

Great Britain plays its ace in the East Timor crisis

by Gail G. Billington

What is behind the hype and diplomatic frenzy over the Indonesian province of East Timor? The British monarchy is pushing British Prime Minister Tony Blair's "doctrine of the international community"—that is, global military intervention against sovereign nations. That idea, enunciated by him on April 22 in Chicago, is totally coherent with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's desire to advance what she calls a "community of democracies"—democracies that are not necessarily nations. The Mont Pelerinite "free trade" governments of Australia and New Zealand have now offered to lead in imposing that doctrine, via a UN-approved, if not sponsored, *armed* peacekeeping task force into the East Timor, even if it proves suicidal to their own best interests.

But that's not all. The monarchy's push for this Blair intervention line proves once more, that "whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." The real threat from Buckingham Palace and the City of London is the destruction of all of Indonesia, for which East Timor is only a stepping-stone—even if Indonesia's destruction inevitably means debt default, and implosion of the global financial system.

For over 20 years, East Timor has been a problem, but it has always been *manageable*. Until, that is, the British-American-Commonwealth (BAC) group that controls the International Monetary Fund (IMF) launched its financial assault on Indonesia, which devastated the country within months beginning in summer 1997, undoing decades of economic development. It was that assault which created the conditions in which East Timor went from being a manageable, although continuing, problem, to the bleeding wound it is today.

Right from the start, in autumn 1997, and the Halloween signing of Indonesia's first letter of intent with the IMF, Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche had indicated just what the character of that assault was: a thrust for the destruction and dismemberment of Indonesia. But the Indonesian military leadership did not manage to resist the IMF as it should have, and failed to do what Malaysia under Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad and China have done.

LaRouche commented on Sept. 9, 1999 on the situation as follows: "Now the leadership of Indonesia must face reality, and repulse the assault against the country. It must, number one, expose the British role in this attack. Number two, it

must threaten a sovereign default if this assault doesn't stop, while moving closer to China, India, and Malaysia in joint defiance of the IMF and BAC. If the Indonesian leadership doesn't do this, it will seal its own fate: the dismemberment and destruction of Indonesia," even if that destruction, in turn, would trigger a global financial meltdown.

Colonial residue

The saga of East Timor is an acute example of the refusal to eradicate the remnants of European colonialism in the aftermath of the premature death of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945. Roosevelt had been determined to finish this job, over the violent opposition of Britain's Winston Churchill. That failure fueled the ideological "Cold Wars" that consumed the next three decades, including in East Timor.

The Indonesian province of Timor Timur (East Timor) shares an island the size of New Jersey on the southern perimeter of Indonesia with Nusa Tenggara Timur (West Timor). For over 450 years, up until 1975, Portugal clung to East Timor as one of the last possessions of its former global empire. In 1973, a UN report exposed Portuguese colonial regimes as among the most repressive. The World Health Organization reported the same year that East Timor was one of the worst places to live in the world.

In April 1974, a coup in Portugal brought to power a leftist military junta that wished to rid itself of the colony, but not before arming both sides in an incipient civil war which pitted a radical-left movement, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretelin), against factions that wished to reintegrate with West Timor. After arming both sides, but especially arming and training Fretelin, the Portuguese colonial military abandoned the province in August 1974, unleashing a bloody war. It is a war in which 90% of the population was and still is Catholic; the civil war in East Timor continues to be Catholics killing Catholics, be they pro-Indonesia militia or advocates of independence.

Three months after abandoning the province, Portugal declared itself the administrative power. Two days after Fretelin declared the formation of the Democratic Republic of Timor on Nov. 28, 1975, the pro-integration coalition issued its "Balibo Declaration," announcing the integration of East Timor with Indonesia. On Dec. 7, 1975, the pro-integration

coalition, backed by the Indonesian military, took control of the capital city of Dili. On July 17, Indonesian President Suharto signed the law that established East Timor as the 27th province of the Republic of Indonesia.

