

## **BACKGROUND**

**Introduction:** When the media presented a story on multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis in PNG and the Torres Strait Islands no mention of the disease occurring in West Papua was made. Why? Does multi-drug resistant TB stop dead at the man-made border? Is West Papua a ‘black hole’ so far as the Australian media, government health departments and ordinary citizens are concerned? Does no one in fact know whether multi-drug-resistant TB exists in West Papua? Given the very poor health care in most of West Papua there is a strong likelihood the disease is spreading through the territory and has the potential to form an ineradicable pool of infection.

These questions are symptomatic of the widespread lack of concern, lack of knowledge, and lack of information about West Papua in Australia. A country a short canoe ride from the Australian mainland is to the majority of Australians as little known as North Korea.

**Background:** Both Australian and US troops were in Dutch New Guinea during WW2 yet Australia has been virtually silent about this aspect of our military history, many people expressing surprise when they hear that Australia had any personnel there. After the war the Netherlands offered to prepare the West Papuans over a 10-year-period for independence. Even though Dutch New Guinea was a separate colony with its own stamps, own administration, own structures, legislation and laws, (what the Dutch called ‘a colony of a colony’) Indonesia insisted that it was an integral part of the Netherlands East Indies. The Indonesian attempts to invade the colony in the early sixties were so pathetic that tribesmen with bows and arrows caught Indonesian paratroopers and handed them over to the Dutch authorities.

But the United States in an effort to appease left-wing figures in Jakarta and gain access to Indonesian resources forced Holland to sign the New York Agreement in 1962. The UN sent in ‘peacekeepers’ even though there was no conflict between the West Papuans and the Dutch and the Indonesians could have been pressured to desist in their attempts to invade. The 1,500 troops were predominantly Muslim Pakistanis led by Major-General Said Uddin Khan; an act of stupidity and insensitivity on the part of the UN as these troops had no shared language, and no cultural, religious, or racial affinity with the West Papuans. They were there to collect up the remnants of Indonesia’s failed invasion and to pave the way for the arriving Indonesian colonialists in 1963 who were in effect handed West Papua with the vague and unspecified requirement that they hold a referendum in the future. Even though all principals were signatories to the 1960 UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples the West Papuans were treated with such contempt that the provisos of this Declaration were never seen as applying to them.

President Suharto said, “There *will* be an act of self-determination, of free choice, in West Irian, but if they vote against Indonesia or betray or harm the Indonesian people, this would be treason”. The UN did nothing to counteract this. In fact the UN conduct of the referendum was so poor it is a permanent blot on its record. It had no transport of its own and depended on the Indonesian army. It reportedly did not even have typewriters. Even though Indonesia had carried out a major military operation killing hundreds of

West Papuans in the Wessel Lakes area just before the arrival of the UN (the Indonesians admitted to killing 162 people) this was not seen as reason enough to re-think the referendum. Out of around 600,000 adults in the territory, the Indonesians rounded up 1,025 men or less than a quarter of one percent of the adult population, and required them to vote under the eye of heavily-armed Indonesian soldiers. Only one woman is known to have been included in that 1,025 making the referendum an act of gross discrimination.

Australia had accepted around 250 West Papuans as refugees since 1963 but to its shame it deliberately prevented two West Papuan men (Clemens Runaweri and Willem Zonggonau “At the request of the Indonesian government Australian authorities detained them on Manus Island when their plane stopped to refuel, ensuring that West Papuan voices were silenced”) passing through Manus Island to reach the UN in New York. Most UN members voted for Indonesia having never seen, heard, or met a West Papuan. Australia voted that a free and fair referendum had been carried out. Fifteen nations led by Ghana asked that the referendum be set aside and a new one carried out in 1974. They were out-voted. Had this been done it would have put Indonesia on notice, it would have given the UN time to set up proper structures to make sure all West Papuans had a chance to vote on their future, it would have given the West Papuan people time to plan and discuss, and coming at a time when Indonesia was planning its invasion of East Timor it might have circumvented that tragedy.

**Human Rights:** West Papua has been on the list of territories of serious concern to human rights organisations ever since the Indonesian takeover. Forced removals, killings, torture, a refusal to respect West Papuan languages, culture, and land rights has been integral to the way Indonesia has colonised West Papua. Indonesian rule has been reinforced by the presence of 25,000 to 30,000 soldiers in addition to police throughout their occupation. West Papua remains the most serious human rights situation in the Australasian and Pacific region. Australia has demonstrated repeatedly that Indonesian behaviour in West Papua does not warrant the kind of response we are now seeing in the Middle East even though an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 West Papuans have died at Indonesia’s hands. West Papuans continue to be imprisoned and to die in prison for merely raising the West Papuan flag.

