

Spy Intercepts Confirm Australia's Bloody East Timor Secret

International Editor Hamish McDonald reveals the critical evidence Australia's spy chiefs have kept hidden, as trials begin in Jakarta today over violence during East Timor's independence vote.

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Australia's bloody East Timor secret

Spy intercepts confirm Government knew of Jakarta's hand in massacres

By Hamish McDonald, International Editor

The Australian Government sat on explosive intelligence material which showed the direct involvement of senior Indonesian army generals in the violence which swept East Timor in 1999.

Defence sources in Canberra have given details of how Australian electronic eavesdroppers intercepted secret messages between the Indonesian officers who ran a campaign of fear to deter the East Timorese from voting for independence.

But virtually none of the collected evidence, which could be vital to finding the masterminds responsible for crimes against humanity, has been shared with United Nations investigators.

This is because of concerns that Indonesia would adopt countermeasures to foil future interception operations by the Defence Signals Directorate.

Transcripts of the DSD intercepts revealed to the Herald show a covert chain of command down from the then President B.J. Habibie's co-ordinating minister for politics and security, General Feisal Tanjung, to army generals and colonels on the ground in East Timor.

It provides evidence for the first time that Tanjung, a career special forces and paratroop officer, used a network of similar minded officers in a campaign to avert a vote for independence in the United Nations-supervised ballot on August 30, 1999.

When this failed to their enormous surprise, a DSD intercept shows the officers then organised the forced deportation of one third of East Timor's population and the destruction of infrastructure, with the assistance of two other ministers in Habibie's cabinet the former generals A.M. Hendropriyono and Mohammad Yunus Yosfiah.

Three Indonesian army and police generals who were in charge of security for East Timor in 1999 are among 18 suspects whose trials begin in Jakarta today over four militia rampages in Liquica, Dili and Suai. But the generals who planned and directed the militia operation appear likely to escape indictment.

The leak of highly classified intelligence material is the first time raw DSD intercepts relating to a contemporary event have been disclosed. It reflects deep disquiet in defence circles that Canberra at first downplayed the high-level Indonesian military

involvement with the militias blaming it on "rogue elements" and since then has not used it to help war crimes investigations.

Intercepts in February 1999 show Jakarta had sent detachments of special forces, code-named Tribuana and Venus, to begin black operations in East Timor, and that a commander based in Bali, Major-General Mahidin Simbolon, was referring to a militia group as "his crew".

As the militia campaign geared up with massacres of independence supporters in April, the DSD picked up conversations in which the East Timor army commander, Colonel Tono Suratman, is supervising the notorious militia leader Eurico Guterres.

Other messages include the allocation of radio frequencies by the Indonesian military command in Jakarta to militia groups, and a general in Jakarta's military intelligence agency organising T-shirts for demonstrations against the United Nations mission supervising the ballot.

The intercepts show the key officer running the militia in East Timor, Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim, was ready to assassinate Guterres if he changed sides after the vote.

One intercept indicates that just after the arrival on September 20 of the international security force led by Australia's Major-General Peter Cosgrove, the covert campaign chiefs had sent in hit squads of special forces troops, code-named Kiper-9, to target independence leaders and turncoats from the pro-Indonesian cause.

The unfinished story of accountability in East Timor hangs over moves by the United States and Australia to improve contacts with Indonesian military and security agencies to pursue their campaign against terrorism.

The retired general Hendropriyono, who as transmigration minister in 1999 helped set up the camps into which East Timorese deportees were driven, was recently made head of Indonesia's National Intelligence Body.

On his visit to Jakarta last month, the Prime Minister, John Howard, accepted an Indonesian proposal to step up intelligence exchanges with this agency.

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Silence over a crime against humanity

International Editor Hamish McDonald reveals the critical evidence Australia's spy chiefs have kept hidden, as trials begin in Jakarta today over violence during East Timor's independence vote.

