leaders to order the complete disarming of the secessionist guerrillas of FALINTIL, in return for more empty promises that the Indonesian generals will disarm their thugs. Gusmao took part in a similar ceremony in Jakarta on June 18, where he embraced and shook hands with Wiranto and militia leaders.

The Timorese leadership's co-thinkers in the East Timor International Support Centre are openly calling for a full-scale UN military intervention, invoking the precedent of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. “ABRI [military] bastardry in East Timor at least equals and probably exceeds Serb cruelty in Kosovo—yet the world is almost ignoring it,” wrote the centre's information officer Andrew McNaughtan on June 22. “Belgrade is bombed whilst the world only whispers to Jakarta about a crime that is at least commensurate.”

Until now, the US and other major powers have chosen not to intervene militarily, but that could change. A US Embassy spokesman in Jakarta on Tuesday accused Indonesia of supporting the militia terror. He said pro-integration militias, backed by elements of the Indonesian military, had tried to influence the vote through violence and intimidation. “The Indonesian government, which agreed to be solely responsible for security in East Timor, has not reined in or disarmed these militias,” he said. “Indeed, there is mounting evidence of Indonesian military support for militia activities.”

As in Yugoslavia, any intervention would be designed to pursue the economic and strategic interests of the major powers, not protect the democratic and basic rights of the ordinary people. By collaborating with the UN operation, Gusmao and Horta are underlining their willingness to head a UN-installed government that would be financially dependent on, and closely controlled by, the imperialist powers.

The economic resources at stake were highlighted on Monday. Shell, the British-Dutch oil giant, announced an agreement with Woodside Petroleum and Duke Energy to conduct an in-depth study into a \$2 billion plan to bring natural gas from the Timor Sea (between Timor and Australia) to customers in Australia's Northern Territory and Queensland. The CNRT leadership has previously pledged to honour such arrangements, made under the Timor Gap Treaty signed between Indonesia and Australia in 1989.



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