

East Timor: Leaked autopsy report shows alleged “coup” leader Reinado shot at point-blank range

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Two leaked autopsy reports—which have been published in full on the Wikileaks web site—definitively refute the official version of the events of February 11 in East Timor, according to which former major Alfredo Reinado had engaged in a shoot-out with President Jose Ramos Horta’s security forces while attempting to storm the president’s residence. This was supposedly part of either a coup attempt or planned assassination of both Ramos Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao. The available evidence now strongly points to the likelihood—raised by the *World Socialist Web Site* from the very outset—that Reinado was set up and lured to Dili in order to be murdered.

Reinado’s autopsy report indicates that he died after being shot through the eye at near point-blank range. According to a forensic expert consulted by the *Australian* newspaper, the autopsy’s finding of “burning/blackening of the surrounding skin” to each of Reinado’s four wounds (to the eye, chest, neck, and hand) means that he must have been shot from a range of less than 30 centimetres. The report on Reinado’s colleague Leopoldino Exposto found that he was killed by a single gunshot to the back of the head, also by a “high-velocity rifle fired at close range”.

Reinado and his men were heavily armed when they entered Ramos Horta’s house in the early morning of February 11. The autopsies reported that Reinado was wearing a green vest with 12 magazines containing a total of “347 live ammunitions” in the pockets. Exposto had one magazine with 39 live ammunitions in his vest, as well as a bag with another 98 live ammunitions. It is inconceivable that Reinado—who had received militarily training in Australia—could have led his men into a hostile operation against Ramos Horta but was then somehow shot at point-blank range while not a single presidential guard was wounded.

Reinado’s men, who have since been arrested, have all sworn that they understood that they had an appointment to meet with the president. Several civilian witnesses have now backed this testimony.

For months after the former major’s killing and Ramos Horta’s wounding the Australian press echoed the official line presented by both the Timorese and Australian governments. Deeply sceptical statements issued by a number of senior political figures in Dili went unreported, most notably those of Fretilin leader and former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, who declared he had photographic proof that the alleged attack on Gusmao’s vehicle had been staged.

The official version of events is now so implausible and discredited that even the Australian media feel obligated to change tack.

After reviewing the autopsy evidence, the *Australian*’s Paul Toohy concluded on August 13: “What is certain is that the events inside the villa that morning are not as clear as previously presented, and may have involved Reinado and Exposto either walking into a trap or being held at close quarters before being shot.” A later article in the same newspaper

added: “Many East Timorese believe the whole thing was a set-up; that rebel leader Alfredo Reinado was invited down to Dili to be killed, to end the two-year stand-off in which he and his rebel band remained armed and roaming the hills in the country’s west.”

An article published in the Fairfax press on August 19 cast serious doubt on the earlier allegation that one of Reinado’s men, Marcel Caetano, had shot President Ramos Horta. “Investigators now believe the shooter was wearing a different uniform from that of Reinado’s men—a uniform gang members used to wear,” the story revealed. “The revelation will fuel fresh speculation in Dili that Reinado was lured to Mr Ramos Horta’s house, where gunmen were waiting.”

The series of leaked evidence and news reports that has emerged in the past fortnight raise the obvious question: if, as appears increasingly certain, Reinado was lured to Ramos Horta’s residence to be killed, who set him up and why? But this question has not been raised by any section of the Australian media. Even more astonishingly, not a single question about the events of February 11 and their aftermath was put to either Gusmao or Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd during a joint press conference they held in Canberra last Monday.

Gusmao and the 2006 crisis

The new evidence points to the possibility that Prime Minister Gusmao, or forces closely aligned with him, were responsible for setting up Reinado’s assassination. There is no question that he was among those with the most to gain from Reinado’s death.

Just weeks before his death, the former major released a statement accusing Gusmao of directly instigating the 2006 split in the Timorese military which precipitated widespread violence and culminated in the deployment of hundreds of Australian troops, followed by the resignation of Fretilin Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri.

There was already substantial evidence pointing to Gusmao’s provocative role in the 2006 crisis. Reinado’s statement, however, indicated that the prime minister had not merely exploited the military split for his own ends but had actively worked to provoke the violence in order to bring down the Fretilin administration. The widely circulated DVD in which these allegations were made also included Reinado’s threat to reveal more information about Gusmao’s actions.

