A Secret Genocide: The blood politics of West Papua
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Most people have never heard of West Papua and both the Australian and Indonesian governments would like to keep it that way. The region, less than two hours flight north of Darwin, is the scene of a slow-moving genocide. Indonesian armed forces are estimated to have killed roughly one seventh of the 1961 population either directly or by starvation and sickness from forced relocation.¹

Enough Indonesian migrants have been shipped in to reduce the survivors to a minority. If trends continue West Papuans will cease to exist.²

The island of New Guinea is a resource-rich land mass where Melanesians have lived for up to 50,000 years, evolving into tribes that speak more than 1000 different languages.

A line on the map cuts the island in half from north to south.

After World War II the Dutch ruled the west. Australia had the east.

As the colonial era unwound Indonesia reached for the land and was willing to fight The Netherlands to get it.

But the Papuans wanted independence.³ They shared no cultural ties with Indonesia. They were tribal and Christian Melanesians.
On December 1, 1961, the West Papuans raised their new Morning Star flag and sang a national anthem. Indonesia sent in armed infiltrators.

They never made it. At Vanimo in the Australian Territory of PNG they were questioned by ASIO and sent to Manus Island. Their complaints were never heard.7

The "Act of Free Choice" was unanimous and the UN acknowledged Indonesia’s annexation. The Papuans have been fighting ever since. Many fled to the jungles and attacked the Indonesians with bows and arrows, sticks, rocks and any guns they could find.

The Indonesians retaliated with napalm, chemical weapons, cluster bombs, aerial strafing, mass migration and a military occupation that has never really ended.8

Estimates of the death toll are speculative but range from 100,000 to 500,000 deaths since 1969.9 There are now 8,000 West Papuan refugees living in the Western Province of PNG.10 The numbers fluctuate with Indonesian military operations which sport codenames like "Tumpas" (annihilation).11

"When they are killing people they want to make sure nobody finds out,” said journalist and academic John Martinkus. "If you look at it coldly, it is quite correct. If people did know the extent of the torture and intimidation there would be outrage.”

As a result, in July 1998, Australians had no idea that Indonesian soldiers and police were in a standoff with a group of unarmed Papuans on the island of Biak. They had hoisted the Morning Star flag...
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They raped and killed children, some of whom were still wearing their school uniforms. They sexually mutilated women.

above a water tower and were refusing to leave. The armed forces started shooting. They rounded up the survivors and butchered them. They raped and killed children, some of whom were still wearing their school uniforms. They sexually mutilated women.

Up to 150 people died. The bodies, some missing limbs and cut into pieces, washed up on the beaches and became tangled in fishermen's nets. Indonesia denied the atrocity for years. The story was buried until Sydney University's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies convened a citizen's tribunal to investigate.

Fifteen years after the massacre had occurred the story was run by the ABC, The Guardian and News Ltd. The effectiveness of the time lag is clear. Indonesia's supporters can say things are different now and nobody is listening to the people who say otherwise.

Australia's Stance: Protect Indonesia

The Australian Government just wants a good relationship with Indonesia. The archipelago sits on top of Australia's sea lines of communication. It has a population of more than 250 million. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will this year donate $601 million in aid.

"More than 120 million Indonesians live on less than $2 per day. Australia is helping to save lives," DFAT says on its website. But Indonesia is not poor. It is the world's 16th largest economy.

When adjusted for purchasing power parity, Indonesia's GDP outstripped Australia's in 2012. Forbes Asia found the richest 50 Indonesians were worth a combined US$95 billion last year. Jakarta has no difficulty paying Russia for attack helicopters, amphibious tanks and submarines and is on a five-year plan to upgrade its US$8 billion military.

Indonesia is also buying Sukhoi fighter jets that analysts say will dominate Australia's northern airspace by 2020.

Jakarta has at best been indifferent to Australia's overtures and, at worst, its open hostility is kept in check by aid money and Australia's US security alliance.

To court favour, Canberra has been rejecting political refugees from West Papua since 1962.

The Howard Government broke with tradition in 2006, granting 42 temporary protection visas to West Papuans who fled to Cape York in an outrigger canoe. Indonesia furiously recalled its ambassador.

The Dutch begin preparing the Papuans for autonomy. December 1 - Independence day. West Papuans name their country, raise the Australia and the US support Papuan independence. Morning Star flag and sing their national anthem. Two weeks later Indonesian President Indonesia agitates for West New Guinea. Sukarno orders Indonesians to "liberate" West Papua. Armed infiltrators move in.

