

West Papua and New Zealand Foreign Policy

During the years when Indonesia occupied East Timor, New Zealand backed Indonesia while making low impact representations about human rights. This policy was consistent under both Labour and National Governments. New Zealand's West Papua policy stance is in a similar mould.

On a positive note, New Zealand is said to be proactive on behalf of West Papua at the annual Pacific Islands Forum, where key discussions are kept confidential. For example, Prime Minister Helen Clark was reported to have taken the initiative to call for the inclusion of West Papua in the Forum communiqué at the 2007 meeting.¹ However, a scrutiny of government documents covering the last seven years² reveals that New Zealand affirms its support for Indonesia's 'territorial integrity' and its engagement with West Papua is focused on funding 'acceptable' aid projects.

New Zealand hasn't always been on Indonesia's side over West Papua. New Zealand supported the Netherlands and its moves to prepare West Papua for self-determination in the early 1960s. New Zealand politicians and diplomats unequivocally affirmed their commitment to the principle of self-determination when the issue was debated at the United Nations.³

At the time of the so called 'Act of Free Choice' in 1969, New Zealand media coverage was critical of Indonesia's role: 'a tormented and impoverished little country is being subjected to the farce of what must be the most contrived 'free election' outside the communist bloc.'⁴ But New Zealand was one of the 84 nations which supported the United Nations resolution which recognised the Act of Free Choice.

¹ Islands Business, Cover Story 'Forum's increasing relevance Is it becoming more of a regional cop?', November 2007

² NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Documents released under the Official Information Act to Keith Locke M.P. or to Maire Leadbeater, Spokesperson Indonesia Human Rights Committee, Auckland

³ For example Prime Minister Holyoake told the UN in 1963 that a 'just and lasting solution' for the Papuans 'must be based on the principle of self-determination'. Annual Report, Department of External Affairs, year ended 31 March, 1963

⁴ Auckland Star 19 July, 1969

In 1999 New Zealand suspended its military ties with Indonesia in response to the cataclysm of military and militia violence that engulfed East Timor when the people voted for freedom. In 2000 a New Zealand peacekeeper, Leonard Manning, was killed by an Indonesian soldier.

For a few years New Zealand's bilateral relationship was, not surprisingly, somewhat destabilised and in the upheaval some chinks of light broke through.

New Zealand was more active on the Papuan issue during the time of reformist Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid. Foreign Minister Phil Goff met with Free Papua Movement (OPM) Spokesperson John Ondawame, against his officials' advice. The Minister later cautiously hinted that New Zealand might be willing to play a neutral mediation role – if that was acceptable to both parties.

Foreign Minister Phil Goff and even told an Indonesian delegation in October, 2000 that while New Zealand wished to see a 'stable, democratic, prosperous and united Indonesia, Indonesia's unity was dependent on how Jakarta sought to resolve separatist tensions, rather than external statements about Indonesia's territorial integrity.'⁵

But in the following year, New Zealand seemed less willing to push the diplomatic boundaries. New Zealand warmly welcomed the Special Autonomy legislation for Papua in October 2001⁶, and ever since official statements express the view that the 'best route to a peaceful solution in Papua'⁷ is the full implementation of the special autonomy package.⁸

One litmus test of the relationship between New Zealand and Indonesia is the ease with which New Zealand's Jakarta based diplomats have been able to gain permission to visit West Papua. In the years after the crisis in East Timor, New Zealand diplomats had difficulty in arranging visits to West Papua. However, in the last four years Embassy officials have been able to gain easy access.