Reinado was killed before he had the opportunity to release further information. But even his initial allegations had seriously destabilised Gusmao’s already unstable coalition government.

By early February, President Ramos Horta had publicly indicated that he agreed with Fretilin’s demand for fresh elections and the formation of a new administration. In a meeting held in Dili on February 7—just four days before Reinado was shot dead—Ramos Horta convened a meeting of Fretilin and government parliamentarians to try to reach an agreement for new elections. With Gusmao strongly opposed and insisting that his

government could continue to govern, the meeting ended inconclusively. Further meetings were planned but never held, due to the February 11 violence, after which Gusmao announced a “state of siege” and claimed emergency authoritarian powers.

Ramos Horta’s apparent rapprochement with Fretilin and moves against Gusmao coincided with the president’s attempts to finalise a “surrender” deal with Reinado. The president met with the “rebel” soldier on January 13 and offered to amnesty the murder charges against Reinado (stemming from his 2006 attacks on government forces) if he first disarmed and submitted to house arrest. These negotiations again point to the absence of any logical motive for Reinado to lead an armed attack against Ramos Horta.

Investigation blocked, evidence corrupted

In the aftermath of the February 11 events, Prime Minister Gusmao has blocked the formation of an international inquiry, despite the Timorese parliament demanding one. As a result, the sole investigation underway is headed by the country’s prosecutor-general, Longuinhos Monteiro, who has little credibility in Dili. An earlier UN report into the 2006 crisis accused Monteiro of blindly following Gusmao and concluded that he did not “function independently from the state of East Timor”.

According to a leaked UN report on Monteiro’s investigation into Reinado’s death and Ramos Horta’s wounding, the National Investigation Department has been subjected to “political and military interference” and a lack of cooperation. An Associated Press report added: “Poor handling of evidence—including the weapons used by the rebels—has also botched the investigation. A source close to the investigation said the F-FDTL [Timorese Defence Force] soldiers guarding the president’s home took Reinado’s cell phone off his body, and continued to receive and make calls for days after his death, before handing it over to investigators.”

This corruption of critical evidence, combined with Gusmao’s veto of an international investigation, may result in the exact course of events leading up to Reinado’s death and Ramos Horta’s wounding never being known. Monteiro’s final report will likely be a whitewash.

Serious questions have been raised by Portuguese journalist Felícia Cabrita about Albino Assis, one of Ramos Horta’s military security personnel. In a report published in the weekly *Sol* newspaper in March, Cabrita suggested that Assis betrayed both Reinado and Ramos Horta. Phone records indicate that Assis and Reinado had maintained frequent contact in the period leading up to the February 11 violence. The Portuguese report also alleged that Assis contacted Salsinha, leader of the mutinous military “petitioners”, and told him that Reinado had been killed and Ramos Horta badly wounded. Salsinha had travelled from the western districts with Reinado but, instead of going with him to visit Ramos Horta, had waited near Gusmao’s residence. Why did Assis tell Salsinha what had happened? Did Ramos Horta’s guard know in advance that the petitioners’ leader had come to Dili with Reinado? The many unanswered questions only add to the uncertainty about what really happened in relation to the alleged attack on Gusmao’s vehicle convoy which followed the shootings at Ramos Horta’s home.

Suspicion has also fallen on the Indonesian-based Hercules Rozario Marcal, who visited Dili just days before February 11. “Hercules was born in East Timor and gained notoriety in Jakarta in the 1990s as a gangster running protection rackets,” Melbourne’s *Age* reported. “His gang also served as enforcers for the Suharto regime, intimidating dissidents and East Timorese independence activists. His military patrons were reputed to include the then general Prabowo Subianto, Suharto’s son-in-law. At one stage he lived in the Jakarta house of Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim, who in 2003 was indicted by a UN war crimes tribunal for crimes against humanity.”

Timorese investigators have reportedly established that Hercules contacted and may have met Reinado. His contact number was also found stored in Reinado’s mobile phone. On January 21, just three weeks before

Reinado was killed, Hercules met with Gusmao, ostensibly as part of an Indonesian business delegation investigating hotel and housing investment opportunities. In an extraordinary move, the Gusmao government announced earlier this month that it was awarding Hercules a contract to build a mini-mart and swimming pool on the site of a refugee camp in central Dili—despite the gangster reportedly being under investigation for his potential involvement in Ramos Horta and Reinado’s shooting.