The evidence is contained in the most tightly held archive in Canberra: the electronic data base of the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD), the result of months

intercepting secret communications between Indonesian officers involved in a shadowy campaign to thwart East Timorese hopes of independence in 1999.

Some details of this vast intelligence record have been revealed for the first time to the Herald by senior defence community sources in Canberra. They are dismayed at a huge crime against humanity, committed on Australia's doorstep and under the eyes of the United Nations, remaining unexposed.

The DSD intercepts map out the chain of command, from the local militias and covert Indonesian forces in East Timor up to one of the most feared military men in Jakarta, General Feisal Tanjung, whose involvement has so far escaped mention in human rights investigations.

The defence sources also say that some of this critical intelligence in the first half of 1999, pointing to high-level Indonesian involvement, was not included in intelligence exchanged with United States' agencies at a time when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was blaming the militia violence on "rogue elements" in the Indonesian army.

The tensions this caused between Canberra's Defence Intelligence Organisation and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) have been seen as contributing to the June 1999 suicide of the DIO liaison officer in Washington, Lieutenant-Colonel Merv Jenkins, after he was questioned by DFAT security officials about "Australian Eyes Only" material shared with American counterparts.

The intercepts, contained in files classified as "Secret Spoke" (meaning derived from intercepted clear-voice telephone calls) or "Top Secret Umbra" (derived from encrypted or scrambled voice communications), have not been shared with UN or other investigators.

But they include details of command and communications hierarchies that would provide vital evidence for international-standard war crimes tribunals, such as those prosecutions being mounted in The Hague against politicians and generals in the former Yugoslavia.

Instead of setting up such a tribunal for East Timor, the UN has stood back for 21/2 years to let Jakarta fulfil its promise to mount its own trials of those responsible for the 1999 massacres, abductions, coerced population movements and destruction.

In Jakarta, the first trial is due to begin today, with former East Timor governor Abilio Soares and former provincial police chief Brigadier-General Timbul Silaen accused of crimes against humanity involving widespread attacks on civilians.

Silaen is one of three generals among the 18 military personnel and civilian militia leaders accused of participation or responsibility in some of the more large-scale acts of murder in 1999. The other two are Major-General Adam Damiri, former head of the Udayana regional command, which included East Timor, and Brigadier-General Tono Suratman, who was East Timor military commander for much of 1999.

To the extent they face substantial punishment the three still seem to be in the pipeline for promotion within the army and police these generals and a number of

colonels and junior officers appear to be the sacrifices to appease foreign and local concerns.

The senior generals who were more closely supervising the militia campaign on the ground in East Timor, and who reported directly to top military figures in Jakarta, have been left off the list of accused, although some were named as suspects in Indonesia's special human rights commission report in February 2000.

So far, it appears the Indonesian legal process, while concentrating on specific incidents of terror, has not attempted to lay overall blame for the militia campaign ahead of the August 30, 1999, vote, or for the systematic drive after the result was announced to deport the population and lay waste to the territory.

The Indonesian armed forces commander and defence minister at the time, General Wiranto, was forced to resign from his later cabinet post as co-ordinating political and security minister after the February 2000 report said he carried moral responsibility for the violence, given that Indonesia had guaranteed security for East Timor's referendum.

But now Wiranto also appears to be a fall guy, in terms of political, if not legal, responsibility. In all the inquiries so far, little attention has been given to the role of Feisal Tanjung, Wiranto's predecessor as armed forces commander then as political-security minister, whose pivotal role in instigating, planning and executing the militia campaign is brought into focus by the DSD intercepts.

Normally, the political-security position in the Indonesian cabinet has little executive responsibility or clout within the Indonesia military, compared with that of the commander. But the weighting of the two roles seems to have been reversed in 1999 because of the personalities and records of the officers involved.

Wiranto was a sociable some say weak political general who had risen to senior ranks through his positions in the entourage of former president Soeharto, who had been forced out of office by popular protest in May 1998. Throughout 1999 he kept an eye out for his prospects in Jakarta as political parties courted the powerful military following general elections in June.

