

## The anti-FRETILIN hit list, secret briefings and the co-option of Australian foreign policy, 1974-75

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Amongst Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) papers in the Australian National Archives in early 2015 I came across a peculiar document. Entitled, *Steps to Prevent Communist Agitators to Escape* (Taylor 1975), it was handed to the First Secretary and Counsellor of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, Alan Taylor, in September 1975, some two and a half months before the Indonesian invasion, by Harry Tjan, an intelligence officer with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the think tank and diplomatic wing of the Indonesian intelligence agency OPSUS. Dated 29 August 1975, just after the departure of the Portuguese administration to Atauro Island and the establishment of the *de facto* Fretilin government, the handwritten document states that measures should be taken, ‘to avoid the escape of communist guilt leaders’ and that, ‘through some of the individuals herein referred it will be possible to establish the links between PKI and Fretilin’. It also states that, ‘further reports will be produced when the times comes in Dili’.

Amongst other things it alleges that, ‘the communism adopted by Fretilin is the same kind of that developed in Mozambique by Peking man Samora Machel and...Amilcar Cabral, the late President of PAIGC’. Allegations against individuals include the claims that, ‘a Goan origin man named Roque Rodrigues’, led a group which, ‘started up the communisation of Fretilin’, that a Mary (sic) Alkatiri, ‘is signalled as the man who have (sic) obtained contacts for Fretilin and PKI’, and that Nicolau Lobato, Francisco Xavier do Amaral and Roque Rodrigues, ‘established contacts with Cuba, Chinese Peking, Russia, Fremlio (Mozambique) MPLA (Angola) PAIGC (Guinea-Bissau) and other communist countries including the heads of Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)’.

The list of nineteen ‘suspected communist agitators’ also includes Antonio Carvarino, the Fretilin writer and successor to Nicolau Lobato, killed immediately upon his capture in February 1979, Jose Ramos Horta, who in exile campaigned tirelessly for his nation’s liberation, and Rosa Muki Bonaparte, secretary of the Popular Organisation of Timorese Women, executed on the Dili waterfront on the first day of the invasion, 7 December 1975.

The document raises a number of questions. Is it authentic? If so, why was it translated into English and handed to an Australian diplomat? What impact did it have on DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) thinking or Australian policy? To answer them it is necessary to examine a series of briefings provided by OPSUS to Australian officials in the year and half preceding the invasion.

As Monk documents, the Indonesian intelligence organisation BAKIN, under which OPSUS operated, and the Australian Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) exchanged intelligence from 1971, and Harry Tjan himself was in contact with the embassy from his days as an anti-communist student activist under Sukarno (Monk 2001, 189). As Ambassador Furlonger reported in a cable to Graham Feakes of the DFA South Asia Division, Tjan approached Jakarta embassy First Secretary Jan Arriens on 2 July 1974 to inform him that he intended to submit a paper to Suharto recommending a clandestine operation to ensure East Timor opted for incorporation into Indonesia. Tjan also told Arriens that he saw a role for Australia in ‘neutralising’ unfavourable international opinion towards an Indonesian takeover. Furlonger commented, ‘We are, in effect, being consulted. They clearly expect a response from our side: a failure to do so soon will be taken by them, I fear, as tacit agreement’ (Way 2000, 63).

Feakes responded cautiously, stating that while Tjan’s briefing was ‘most valuable’, ‘we should not encourage the Indonesians in any way to talk to us along those lines’ as ‘any hint’ of Australian acquiescence to such activities would be damaging to its domestic credibility and international reputation (Way 2000, 70-1). Despite his misgivings, however, the briefings continued with remarkable candour, given impetus by Whitlam’s indications to Suharto in Wonosobo in September 1974 that he favoured integration (Way 2000, 95-100).

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Many of the references to the potential use of force in them predate considerably any armed instability in the territory. Shortly before the Wonosobo meeting, for example, OPSUS operative Lim Bian Kie told Furlonger that if Portuguese Timor did not vote for incorporation the use of force would not be ruled out and discussed scenarios for fomenting disorder (Way 2000, 123). In October 1974 Tjan told Arriens that Indonesia's determination to take over East Timor had reached 'an almost irresistible momentum'. Arriens himself raised the prospect of military intervention and his report, written quite early in the process when peaceful decolonisation otherwise appeared entirely feasible, indicates something of the tone and orientation of such discussions:

I said that I imagined that if Indonesia was seriously contemplating military intervention that there were ways and means of doing this. I speculated that the intention behind Benny Moerdani's three months comment<sup>2</sup> was that this would give Indonesia time to mount a campaign of infiltration and subversion that would make a takeover necessary if not altogether presentable. Tjan said that he did not know about such things in detail but that he thought my outline was 'very probable' (Way 2000, 129).

