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Is West Papua Another Timor?

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I N F O R M A T I O N A N D R E S E A R C H S E R V I C E S

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27 July 2000

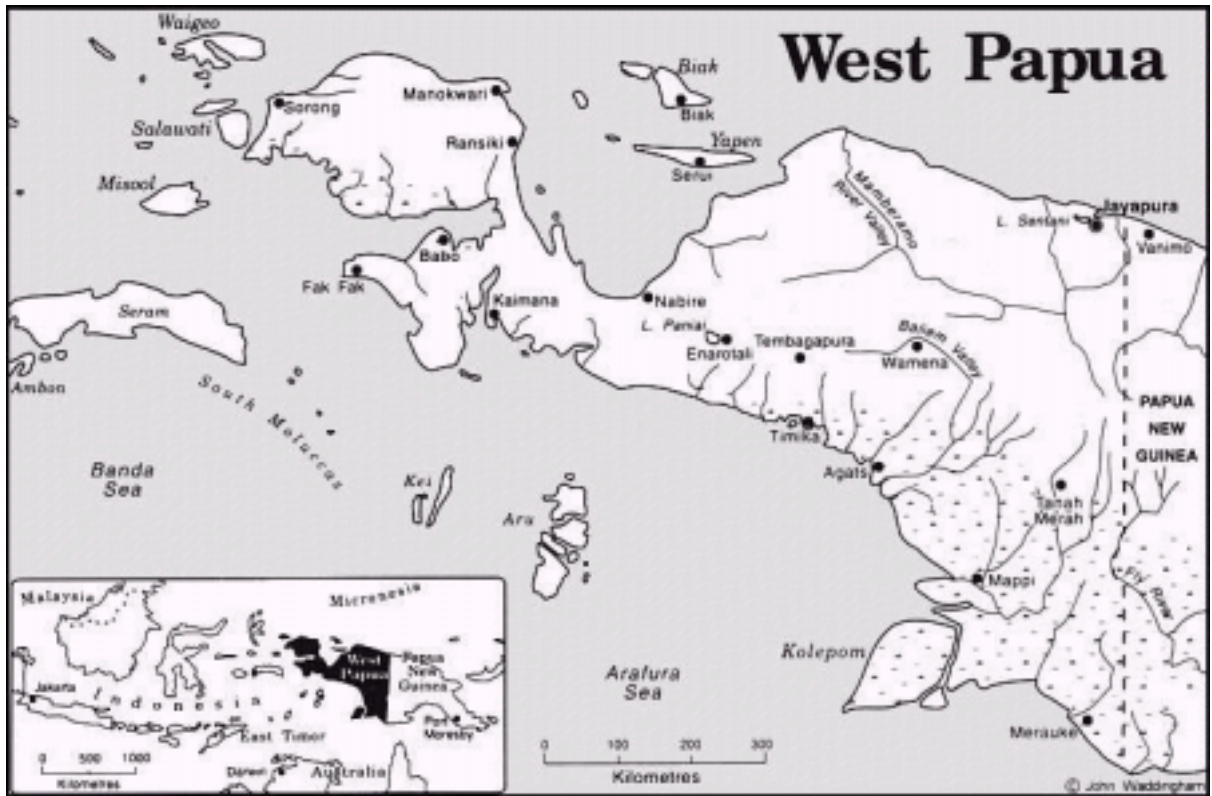
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Contents

Major Issues	i
Introduction.....	1
A Legacy of History.....	2
The Contribution of Dutch and Australian Policy to the creation of a West Papuan Nationalism.....	5
Indonesia's Contribution to the Development of West Papuan Nationalism.....	6
What Choices for Indonesia, Australia and Papua New Guinea Now?.....	7
Indonesia.....	7
Australia	9
Papua New Guinea	11
Conclusions.....	12
Endnotes.....	14
Appendix A.....	19
Resolution from the Papuan People's Congress.	19
Appendix B	21
Australian Papuan New Guinea Security Cooperation	21



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Major Issues

Among the problems facing Indonesia in its post-Suharto transition to democracy is the heightened expression of discontent in some of its regions including Aceh, the Moluccas and the western half of the island of New Guinea which has recently been renamed West Papua.* Responses expected or required from Jakarta to this state of affairs range from proposals for significant regional autonomy to secession or independence. Parallels are frequently drawn between the situation in West New Guinea (WNG) and East Timor, i.e. unless Indonesia moves quickly and convincingly to respond to the situation, a Timor-like situation is likely to develop.

Remarkably, given the province's history, a Congress of 2700 Papuan representatives was allowed to take place in Jayapura at the end of May. Surprisingly (to Jakarta) the resolution which followed it called for West Papua independence. Unsurprisingly, Jakarta has responded that it will not countenance any suggestion of threats to its territorial integrity, in effect that the independence of WNG is not negotiable.

The Congress statement represented the radical extreme of the West Papuan nationalist movement. But there is no doubt that it reflects a long and strong history of West Papuan nationalism which is unlikely to fade away. Particularly in the present circumstances of different expectations from the changed regime in Jakarta, unless properly managed, West New Guinea has all the potential to become a very troublesome issue for Indonesia—and also for Australia and Papua New Guinea.

