Papua and the Security Cooperation Treaty with Indonesia

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Papua and the Security Cooperation Treaty with Indonesia

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Essay - Papua and the Security Cooperation Treaty with Indonesia
3. Nautilus invites your response

Introduction

Victoria University's Richard Chauvel argues that while the Framework for Security Cooperation Agreement signed recently by Indonesia and Australia "reflects the Indonesian government's anxieties about the way the Papuans used their presence in Australia 'to champion their separatist aspirations'", but "does little to address to core issues of the conflict in Papua." Chauvel concludes that "the history of Australia-Indonesia tensions over East Timor and Papua, would suggest that reform in Papua is a prerequisite for good neighbourly relations."

Essay - Papua and the Security Cooperation Treaty with Indonesia

The 43 Papuan asylum seekers left an indelible mark on the Framework for Security Cooperation Agreement signed in Lombok on 13 November. [1] Negotiations for the agreement commenced long before the Papuans landed on Cape York in January 2006. However, the resolution of the tensions generated by the Papuans in Australia's relations with Indonesia became one of the principal objectives of the agreement, especially for Indonesia. Hassan Wirayuda, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, expressed the hope that the agreement would remove the distrust in the turbulent relationship. Yet the agreement does little to address to core issues of the conflict in Papua.

Article 2.3 of the agreement is the Papua provision. In it Indonesia and Australia agreed that they "…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". At the joint press conference with Alexander Downer in Lombok, Hassan Wirayuda argued that the agreement meant that Australia could no longer be used as a "staging post" for Papuan separatists. [2]

This provision accurately reflects the Indonesian government's anxieties about the way the Papuans used their presence in Australia "to champion their separatist aspirations". Yet, in the Australian political context, it credits the Papuan exiles and their Australian supporters with influence they have not been able to exercise, even in the months following the arrival of the asylum seekers when there was significant media attention given to Papua. Furthermore, Hugh White argues that there is no likelihood that Australia can or will fulfil its obligations under this provision of the agreement. White asserts that no Australian government would be prepared to act decisively to stop Papuan separatists, or other Indonesian dissidents, from campaigning in Australia. [3]

More importantly, the provision focuses attention on the symptoms of the Papua conflict rather than addressing the causes in Papua. In Indonesian thinking, the controversies surrounding the Papuan asylum seekers in Australia and the Lombok Agreement have deflected attention from the problems they confront in Papua itself. For some Indonesians 'Papua' has become an issue in the bilateral relationship with Australia.

Papua has presented Indonesia with complex and intractable governance challenges since the Dutch ceded the territory in 1962. Indonesia was able to impose its authority in the face of ad hoc, localised and sporadic guerrilla resistance led by the OPM (the Free Papua Organisation). However, Indonesia's military suppression of Papuan resistance fuelled the expansion and consolidation of a Papuan identity and the desire for independence. Indonesia's policy responses to the emergence of a non-violent independence movement after the fall of Soeharto have vacillated between accommodation and repression.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has not resolved the confusion and contradictions in the Papua policy he inherited from President Megawati. He supports the 2001 Special Autonomy Law as the framework for resolving the Papua conflict within the Indonesia state. The law promised substantial devolution of decision making powers and the distribution of up to 80% of government revenues, raised in Papua, to the province. The law also accommodated many values of Papuan nationalism. However, the new province of West Irian Jaya, established by Megawati in 2003 in the western part of Papua, in contravention of the spirit and letter of the Special Autonomy Law, continues to exist without a legal basis. Megawati established West Irian Jaya as part of her policy to divide the independence movement and undermine the implementation of the Special Autonomy Law. The Constitutional Court decision of November 2004 complicated President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's policy choices. The court decided that the law on which the new province of West Irian Jaya had been established, was unconstitutional, but nevertheless ruled that the province should be permitted to continue to exist. Two years after the court's decision the province continues to

function without a basis in law. The government's decision to hold elections for governor of West Irian Jaya in March 2006 has enhanced the new province's legitimacy and political reality, but not its legal status. In February 2006, the President added to the confusion surrounding the Indonesian government's policy intentions in Papua when he responded positively to the campaign for the establishment of yet another province in south Papua, centred on Merauke.

In addition to the establishment of the new province of West Irian Jaya, Megawati's strategy of divide and rule has also been reflected at a lower administrative level by the proliferation of district governments. Since 2003 the number of district governments has grown from 12 to 29, with the effect that already weak local governments have become even less capable of delivering government services. The proliferation of district governments in Papua has meant that experienced and qualified officials, especially Papuans, are spread even more thinly among the newly created administrations. The recently elected Governor of Papua, Barnabas Suebu, has recognised the weakness of the district governments by distributing development funds directly to villages, thus bypassing the local administrations.

Jakarta has been caught between two of its strategies to overcome pro-independence sentiment in Papua. It has succeeded in fragmenting the Papuan elite through the establishment of the new province of West Irian Jaya, entertaining the prospect of yet further partition and the proliferation of district governments. However, in so doing, it has undermined its capacity to deliver better services and promote economic development, which the government hopes will lessen Papuan resistance.

The cycle of violence persists in Papua. The Abepura demonstration of March 2006, in which five members of the Indonesian security forces were killed, was followed by the sweeping operations that terrorised local populations and the brutal treatment of those detained.

The long periods when Australia's relations with Indonesia were dominated by West New Guinea and East Timor suggest that it is these issues of governance in Papua and the behaviour of security forces that will shape future relations rather than the activities of a handful of Papuan exiles and their supporters in Australia.