The resumption of defence ties has played a part in the warming relationship. In 2005 the New Zealand Defence Attaché based in Jakarta recorded his view that 'at the moment the New Zealand-Indonesia relationship resembled a 'three legged stool' with one leg (ie the defence aspect) missing... the TNI was still a major force in Indonesian life; without engagement with TNI we could not hope to build a full relationship.'⁹

⁵ Cable Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wellington to New Zealand Embassy, Jakarta, 31 October, 2000

⁶ Press Release, New Zealand Government, 'Goff Welcomes Autonomy Package for Irian Jaya', 29 October, 2001

⁷ Letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs, Phil Goff to Maire Leadbeater for the Indonesia Human Rights Committee, 10 December, 2003

⁸ Phil Goff did make a mediation offer on at least one further occasion in Yogyakarta in 2002. He emphasised that the offer was contingent on Indonesia's willingness to involve a third party which he rated as an 'outside chance. New Zealand Herald 8 October, 2002 'N Z Offers to Help in West Papua'

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wellington, 29 June, 2005, Note for File, 'Call by Outgoing Defence Attaché, Jakarta

At the end of 2006, Foreign Minister Winston Peters advised that defence ties with Indonesia were to be resumed. The records show that the move was desired by both parties, rather than being made under pressure from Indonesia.¹⁰

Defence ties so far are low key and revolve around an officer training exchange programme. The move was justified in terms of supposed Indonesian military reform and in the light of ‘similar steps by a number of other countries’,¹¹ including Timor Leste. Mr Peters said ‘engagement rather than sanctions are more likely to result in further positive progress...’¹² The ‘positive influence’ argument was also used during the 1990s, but no evidence has yet been advanced to back this claim.

New Zealand has also embarked on a programme of training the police in West Papua in ‘community policing’ and ‘conflict management’. In 2007 thirty two West Papuan police (only 10 of them indigenous Papuans) attended a workshop in Jayapura at which participants were told how New Zealand police try to build community relations and anticipate and prevent conflict.¹³

New Zealand now has privileged and rare access to West Papua. This includes access to ‘sensitive’ areas such as the Central Highlands where conflict with the military has been at its most intense. Officials are also able to visit the controversial Freeport McMoran Mine¹⁴ and have witnessed logging inside the Wasur National Park.¹⁵

Unfortunately, this access appears to have come with the price tag of New Zealand passivity and complicity. This extends to the bilateral aid programme where New Zealand is taking a cautious approach to working with any agencies including Church groups, both in West Papua and in New Zealand, that might be seen to be in support of independence or self-determination.

‘We fully appreciate that in a free society New Zealand NGOs have every right to make their views known and that some will continue to support the Papuan separatist cause and inevitably irritate the Indonesian authorities. At the same time, care is needed to ensure

¹⁰. Indonesian Defence Minister Sudarsono did not immediately accept New Zealand’s offer to host and officer for a Defence Command and Staff College course of study. (Email from John McKinnon (DSPI) to Philip Gibson, New Zealand Embassy Jakarta and other diplomats, 6 June, 2006)

¹¹ Letter, Minister of Defence, Phil Goff to Maire Leadbeater, Indonesia Human Rights Committee, 11 June 2007

¹² Letter Minister of Foreign Affairs, Winston Peters, to Maire Leadbeater, Indonesia Human Rights Committee, 12 March, 2007

¹³ Cable New Zealand Embassy, Jakarta to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wellington ‘Inonesia:Papua: Community Policing Workshop – A Partnership Approach’ 10 April, 2007

¹⁴ New Zealand Embassy, Jakarta, Report of the DAS [Defence Attaches] Visit to West Papua 17-21 January, 2006 refers to flying over the Freeport mine tailings: ‘From the air the vastness of the tailing catchment area is overwhelming, whereas from the ground everything just looks so dead, virtually nothing lives in the tailings...’

¹⁵ New Zealand Embassy, Jakarta, ‘Note for File:Papua:Development Issues’ 12 February, 2007

that there is no justification for accusations that NZAID funding is being channeled to NGO activities that support Papuan separatism and thus undermine New Zealand Government policy.¹⁶

Self-determination for East Timor looked unlikely for most of the 24 year occupation, but it did come about when governments finally responded to escalating public pressure. Pressure is needed to now to spark New Zealand's conscience to life again. A good beginning would be to revive the offers to help with dialogue made in the past – especially in the light of the recent calls from Papuan leaders for an independent international mediator.

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¹⁶ Cable New Zealand Embassy Jakarta to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wellington, 30 January 2007
'Indonesia, Papua and Perceptions of New Zealand' , 30 January, 2007