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The year 1978 has been the most turbulent since Papua New Guinea (PNG) gained independence in 1975. Massive internal and external pressures converged on the new government elected in July 1977, leading to the submission of parliamentary votes of no confidence against the ruling Somare-Chan coalition partnership. The internal pressures were created substantially because of widespread popular feelings that corruption in the public service was becoming widespread, especially in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy. Prime Minister Michael Somare, pressured by the radical wing in his Pangu Pati, introduced a tough anti-corruption leadership code intended to disclose the sources of income and restrict the forms of property ownership of cabinet ministers and senior public servants. Somare's coalition partner, the People's Progress Party led by businessman Julius Chan and committed to a free enterprise system and foreign investment, was not consulted about the code before it was introduced in Parliament, and threatened to withdraw from the partnership if the code was not watered down or withdrawn altogether.

Although Somare controlled only 45 of the 109 seats in PNG's unicameral Parliament while his coalition partner had 20, he proceeded with the code. A reinvigorated opposition party called the People's United Front collaborated secretly with Chan's PPP in introducing a vote of no confidence in Somare. Political tension escalated in the country as it became evident that a change of government was eminent. With defeat seeming inevitable, Somare at the very last minute withdrew the leadership bill, thereby retaining the support of his coalition partner and defeating the vote of no confidence.
The incident was open testimony that fundamental differences existed between the coalition partners. The Pangu Pati, the largest party in PNG's multiparty system, supports a mixed economy with strong controls on foreign investment. Its partner, the PPP, is for a much more open free market system. Less than three months after the first vote of no confidence, another political crisis occurred in which the differences between the coalition partners resurfaced as the main cause. Somare reshuffled the cabinet, demoting several PPP ministers and substantially increasing the number of Pangu Pati ministries. This time the PPP, in open rage, pulled out of the coalition regime and brought to an end six years of stable and progressive government that had existed since 1972 when the Pangu-PPP parties came to power. Again a vote of no confidence was introduced, but Somare was saved by a small splinter party that defected from the opposition upon accepting the offer of several cabinet positions. However, the net effect has been the growth of the parliamentary opposition, which now commands an array of powerful and experienced politicians more qualified in a number of areas to run a government than those who remain on the Pangu Pati benches. Parliamentary politics in PNG now seems to be launched on a course of instability. Even if a change of government does not occur soon, the alignment of forces in the Parliament will entail more bitter ideological struggles that can only be very divisive in a country that is notoriously fragmented socially, culturally, and regionally. The Pangu Pati now has almost sole control of the government since its new coalition partner, the United Party, is very small. The Opposition now consists of the PPP, Peoples United Front, and Papua Besena, which together only require five to eight members to topple the government.

The two crises in leadership that redrew the alignment of political forces would themselves be historic in PNG's political history. However, in 1978 the government also faced pressures of a different kind but with a menacing dimension capable of undermining the very existence of the state. Early in the year, elements in Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) (Free Papua Movement) based in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, kidnapped nine high-ranking Indonesian provincial officials, using them as ransom to demand independence for the western half of the New Guinea island. The rebels were known to be using the PNG side of the border as both a base and a sanctuary. The PNG government was pressured by Indonesia to move against the OPM. Events in East Timor served as a stern reminder that Indonesia did not view contiguous regional threats to its security very kindly. PNG has been continually embarrassed by the openness with which the OPM operated within PNG.

Caught between an ethnic bond committing its emotions to its Melanesian counterparts across the border on one hand, and a clear need to promote its national security against an Indonesian menace
on the other, the PNG government had to make difficult decisions as to whether to eliminate the OPM from its territory. It finally chose to expel the OPM. In June-July 1978, to demonstrate that it sincerely sought Indonesian friendship, PNG and Indonesian troops mounted a joint military operation along the border to uproot and destroy the OPM. The incident triggered popular demonstrations and acts of disapproval against the PNG government, especially since Indonesian troops ventured into PNG territory in pursuit of the OPM, destroyed villages, and precipitated a flood of refugees into PNG.

Engaging in a joint border operation with Indonesia to eliminate the OPM was a major foreign policy decision undertaken by the PNG government. It entailed enormous risks by incurring popular disapproval and was premised on the expectation that it would eliminate a major source of malaise between Indonesia and PNG. In reaching this crucial decision, the PNG government took a calculated gamble that its action would promote national security, to which it had ascribed higher priority than the more elusive and dangerous course of ignoring the use of its territory by the OPM guerillas against Indonesia's presence in Irian Jaya.

