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From: Rob Wesley-Smith [mailto:rwesley@ozemail.com.au]
Sent: Tuesday, 27 March 2007 2:35 PM
To: Dermody, Kathleen (SEN)
Subject: Submission re Australia's involvement in peacekeeping

Rob Wesley-Smith

26th March 07

Kathleen Dermody
Secretary
Standing Committee Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Submission re Australia's involvement in peacekeeping

Thankyou for the chance to make a submission on this area of great interest to the East Timor support movement generally, and especially to myself as a resident of north Australia close to the 'arc of instability'.

I think there is a changing nature of Australia's involvement in peacekeeping in recent years, and in this discussion I do not intend to get involved in semantics over peace - achieving and peace - keeping, as Mr Downer sometimes does. Of course there are times when a distinction is useful, but in low level operations the roles may overlap initially or at times.

I think the obvious starting point is the formation of Interfet in 1999. Our movement not only agreed with this, but had vigorously called and campaigned since late 1998 for UN Peacekeepers to be in place during the build up to the elections in East Timor on 30th August. Indeed also before the results were announced I pleaded with the UN NOT to announce them until they had discussed them with Pres Habibie and got his agreement to UN Peacekeepers. Not doing so, in the face of much evidence, led to the implementation of a planned campaign to destroy the potential new nation, only curtailed by Interfet, and leaving such ruins that the rebuilding job required a long period of outside support. This was rejected most by the Howard/Downer and Bush/Cheney governments, in 2002 in the build up to their invasion of Iraq, which was not coincidental. This means that somehow **Peacekeeping must be insulated from other military adventures** if possible.

In 2003 I took part in a major seminar at Charles Darwin University on: "The Eye of the Storm: northern Australia's location in an arc of instability", and my paper was "The political and human reality of defending north Australia - we gotta be friends". It pointed out the huge disparity between spending on Military cf Foeign Aid, especially for the USA at over 30:1, Australia at over 8:1, whilst European countries were more like 3-4:1, and Scandinavian 2-3:1. This indicates we need to reset our approach so that we try harder to **avoid** having to get into the situation of needing Peacekeepers in the first place. This means being far more **proactive and generous with civilian support**, and this is a topic we could discuss further.

One can only suggest rules of engagement that allow **adequacy and flexibility**, as situations hopefully will change and often quickly. For example, in May 2006 the East Timor authorities asked for Police help, but were sent high powered Military. After maybe an early role of demonstrating overwhelming force, the need was clearly for police, for flexibility, for a capacity to find out what was behind the incidents, to catch perpetrators, and to remove them from the action for a long enough time. Instead we had a rather ridiculous and embarrassing ongoing scenario of heavily armed and heavily kitted military trying to deal with Timorese who could just run away and hide. We commented heavily on these needs very early on. Following are extracts from my 25th May and 29th May statements, and these show the complexity and needs for more than just military. Despite this it took an awfully long time to change the nature and capacities of our forces on the ground, and I'm not sure they still have it quite right. The first and second military leaderships in their public statements do not inspire confidence in their knowledge, their abilities, and frankly in their honesty.

eg 25th May 06 I wrote:

The situation in East Timor has moved on rapidly, and I believe most Dili residents now desperately want Australian police and/or military intervention. This is from media reports but also speaking to recent visitors and residents. The leader of the so-called dissident military also has called for and now welcomes the imminent arrival of Aussie forces.

We support this as of yesterday, though we know we don't have all the information we really need.

Now the East Timor govt as part of their resolution has asked for help.

What is unusual for us as activists is that Alexander Downer has spoken well last night and this morning, (can't say the same for Nelson arguing that the situation is more dangerous now than in 1999 - what rubbish), and also we substantially agree with the editorials this morning not only in the SMH but also The Oz - gasp! Credit where its due.

However note that Horta asked for Police, perhaps with a small military for protection, but Downer will send Military. I hope they also send skilled civil reps to help negotiations - I'm available!