The underlying frictions that fueled the civil war have never subsided. Despite Indonesia having spent \$892 million to build essential social and physical infrastructure to make East Timor humanly habitable, and continuing to spend an estimated \$100 million per year on the province, the UN still refuses to recognize Indonesia's jurisdiction over East Timor, accepting instead Portugal's claim as the administrative power. On the international front, the cause of East Timor's independence has been championed by the three former colonial powers in Indonesia—Britain, Portugal, and the Netherlands—and by an extensive network of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Popular consultation

In January of this year, Indonesian President B.J. Habibie indicated for the first time that Indonesia would consider a popular consultation for the 800,000 people of East Timor, to decide whether to “accept” or “reject” greater autonomy within Indonesia. Were that autonomy rejected, a process leading to the separation of East Timor from Indonesia would follow. Following months of negotiations, on May 5, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, and Portuguese Foreign Minister Antonio Guterres signed an agreement on the modalities for the consultation to proceed under UN supervision. On Aug. 30, after an overwhelmingly successful voter registration process, in which more than 451,000 voters registered, over 97% of registered voters cast their ballots, with 78.5% voting to reject extended autonomy, and 21.5% voting for.

Within hours of the vote being announced by Kofi Annan on Sept. 7, widespread violence, arson, and looting erupted in East Timor, largely committed by pro-Indonesia militias who refused to accept the result, charging the UN with rigging the vote by intimidating or tricking voters into voting for independence. As of Sept. 10, a senior pro-independence official estimated that 200-300 people had been killed in the previous three days. No reliable estimates of fatalities are available, but an enormous refugee crisis has been created, with some estimates of up to 100,000-200,000 people uprooted and in urgent need of shelter, food, and medical services.

The BAC runs amok

The Blair government, backed by a sympathetic Madeleine Albright, the leadership of Australia and New Zealand, and former colonial power Portugal, among others—a combination that epitomizes the BAC oligarchy—has seized upon this crisis as the pretext to demand that the world's fourth-largest country and third-largest democracy sacrifice its national sovereignty to Blair's “doctrine of international com-

munities.” They are demanding that Indonesia accept deployment of an armed foreign peacekeeping task force into what continues to be its sovereign territory, at least until November, when the upper house of the Indonesian Parliament, the People's Consultative Assembly, must vote whether or not to ratify the Aug. 30 vote.

During late September and early October, reports circulated that as early as February 1999, while the NATO “out-of-area deployment” war on Yugoslav was being prepared, U.S. and Australian officials were already discussing contingencies for deployment of a UN peacekeeping task force into East Timor, even though the tripartite agreement to hold the consultation at all was not signed until three months later. Australia and New Zealand have volunteered to take the lead in any task force, just as Australia played the leading role in the UN's Assistance Mission in East Timor, which is headed by Ian Martin, former head of Amnesty International.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's arrival in Auckland, New Zealand for an emergency meeting on East Timor, ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) meetings on Sept. 12-13, is the giveaway that the furor over the East Timor crisis is not what it appears to be. In fact, Cook had no business being at the APEC meeting at all, because Britain is not even a member of that organization. Cook was deployed on a wrecking operation, on a mission far worse than that carried out by Vice President Al Gore at last year's APEC summit in Kuala Lumpur, at which Gore insulted and threatened the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad. Cook was sent to subvert crucial talks, in particular, among and between President Clinton, China's President Jiang Zemin, and Russian Prime Minister Putin, and to force onto the table of the only major Asia-Pacific economic forum, the new globalist doctrine against the nation-state. Thai Foreign Ministry official Kobsak Chitikul asked the obvious question: “Why is Mr. Robin Cook here?” The emergency meeting took place with the notable absence of the foreign ministers of APEC members China, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. On Sept. 7, as Albright and Cook were converging on Auckland, Fretelin leader Xanana Gusmao accepted Britain's invitation to seek protection in the British Embassy in Jakarta.

The din in international press comparing Indonesia to Kosovo, and declaring this nation of 213 million a “pariah” state, was the subject of the first joint hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the House Committee on International Relations in 15 years on Sept. 9. Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) has introduced legislation to cut off assistance from the IMF, World Bank, and U.S. government. The IMF and World Bank have delayed the next expected disbursements of up to \$2 billion.

Under extreme pressure, President Clinton and his National Security Adviser Samuel Berger have insisted on the strategic importance of the United States' historically strong ties with Indonesia. Fending off reporters on Sept. 8, Berger

told reporters, "Because we bombed in Kosovo doesn't mean we should bomb Dili." He rejected comparisons of Indonesia to Kosovo, and warned that deployment of an armed task force into East Timor without Jakarta's consent, would be the equivalent of a declaration of war on the fourth-largest country in the world.