In a conversation with Taylor in March 1975 Tjan discussed scenarios to provoke a reaction by Dili or Timorese parties to create a pretext for intervention (Way 2000, 220-1). In a dispatch to Foreign Minister Don Willesee in June Ambassador Woolcott acknowledged that an act of self-determination would be likely to lead to independence, but that nevertheless, 'Indonesia's covert activities in Portuguese Timor will be stepped up.....'Refugees' are being prepared at Atambua to return to Portuguese Timor to play their part ..... In short Indonesia hopes to repeat the success achieved in the West Irian act of free choice' (Way 2000, 267). In a meeting with Taylor and DFA Indonesian section chief Michael Curtain in June, Tjan flagged Portuguese proposals for the Macao conference as unacceptable, discussed scenarios for subversion and speculated on possible international reactions to an Indonesian use of force. He added that Australia had, 'helped push Indonesia in the direction of a decision on integration after the April 25 revolution in Portugal' (Way 2000, 281-2). On 10 July Tjan informed his Australian contacts that, 'The blueprint of Indonesia's plan for Portuguese Timor's incorporation had been worked out. At one end of the spectrum...was Portuguese Timor's voluntary decision to join Indonesia. At the other extreme was armed intervention...without provocation' (Way 2000, 290-1).

DFA attitudes are revealed in a letter from Secretary Alan Renouf to Heads of Mission in March 1975, during the UDT/Fretilin coalition. He states that while military intervention could not be ruled out, 'those within the Indonesian administration who favour a program of more or less discreet pressure and persuasion - and no doubt subversion - as distinct from direct military intervention...have been in the ascendancy' (Way 2000, 223). Having accepted an Indonesian takeover as inevitable but with evidence suggesting it would not enjoy popular Timorese support, Indonesian subversion of the decolonisation process was accepted as necessary and those in the Suharto regime favouring it over direct intervention viewed as moderates deserving of support.

After the civil war and the coming to *de facto* power of Fretilin, Indonesia instigated *Operation Flamboyant*, a covert military campaign launched from West Timor that was both illegal and lethal, with, for example, over seventy civilians killed in an 8 September attack on Ermera alone (UNSW Canberra). OPSUS operatives made sure to keep their Australian contacts well informed. On 2 September, for example, Tjan and Lim Bian Kie told Taylor that, 'Indonesian forces would ensure that result of any pursuant decolonisation program would be integration with Indonesia' and outlined support for anti-Fretilin forces (Way 2000, 371-2). A September 3 cable from Woolcott informed Canberra that, 'We now have from Lim Bian Kie ... and Tjan ... a detailed account of Indonesia's planning' including Indonesian 'volunteers', arms, and efforts to cut off food supplies to Fretilin in Dili (Way 2000, 377). A 30 September cable from the embassy reports that, 'Tjan told us today that...the President had agreed to increased Indonesian assistance to the anti-Fretilin forces... He said that up to 3800 Indonesian soldiers from Java would be put into Portuguese Timor gradually. Atsabe would be their base' (Way 2000, 439). Several weeks later a report was more explicit still. 'We have received from Tjan today, 13 October, more details of the Indonesian assistance to anti-Fretilin forces in Portuguese Timor ... the main thrust of the operation would begin on 15 October. It would be through Balibo and Maliana/Atsabe' (Way 2000, 462).

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<sup>2</sup> Moerdani had been reported as saying that Indonesia was capable of taking over Portuguese Timor in three days.

Meanwhile in public Australian representatives told a different story. The DFA position was officially one of 'non-involvement' in Portuguese Timor, based on the premise, stated repeatedly in Department documentation, that Australia was not a 'party principal' to the situation. Nevertheless, DFA officials and Australian political leaders clearly saw it as their role to defend and support Indonesia.

