

CHAPTER 6.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF A MORE POWERFUL OPM.

6.1 INTRODUCTION.

As the economic developments chronicled above take place OPM activity will increase. Aided by improving communications and the support of the international environmental movement, the OPM will move to counter the exploitation of natural resources in the mining and forestry industries. There is also the chance that they will act against the transmigration camps, although there is little that can be done about the high level of spontaneous migration.

An escalation of the conflict will have repercussions for the countries in the region, particularly Papua New Guinea, Australia and Indonesia. I am treating Indonesia as a foreign country in this context because Irian Jaya is, in effect, a colony of Indonesia which is held within the Republic only by force of arms. What happens inside Irian Jaya does have consequences for the nation as a whole and it is important that these consequences are discussed.

A more powerful and better organised OPM may directly attack forestry and mining operations, as they have done in the past ¹. Such attacks would be conducted from headquarters that are located in the border region with PNG. The OPM has always had camps in this region because of the relative safe haven that can be found on the PNG side of the border. There is also the support network of the refugee camps inside PNG, and access to the outside world via PNG's telephone and postal systems.

The ABRI will respond to OPM attacks by raiding bases inside PNG and pursuing OPM rebels who escape across the border after operations. This violates PNG's sovereignty, destabilises the border area, and could result in more non-combatant refugees fleeing into PNG to avoid the fighting or the ABRI's retaliatory actions. It is in this context that an escalation of OPM activity will have consequences for neighbouring countries.

6.2 THE CONSEQUENCES FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

PNG is already facing challenges on many fronts. The conflict in Bougainville has degenerated into a lingering civil war with no end in sight. The PNG government, in conjunction with Bougainvilleans from the north and south of the Island, is bogged down in a jungle war with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). The BRA draws its support from the Nasioi people who live around the Panguna mine area ². Most of the infrastructure of the once highly developed island has been destroyed, and the viciousness of the conflict has left deep rifts throughout the population.

Because the BRA has received virtually no international support, except tepid and ambivalent assistance from the Solomon Islands, there is little hope that the dream of independence will be achieved. The people of the adjacent Solomon Islands share many ethnic, cultural and language similarities with the Bougainvilleans and have been a source of logistical support and a safe haven for the BRA. However the Solomon Islands' government has not recognised Bougainville's independence, although it has also not moved to clamp down on Bougainvilleans travelling back and forth across the narrow straits separating the two countries ³. This ambiguity has allowed the BRA to persist in their campaign, and maintain their control over large areas of the island. The situation has settled into a stalemate, with neither the PNG government or the BRA being able to win or lose the conflict. The Bougainville war is set to continue for years to come.

Besides PNG's woes over Bougainville, the country faces severe problems of social breakdown and economic mismanagement. As traditional structures of social control are progressively weakened by the process of a society moving from a cashless, agrarian, subsistence state towards western capitalism, anarchy and chaos are growing. Coupled with a lack of economic development, which is providing few jobs for the growing population, this has resulted in severe law and order problems. Rascal gangs terrorise many areas of PNG, engaging in rape, robbery, murder and armed hold-ups ⁴. The problem has grown to the stage where it is beyond the capacity of the government to control these gangs who now constitute a real threat of social breakdown in many parts of the country, for instance the Western Highlands Province.

Economically PNG is also in dire straits, largely due to the mismanagement of successive governments. The currency collapsed in the second half of 1994, being devalued by approximately 30% against the Australian dollar. Even with the large amounts of foreign aid received from Australia (in excess of A\$300 million a year) and other nations, the government is unable to meet its commitments. For instance government offices are having their electricity and telephones disconnected, police vehicles are unserviceable due to lack of funds to buy petrol, and stories are rife of government employees not being paid ⁵.

Given the problems PNG is facing on Bougainville, with its economy and by the rascals, it is ill equipped to confront the OPM. The PNG government will be under increasing pressure from the Indonesians to do just that as the level of OPM activity grows. With the PNG Defence Force bogged down in Bougainville military actions against the OPM inside PNG are being left up to the ABRI. For instance Indonesian military forces massacred thirteen Papua New Guineans in the West Sepik Province on October 29, 1993 while on operations against the OPM ⁶. Both the PNG and the Indonesian governments denied that these killings ever took place, even when survivors suffering from bayonet and gunshot wounds were recovering in hospital in Wewak PNG (see Appendix 7). This extraordinary denial, in the face of compelling evidence (wounded survivors), hints that there may be some level of complicity between the PNG and Indonesian governments. The PNG government is unable to effectively patrol its own border to stop either the OPM or the ABRI entering at will. This situation is reflected in the 1992 Border Agreement between Indonesia and PNG which gives Indonesia the right of 'hot pursuit' after OPM forces into PNG territory. This diminishes PNG's sovereignty over its border regions.