TOUGH-minded Feisal Tanjung had spent much of his career in the feared Special Forces, known as Kopassus, or the paratroop units of the Strategic Reserve. He had associations with operations in East Timor from the earliest occupation days in 1975.

Tanjung appears to have operated a chain of command parallel to that wielded by General Wiranto, using officers with Kopassus and East Timor backgrounds, especially the two major-generals Zacky Anwar Makarim and Sjafrie Sjamsuddin assigned as "liaison officers" to the UN mission running the ballot in East Timor.

Most of these officers were, like Tanjung, associated with the "Green" or conspicuously Islamic faction active in the Indonesian forces in the last years of the Soeharto era. Wiranto and key aides like then lieutenant-general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono belonged to the "Red and White" or more secular nationalist faction (the name derived from Indonesia's national flag).

Because of his political ambitions, Wiranto may have been happy to distance himself from the dirty work involved in keeping East Timor within Indonesia. His colleagues may have been equally content to preserve his political acceptability in order to maintain the military's privileged position. This meant the crescendo of protests made to Wiranto by Canberra and other foreign capitals about the obvious military collusion with the militias went to the wrong address. Equally, Wiranto's promises of fair behaviour by the security forces carried little weight.

According to the Defence sources, the Indonesian embassy in Canberra was also out of the loop. DSD intercepted several queries by the then defence attache in Canberra, Brigadier-General Judi Magio Yusuf, to his Jakarta superiors asking for clarification of atrocities being reported from East Timor. He was routinely told these were foreign press fabrications and to ignore them.

Nine specific intercepts detailed by the Defence sources, plus accounts of other patterns of command and consultation at critical points in 1999, reveal some of the key officers and strategies in the covert campaign to retain East Timor.

On February 9 less than a fortnight after then president Habibie's announcement that the East Timorese would have an early choice between wider autonomy within Indonesia or independence DSD intercepted messages confirming that two Indonesian special forces units, codenamed Tribuana and Venus, had arrived in East Timor to join undercover operations.

The East Timor military command, abbreviated to Korem 164, had already been using armed local auxiliaries and militias since the latter months of 1998 to counter the popular unrest that had been growing since Soeharto's fall.

On February 14, DSD heard the Dili militia leader Eurico Guterres telephone the Tribuana unit about the condition of an injured member of the militia group, which was called Mahidi. Tribuana told Guterres: "We know that Brig-Gen Simbolon is concerned that one of his crew is injured."

This refers to then Brigadier-General Mahidin Simbolon, who was chief of staff in the Bali-based Udayana regional command, which included East Timor. A former East Timor commander, Simbolon was close to the Mahidi leader Cancio de Cavalho, whose coined name for the group (Mahidi, from the Indonesian words meaning "Live or Die for Integration") was a tribute to the Indonesian officer.

On May 5, Indonesia's commander in East Timor, then Colonel Tono Suratman, was intercepted phoning Guterres to ask where he was massing his militia group for a show of force in Dili, the territory's capital. Guterres reported 400 militias waiting outside a city hotel.

On June 1, DSD intercepted Colonel Suratman telling Guterres: "Don't deal with me directly. Contact me via Bambang [referring to Major Bambang Wisnumurti, the intelligence chief in Suratman's command]."

On August 8, DSD intercepted a message from military headquarters in Jakarta, allocating radio frequencies for use by pro-Indonesian groups. This was one of a series of frequency allocations that were intercepted routine signals but the kind that

provide crucial pieces of evidence for war crimes prosecutors. The point of contact for the militia groups was another intelligence officer, a Lieutenant Masbuku, in Suratman's Korem 164 headquarters in Dili.

On August 9, a message stated that Director "A" in Jakarta's military intelligence agency BAIS, a Brigadier-General Arifuddin, had organised flags and other material for a demonstration against Unamet, the UN mission. Arifuddin said 5000 T-shirts had been prepared, and 10,000 ordered.

