

Pressure stepped up for UN force in East Timor

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Mounting pressure is being applied by the major Western powers on the Indonesian government of President B. J. Habibie to invite a United Nations military force to take over administration of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. The growing demand for UN military intervention comes as Indonesian army backed militia groups step up their terror campaign against the East Timorese population following last Saturday's announcement of a 78.5 percent vote for independence.

The United Nations Security Council has decided to send a five-member mission to Jakarta to press the Indonesian government to urge Indonesian authorities to reign in the militia forces. The Security Council resolution said the mission would "discuss with the government of Indonesia concrete steps to allow the peaceful implementation of the ballot result." The news agency AFP cited a source who said the mission would also urge Jakarta to accept deployment of an international military force.

Pro-Indonesian militia squads, supported by Indonesian armed forces and with the tacit support of Indonesian police, have been on a rampage since the ballot result was announced.

Unconfirmed reports said that at least 145 people had been killed over the weekend as the militias torched houses and buildings in the capital Dili and elsewhere and hunted down pro-independence supporters. According to a Dutch journalist, militiamen had sprayed automatic gunfire on a group of 1,500 refugees seeking shelter in the compound of the UN Mission in Dili.

On Monday militia opened fire on hundreds of refugees camped outside the home of Bishop Carlos Belo and then later set the house on fire. At least 25,000 people are reported to have been displaced from their homes in Dili and tens of thousands more in the rest of the island. The Red Cross compound was attacked by militia firing automatic weapons. After the shooting refugees were forced from the compound and marched to the seafront.

The push for the so-called peacekeeping force is being spearheaded by the government of Portugal, the former colonial power, which has intimated that a force should be sent in even without the sanction of the Indonesian government.

In an interview with CNN, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres said he had been speaking to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who was "working actively to create the conditions" for a possible force to intervene.

While officially adhering to the position that a UN force would require the agreement of Indonesia, Guterres said the overwhelming vote for independence had created the "democratic

legitimacy" for the UN to intervene. Guterres said that "we would like to have Indonesia cooperating with us" in sending in a peacekeeping force. "But I think that without that international element of security, it would be impossible to restore law and order in the territory."

The official Indonesian position is that under the terms of the May agreement with Portugal and the UN, which authorised the ballot on independence, it will not allow the UN to intervene until after the MPR (national assembly) has met to consider the result of the ballot. Such a meeting is not scheduled to take place until next month, or possibly November.

The leaders of the East Timorese independence movement are backing the Portuguese push. The leader of the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT) Xanana Gusmao, due to be released by Indonesian authorities this week, has called for the UN to send in military forces to save the East Timorese "from a new genocide." CNRT international spokesman Jose Ramos Horta has called on the UN Security Council to "act promptly" warning of an "imminent, extraordinary human catastrophe" under its eyes.

Horta called on the Australian government to act and join New Zealand in lobbying the UN Security Council for a "limited intervention."

The Australian government is working to put together a so-called "coalition of the willing" comprising Australian troops and forces from a limited number of other countries to go in prior to the organisation of a UN force. But both Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer have said that such a force would require the approval of both Indonesia and the UN Security Council.

The Australian media has been waging an increasingly bellicose campaign for direct military intervention. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign editor Hamish McDonald: "At this point, General Wiranto and Mr Alatas [Indonesian Foreign Minister] should be told privately by interested powers that their persuasive powers are seen as exhausted, and that Indonesia's claims to run East Timor have been nullified by its repeated failure to clamp down on the militias. They should be presented with an offer of an outside force they cannot refuse."

Across the Tasman Sea, the New Zealand *Evening Post* has pushed for "multilateral peacekeeping operations". Citing "good humanitarian reasons", the editorial also pointed to more direct interests.

"For New Zealand, the implications of regional instability have the potential for enormous repercussions, not least because

Indonesia is a potent, if volatile force in South-East Asia. It's a lucrative market given the right conditions—New Zealand's fortunes would be affected without it—but it's also important for this country to be actively interested in regional peacemaking solutions. Indonesia simmers with contestable factions seeking to profit while economic restructuring sputters along in the wake of last year's economic collapse, and it will take patience and constructive diplomacy to ensure New Zealand's attitudes aren't misunderstood."

A report in the *Australian Financial Review* on Monday suggested that Australian troops could be sent within a week and that Indonesia's military chief General Wiranto had indicated that he had no objections to a UN force. Citing Australian diplomatic sources, the report said that Wiranto's agreement had "removed a major domestic obstacle to President Habibie formally requesting peacekeepers" as without the backing of the army he could not agree to a UN "peacekeeping presence."

However, Wiranto is still maintaining publicly that East Timor remains part of Indonesia until the vote for independence is officially ratified by the MPR.

One of the army's main objectives in East Timor is to set an example to other regions of the archipelago, including Aceh and Irian Jaya, as to the violent response they can expect if they push for secession.

A crucial factor in its calculations is the position of the United States. While the US appears, at least at this stage, to have ruled out direct involvement of its forces and will provide only technical assistance and support, it is bringing intense economic pressure to bear.

A letter from Clinton to Habibie late last month, described by administration sources as "very tough", warned of possible cuts in economic aid provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

It was duly followed up by a statement from the IMF itself indicating that it was "closely watching" East Timor along with other international institutions. "Indonesia, which is making progress in its program of economic reform and recovery supported by the international financial community and through the IMF, should have every interest in seeing the process in East Timor unfold smoothly and without violence, in accordance with internationally recognised norms," the statement said.

On the military front, an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* cited comments by US academic Professor Tom Plate pointing to behind-the-scenes manoeuvres between the US administration and the Indonesian regime. "I believe that a deal has been cut with the US by which Jakarta will recognise and honour the results of the East Timor referendum in return for American support for suppression of any other separatist movements—that America will kind of look the other way and not make it an issue," he said.

The British Labour government, which has been a key supplier of arms to the Indonesian regime, is also pushing for UN intervention. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said he had placed the destroyer HMS Glasgow, currently operating in the South China Sea, on standby for possible East Timor operations.

"If the government of Indonesia cannot get its own security forces to restore order, it should allow the international community

to assist in securing an orderly transition to independence in East Timor," he said.

While the major powers are citing "humanitarian interests" and concerns for "democracy" as the basis for their intervention, even a brief examination of the history of the region shows that they are directly responsible for the crisis now unfolding.

The US was directly behind the military coup which brought the Suharto military regime to power in 1965 and helped organise the massacre of more than half a million workers and peasants, supplying the regime with the names of Communist Party activists and leaders. In 1975, the Indonesian invasion came the day after a visit to Jakarta by President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger who emphasised that the region had to be "stabilised" following the US defeat in Vietnam.

The Australian government backed the Indonesian annexation of East Timor and continued to supply military assistance and training for its armed forces as they suppressed East Timorese resistance, at an estimated cost of 200,000 lives. Not the least of its concerns is the lucrative Timor Gap Treaty with the Indonesian regime under which Australian interests receive 59 percent of the oil wealth in the Timor Sea.

Likewise the government of Portugal, whose 400-year rule reduced the East Timorese to among the most impoverished peoples of the world, has never relinquished its colonial position and is eager to re-establish its interests in exploiting the resources of the region.

The establishment of a UN protectorate in East Timor, with or without the permission of the Indonesian regime, will not secure peace and prosperity for the East Timorese people. Rather it will be the mechanism through which the major powers fight to secure their economic and strategic interests in the region.



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