The whole statement is printed later, and I think that much of it is useful background to this Inquiry at least in so far as East Timor is concerned, and I think it stands up well today.

eg On 29th May I wrote to colleagues at least, in context of trying to get a comprehensive agreement within activists:

1. *The Australian troops have been welcome but far too slow in acting. This was the same in 1999 with Interfet. The ETGovt asked for Police, but Australia decided to send troops only initially. It should have been Police with Military support. **Or use many of the troops in a different way ie as policing officers.** Take their huge backpacks off them, replace the boots with running shoes, the M16s with Uzis, give them utes, and then let them run around to actually STOP the burnings looting and killings. What's been happening is incongruous. At the same time Brigadier Mick Slater is telling people to go home where our troops will protect them, and not occupy their time guarding at mass gatherings. He is also saying all East Timorese including Police and Military in Dili will be disarmed. What a load of codswallop and baloney! One wonders where he's at. The troops as used so far have patently NOT been protecting homes, and cannot.*

***At last some Police are being sent, too late to have avoided so much destruction by gangs of young male macho thugs, so unnecessary.** After people in grinding poverty have begun to get homes established again, and this was one of my observations late last year that one saw many more homes becoming established and more finished, now so many are gone again it is doubly heartbreaking. I think outside help will be needed for rebuilding, and for decent town planning in this chaotic city growing like topsy-turvy. As I called for last year, building iron of Australian standard should be subsidised to say 10-20% of its real price to allow a nation to rebuild - not just in Dili.,*

2. *I have challenged my Left colleagues to recognise the immediate crisis and stop theorising and support the call for Peacekeepers and outside Police. This is not to deny the East Timor Government role, in fact the ETG called for outside intervention last Wed night. ... I admit I don't know it all, who does, and **East Timor has layers of mystery and knowledge that is hard to extract.** The situation has spiralled out of control with relatively small numbers of young macho thugs doing enormous damage almost unchecked. I expect a lot more post traumatic stress to occur in many people, and why not?*

Whoever is behind all this stuff the burnings and killings are a present reality and we need plenty of Cops to stop it. It doesn't matter what (theories) you have written while Dili is being destroyed again by Macho illeducated Men.

Now we need massive programs in ETimor to bring people together, national cultural programs and education, and a huge antipoverty drive.

*I see Howard/Downer as villains for stealing ET resources over last 6 years, and removing the army and police support before time. **This sort of support maybe needed for a decade.** I*

see Howard setting an agenda in saying the ETG has been lousy for years when they had to battle poverty and rebuilding without adequate funds due to Howard's theft. Howard/Downer took their eye off the game in the Solomons too, the military can maybe stop violence but not rebuild a nation.

But I see they (Howard/Downer) have acted quickly in this crisis, even though they should have sent Police as well first up, as Horta asked, and the army is a bit slow - they are worried they may be shot when the looting burning and maybe most killing has been by local gangs, now motivated by revenge in defending the East West positions.

It is obvious that if you carry a big weapon, you either can't use it, or if you do you kill someone. if you wear heavy boots and carry a big rucksack it is obvious you can't run very fast. If you arrest someone for what seems a heinous crime and then let them go back onto the streets in 24 hours you will lose respect. **If you don't use local knowledge** then you are unlikely to know what is going on. It is clearly apparent to anyone following the East Timor scene for a while that the people developed skills above all in **resisting**, and this means it will not be easy to beat them. The Indonesian military found that. People were wanting something like the Portuguese rather brutal special Police to achieve results. This is an indictment on our mix of people and their capacities, and suggests training with other skills, and kit.

26th June I was quoted by an IPS article: ... he (W-S) told IPS, adding that television images of Australian troops who arrived in Dili where they stood by watching as looting and burning went on made him wonder, if it was a part of a sinister plot by Canberra to declare East Timor a failed state "so that they could control the Timor Sea (oil) theft". end quote. Clearly this is frustration, but what is the answer?

One element easily seen and in fact commented on was the need to **use local East Timorese skills** and resources, and inter alia I pointed this out strongly in the 7th July 06 statement that follows. It seems to have taken 6-9 months for this to happen in any realistic way. Why? Was this arrogance by our political and military leaders who believed they had the firepower to deal with all troublemakers? We have NOT been told even now who is behind the problems, does that mean our forces have not had the capacity to do proper intelligence, didn't have the language skills, the mandate, the training, the interest, or what? This needs answering as it bears heavily on the Inquiry points b, c, d.