The remaining part of this paper provides background information on the OPM, for we believe that it is a potential source of continuing difficulty not only in relations between PNG and Indonesia but also in this region of the Pacific.

The Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)

Irian Jaya, known at various times as Netherlands New Guinea, West New Guinea, or Irian Barat, is now the seventeenth province of the Republic of Indonesia. It is the largest of the Indonesia provinces, representing 22% of the Republic's land area. Once presumed to have little economic value, it now boasts such important minerals as oil, nickel, and copper. In an increasingly resource-hungry world, these mineral resources make Irian Jaya an important province of Indonesia. Fifteen years after incorporation into Indonesia, the legitimacy of Indonesia's authority in Irian Jaya is rejected by the OPM.

The OPM is the direct offshoot of Dutch efforts to instigate the formation of a nucleus of Papuan dissidents to fight for the exclusion of West Irian from an independent Indonesia. But when the cause of establishing a separate Dutch colony or client state failed, and West

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Irian was for all practical purposes turned over to Indonesia on August 15, 1962, many of the Dutch-trained anti-Indonesian dissidents continued their activity on their own initiative to free West Irian and make it an independent sovereign state. Essentially, this motif would provide continuous justification for the existence of the OPM since its formation some time in 1963.

The OPM has two segments. One, based outside Irian Jaya, is almost entirely engaged in political and propaganda activities. The other is based for the most part within Irian Jaya, but overlaps across the northern border into PNG territory; it is both military and political in purpose. Over the years since it was formed, the OPM has witnessed the gradual and effective consolidation of Indonesian control of Irian Jaya. Large numbers of non-Irianese from the Moluccas, Celebes, and Java transmigrated to west Irian so that by 1969, when "The Act of Free Choice" occurred, a substantial part of the urban population, which was concentrated in the provincial capital Jayapura, was non-Melanesian in origin. Today, about 250,000 non-Irianese live in Irian Jaya; Jayapura, once a sleepy Melanesian town, is mainly an Asian city. A systematic program of Indonesianization in all government, cultural, and educational institutions results in the progressive loss of West Irianese cultural identity as well as the subjugation of the indigenous population in all walks of life to Indonesian personnel.

From these sources—"forced incorporation," "cultural imperialism," "loss of land," "political repression," etc.—the OPM gathered sustenance and support from frustrated West Irianese. At various times, the OPM sought self-determination only for Irian Jaya, but on other occasions it envisaged its liberation efforts as part of a dream to establish an independent Melanesian Federation encompassing not only Irian Jaya, and Papua New Guinea, but also the other Melanesian South Pacific islands including the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, Fiji, and New Caledonia. PNG's independence in September 1975 encouraged the OPM to believe that it too can achieve independence from its colonial master.

Throughout its 15-year history, the OPM never grew into a sufficiently significant guerilla force for the Indonesians to consider it more than a nuisance. In 1970, however, the OPM received a significant boost when it obtained the services of General Seth Jafet Rumkorem, an Indonesian-trained intelligence officer from Biak, Irian Jaya. Rumkorem, who defected from the Indonesian army, initially became an effective leader. He resuscitated the morale of the freedom fighters, giving the resistance movement credibility. In general, however, Indonesian control of Irian Jaya remained strong and undisputed. In 1977, an internal schism emerged among the OPM's military leadership. Rumkorem was challenged by Jacob Prai, an ex-University law student, who felt that the movement was again sagging and needed to be reinvigorated. Prai successfully seized the OPM military apparatus, but
Rumkorem and a few followers decided to break away and form their own splinter resistance movement.4

During the life of the OPM, its active guerilla force was never very large. Estimates of its precise size ranges from 20,000 trained guerillas, which is an OPM figure, to 2,000 including wives and children, which the Indonesians concede. Most reliable sources accept a more modest figure of 400–600 hardcore guerillas.5 Villages contiguous to the border on both sides have demonstrated steadfast support for the activities of OPM troops, most of whom are indistinguishable from ordinary villagers. The weaponry of the movement was never impressive. One observer who was allowed to live and travel with the guerillas reported that they possessed only 63 guns of World War II vintage and virtually no ammunition.6 They were, however, experts with traditional village weapons such as bows, arrows, and axes, and possessed an uncanny intimate knowledge of the jungle. In terms of the small-scale ambush-type operations they conducted against the Indonesian patrols and installations, they were effective to the point that the Indonesians have terminated patrols into the jungles.7 Partly because of their inability to capture an adequate supply of modern arms from the Indonesians, the OPM has appealed to overseas sources, so far without success.