**Disease Status:** Although some diseases have entered West Papua by accident Indonesian troops deliberately brought in cysticercosis, caused by eating infected pigs. After widespread killing of village pigs by Indonesian soldiers alarm bells should have rung when they imported a supposed gift of pigs and handed them out to the Mee people. The disease spread unchecked for years as a ‘mystery’ disease\*. It was only when West Papuan refugees unwittingly carried it across the border into PNG that it was properly diagnosed and prevention and treatment could be publicised. The disease status of West Papua, human, animal and plant, remains poorly researched because of Indonesian restrictions on entry, exit, and internal travel and discussion. West Papuans who talk to foreigners tend to find themselves arrested and interrogated. Of most concern to Australia should be the fact that Indonesia has no quarantine system in place to adequately check the massive number of arrivals of ‘transmigrants’ from Indonesia. We know that foot-and-mouth disease is endemic in Indonesia as far east as Bali. It would seem only a matter of time before it enters West Papua and becomes endemic there. If it is not there

already (and given that most West Papuans have never seen foot-and-mouth and would not be able to correctly diagnose an infected pig) this is probably because most arriving ‘transmigrants’ tend to be from cities rather than farms. The actions taken elsewhere, such as wholesale slaughter, are not realistic in New Guinea where pigs are integral both to economic and cultural life. Australian farmers and pastoralists in northern Australia are probably going to have to accept that it is a matter of ‘when’ not ‘if’ that foot-and-mouth settles in a short bird flight from Australia.

**Climate Change:** The Freeport mine in West Papua has the dubious distinction of being the world’s dirtiest mine, so environmentally damaging that countries such as Norway have disinvested from the companies involved. It dumps more than 200,000 tons of untreated tailings into the river system every day, killing rivers, sago swamps, and fish and prawn breeding grounds along the south coast of New Guinea. The PNG villagers affected by the Ok Tedi mine had some legal redress. West Papuan villagers have no such redress. The currents along the south coast of New Guinea and through the Torres Strait do not run permanently in one direction, thus dispersing this toxic burden. Instead they run east for part of the year and west for the other part, thus building up a toxic time bomb for the future. But as the level of environmental damage (which is visible from space) cannot be addressed or realistically publicised just how rising sea levels will impact on an already dangerous situation is not clear.

Rising temperatures and rising sea levels will probably impact on Jakarta before they impact on West Papua’s most low-lying areas. Jakarta built on low-lying reclaimed land faces a problematic future with storm surges and climate change impacting on its more than ten million people. A breakdown of central government functions cannot be dismissed. We know that the Boxing Day tsunami radically changed Aceh’s future. Although it seems very unlikely that Indonesia will ever experience another Krakatoa it is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The need to remove army personnel from West Papua or a breakdown in communications obviously would impact in various ways on the situation in West Papua. Many people remain unaware that Indonesia is a member of the nuclear club. No nuclear power station, no matter how well built or run, can be seen to be immune to natural disasters or human error. Japan was wealthy enough and stable enough to cope with the massive damage wrought by a tsunami but Indonesia does not provide that sense of economic, communal, and cultural stability.

**Financial:** From being a net exporter of oil Indonesia is moving, on a rising market, to becoming a net importer of oil. For 300 million people this is a matter of serious concern. West Papua’s mineral resources, principally gold and copper, have proved a ‘cash cow’ for the Indonesian government but they are dependent on world prices and not being undercut by gold or copper produced more cheaply elsewhere. Indonesia has become addicted to West Papua’s resources and its massive security presence is there partly to keep the funds from these resources flowing into Jakarta. West Papuans are increasingly aware that their resources do not fund their needs but the needs of the government and military in Jakarta. In effect Freeport and other resources fund the military which prevents West Papuans demanding control over their own resources. Indonesia has not brought care or expertise to bear on the careful husbanding of resources in West Papua or anywhere else. West Papua has been divided into logging concessions irrespective of

West Papuan wishes and irrespective of the potential damage caused by massive logging. Other resources, fish, crocodiles, birds-of-paradise, etc are casually decimated, not least by underpaid Indonesian soldiers. West Papua, once self-sufficient in food, now suffers periodic famine. Most dry seasons see Singapore and Malaysia blanketed by smoke as Indonesia turns its tropical forests into palm oil monoculture.

The financial crisis in Indonesia in 1973 in which the state oil company Pertamina went broke at a time of rising oil prices and the financial meltdown in 1998 are reminders that Indonesia is more dependent on the world than the world is dependent on it. Its financial woes are invariably worsened by corruption and bad management. It is not clear how a more severe financial crisis, leading to civil unrest in Indonesia, would play out in West Papua.