During a visit to Australia by Horta in December 1974 DFA representatives assured him that, 'Indonesian leaders had stated on a number of occasions that...they would scrupulously respect the outcome of an act of self-determination' (Way 2000, 154). Whitlam's principal private secretary wrote to the then united Fretilin/UDT leadership on 17 March 1975, stating that Whitlam, 'has noted what you say about Indonesian activities ... these reports have been emphatically denied by the Indonesian Government. The Australian Government, whose opposition to any resort to military force is well known, was glad to receive this confirmation' (Uren 1975). In a speech to an Australian Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Japan on 17 June Willesee assured his audience that, 'The Indonesians say they agree with all of us' regarding self-determination (Way 2000, 279). On 26 August Whitlam told the House of Representatives that, 'Indonesian policy is to respect the right of the people of Portuguese Timor to self-determination and Indonesian leaders have often denied that Indonesia has any territorial ambitions towards Portuguese Timor' (Way 2000 347). He wrote to the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia on 18 September assuring them that, 'President Soeharto has been clearly and strongly committed to a process of peaceful decolonisation ... thus far, at least, Indonesia has exercised considerable restraint in her actions' (Whitlam 1975).

Through their acquiescence Australian representatives from the highest levels down effectively provided their assent. Through public disinformation and denial of what they knew, they took this a step further, effectively becoming propagandists not only for the Suharto regime, but for the faction within it working most stridently to undermine the Timorese decolonisation process, including through subversion and violence. This course did not unfold without some expressing concerns. In a minute dated 12 September Assistant Secretary Walter Miller noted the dangers of a protracted struggle an Indonesian invasion may produce, suggesting instead that Australia, 'attempt to influence events in favour of Indonesia accepting, with whatever concessions, guarantees and safeguards it can obtain, the prospect of a Fretilin-dominated independent East Timor'. He also noted that, 'The Indonesians have, shrewdly, compromised us by making sure that we know their plans for covert intervention in some detail' (Way 2000 418/9). In July Willesee is reported by Feakes as expressing concern about international reactions to Indonesian intervention, even suggesting that Woolcott point out to the Indonesians that Australia had voted to exclude South Africa from the United Nations (Way 2000, 294). In a minute to Whitlam on 20 August he discussed the 'embarrassing' situation Australia might find itself in should Indonesia take military action, stating, 'I am also concerned that a failure to provide our views at this juncture may limit the range of reactions to any Indonesian military action available to us since the Indonesians would be able to argue to us that we were forewarned of their thinking and did not demur' (Way 2000, 320).

However, the nature and content of the OPSUS briefings acted to constrain policy options. Officials felt a need to protect their sources and to conceal the compromised position the briefings had put them in. This became clear when the increasingly obvious nature of the Indonesian incursions made a public protest by the Australian government inevitable. On 17 October Renouf wrote to Willesee that, 'the nature and extent of Indonesian involvement will soon become apparent' which would put 'pressure on the Government to condemn the Indonesian intervention'. He therefore advocated a carefully worded statement aimed at minimising damage to the Indonesian relationship, expressing 'extreme disappointment that the situation has developed in such a way that the Indonesian Government has apparently found it necessary to seek to resolve the issue by force...', while 'balancing' this with criticism of Fretilin and Portugal. Noting this would involve disputing Indonesian claims denying military involvement, he stated that nevertheless, 'we do not believe it will be possible to remain silent beyond a certain point' (Way 2000, 477-8).

Woolcott responded that even a private representation to Suharto or Malik would 'place Tjan and Moerdani in a most difficult position vis-a-vis their Government' arguing that, 'such statements... could presumably only be made on the basis of intelligence or...information given to us here in the strictest confidence' and would compromise sources, betray trust and damage the intelligence relationship. He proposed instead to 'cast our representations here in the context of media reports' (Way 2000, 487). Whitlam wrote, 'I find this convincing' on the cable. The eventual statement referred only to 'reports' which, 'suggest a degree of Indonesian military intervention' and balanced its 'extreme disappointment'

with Jakarta with criticism of Fretilin and Portugal (Way 2000, 530-2). This would have sent a message to the Indonesian hawks that such official criticisms were intended for little more than public consumption.

Some researchers point to the allegedly high quality of the intelligence obtained through the briefings; Monk, for example, describes it as being, 'of the kind that secret intelligence officers dream about' (Monk, 2001, 109). There is evidence, however, that they were in fact a selective mixture of information and disinformation aimed at achieving OPSUS objectives. A cable from Canberra to Lisbon and Jakarta on 30 September notes that Tjan appears to have deliberately misled his Australian contacts concerning Indonesian communications with Lisbon (Way 2000, 438). There are also inconsistencies in statements concerning Foreign Minister Malik. Tjan sowed distrust of him as early as August 1974, informing DFA officials that the Foreign Minister did not trust them (Way 2000, 80). In a meeting with Charge d'Affaires Malcom Dan on 13 February 1975 Tjan described Malik as, 'the most extreme of the hard-liners', claiming he, 'had gone from one extreme position to the other on Portuguese Timor'. A month later he claimed that Malik had been 'very tough' in a ministerial meeting, advocating integration 'by force if necessary' with Murtopo in contrast taking a more moderate position (Way 2000, 220-1).