The OPM required a secure source of respite beyond the pursuit of the well-equipped Indonesian counter-insurgency forces. This they obtained not only from their thick jungle hideouts, but also by crossing the border into PNG territory. Consequently, a substantial number of OPM activities have been concentrated around the border, particularly the northern sector not far from Jayapura and Vanimo. To the guerillas, the 400-mile border, lacking clear demarcation lines and poorly guarded, is a seamless web through which a flow of men, medicines, and small weapons flow. While most of the guerilla food and weapon supplies appear to be derived through their own efforts and from supporters on both sides of the border, other kinds of support, particularly information and political direction, appear to be obtained through a network of secure contacts established in PNG. About 10,000 Irianese refugees, most sympathetic to the OPM but legally pledged not to support the movement, reside in various parts of PNG, mainly in Port Moresby. From these refugee groups a major source of the OPM's external assistance flows to the border. For instance, the “South Pacific News Agency,” which is the propaganda mouthpiece of “the Provisional Revolutionary Government of West Papua New Guinea,” is secretly located in Port Moresby.

6 Baker, “The Jungle War.”
7 Ibid.
Finally, the ideological orientation of the OPM must be described, since its success, should that eventuate, could have regional implications. The OPM has repeatedly announced that its objective is to establish an independent state or federation within the ideological framework of the Pacific Western Alliance system. More recently, it has specified that it would establish a Christian democratic government. Consequently, they expect external support from Western sources such as Australia, Holland, the U.S., etc. No encouragement has been promised from these sources, which appear to be solidly committed to a united Indonesia.

The question of Western support has become a source of internal dissension within the OPM leadership. Seth Rumkorem's dispute with the Jacob Prai faction was over ideological commitment, with the former expressing a preference for a socialist system and the latter maintaining its advocacy of Christian democracy. In either case, the OPM remains isolated since no external sponsors have accepted their invitation. More recently, in desperation, the Prai faction has offered mineral rights to any country that would supply the OPM with arms. Failure of external sponsors to appear has triggered a set of radical tactics to draw worldwide attention to their cause. Until recently, the OPM forces have limited their activities to ambushes of Indonesian patrols and installations. Since 1977, however, the OPM has threatened the use of sabotage, terrorism, and kidnapping. Some of this has already occurred. The OPM claimed that it was responsible for the sabotage that suspended operations of the large American-owned Free Port Copper mine in Irian Jaya. In February 1978, nine Indonesian officials, including the provincial governor of Irian Jaya and senior military and intelligence officers, were kidnapped by the OPM. The hostages were used to demand a "round table" conference with Indonesia to discuss the independence of Irian Jaya. Even PNG, which has until recently paid a blind eye to OPM activities within PNG, has been threatened with terrorist action if it does not desist from behavior hostile to OPM activities within PNG.

Overall, the OPM has grown much larger than it was in the 1960s. It has become increasingly bold in its politico-military offensives and has successfully drawn some international attention. Through its political arm in Holland and an office in Dakar, Senegal, the OPM has distributed information on the Indonesian role in Irian Jaya.

Under Indonesian pressure, the PNG government has agreed to clean up its side of the border. The OPM leader and his Deputy were arrested and jailed by the PNG government for illegal entry in September 1978. All this attests to a new phase in the border conflict. The Indonesians do not take the border conflict for granted anymore. President Suharto has requested that the Prime Minister of PNG demonstrate his commitment to Indonesia's territorial integrity by taking
action against the OPM. The PNG government obliged him during June-July 1977 when the PNG Defence Force launched a large anti-OPM operation on the PNG side of the border. In doing this, PNG foreign policy decision-makers chose to ignore the human rights issues implicit in the OPM struggle for self-determination and opted instead for national security interests. In expressing this choice, the government leaves itself vulnerable to chauvinist politicians who can severely embarrass it by capitalizing on the widespread anti-Indonesian sentiments shared by most sections of the PNG citizenry.

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