On Sept. 9, President Clinton issued a statement that many observers see as an effort to minimize the damage to U.S.-Indonesia relations. He announced the suspension of "all programs of U.S. military cooperation with Indonesia," while taking into account the importance of Indonesia to the United States and the world, and gave support to the political and other reforms undertaken in the midst of its worst financial crisis, but still insisting that "the Indonesian government and military are responsible for the safety of the East Timorese and of the UN mission there. If Indonesia does not end the violence, it must invite—it must invite—the international community to assist in restoring security. It must allow international relief agencies to help people on the ground. It must move forward with a transition to independence. Having allowed the vote and gotten such a clear, unambiguous answer, we cannot have a reversal of course here." But, the United States, citing its commitments in Bosnia and Kosovo, has said that its role in any task force would be "logistical" in nature, not involving actual troop deployments.

More rational voices in England are also weighing the risks of radical measures against Indonesia. A *Times* of London editorial on Sept. 10 urged the government to "rein in the war horses" that Foreign Secretary Cook would let loose. Commenting on Cook's radio interview, the *Times* warned, "There are hints in Mr. Cook's comments, . . . that his fervor might carry him away. . . . It is important for Britain not to run the risk of talking itself into commitments it cannot sustain. Thousands of British peacekeepers are already in Kosovo and Bosnia. Moreover, the air of barely contained menace in Mr. Cook's remarks comes as uncomfortable smidgeon too close to the policy option that Indonesia's foreign interlocutors hastily rule out whenever it is voiced: that of sending troops against Jakarta's wishes. This would represent war, with the world's fourth-largest nation."

Lord Eric Aveybury is the unofficial head of the "human rights" lobby in Britain, and is the head of Tapol, one of the premier East Timor-focused NGOs in the world, along with the East Timor Action network. Aveybury admitted to a journalist that there is a "stalemate" over the deployment of an international peacekeeping force into East Timor. He acknowledged that even the Australians, who are prepared to deploy 4,000 troops into East Timor and have conducted evacuations so far, will only do so if they invited by Jakarta and are given a UN Security Council mandate.

Jakarta's options

Indonesians have been conflicted by the East Timor consultation since January. Many leading figures, such as Abdur-

rahman Wahid, head of the 30-million-member Nadlatul Ulama, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose PDI-P party won a plurality of votes in the general election on June 7, opposed the vote. Other prominent Muslim intellectuals are said to have been looking for ways to relieve Indonesia of the financial burden of a province that seems too ungrateful. Others have said the modalities of the consultation were too hurried, and that a longer transition was required, but that once that President Habibie had indicated that the possibility existed, the moment of opportunity had to be taken.

The violent response to the vote strongly indicates that Jakarta and much of Indonesia were surprised by the overwhelming "rejection" vote. A strong backlash has developed, charging that UNAMET unduly favored the pro-independence side and manipulated the vote. But the strongest reaction is to the threat of a breach of Indonesia's sovereignty, both by the imposition of sanctions, and deployment of a peacekeeping force without Indonesia's permission.

On the security issue, Defense Minister and Commander in chief of the Armed Forces (TNI) General Wiranto has indicated that a task force to assist Indonesian resources might be acceptable, but only after TNI and police have allowed to stabilize the situation first.

On the economic front, however, Indonesian Economic Minister Ginandjar Kartasasmita denounced the IMF and the World Bank for trying to put pressure on Indonesia over East Timor. They had "no business" in East Timor, he said, and were stepping outside their charters by commenting on the situation. That sentiment is widely shared in Indonesia; the Indonesian Importers Association has threatened to boycott New Zealand and Australia, a move praised by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce. In his Sept. 9 column in the largest-circulation daily *Kompas*, Dr. Kwik Kian Gie, senior economic adviser to Megawati Sukarnoputri, and a proponent of currency exchange controls, pointed out that the funds Indonesia receives from the IMF and World Bank are going to pay off debts. "The international community knows this well. If new loans stop, old loans are automatically not payable." A sovereign default on Indonesia's outstanding debt of around \$130 billion would bring down the global financial system, faster than Robin Cook can say "free trade."

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