

Australian government launches police raids over leaked Timor documents

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In a clumsy bid to silence critics of its record in East Timor and Indonesia, the Howard government has launched a series of police raids over last year's leaking to the media of intelligence documents relating to the militia violence in East Timor.

On September 16, the Australian Federal Police conducted a dawn raid on the Canberra home of Philip Dorling, an adviser to the Labor Party's foreign affairs spokesman Laurie Brereton. Police searched Dorling's entire house, including the ceilings, under the floor and through his dirty washing.

Defence and intelligence sources have since told reporters that police earlier raided the Sydney home of an Army intelligence officer, Captain Clinton Fernandez. Others named in the police search warrant include a former Australian diplomat Bruce Haigh and high-ranking military experts, such as Lieutenant Colonel Lance Collins, who was reportedly closely involved in the preparations for last year's Australian-led Interfet operation in East Timor.

The raids were timed to coincide with the Olympics, in an apparent attempt to use the saturation media coverage of the Games to drown out news of the operation, which police sources have described as the largest of its kind in Australian history.

The search warrant states that the police are seeking evidence that public servants and journalists from the *Bulletin* magazine, the *Age* newspaper and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *7.30 Report* and *Four Corners* programs unlawfully disclosed government information between January last year and June this year.

The leaked documents, said to be 79 top secret reports from intelligence and security agencies, revealed that the government was told as early as March 1999 that the Indonesian military was organising

Timorese militias to carry out killings and intimidation in East Timor and planned a "scorched earth" policy if the UN ballot on August 30 last year resulted in a vote for secession from Indonesia.

Media outlets, including the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reported in mid-April 1999 that Australia's Defence Intelligence Organisation informed the government on March 4 last year that the Indonesian military was arming and operating with the militias. On July 8, 1999 the *Australian Financial Review* said the government had received secret reports proving that top-level Indonesian officers and cabinet ministers were complicit in the terror campaign.

Nevertheless, the government insisted that the UN ballot should proceed and that security should be left in Indonesian hands. Prime Minister John Howard, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and other government leaders denied any knowledge of the leaked intelligence reports. They insisted that they had no evidence of official Indonesian involvement, claiming that "rogue elements" of the Indonesian military may have been responsible.

While publicly professing concern for the plight of the East Timorese people, the government calculated that a defeat for the Indonesian autonomy proposal, accompanied by an onslaught by the military and its thugs, would provide the political basis for a military intervention under the flag of the United Nations.

In March 1999, shortly after receiving the intelligence reports, the Howard government began intensive preparations for 5,000 Australian troops to be dispatched to East Timor. The timing of the military mobilisation was not based on any consideration for the fate of the East Timorese. By the time the troops arrived, on September 20, 1999, the island was already devastated. Interfet's mission was to secure the territory

and ensure that Australia's economic and strategic interests were protected.

Opposition politicians and media proprietors used the leaked documents to criticise the government for not demanding UN intervention into East Timor before, rather than after, the UN ballot. Labor's policy, supported by elements within the military and intelligence apparatus, was to push for a more aggressive Australian-led involvement in the territory.

The search warrant confirms that the leaks were extensive and came from within the country's highest-level military, intelligence and diplomatic organisations. It refers to documents from the Department of Foreign Affairs and an array of military and civilian intelligence bodies—the Defence Intelligence Organisation, the Defence Signals Directorate, the Office of National Assessments, the Australian Theatre Joint Intelligence Centre, the Australian Defence Force Intelligence Centre and the Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation—as well as briefing notes and minutes.

The government is now using the police investigation in an effort to cover its tracks and intimidate its critics. Those under investigation face jail terms of up to two years for contravening Section 7 of the federal Crimes Act, which makes it a serious offence to release official information without authority.

As numerous commentators have observed, the police would not have conducted such political raids without government authorisation at the highest levels. The government ordered the police investigation last year, but the search warrant was only issued last week, three days before the opening of the Olympic Games.

Facing widespread media criticism, government ministers have denied any prior knowledge of the police raids, yet admitted to having been briefed on their progress. Foreign Minister Downer and Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone have both defended the operation. "I have no concerns with the Federal Police," Downer said. "I think they do a very good job."

Opposition leader Kim Beazley accused the government of "bullying" a Labor adviser in a "serious breach of parliamentary privilege". Brereton said it was "an outrageous effort to intimidate me and my staff and to prevent me doing my job". The Labor Party, however, abandoned a legal action to prevent police use of the materials taken from Dorling's residence. Instead,

Labor will refer the matter to parliament, which is currently not sitting.

The entire affair points to the emergence of divisions within the military and intelligence apparatus. Apparently worried by the prospect of further damaging leaks, the Howard government this week announced that employees of six intelligence agencies would be subjected to "intrusive" scrutiny, including lie detector tests, random bag searches, psychological testing and financial checks.



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