I wrote a substantial opinion piece 7th July, and extracts related to this Inquiry are below:

East Timor: Coup, Mismanagement, Future
by Rob Wesley-Smith 7th July 06 (East Timor activist since 1974)

The recent sad events in East Timor ('Timor Leste') came out of the blue to most people. Yet was it a planned coup by Australia as some allege?

In an article in The Guardian 6th July Peter Symond seems in no doubt. But to use as evidence that not long before the Australian forces were invited over to quell the lawlessness they had prepared for such an eventuality is rather tenuous. Blind Freddy could see the need arising. In early 1999 I led a delegation of activists to the North Australian military command to assure them that armed intervention to save the East Timorese from Genocide was supported by human rights activists. We had campaigned on the need for armed peacekeepers since late 1998. Blind Freddy could see the need then too.

*Ironically in 1999 blind Alexander Downer could not see the need for armed peacekeepers, or so he argued, so the UN was powerless to enforce its boast to stay and protect the East Timorese in the lead up to the 30th August ballot and thereafter. A couple of years ago again it was blind Alexander who argued that East Timor did not need and could not expect a modest UN delegation including military and police to stay on and help it through its early democratic pains. It is also claimed that Australia deliberately mistrained or avoided training the army so it would be ineffective. Was all this **grossly negligent policy** an attempt to cause a failed state?*

*I think the jury is out on this one, but maybe. When you factor in Australia's unrelenting tough stance on negotiations over the oil and gas spoils of the Timor Sea, where the Australian government has taken from East Timor waters over 5 x what it has returned in civil aid, and is appropriating to itself half the % of Greater Sunrise Royalties when that lies within East Timor waters according to UNCLOS guidelines, one sees a determined push to keep East Timor poverty stricken. They have **not had an economic dividend from Independence**, thus rightly fuelling discontent.*

But ...

East Timor as a country was devastated by the almost complete looting, burning and destruction of its towns, many villages and its agricultural resources. You would have thought the UN and international community would take steps to help rebuild, but apart from some government buildings and some infrastructure this was not the case, leaving NGOs and the better off Timorese to shoulder most of the burden, and the majority poor population to suffer. Should Alkatiri have borrowed? Well, once Bayu Undan was locked in and substantial revenues were about to flow, then why not? This could be paid back in one year. Poverty reduction programs were urgently needed. Perhaps if meaningful poverty reduction programs had been implemented then the present discontent with the Alkatiri/Fretilin government would not have been so volatile. Whilst I blame Australia most for cutting off the funds, Alkatiri must shoulder some blame.

*I notice Peter Cosgrove arguing that soldiers not police were needed this time around. This too is poppycock, few threats existed to the wellarmed ponderous soldiers, what was needed was police who could intervene and take thugs off the streets, and to **find out who were the ringleaders**. They should have been working with the loyal Timorese police, not marginalising them. Where was their intelligence coming from, and what was it if they did get any? How many houses were burned in Dili after the Aussie troops arrived until now? No one will say. Shades of September 1999 with Cosgrove in charge.*

and so on ...

The East Timor support movement existed effectively since 1975, but as a few of the originals succumbed to time and the difficulties, a large number of recruits came on board in 1991 after the infamous Dili Massacre. There is a wealth of experience here which seems to be studiously ignored in the main by government and media. There is an international email list operating since 1991ish and one can read just about everything if one has the stamina. I went to East Timor on 10th October and basically worked there until Feb 2000, and have visited many times since, after a background of being an East Timor activist since 1974. I felt the very first days of Interfet were fantastic, but then I thought the forces were slow to move out and protect the people. I have written on this before but will avoid digging this out. It is not as though one did not have opportunities to observe, as one met liaison people at UN daily meetings, and Intel officers visited where I was staying as Timor Aid activists were taking supplies to areas not yet liberated by Interfet, as I did to Same, ironically the town where this year our ADF (as ISF) attacked Alfredo Reinado killing at least 5 men, this being the first time our forces did not act to protect East Timorese but set out to probably kill them. One wonders who is using who here, why, if the President and PM wanted their own reined (sic) in, not use their own military?