However, evidence from Malik himself and his associates provides a different account. In November 1974 Malik's private secretary Alex Alatas told Dan that Malik, 'was very conscious of the damage that would be done to Indonesia internationally if any precipitate military action were taken' and was concerned about, 'the views of some influential groups...in the Indonesian Government structure concerning Portuguese Timor', particularly 'some of Ali Murtopo's advisors' who 'tended to favour the use of force' (Dan, 1974). In August 1975, after the UDT coup, Malik told Woolcott that he had argued against intervention and had, in Woolcott's words, 'persuaded the President that Indonesia's first step must be to persuade the Portuguese Government in Lisbon to assert its control in Timor' (Way 2000, 310).

DFA officials viewed Malik as largely isolated in the decision making process regarding East Timor (Way 2000, 80, 516). However, it is clear that by privileging the OPSUS channel of consultation over that of the Indonesian Foreign Ministry they would have contributed to making this so. This was effectively an intervention in Indonesian factional politics in support of the hawks. Given the above inconsistencies, the 'hit list' cannot be accepted at face value just because it came from an OPSUS operative. That said, it displays imperfect but significant knowledge of Fretilin and the situation in Dili. A likely source is the Indonesian consulate in Dili, evacuated in August 1975. The report of the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation *Chega* records testimony regarding the existence of an Indonesian 'hit list' of individuals to be targeted for execution (CAVR 2013, 209), and the existence of such a document is certainly consistent with Indonesian actions after the invasion. Tjan's purpose in providing it in English to an Australian diplomat is clear. It was an attempt, and a successful one, of procuring Australian complicity with planned Indonesian actions, of creating a situation in which, as Willesee put it, 'we were forewarned of their thinking and did not demur'.

It is arguable that Tjan and OPSUS need not have bothered. The covering letter from Taylor indicates the document was forwarded to Secretary Renouf on 23 September. This researcher has been unable to find any further reference to it in the archives. There is certainly no evidence that it rang any alarm bells or caused a re-examination of policy. This is consistent with DFA documentation from this period, which contains virtually no reference at all to any concern for human rights. On a reasonably regular basis, however, Portuguese diplomats did raise such concerns with their Australian counterparts. On 3 September 1975, for example, Portuguese Ambassador to Australia Antonio Matias invoked to Feakes the spectre of the Indonesian massacres of 1965-66, telling him that, 'Lisbon feared that if the Indonesians were to intervene in Portuguese Timor, many Timorese would die.' Feakes made no direct response to the Ambassador's fears, informing him instead that, 'the Indonesian Government had, in the main, not been responsible for the deaths' and that, 'Traditional differences and rivalries were a major contributing factor' (Way 2000, 374).

A small exception to this pattern can be found in a cable from Renouf to Woolcott on 7 September, in which he states that, 'We may not agree with Portuguese apprehension but there is at least some reason for their fear that in 'restoring law and order'...Indonesia might have treated, and still would treat, FRETILIN harshly' (Way 2000, 477). This brief reference appears entirely singular in nature, the only mention of anything resembling any concern for the human rights of the East Timorese this researcher has been able to find in the DFA archives for this period. Human rights were simply not on the DFA horizon, nor apparently on that of their political overseers.

However, while not discussed explicitly, the likelihood abuses would occur was clearly understood. On 2 September Taylor detailed a discussion with Tjan and Lim Bian Kie regarding intervention. He reports, 'Indonesian forces would ensure that result of any pursuant decolonisation program would be integration with Indonesia. Indonesian forces could not have their hands tied during this period' (Way 2000, 371).

As Chega documents, 'The day of invasion saw widespread atrocities committed by Indonesian troops against East Timorese civilians, including summary executions and massacres' (CAVR, 60). Fretilin's Alarico Fernandes sent radio reports of the atrocities which were reported in the Australian media. While Australia reluctantly supported the UN General Assembly resolution of December 12 'deploring' the invasion, no Australian concerns were expressed regarding these abuses through public nor private channels. Australia was acquiescent to Indonesia's expressed contention that it should not have its hands tied, as it was to remain for most of the following twenty-four years of occupation.

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