Indonesia has also been involved in trying to influence politics in PNG. In 1987 Ted Diro, PNG's Foreign Minister and former head of the PNG Defence Force, was given US\$139,400 by General Benny Murdani, the head of the Indonesian armed forces ⁷. When public knowledge of this 'gift' was revealed both men declared it a private matter between two individuals. But, as Sean Dorney noted, "from Indonesia's point of view, Diro was the perfect Foreign Minister - a former Brigadier General who understood the military mind and who was fully aware of how

vulnerable PNG was to military pressure on the border”⁸. There can be little doubt that Indonesia paid this money because they approved of Diro and saw his political advancement as serving their own interests.

The Indonesians have also shown their disapproval of politicians who are particularly outspoken on the issue of Irian Jaya. When Deputy Prime Minister Iambakey Okuk attacked Indonesia over its record in Irian Jaya during the 1982 election campaign, he drew a sharp retort from the Indonesian embassy. They warned of the dangers in electing someone who “will create disaster instead of developing peace and harmony between neighbouring countries”⁹. That Okuk failed to win the election probably had little to do with the Indonesian statements, yet they were a clear indication that Indonesia is concerned with the domestic political scene in PNG.

Indonesian influence in the PNG body politic is limited by the general antipathy felt towards Indonesia by most of the population. Many people hold fears of an Indonesian invasion, and the plight of the West Papuans is well known¹⁰. That PNG policy is so accommodating of Indonesia, to the detriment of the West Papuans wanting independence, is due to the sheer importance of the relationship between the two countries. Even before PNG’s independence in 1975 it was widely held that a good relationship with Indonesia was a ‘cornerstone’ for a stable PNG¹¹. This transcended the feelings of sympathy held by most of the population for the plight of the West Papuans.

The consequences then of an increase in OPM activity for PNG are:

1. Military incursions by the Indonesian forces into PNG territory chasing OPM rebels and attacking their bases. This could undermine PNG’s sovereignty and places in danger the lives and property of PNG citizens in the border region.
2. Such military operations have the potential to cause more refugees to flee into PNG to escape both the

OPM and the ABRI. This would be a burden to the PNG government and causes discontent among the people on whose land the refugees settle ¹².

3. Indonesia may attempt to influence PNG domestic politics because popular support for the OPM amongst the general population is diametrically opposed to the official pro-Indonesia foreign policy. This leaves open the opportunity for a populist politician like Okuk to attack Indonesia as an election strategy.
4. A stronger OPM would also impact directly on PNG by adding to the law and order problems, particularly if the OPM becomes involved in the drug trade or extortion of PNG companies. The OPM does not consider itself bound by PNG's laws, and has warned the PNG government that actions will be taken against PNG if the Defence Force or police attack or arrest OPM members (see Appendix 2). They have specifically warned PNG against conducting joint border patrols with the ABRI.

6.3 CONSEQUENCES FOR AUSTRALIA.

While Australia does not share a land border with Indonesia, it is a close neighbour, close enough to be a destination for refugees fleeing Irian Jaya should large scale fighting break out again. Five refugees from Irian Jaya arrived on Thursday Island, in the Torres Straits, in 1985 but were rejected for refugee status by Australia ¹³. The potential always remains for more of these people to arrive, both to escape conflict and to publicise the issue. If, for instance, several hundred arrived Australia would be confronted with a considerable problem.

The granting of refugee status depends on the refugees being able to prove that there are genuine fears about their safety should they be returned to their country of residence. This is often difficult to prove and requires thorough investigation on the part of the Australian government. Such a process would attract negative publicity in the media: a situation which is anathema to the three countries involved. The last thing that Australia, Indonesia or PNG want is for the spotlight of international attention to be turned on Irian Jaya. But a moderate inflow of refugees into Australia would have just that effect. While thousands of refugees in PNG generate scant concern, a relative handful on the Torres Strait islands would make the headlines.

Currently there are probably fewer than 100 Irianese in Australia¹⁴. Many of them are actively involved in promoting the cause of an independent West Papua and building support for the OPM. Groups such as the Australia West Papua Association seek to publicise the issue by reporting on events inside Irian Jaya and lobbying politicians. The AWPA works in a loose coalition with environmentalist groups such as the Northern Territory Environment Centre; anti-nuclear groups such as the Campaign for an Independent and Nuclear Free Pacific; church groups and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, and groups and individuals fighting for East Timor's independence. The most powerful ally is the environmentalists as they have an elaborate global network of affiliated organisations connected by fax, electronic mail and the Internet. Information can be rapidly spread and campaigns highly co-ordinated. As the fight over Irian Jaya's forests gets under way in the coming years, the environmentalists could become the main supporters of West Papuan nationalism.