Australian forces stood down?

There remain a number of outstanding questions regarding the Australian government and military’s murky relations with Reinado, going back to his role in the 2006 crisis. (See “East Timor: Hunt for ‘rebel’ military leader called off”)

In the weeks leading up to February 11, Reinado and the Australian military, using Angelita Pires as a go-between, informed each other about their respective movements in order to avoid any unexpected encounters in the jungle of Timor’s western districts. In addition, it is now also known that at least one senior Australian military figure was directly involved in the negotiations between Ramos Horta and Reinado in January. According to an August 22 article in the *Australian*, Major Michael Stone accompanied the president to the January 13 meeting in the western town of Maubisse. Stone was appointed Ramos Horta’s military affairs adviser in late 2007 after being granted a two-year release from his Australian Army duties.

There can be no doubt that Australian intelligence would have had the former major under close surveillance up to and on February 11. Similarly, it is highly unlikely that Reinado’s many phone calls and text messages sent from his mobile phone—including calls made to and received from Australia—would not have been intercepted.

How then were Reinado and his men able to drive from the Ermera district, south-west of the capital, through the capital and straight into Ramos Horta’s residence without being detected by anyone, including the hundreds of Australian and New Zealand troops in the country? With twelve heavily armed men accompanying Reinado in two vehicles, and another ten with Salsinha in two other vehicles, it was hardly an inconspicuous convoy. In addition, Reinado’s men have told the media that they drove slowly to avoid being early for what they believed was a 6 a.m. appointment to meet the president. “The rebels point out they dawdled on the way to Dili, stopping in places to kill time to arrive at the appointed hour,” the *Australian* reported.

The day after the February 11 attacks, East Timor’s army chief Taur Matan Ruak expressed his concern: “Given the high number of international forces present in East Timor, in particular within the capital, how is it possible that vehicles transporting armed people have entered the city and executed an approach to the residences of the president and the prime minister without having been detected? There has been a lack of capacity shown by the international forces, who have primary responsibility for the security within East Timor, to foresee, react and prevent these events.”

Ramos Horta later made similar comments: “I didn’t see any ISF [Australian-led International Stabilisation Force] elements or UNPOL [police] in the area ... normally they are supposed to show up instantly, and in this case of extreme gravity they would normally seal off the entire area, blocking the exit route of the attackers. That didn’t happen. As far as I know, no hostile pursuit of the attackers was made for several days. How did Mr Alfredo Reinado happen to be totally undetected in Dili when the ISF was supposed to be keeping an eye on his movements?”

The circumstances of Reinado’s death raise the question as to whether Australian forces were deliberately stood down on February 11.

Such an act would in no way be inconsistent with Canberra’s filthy record in East Timor. In 1975 the Whitlam Labor government encouraged the Indonesian military junta to invade and annexe the former Portuguese colony; the Hawke-Keating Labor government later finalised an

agreement with the military dictator Suharto for the illegal exploitation of the billion dollar oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea. In 1999 the Howard Liberal government dispatched hundreds of troops in order to protect the Australian ruling elite's vital interests in the tiny half-island, and oversee its transition to so-called independence amid the collapse of the Suharto regime.

The precise role played by Australian forces in the 2006 military split and subsequent violence is yet to be determined. There is no doubt, however, that the Howard government manipulated the unrest to send in the troops and then engineer a "regime change" commensurate with its strategic and financial interests. The Alkatiri administration was regarded as too close to rival powers, particularly Portugal and China, and had proved unwilling to fully accommodate Canberra's demands during negotiations over the allocation of the Timor Sea's oil and gas.

Having expended substantial efforts resources in ousting Alkatiri, the Australian government would have viewed with alarm President Ramos Horta's apparent readiness to back the dissolution of the Gusmao government, potentially facilitating Alkatiri's return to power. Amid escalating hostility among ordinary Timorese towards Australia's military presence, this would have marked a major setback, with potential geo-strategic consequences beyond Timor's borders. China's rising influence is creating serious concerns within the Australian foreign policy establishment that Canberra's hegemony in the South Pacific is being fatally undermined. It is this, above all, that has led to a series of Australian-led police and military operations throughout the region in recent years, including in East Timor.



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