I observed a similar situation in 1999 as occurred in 2006, that is forces which initially were appropriate were not rejigged quickly enough. In 1999 there had at least been some preparation time, perhaps just by ADF initiative rather than political order, with some soldiers displaying their new Tetum language skills, but I know the preparation of unarmed police earlier and I suspect soldiers about culture and history was very limited. I was ushered into the Intel HQ after my Same trip, and saw written on a board the acronym Falintil, but misspelt. I suggested that by then they should know how it was spelt, and was told that it got spelt all sorts of ways, and what did it matter? I pointed out that it was an acronym (in Portuguese) for the East Timorese self defence force that had basically seen off the Indonesian Armed forces for 24 years, and not to spell it right indicated that the Intel people did not know that, and were not engaging with them.

Cooperation with locals needed in preparation and early on. Indeed as policy from mission statement or by choice the armed forces were consciously avoiding any cooperation with Falintil, which could have markedly improved the early effectiveness of the Interfet action. Indeed it could have saved many people from being killed,

many from being kidnapped, and many houses and other buildings from being burned. The same applied to cooperation with the 'Resistance', which as I have said enabled Timor Aid people and even myself to go where Interfet did not or dared not. Was this poor preparation or by orders - by people without understanding? As activists in Darwin we know that Police going to East Timor in August were told not to talk to us or take documents from our stall, and some told us they were never told about 'Militia' or what they had done or could really be like. This was stupid and even criminal. I also tried in October in Dili to engage discussion on policy on removal of weapons from people, and being an agriculturalist, when told by Military that anyone carrying weapons (eg Machetes) would have them removed, was able to point out that this meant that workers/farmers would lose the means for their livelihood. The alleged policy was hastily restated to anyone 'carrying weapons in an aggressive manner'. Really this sort of thing should have been well sorted before arrival. Lots of activists in Australia, either East Timorese, or some Australians, could have prepared the Military on such issues. About 15 as I recall, but maybe more, put their names on a list to be available to go in with troops as interpreters and guides, but NONE of them were wanted. We all saw on tv soldiers shouting to East Timorese in English. One has to admire their discipline in not firing shots at all in the early days, and only later when under attack.

I had **excellent interactions** with Interfet as Australian staff facilitated bringing across around 30 Darwin musicians and helping with looking after them in Dili (mainly water), and helping with a big concert, the first public entertainment event in the new country, attended by est 17,000 people, an epic event, and I acknowledged this to the crowd especially Maj Graham Finney. It was impressive that they saw their mandate to include such matters, though this was 7th Dec so Dili has been pretty peaceful for some time. I had a splendid experience with ADF hospital staff with patients I brought in from the bush, due to the OIC Colonel, though initially I was told the place had to be kept clear for soldiers, but major casualties even by then were unlikely. In subsequent years I occasionally met troops on the road, and found them impressive, but by then most had no doubt learned a lot and possibly the staff were happy to be there and were well motivated. These men were quite different to the callow youths on questionable point duty in Dili who were sullen, rude and threatening, certainly unlike say the Thais. Was that because of poor training or just a boring and probably by then an unnecessary job? There also were incidents of bashing Timorese at night and not being prepared to listen to better educated Timorese explaining the situation. I question the rules that demanded soldiers carry their weapons at all times, even when doing fitness jogging, at restaurants, etc once all threat of threat had gone. After all this applied for years and no doubt does again, but now is a different situation to then. Again one wonders about the intelligence being received, the engaging of East Timorese staff, and that perhaps bringing over more police earlier would have been a good idea. **More police need to be trained** for such eventualities, and necessary modern equipment made available. I think **more generous provisions** need to be made, not so much as pay etc while on duty, but to victims and family in the sad event of serious injury, health problems or death.