**Islam:** In 1963 West Papua was predominantly Christian and animist. Now its population, because of the massive 'transmigration' program, is predominantly Muslim. It has been repeated so often that Indonesia is a moderate Muslim country that this is accepted without question. Yet the 21<sup>st</sup> century is demonstrating that one time secular states, such as Iraq and Syria, do not automatically remain secular, and that extremist Islamic groups can appear almost out of nowhere. We know that the Indonesian group Lasker Jihad has set up secret training camps in West Papua where they are invisible to Australian eyes. Small but extreme Islamic groups in Indonesia regularly appear, merge, change, reform, develop. It would be idle to suggest that Australian Intelligence can adequately monitor them all. (Lasker Jihad has never, in fact, disbanded and for the Australian Government to claim it has is naïve, as it merely changed its name.) We know that Aceh has brought in Sharia Law since gaining its autonomy. It would be unrealistic to suggest that this can never happen in West Papua.

**Threat to PNG:** As soon as Indonesia achieved independence it began to toy with ideas of a greater Indonesia. Maps were produced to show PNG as East Irian and Australia as South Irian. Clearly the threat that Indonesia poses to Australia is one of instability and the large-scale movement of refugees rather than military action. But that Indonesia does pose a threat to PNG is backed up by some evidence.

1. Indonesia has repeatedly violated PNG airspace, both before and after PNG's independence. Indonesian soldiers have made incursions into PNG territory. Indonesia was found to be building a road partly inside PNG. As the border follows the 141<sup>st</sup> meridian it is not difficult to determine its position with even simple surveyors' instruments. As the border runs through a number of villages the setting up of a string of Indonesian military camps ostensibly to prevent refugees and guerillas reaching the border also produces a permanent form of intimidation.

2. It isn't clear to what extent Indonesia has resorted to outright bribery, as in PNG's Defence chief Ted Diro's case, as its influence has seemingly become more subtle. But we have heard of PNG villagers convinced that Indonesia is building wonderful homes and facilities for the West Papuans without understanding that this propaganda refers to buildings and services provided to Indonesian 'transmigrants' who are taking over West Papuan land.

3. The unease people in PNG expressed about the asylum seekers on Manus Island clearly involved the understanding that Indonesia's major policy in West Papua is

that of ‘swamping’ the indigenous people by Muslim outsiders. That Indonesia wanted West Papua for prestige, resources, and ‘lebensraum’ is clear. The West Papuan people are a nuisance. People in PNG have some understanding that the sheer numbers of arriving Indonesians, principally Muslim, from Java, Sulawesi etc, present an indeterminate threat. If the current rate of ‘transmigration’ continues then Muslims will be in the majority by 2030 in the entire island of New Guinea.

4. Indonesia has learnt, it would seem, that invasion requires it to have powerful friends in the international community, principally the USA, and that as the US increasingly turns elsewhere a more subtle approach to spread Indonesian influence, to white-ant PNG structures, to increase its economic stake in PNG etc is needed. Indonesia is buying up PNG businesses, such as the supermarket chain PAP-INDO, seeking logging concessions, buying into businesses etc.

5. Indonesia has shown itself skilled at fomenting unrest when it has suited its purposes. It is less clear what will happen if Indonesian control of West Papua breaks down. West Papuan refugees have fled Indonesian army actions and there are now more than 20,000 West Papuan refugees in PNG. More problematic is the possible movement of Indonesian ‘transmigrants’ under pressure of major unrest or natural disasters. PNG could not cope with a massive influx of people who no longer have homes in Java or elsewhere.

There are many issues which suggest that it is in Australia’s best interests to make West Papua a major talking point within both official and unofficial circles here. It is important that Australia press Indonesia to allow the free movement of people into and out of West Papua.

We would also urge the Australian government and Defence forces to make public Australia’s presence in Dutch New Guinea during WW2 as part of this opening-up process. We would also urge that all Australian military aid to Indonesia be closely linked to its human rights record and the opening up of West Papua both to allow outside interests such as journalists and human rights lawyers to enter and to allow the free passage of West Papuans both internally and to travel abroad.

Australia has bent over backwards to not offend Indonesia. Yet human rights abuses and environmental damage are abuses and damages regardless of who is responsible. If it was Vanuatu or Fiji which was abusing the West Papuans and creating toxic time bombs we would have no difficulty in saying so.

It is our understanding that independence is inevitable in West Papua. No nation, no border, no administration is set in stone and Indonesia’s colonial control over West Papua is ultimately dependent on situations over which Indonesia has relatively little control. Australian Defence and Foreign Policies should be predicated on this understanding, not an ostrich-like belief that nothing will ever change.

This material was originally prepared for a Defence White Paper by Jennie Herrera on behalf of the Tasmanian West Papua Association. But a number of people have said they would like to see it made available to a wider readership.

\* See, eg, Robert Wooton’s book *The Lost World of Irian Jaya*.