In intercepts in a file dated September 4, and classified "Top Secret Umbra", Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim is making last minute calls to find out how the count of the votes from five days earlier is going (the result, a 78.5 per cent majority for independence, was later announced by the UN that morning).

Anwar spoke to a police officer named Andreas and asked how the count was going. The police officer said that with 50 per cent of the vote counted, only about 20 per cent seemed to be for the autonomy-within-Indonesia option. Anwar appeared incredulous, asking: "Are you sure? How can it be?" He pointed out that all across East Timor, households had been displaying the red and white Indonesian flag.

Anwar also spoke to Brigadier-General Glennly Kairupan, head of another special team appointed by General Feisal Tanjung, for pointers to the impending result, and to the East Timorese activist leading Jakarta's political campaign in the ballot, Basilio Araujo who said it was obvious the poll was fixed.

While speaking to Araujo, General Anwar also asked him to keep a close eye on Eurico Guterres. Anwar said Guterres had a relative who was a Catholic nun, and might easily be persuaded to jump to the independence side. "I'll take care of him if he goes over to the other side," Anwar said.

ONCE the ballot's result was announced on September 4, the Indonesian authorities on the ground moved quickly to adapt existing contingency plans for evacuation of pro-integration elements and Indonesian residents.

Across the central and western parts of East Timor, people were driven from their homes and shepherded to land or sea transport to West Timor or other parts of Indonesia. The aim, apparently, was to discredit the UN ballot as rigged, by suggesting that a majority of Timorese were voting with their feet in accordance with their true wishes, or to create conditions for partition of the territory. Over the grim two weeks this scheme was carried out, before the arrival of the Australian-led international force Interfet on September 20, DSD picked up numerous scrambled telephone conversations between General Tanjung in Jakarta and General Anwar in Timor discussing details, the Defence sources say.

In addition, DSD intercepted other discussions about the population transfer involving General Anwar and two ministers in the Habibie government, both with intelligence and special forces backgrounds. One was Lieutenant-General A.M.Hendropriyono, the minister for the former inter-island "transmigration" scheme, the other Lieutenant-General Yunus Yosfiah, the information minister.

On September 21, as Interfet was still landing troops in Dili and establishing an uneasy interregnum with Indonesian forces, DSD intercepted a phone call to the veteran pro-Indonesian political leader Francisco Xavier Lopez da Cruz, informing him that Kopassus had formed special hit-squads code-named "Kiper-9" to hunt down pro-independence elements and pro-Indonesian figures who changed sides.

A final intercept revealed by the sources, reported on October 5, details a message from the East Nusatenggara provincial police commander to the police chief in the provincial capital Kupang (in West Timor). The local police chief is reminded that some visitors from the US State Department are about to visit camps holding relocated East Timorese. He is to make sure the visitors get the impression the refugees are free of harassment.

The generals who figure in the command chain of this campaign aside from Damiri, Suratman and Silaen are all free of legal charge. Feisal Tanjung is active in party politics since losing ministerial office with the end of the Habibie presidency in October 1999, along with former information minister Yunus Yosfiah. Damiri's former chief of staff in the Udayana command, Mahidin Simbolon, has been promoted to his own command, in Papua, where local independence activists fear he could pursue a militia strategy against them, and where Kopassus soldiers are suspected of murdering the Papuan Council leader Theys Eluay.

Zacky Anwar Makarim remains in the army, attached to the TNI headquarters without specific assignment. Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, who is among army officers resisting legal summonses to testify on violence against students in early 1998 (when he was Jakarta garrison chief), has been appointed official TNI spokesman.

The former transmigration minister who helped organise the mass deportations in September 1999, General Hendropriyono, has had a revived career, being made head of the new National Intelligence Body created by President Megawati Sukarnoputri, whom he had cultivated in her opposition years against Soeharto.

Only the decades of impunity enjoyed by the Indonesian security forces make the country's leadership unabashed by the irony that Hendropriyono and Sjamsuddin are now the public faces of a TNI and intelligence service being asked to join the War against Terror.