Wider responsibilities incl Pathology

When UN forces went into Kosovo they had teams of forensic pathologists and HRs lawyers etc right there ready to uncover evidence of any war crimes. When Interfet went into East Timor, they either had no such personnel, or had some who were not allowed to do their job (this latter is what I was told from one involved). I believe this was a political directive from the Australian Howard/Downer government and maybe also the UN which still placed relations with Indonesia, and still does, way above uncovering or holding accountable war crimes and war criminals. In the Solomons I believe this was a priority, but then this would not offend a big regional neighbour. I contend **such personnel need to be trained to be ready to go in with the armed forces and police** in international situations, probably mainly Police and some Military, but also some civilians, in order that the truth be gained and be seen to be gained.

When Capt Andrew Plunkett uncovered mass graves in Oecussi, due to an error by the Indonesians in where they thought their border was, and when he detailed his findings to Gen Cosgrove and his Minister and to media, the Minister and General were most upset, and the honourable Plunkett's career prospects dived at that time. What sort of message did and does that send? Well he was not supported and had to leave the ADF. What does that say about policy and implementation. We know the same pressures applied to the honourable Lt Col Collins, Capt Toohey, probably to Maj Fernades, and of course in USA to Merv Jenkins. This says a lot about the **Military and Political culture that needs changing** for the better for us all.

The ADF also bulldozed mass graves, eg a well near Liquica which had not been fully investigated, it may be that filling it in was warranted but NOT to try to obliterate any sign that it had been there. This was illegal and disgusting and disrespectful.

Equipment

It seems and has to me since 1999 that the ADF has only 'big' or 'heavy' equipment, suitable for fighting a full-on war, but not suitable for dealing with civilian unrest and gang skirmishes. I remind you that the Aus Govt had insisted on having the mandate in East Timor, its troops are not under UN auspices, and it was the Aus Govt that determined the mix of forces that went in in late May early June last year. So it needs to have more versatile equipment and outfitting. I have already commented on some aspects of this in relation to weapons and clothing.

In 1999 troops were getting around in APCs (overkill for most of East Timor after the first 2-3 weeks, this not including some border areas eg Suai), huge Mack trucks that damaged mountain roads, or Landrovers which had not got any bullet proof protection even though some had a machine gun mounted up high. I commented at the time and a soldier said well make a submission ... It just seems to me that having some basic protection against bullets to say the AK47 level would be wise. There was a case in Suai where 2 SAS were gravely wounded by Indonesian Militia attack, and in this case APCs

were subsequently used to clear them out/clean them up, (little true detail made public, don't want to upset the murderous Indon Govt!) I envisaged some bullet proof panels that would slope up to half way up the windscreen on demand, at least bullet proof or resistant glass in the windscreen, some protection built into doors, and some panels up on the roof if a machinegunner or rifleman is to sit perched up there. Design aspects of the underside might be looked at too. As long as this could be done without huge weight penalties it would make the crew much safer and make the vehicle a more formidable fighting machine if required - in my humble opinion.

Large weapons for foot patrols as in the East Timor situation after the first few days of arrival in 2006, are inappropriate. Perhaps one man per patrol has a heavier weapon, but others have smaller /lighter and more versatile weapons, even machine pistols, long batons, and electric stun devices that could be shot to disable an assailant with eg darts as used, even a long throw targetted spray device. They prob would wear light concealable bullet proof vests, and running shoes. (I saw this in remote NT when special forces were called in to catch some bush-savvy criminals, and the good guys were wearing running shoes, and when a wanted man was spotted up a tree a chainsaw was produced which quickly persuaded the man that he was about to become very isolated indeed - that showed the required flexibility!) The aim is for those military to be able to run and interact and catch offenders, to stop the violence, burnings and lootings. They may well carry light digital movie cameras to collect the evidence, maybe mounted on their headgear. As proof of this thesis, in a recent confrontation at a refugee camp near the Dili airport, in self-defence a soldier shot dead 2 Timorese men. I would like to know more about the exact situation and the level of education and experience of that soldier.