In the Joint Press Conference, Alexander Downer gave just a hint of what one hopes he said to Hassan Wirayuda more frankly over lunch, when he noted the determination of the Indonesian government to deal with problems like Papua with the same diplomacy and goodwill as it handled the Aceh problem. Indeed, in an earlier statement, Downer asserted that the Indonesian Government was working on a resolution in Papua similar to that it had achieved in Aceh and that Australia supported the Indonesian objective of wide ranging autonomy for Papua. Downer insisted that the Indonesian Government was "…working hard to implement those things and they deserve to be congratulated, not constantly berated by people who think that Indonesia is still some kind of a dictatorship." [4]

In other respects, the Lombok Agreement identifies the areas of cooperation that make relations with Indonesia so critical for Australia. Hassan Wirayuda reacted strongly to the suggestions in the Australian press that the agreement gave Australia no benefits. He specifically cited Indonesia's role in controlling the flow of Afghan and Iraqi refugees transiting through Indonesia to Australia. The agreement provides a framework for cooperation in counter terrorism that has developed since the first Bali bombing. Illegal fishing and narcotic trafficking are just two other areas where Australia depends on Indonesian cooperation. The benefit for Australia in the Lombok Agreement was the manner in which the agreement brought together in a coherent framework diverse areas of cooperation, many of them already covered by ad hoc agreements.

Alexander Downer hoped this framework would provide "…the bedrock for the relationship for many

years to come". Asked what he thought was the most significant aspects of the agreement, Downer identified "…consolidating the agreement between our defence forces, our police, our intelligence agencies and other government agencies in areas like counter terrorism, people trafficking and people smuggling, drug trafficking - a whole raft of different security threats to our countries."

Accommodating Indonesian anxieties about the pro-independence campaigns of Papuan exiles and their supporters in Australia was part of the quid pro quo. The Australian government had been unnerved by the way Jakarta's responses during the Papuan asylum seekers crisis had threatened the areas of bilateral cooperation Australia most values.

Rodd McGibbon, in his Lowy Institute study, Pitfalls of Papua, identified two policy initiatives crucial for the resolution of the Papua conflict and consolidation of Australia's relations with Indonesia. [5] He argued that one of the greatest political failures of contemporary Australian foreign policy was weak public support for the relationship with Indonesia. Australian political leaders, he urged, needed to engage vigorously in the public debate about Papua and the importance of Indonesia to Australia's security interests. With respect to Indonesia, McGibbon contended that special autonomy represents the most promising framework for resolution of the conflict and the peaceful integration of Papua into Indonesia. How the struggle within the Indonesian government between the opponents and supporters of special autonomy is resolved will be a major influence on Papua's future.

In truth, these two policy initiatives are mutually dependent. If Alexander Downer and John Howard are to more vigorously argue the case for Papua's integration in Indonesia, their persuasiveness will be dependent on the Indonesian government's commitment to the effective implementation of special autonomy. As long as the impasse in Papua policy continues in Jakarta and as long as the high level of violence persists in the Indonesian governance of Papua, the more difficult it will be for Australian government leaders to argue the case for Papua's integration into Indonesia.

The Melbourne-based Indonesian journalist, Dewi Anggraeni, suggests that part of the problem in the bilateral relationship is the lack of effort on the part of both governments. She argues that "…neither Indonesia nor Australia has spent the necessary time, energy and resources they would otherwise have done if they were serious about the friendship." [6] There has been something of this lack of seriousness and unwillingness to engage in public debate in Alexander Downer's promotion of the Lombok agreement. The most sensitive issue for the Indonesians and the most contentious issue domestically in Australia - Papua and separatism in Indonesia - Downer has discussed only in response to journalists' questions and then only in the negative.

Developing close and cooperative relations with Indonesia, on the one hand, and promoting good governance, self-government and breaking the cycle of violence in Papua, on the other, are not incompatible objectives. Indeed, the history of Australia - Indonesia tensions over East Timor and Papua, would suggest that reform in Papua is a prerequisite for good neighbourly relations.

Information about the author

Dr Richard Chauvel teaches at Victoria University, Melbourne. His research has focused on political and social change in eastern Indonesia, most particularly in Maluku and Papua, together with Australia-Indonesia relations. He was a consultant for the International Crisis Group in Papua and his report was published as Indonesia: Ending Repression in Irian Jaya 20 September 2001, ICG Asia Report No 23, Jakarta/Brussels. Two volumes of essays on Papua were published as The Land of Papua and the Indonesian State, (Monash University). He is the author of two policy papers on Papua for the East West Center Washington's project on "The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflict in Asia"; The Papua Conflict: Jakarta's Perceptions and Policies (with Ikrar Nusa Bhakti) and

Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation.
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End notes

[1] Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and Australia on the framework for security cooperation.

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[2] Dr Hassan Wirajuda and Alexander Downer, 13 November 2006, Joint Press Conference with Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Hassan Wirajuda, Agreement on Framework for Security Cooperation.

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[3] Hugh White, December 2006, Security: The Lombok Pact's Empty Promise, Far Eastern Economic Review, December 2006. [subscription required]

http://www.feer.com/articles1/2006/0612/p026.html

[4] Minister for Foreign Affairs, Doorstop Interview, Framework Agreement on Security Cooperation between Australia and Indonesia, 8 November 2006.

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[5] Rodd McGibbon, 2006, Pitfalls of Papua: understanding the conflict and its place in Australia-Indonesia relations, Lowy Institute paper 13. [PDF]

http://www.lowyinstitute.org/PublicationGet.asp?i=475

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Nautilus invites your response

The Austral Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to the editor, Jane Mullett: austral@rmit.edu.au. Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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