

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties concerning the  
**AGREEMENT BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF  
INDONESIA  
ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR SECURITY COOPERATION**

by Martin Wesley-Smith, AM  
February 23 2007

Like many other Australians, I have been critical of aspects of the Republic of Indonesia's performance in East Timor and West Papua. My criticisms have been directed *not* at the Indonesian people, or bureaucracy, or, even Government, but at the army - the TNI. Thus I am alarmed to read that the Agreement proposes "the closest professional cooperation between (Indonesia's and our) Defence Forces".

On the surface, this would appear to be a good move. But there is not the slightest evidence that the close professional cooperation that Indonesia's and our Defence Forces have enjoyed in the past has had any effect in reducing the TNI's savagery in its dealings with the people of East Timor and West Papua. Not a single TNI officer has been called to account for any of the atrocities committed in East Timor during Indonesia's 24-year occupation. As we are currently learning at the New South Wales Coroner's Court, Indonesian forces murdered five journalists working for Australian news services back in 1975, plus Australian newsman Roger East, yet the TNI has consistently denied, and escaped, all responsibility. It appears that the TNI is pursuing the same disastrous policies and methods in West Papua as it did in East Timor - disastrous for the indigenous people, for the environment, and for the Indonesian Government but not at all for the TNI itself, which has made vast profits from illegal logging, corrupt business practices, prostitution rackets etc. During all this, successive Australian Governments have maintained a "softly, softly" approach, claiming that this is a better way to address Australian concerns about human rights and other abuse by the TNI. Well, news for you, Gareth: this approach failed miserably. If anything, it made the situation worse. It's time now for us to stand up, publicly, for what we believe in. No need to hector, necessarily, but to state our case in a spirit of co-operation and solidarity and to let the Indonesians state theirs.

As things stand, the TNI is free to commit any atrocity it likes, knowing that Australian and other governments, eager to appease the world's largest Muslim nation, will turn a blind eye. If once, just *once*, its atrocities were forcefully condemned by the Australian Government, then perhaps it would think twice about committing more of them. But, instead, its behaviour is rewarded, with a security agreement to provide official cover. Other benefits include trips to Australia (and America and Britain), which allow Generals to check their real estate holdings in Perth and elsewhere. Many officers of the TNI are "terrorists in uniform", to borrow Sister Susan Connolly's memorable description - what a strange world it is where Australia co-operates with and supports terrorists in order to maintain its security. The TNI operates a protection racket, and Australia, as always, meekly gives in.

It is clear that this **AGREEMENT** was spurred on by Indonesia's concern for its "territorial integrity", meaning its concern that West Papua might follow East Timor's example. In my view, if Indonesia's "territorial integrity" is any of our business then our position should be to support the indigenous West Papuans' desire for independence. The so-called "Act of Free Choice" was nothing of the sort but was

accepted as such by a Western world governed by Cold War rhetoric and, just as it is now, eager to appease Indonesia. I accept, however, that the indigenous West Papuan people have little hope of getting their country back. In this situation, Australia, rather than support the TNI's murderous attacks on local people - which it effectively does through this **AGREEMENT** - should do everything possible on behalf of the victims.

Richard Woolcott and others maintain, as they did in 1975, that Australian diplomacy is about Australia's interests. I agree, but I ask "Are we talking here about Australia's short-term, medium-term, or long-term interests?" One might argue that this **AGREEMENT** is in Australia's short-term security and commercial interests (although a disaster for indigenous West Papuans). But the possible long-term ramifications are frightening: a large acquisitive Indonesian island (the TNI could easily gobble up Papua New Guinea) immediately to our north, greedily looking south ...

A few years ago terrorism against Western countries and interests was unheard of. When it arrived, it was directed against the USA as a result of that country's interference in the affairs of others - its support for right-wing dictators, death squads, assassinations of popularly-elected presidents, holy warriors fighting against the Soviets, and so on. It is called, by some, "blowback". Australia would have escaped terrorist attack had we stood up on principle against the USA's actions. But, instead, frightened little country that we are, we eagerly sought the role of Deputy Sheriff to the USA in this region, thus guaranteeing that we too would be a target of religious extremists. The perception of many Muslims, if not the reality, is that America is waging a crusade against Islam (this was once admitted but then immediately denied by President Bush). By extension, so is Australia, a perception reinforced by our enthusiastic participation in the illegal invasion of Iraq. What, now, is the best defence against Muslim extremists' desire for revenge? To go to bed with what is in effect a Muslim army? Surely the time has come for us to stand up on principle - on the moral principles that we, as a supposed Christian country, espouse - and decry injustice wherever we see it, to put into effect our so-called "Australian values" - e.g. standing up for the little man - and to be truly independent, a force for good, for compassion, for human rights? Why is the solution necessarily a military one? Where in this **AGREEMENT** is there any mention of co-operation between the ordinary people of Indonesia and Australia through the arts, say, or sport, or education, or community activities at a grass roots level? I believe that activities in these areas are the best defence against terrorist attack.

I was recently in Wellington, New Zealand, where I attended a *wayang kulit* (Javanese shadow puppet play) performance. It was marvellous! Performed in English, it was funny, topical, satirical - a hugely enjoyable production, complete with *gamelan* orchestra consisting entirely of native New Zealanders. This is what we should be aiming for: bilateral cultural endeavours that allow each culture to understand the other. Instead, we seek bilateral *military* endeavours, a complete failure of our imagination. In Wellington I talked to an officer of the Indonesian Embassy there, stressing that my criticisms were directed at the TNI and not at ordinary Indonesians. He agreed, in private, that the TNI caused the diplomats no end of trouble and that at least some of my criticisms were valid.

I see that this **AGREEMENT** seeks to strengthen "bilateral nuclear cooperation for peaceful purposes" (clause 17), pre-empting the debate that Australians need to have about the use of nuclear energy. It is not yet, I hope, a foregone conclusion that

Australians will opt for a nuclear energy future. If we do not then we will hardly be in a position to strengthen "bilateral nuclear cooperation".

My final point is that this **AGREEMENT** could easily constitute a threat to Australian democracy. Under "**ARTICLE 2**", "**PRINCIPLES**", we read:

"3. The Parties, consistent with their respective domestic laws and international obligations, shall not in any manner support or participate in activities by any person or entity which constitutes a threat to the stability, sovereignty or territorial integrity of the other Party, including by those who seek to use its territory for encouraging or committing such activities, including separatism, in the territory of the other Party".

What does "support" mean here? If an Australian, say, were to demonstrate about TNI atrocities against the indigenous population of West Papua, would Australia be supporting these activities merely by not preventing them? I fear that this **AGREEMENT** could be used to justify further attacks (similar to those contained in the Sedition legislation) against the free speech and other rights of Australians. Artists will steer clear of Indonesian subjects in their plays, paintings etc. Self-censorship - already rife in Australia amongst people fearful of incurring official displeasure - will spread still further. I believe that a robust democracy should welcome alternative views, discussion, debate etc, not try to stifle them.

In conclusion, I too want the best possible security for Australia and Australians. But I believe that going down the same old path - the one that has manifestly failed us so far - is bound not only to fail in its stated objective but to threaten our own values. I think that if an **AGREEMENT** is to be reached at all - and I'm not convinced that a formal agreement is necessary - then a new one should be negotiated: one that emphasises cultural links between our countries; one that recognises the need for mutual cultural (artistic, religious, gastronomic etc) understanding; one that honestly recognises our differences and seeks, where necessary, to accommodate them; one that recognises each other's security concerns and needs from a long-term perspective ...

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