Education

As I've said I found some ordinary foot-soldiers doing mind numbing point duty which was overkill and either was frustrating or gave an undue sense of importance, and these appeared to be young and not well educated. Others were bright, and engaged. One sees and reads about all sorts of situations in Iraq with US forces. This reinforces the **need for well educated people to be involved in the Military** as far as possible. Is the Nelson proposed lowering of entry education standards going to be used to provide people for such roles, or to do point duty and clear the garbage, etc? That's not to say such people particularly more mature age folks can't be recruited, but in my view they **need to engage in formal education**. This includes elements of **regional geography, cultural differences, religious differences, language training, people sensitivity, skills at rebuilding or community development etc and prior travel to the region**. Also I believe ADF and Police staff should be able to communicate with locals and civilian helpers eg NGO workers without the **fear of sanctions** from public service type rules barring such things. After alerting Interfet to some of the last Militia down at Betano south of Same, and I was told by a journo that they collected 2 Blackhawks worth, I asked the Capt at a liason meeting just for an indication this had happened and was pompously refused any comment - yet I provide my info freely. That's just bullshit.

I would like to see **more coordination with NGOs**. We in Darwin in 1999 has a great deal of knowledge that could have been useful, but almost entirely this was not wanted. (An exception was earlier in 1999 we had a great reception at Northern Command.) Later there were some brief briefing sessions with local Timorese, which may have been helpful but were very brief. I see no reason why political activists for East Timor, even those with professional qualifications, could not also be used. Was the offer by East Timorese patriots in Darwin to help with language and guidance rejected as it was thought political, or unnecessary? In a liason meeting we were told they could not find a water supply at Suai. I had brought (shanghaied) the only East Timorese to that meeting, he happened to be from Suai, and he knew the answers, but although he provided info he was not welcome onto the revisit. Few East Timorese were engaged in the business in early days of 1999, nor in 2006, this is a major fault and I don't know if it is policy, poor education, poor preparation, or politics.

So, Senators, I have written this from the first person although it is on behalf of affet and AETA nsw, and will be sent to nsw for their edification, but as this is late I send it direct to you before to them. Sorry if its a ramble, the points are in there somewhere. I had more on- ground experience, and wrote early and quite a lot on such matters, you have been spared much of this, hence the confidence given me by AETA, however if you want more just let me/us know. I am most happy to expand on these matters in person if so required, and no doubt AETA will also. Thankyou.

Your sincerely

addenda

1. Australia's involvement in peacekeeping - referral

On 8 November 2006, the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for inquiry and report by 16 August 2007: The changing nature of Australia's involvement in peacekeeping operations and the implications for the Australian Defence Force, AusAID, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Federal Police and other departments and agencies likely to be called on to assist a peacekeeping operation, with particular reference to:

- (a) the policy framework, procedures and protocols that govern the Government's decision to participate in a peacekeeping operation, for determining the conditions of engagement and for ceasing to participate;
- (b) the training and preparedness of Australians likely to participate in a peacekeeping operation;
- (c) the coordination of Australia's contribution to a peacekeeping operation among Australian agencies and also with the United Nations and other relevant countries; and
- (d) lessons learnt from recent participation in peacekeeping operations that would assist government to prepare for future operations.

Here is the link to the committee's website

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/FADT_CTTE/peacekeeping/index.htm

2. 'Aussie Circuit-Breaker Troops Welcomed'

Australians for a Free East Timor Public Statement **25th May 2006**

Rob Wesley-Smith spokesperson

The situation in East Timor has moved on rapidly, and I believe most Dili residents now desperately want Australian police and/or military intervention. This is from media reports but also speaking to recent visitors and residents. The leader of the so-called dissident military also has called for and now welcomes the imminent arrival of Aussie forces.

We support this as of yesterday, though we know we don't have all the information we really need.

The situation has got out of control by East Timor government inaction and incompetence. As I wrote on 28th April:

'the situation regarding the 600 sacked soldiers has escalated, they gave notice of this 5 days ago, and the government of East Timor has failed to sort out the problem. You can't just sack one third of your defence force and expect no trouble. I have great faith in the East Timorese people but declining faith in their government, and this situation is all of their making'.