The campaign to preserve the rainforest of Irian Jaya from rapacious logging companies may involve the marriage of the international environmental movement and those promoting West Papuan nationalism. Such a marriage could result in the maiden name of the OPM being dropped in favour a new, unsullied title. This new organisation would have environmental concerns as its primary goal, but a major secondary goal would be the improvement of the Irianese's human rights and land rights, and the ultimate creation of an independent West Papuan State¹⁵.

Any new organisation would probably become directly involved in assisting the OPM operating in the jungles of Irian Jaya and PNG by providing them with communications equipment, medical

supplies, access to international media and, possibly, funding. Such assistance may be considered by Indonesia to promote terrorism. Indonesia would condemn such an organisation, and possibly Australia, for interference in its internal affairs. Yet the international environmentalists and the West Papuan nationalists would not be deterred because only the most vigorous of campaigns is likely to yield a positive result: the saving of a country's rainforest. Extensive but non-violent campaigns in Malaysia had little impact on that country's forestry industry.

The consequences, then, of a stronger OPM for Australia are:

1. The possibility of refugees landing on Australian territory in the Torres Straits. This would be a logistical problem for Australia and embarrassing for Indonesia. It would also throw the spot light of international media coverage on the situation in Irian Jaya as refugees seek to prove their claims of ill treatment and persecution.
2. The probability of diplomatic tension between Australia and Indonesia if groups within Australia become actively involved in supporting the struggle for an independent West Papua.
3. A deterioration in the stability of PNG if border conflicts increase due to the ABRI responding to OPM operations. This may threaten Australian commercial interests (such as the Ok Tedi Mine, near the Fly River) as well as Australia's general strategic position. PNG is strategically very important to Australia due to its geographic proximity; historical obligation; commercial interests, and the large number of expatriate Australians who work in PNG.

6.3 CONSEQUENCES FOR INDONESIA.

Irian Jaya has already had a profound effect on the evolution of the modern state of Indonesia. The campaign that Sukarno launched to wrest West New Guinea from the Dutch caused the nature of Indonesian politics to shift. As Sabam Siagian, Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia, has noted, "the Irian Barat problem became the triggering factor for the radicalisation of Indonesian politics and the expansion of the Indonesian military capacity" ¹⁶. In anticipation of a major conflict with the Dutch, and with the assistance of the USSR, Indonesia enlarged its military forces. With this enlargement the power of the military grew. Today the military remains one of the most powerful institutions in Indonesian society. The presence of Irian Jaya within the Republic helps to perpetuate this situation.

Irian Jaya is a part of Indonesia because of the Indonesian military forces. Only with the landing of ABRI forces in 1962 did the Dutch agree to give up West New Guinea. Only with the presence of the ABRI could the 'Act of Free Choice' be conducted in 1969. And only with the ABRI could the rebellions of the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's be put down. The ABRI is, then, essential to the continued presence of Irian Jaya in the Republic of Indonesia. This buttresses the power of the military within the state, and impedes the process of democratisation.

To maintain civil order in Irian Jaya, West Papuan nationalism must be repressed. Civil rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of association are limited because the government knows that if West Papuan nationalists were allowed to speak openly they would be widely supported by the Irianese population and the province would be beset by social and political turmoil. So fundamental human rights are forfeited for the sake of preserving Irian Jaya within the Republic. Yet the forfeiture of human rights affects not only the Irianese, but all Indonesians. Irian Jaya, along with several other provinces such as Aceh and East Timor, acts as a block on the liberalisation of Indonesian society.

If West Papuan nationalism was declining, and the OPM diminishing as a force then Irian Jaya's blockage of the liberalisation process would ease with time. However, as this is not the case, Irian Jaya, and by corollary Indonesia as a whole, is set to remain shackled with an oppressive

military presence. While it is unlikely that increased OPM activity will threaten Indonesia's hold over Irian Jaya, it will impede the rate of economic development and require more troops being deployed in the province.

The probable consequences of a stronger OPM for Indonesia are:

1. The process of democratisation of the Indonesian political system may be impeded as human rights remain suspended by the necessity of maintaining order and control in Irian Jaya.
2. There is the possibility of refugees entering either PNG or Australia to escape OPM or ABRI operations. This is embarrassing internationally and would cause tensions with those countries involved.
3. Indonesia may become involved PNG's domestic politics if public support inside PNG for the OPM increases.
4. Economic growth could be slowed by OPM attacks on logging or mining operations. Transmigration camps may also be under threat of attack, especially those in the southern border region of the province.
5. Greater ABRI forces may be needed to counteract OPM attacks and to guard important installations and transmigration camps.
6. Negative publicity is likely as the international environmental groups join forces with the OPM and the West Papuan nationalists to publicise the extent of damage being done by the logging and mining industries.