The Soviet Union gives Indonesia US$100 million in credit, which it spends on military equipment. By 1962 it grows to US$1.5 billion. The US fears growing Soviet ties and moves to support Jakarta's land grab. Australia follows.
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PRIME MINISTER TONY ABBOTT THEN NAILED HIS COLOURS TO THE MAST.

"AUSTRALIA WILL NOT GIVE PEOPLE A PLATFORM TO GRANDSTAND AGAINST INDONESIA,"

The Boigu Seven had not been in PNG long enough to qualify but Mr Morrison leant on Attorney-General Kerenga Kua to bend the rules to make amends, the government signed the Lombok Treaty which states that Australia will not: "in any manner support or participate in activities by any person or entity which constitutes a threat to the stability, sovereignty or territorial integrity of the other Party, including by those who seek to use its territory for encouraging or committing such activities, including separatism, in the territory of the other Party." The Boigu Seven had not been in PNG long enough to qualify but Mr Morrison leant on Attorney-General Kerenga Kua to bend the rules. When they reached Boigu Island they asked for asylum. Within 48 hours they were dumped in PNG. When they reached Boigu Island they asked for asylum. Within 48 hours they were dumped in PNG. The Department of Immigration did not say why they were treated differently to the thousands of would-be migrants who travel to Indonesia and pay smugglers for a passage to Christmas Island. The Abbott Government had won office barely three weeks before. Accepting them would be a dangerous irritant to fragile Indonesian relations. Immigration Minister Scott Morrison invoked a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding to expel them. Under the agreement people must claim asylum through PNG if they have spent seven days or more there before crossing to Australia. The Boigu Seven had not been in PNG long enough to qualify but Mr Morrison leant on Attorney-General Kerenga Kua to bend the rules. "I extracted a – well, we had an agreement that they could go back under the terms of that arrangement," he told 2GB radio host Ray Hadley. The refugees were taken to Kiunga near the East Awin lowara refugee camp and the Indonesian border. Two Indonesians came and took their photographs. Witnesses said they recognised them from the Indonesian consul's office in Vanimo. Many Indonesians were

Bending the rules for Jakarta

Less than 4km separates Australia's northernmost island in the Torres Strait from the PNG coast. Seven West Papuans including a pregnant woman and a 10-year-old girl crossed it in a tinnie last September. They fled after taking part in the Freedom Flotilla protest, broadcast on the internet.
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The flag is strictly banned in Indonesia. In 2004 Nobel Peace Prize nominee Filep Karma got a 15-year treason sentence for lifting the colours. He is still in prison.

acccusations were politically motivated and dropped the red notice. Indonesia lost that skirmish but won a victory in PNG last June when Prime Minister Peter O'Neill pledged closer ties and signed an extradition treaty. It contains a provision protecting political activists – overridden by alleged terrorism.

Activists sheltering in PNG are at risk of being labelled a terrorist and extradited, silencing them.

Wenda faced this risk when he travelled to Port Moresby after Governor Powes Parkop invited him to raise the Morning Star flag over City Hall on December 1, 2013.

It was a significant act of defiance. The flag is strictly banned in Indonesia. In 2004 Nobel Peace Prize nominee Filep Karma got a 15-year treason sentence for lifting the colours. He is still in prison.

But who will take up his case inside PNG?

Papua New Guinea cracks down

When independence leader Benny Wenda escaped Indonesia and was given sanctuary in the UK, Jakarta pursued him aggressively.

Indonesia falsely accused the Nobel Peace Prize nominee of terrorism and issued an international arrest warrant. Interpol found the

seen around town and rumours were rife of cross-border kidnappings.

One of the seven, Jacob Mandobayan, said he was afraid. In December the PNG Government threatened to send him back to Indonesia if he undertook any political activities and he went into hiding.

The threat would appear to be a breach of the non-refoulement principal of international law, which forbids the rendering of a victim to their persecutor.

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Australia-Indonesia land border agreement sets the boundary with Papua New Guinea, which gains independence from Australia in 1975.

Act of Free Choice. Under threat of violence, 1022 Papuan representatives vote in a unanimous show of hands to become part of Indonesia. West Papua is renamed "Irian Jaya."

Irian Jaya is renamed Papua and Special Autonomy laws implemented. Papuans continue to agitate for full independence.

Energy giant BP begins extracting gas from the Tangguh LNG project at Bintuni Bay.

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In the geopolitical sphere, China has replaced the USSR as the new bogeyman to encourage the US and Australia to court Indonesia.

