

Indonesia's accomplices spearhead East Timor "peacekeeping" force

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Following passage of a United Nations Security Council resolution mandating the deployment of a multinational "peacekeeping" force in East Timor, American and Australian officials have stressed that the Australian-led troops will operate in cooperation with the Indonesian military.

Not only does the UN resolution fail to call for the withdrawal of the 26,000 Indonesian troops currently stationed in East Timor, it makes no mention of the role of the Indonesian military and government in the campaign of killings and expulsions that has devastated the province.

Typical were the remarks of Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer, who, interviewed on US public television Wednesday, stressed that the multinational force would "work closely" in a "cooperative effort" with the Indonesian army.

Such statements point to the overriding concern of the Western powers in the face of Indonesia's ongoing assault on the East Timorese—to shore up the military apparatus responsible for the slaughter. Having committed themselves to independence for the province that was invaded and forcibly annexed by Jakarta a quarter century ago, the Great Powers feel compelled to see the process of secession through. But their greatest priority is to insure the continued domination of the military ruling elite over the Indonesian masses.

The attempt to obscure the direct responsibility of top military officials such as General Wiranto for the events in East Timor and buttress the position of the Indonesian military has been fairly blatant. Amnesty International on Tuesday issued a statement condemning the reported plan of the Clinton administration to resume US military sales to Indonesia. It cited a *Washington Post* story that Clinton "is ready to reverse his order last week halting US

military aid and sales to Jakarta" if Indonesia allows a UN-backed force in East Timor. The newspaper cited White House national security adviser Samuel Berger as the source of the information.

The Australians are no less solicitous of the Indonesian regime. In an editorial published Wednesday, the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: "Fortunately, despite the anger, there is no immediate sign of permanent damage to the underlying relationship Australia has built up with Indonesia over the years... The important thing is to quarantine it from what must now happen in East Timor."

The Western governments that are ostensibly intervening for humanitarian reasons—"We took a strong stand for freedom and human rights in East Timor," Clinton declared—are at pains to demonstrate their continued support for a government that has carried out one of the most thorough campaigns of ethnic cleansing in recent history. According to UN estimates, only 200,000 East Timorese, less than a quarter of the population, remain in their homes. Untold thousands have been killed, and the rest are either hiding in the hills or languishing in concentration camps in West Timor and remote islands of Indonesia to which they were forcibly deported.

It is instructive to contrast the attitude of the US and its allies toward Indonesia with the policy they carried out vis-a-vis Serbia. No one can seriously claim that Serb attacks on Kosovan Albanians prior to the US-NATO war approached the homicidal level of Indonesia's rampage in East Timor. Belgrade, moreover, could argue it was seeking to defend its sovereignty over a province with powerful historical ties to Serbia, which had been internationally recognized as part of Serbia and Yugoslavia for eighty years.

Yet the US and NATO, with the backing of the United Nations, demanded the immediate and indefinite withdrawal of all Serb military and police forces from the province, and launched a bloody air war to enforce their demand. There was no talk of “cooperation” with the Serb military. Instead Yugoslav President Milosevic and the top Serb commanders were indicted for war crimes.

The essential difference is the fact that Washington considers Jakarta and its blood-drenched military a critical asset to US imperialist aims, while it considered Serbia an obstacle.

As some observers and human rights activists have pointed out, the very forces that are now posing as the saviors of the East Timorese—the US, Britain, Australia, the UN—are complicit in the tragedy that has engulfed them. A number of human rights groups began warning the UN last January that the Indonesian military was arming militias in East Timor to intimidate pro-independence voters, and then destroy the province if it voted to break away.

“We either witnessed or obtained reliable evidence of the fact that weapons were being stockpiled, that weapons were being distributed by military and police to the militias and that there was always this close relationship between the militias and police,” said Paul Barber of the International Federation for East Timor.

Barber says his group and others constantly issued warnings to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Sidney Jones, executive director of Asia Human Rights Watch, said, “At the time, it was clear the US government and the Australian government and other governments with interests in Indonesia knew perfectly well that the army is behind the militias and was going to continue violence.”



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