I also wrote: 'I hope NZ and Aust do NOT send troops, this is for them themselves to sort out'. However as I said above, sadly the situation now has moved on, and in particular, the recent Fretilin conference not only failed to act but actually made the situation worse by reelecting, with Horta's support, its Sec Gen and thus Prime Minister Alkatiri in

a triumphalist manner, when the situation called for a change in outlook to be inclusive rather than confrontationalist.

Now the East Timor govt as part of their resolution has asked for help. Jose Ramos Horta has had to eat humble pie, Alkatiri as usual is nowhere to be seen or heard, Xanana's bad choices helped fuel the actions, and possibly his actions or inactions are designed to throw the onus on Alkatiri. Alkatiri had appointed on entirely political grounds and not competency grounds an interior/Police minister most regard as corrupt and who plays games that endanger security, and a Defence Minister who is hopeless. Fretilin and the Government have become hardline and divisive, not inclusive, and with lousy PR, and herein lies part of the problem. Further, it has known of the imminent oil and gas monies which now total over \$500m in a New York a/c, so why did it not implement meaningful development programs well before now? Thus it fuels resentment and a belief it is corrupt.

What is unusual for us as activists is that Alexander Downer has spoken well last night and this morning, (can't say the same for Nelson arguing that the situation is more dangerous now than in 1999 - what rubbish), and also we substantially agree with the editorials this morning not only in the SMH but also The Oz - gasp! Credit where its due.

However note that Horta asked for Police, perhaps with a small military for protection, but Downer will send Military. I hope they also send skilled civil reps to help negotiations - I'm available!

Oz govt helped create crisis:

But of course the Howard/Downer Govt has been a major player in precipitating this crisis. First, by abrogating since 1999 all the disputed oil revenues of around \$2bn from Corallinna/Laminaria to Australia, despite this area being disputed and almost certainly under UNCLOS rules belongs to East Timor, the Australian government has assured the East Timorese government and population of poverty, an incapacity to rebuild an economy to develop jobs etc, and even to allow people to rebuild, to provide adequate food etc, in other words, no economic dividend from independence, and thus developing discontent.

Second the Australian government has been the main player in forcing the UN to make earlier than prudent withdrawals of UN armed forces and adequate police and training personnel - even of military transport etc. Australia as well as Portugal has been the main trainer of both Military and Police, yet these officers are inadequately trained and resourced, and the Military does not provide a meaningful existence. (From my experience with Indigenous people in the early 70s I believe one should keep adequate support until it is clearly not needed, often for a decade or two, often until another generation takes over).

Third, the Australian government has denied support to civil society which seeks to discuss such issues and thus to help resolve them. This is a deterrent to leadership development, and a purely political misuse of the small amount of aid supplied anyway, something like 1/5th the revenues taken from East Timor, making that most impoverished nation Australia's biggest foreign aid donor. One wonders what demands Downer/Howard will make of the East Timor nation in recompense for this present operation. After all East Timor has begun its life as an independent nation under great difficulties. It must reconstruct social cohesion after 24 years of brutal and destructive foreign occupation, a foreign occupation enthusiastically supported by all Australian governments during that period. It must reconstruct its economy after the devastation of the Indonesian army's scorched earth policy in 1999.

Fourth, Australia has not supported the calls from civil society for justice for crimes committed during the Indonesian occupation 1975-1999, including when the UN was ostensibly running things August-September 1999. Even the leadership of East Timor government has found that realpolitik has required them to endorse the granting of Impunity to all Indonesian military - this is a slap in the face for all human rights advocated and all those abused. Until people can deal with such issues to their reasonable satisfaction then discontent will continue. The recent formidable CAVR report which conservatively showed that over 180,000 East Timorese had been killed during the Indonesian occupation (supported by Australia) has been buried as much as possible

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that East Timor's recent social and political life has been marked with unrest and conflict. This is part of many new countries' experience, especially those which are poor. All the East Timor politicians are doing their jobs for the first time. Solving these problems is an East Timorese affair, but with help now from other nations. One hopes that the military will have political and social understanding, and work closely with the East Timorese, and I believe this crisis can be resolved without further bloodshed. The East Timorese people deserve our support towards a peaceful and comfortable life. Their country is beautiful and so are most of the people.

Rob Wes

Rob Wesley-Smith