**Indonesia:**
- World's 16th largest economy.
- 2012 GDP: US$878 billion
- 2012 GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity: US$1.2 trillion
- Population: 254 million
- Military power: ranked 19th, ahead of Australia
- Armed forces: 476,000 active troops, 400,000 reserves
- Military budget 2014: US$7.9 billion
- Foreign aid received: A$601.6 million in 2013-14, rising to A$605.3 million in 2014-15

**Australia:**
- World's 12th largest economy
- 2012 GDP: US$1.5 trillion
- 2012 GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity: US$971 billion
- Population: 23.5 million
- Military power: ranked 20th, behind Indonesia
- Armed forces: 58,000 active troops, 44,240 reserves
- Military budget 2014-15: A$29.2 billion
- Foreign aid donated: A$5 billion in 2013-14, staying steady at A$5 billion in 2014-15

**PNG:**
- World’s 114th largest economy
- 2012 GDP: US$15.6 billion
- 2012 GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity: $29.3
- Population: 7.4 million
- Military power: not ranked (too small)
- Armed forces: 2100 personnel
- Military budget 2012: US$84.7 million
- Foreign aid received: A$19.4 million in 2013-14, rising to A$577.1 million in 2014-15

The Future

Indonesia is heading into presidential elections on July 9. The PDI-P party candidate Joko “Jokowi” Widodo is the favourite to win against former Kopassus general Probowo Subianto, banned from the US for his human rights abuses.

Jokowi is touted as being better on human rights than the alternative.

But his PDI-P party represents the same elite that has been jamming its blood funnel into West Papua since 1969.

PDI-P Chairwoman Megawati Sukarnoputri was president from 2001-2004 and used her time to crack down on West Papua and curry favour with former stalwarts of General Suharto’s regime.

Jokowi will not be able to act beyond the bounds of her party.

“I made you [Jokowi] a presidential candidate. But you should remember that you are the party’s official, with a function of implementing the party’s programs and ideology,” Megawati told reporters in May.

Whichever candidate wins the repression is likely to continue.

Special Autonomy laws in 2001 have not changed the lives of most Papuans and economic development only brings more Indonesians.

Jakarta wants to build cattle stations. Energy company BP is expanding the Tangguh LNG plant in Bintuni Bay while official denials it is not difficult to get compliance.

Canberra doesn’t give the impoverished Melanesian nation as much money as it gives Indonesia, but it is PNG’s biggest donor at $519.4 million this year.

PNG has a tiny defence force of just over 2000 troops and relies on Australia to guarantee its 750km border. By comparison, Jakarta has more than 400,000 active troops at its disposal and an Aladdin’s cave of high-tech military hardware.

In the 1980s Cabinet was warned that if Australia had to defend PNG the entire army would be wiped out in the top tenth of the border between Vanimo and Green River.
mining company Freeport McMoRan paid US$13.8 billion into Jakarta's coffers from the Grasberg mine in the decade to 2012. In the geopolitical sphere, China has replaced the USSR as the new bogeyman to encourage the US and Australia to court Indonesia. Australian Government thinking appears to be that a "big Indonesia" is a valuable defence asset, regardless of the bloodshed needed to yoke its unwilling citizens together. It is seen, wishfully, as a shield to the north and a protection from the feared instability of two or three smaller nations that might be poor and disorderly.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared:

"The people of West Papua are much better off as part of a strong, dynamic and increasingly prosperous Indonesia."

Not everyone in Indonesia shares this view. In 1999, political analyst Soedjati Djiwandono wrote: "Would we prefer to have a single nation-state out of this huge but almost unmanageable archipelago … marked by abject poverty among the majority of people, by continued injustice, continuous tension and conflicts because of seemingly irreconcilable differences in ethnic, religious and cultural terms? Or at the risk of being dubbed 'blasphemous' to split peacefully into two, three, four or even five smaller nation-states with a greater chance and hope for peace, greater prosperity, equality and justice for all?"

The independence movement has never forgotten that when Australian troops arrived in East Timor it sent such a clear signal to the Indonesian settlers in West Papua that 60,000 of them left for other parts of Indonesia. Many Papuans are hopeful. They do not see their struggle as futile and they want to tell the world about their situation. Not all Indonesians are against them. Just the ruling elite.

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Author: Alison Bevige is a print journalist based until recently at the Northern Territory News. She travelled to Port Moresby in December to observe the December 1 flag raising and to meet West Papuans in exile to find out what is really going on.
REFERENCES

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