This paper sets out briefly to examine the crucible in which WNG nationalism was created and, in particular, to remind of Australia's—remarkable from today's point of view—role in it. Australia has played a small but very significant part in WNG's history and this is one reason why the situation in WNG is different from that in East Timor. Another reason for the difference between the WNG and East Timor situation is that the basis for Indonesia's claim to it is entirely different and stems from WNG's place in the former Netherlands East Indies to which the Republic of Indonesia sees itself as the rightful heir. Thus in one interpretation of international law, Indonesia has a legitimate claim to WNG

* Because of these name changes, each of which had political significance, unless the context suggests otherwise, the description WNG will be used throughout.

that it did not have to East Timor. And it is for this reason that Indonesia will not consider independence for WNG for it could open a Pandora's Box.

The future of WNG is at the centre of issues currently confronting the Wahid regime and, if mishandled, is likely to influence not only Wahid's future but the stability of Indonesia as a whole.

For this reason, the issue is also—or ought to be—a very central one for Australian foreign policy. This is in part because of Australia's historical involvement but also because of the importance of good relations with Indonesia and also on account of its defence relationship with Papua New Guinea. Indonesian stability was and is a vital national interest for Australia. But changes in the nature of international relations since Australia first became involved by deciding to back Dutch retention of WNG suggest that, whether it likes it or not, Australia is unlikely to be able to ignore a deteriorating situation in WNG.

Introduction

The resignation of President Suharto in May 1998 and the events that followed it acted as a catalyst to opponents of Indonesian rule in West New Guinea (WNG) which resulted in an upsurge in incidents between Papuans and Indonesians.¹ President Habibie responded with a willingness to apologise for human rights violations but did little in practice and the incidents continued.² Following the election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President in October 1999, some concessions to political expression were made, from a change of the territory's name to Papua to permission to hold a Congress to discuss the future of the territory. These extraordinary concessions, however, have produced some unintended consequences, at least from Indonesia's point of view, for they appear to be seen by some as signals that West Papua, too, can have its independence from Indonesia. This at best causes grave embarrassment to President Wahid and to Indonesia and, at worst, could trigger a cycle not dissimilar to the one that unfolded in Timor.

Allegations of Australian support for West Papuan independence,³ allegations of Golkar support for the Congress (including funding) with a view to undermine Wahid⁴ and allegations of Timor-like tactics with Indonesia's military training of opponents of independence in West Papua⁵ (perhaps to force a crackdown by Wahid) are all reasons to be concerned about the situation in WNG. WNG has the potential to destabilise the Indonesian regime.⁶ WNG has the potential to exacerbate and complicate the re-building of Australia's good relations with Indonesia. And WNG also has the potential to pose some very serious questions for neighbouring Papua New Guinea (PNG) with whom Australia has a defence relationship.

It is amazing that the 29 May–3 June Congress was allowed to take place at all. Credit has to be given to President Abdurrahman Wahid for allowing it to do so. Ever since it took over the administration of the territory from the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) in 1963 and its sovereignty in 1969, Indonesia has not countenanced any suggestion of discussions about a status for WNG other than as part of the Republic of Indonesia. But suddenly West Papuan nationalists have been allowed to fly their flag at protest meetings when this provoked repression, imprisonment and worse in the past, and there has been unprecedented freedom of political expression culminating in the Congress. But Indonesia had apparently expected the Congress to be representative of all points of view in WNG and not just the secessionists. Its Five Point statement affirming the province's determination to separate from Indonesia made it clear that this was not the case (see Appendix A).

There is no question that Indonesia would countenance independence for WNG just as there is no question that Australia would support a push for sovereignty on the part of WNG, and this both have repeatedly made perfectly clear. The sovereignty of WNG is thus not at issue (except for its proponents in the territory). But that there is a movement for independence in WNG and that some elements in Jakarta appear to be making allegations of Australian support for it an excuse for continuing coolness in the relationship (including continually postponed visits by President Wahid to Australia), illustrates its seriousness as an issue. For Indonesia it goes to the heart of its territorial integrity and thus to its stability. For Australia, because of proximity, because of history and because of its ongoing links with Papua New Guinea (PNG), it is likely to be just as challenging to its relations with Indonesia as was the situation in Timor. But there the parallel with Timor ends.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the circumstances of WNG most often illustrated by comparisons with East Timor. In fact the circumstances of the two territories are very different: Indonesia has a claim in law to WNG that it did not have to East Timor.⁷ In addition, Australia played a role which, in earlier years, contributed in no small part to events as they turned out—and clearly Indonesia, or some Indonesians have not forgotten this.

This paper sets out to explain the background to the nationalist movement in what was Dutch New Guinea or West New Guinea, became West Irian or Irian Jaya and is now Papua or West Papua to give the current situation context.* It will examine briefly the relevant history, look at its legacy and assess what options appear to be available to Jakarta, to Canberra and also to Port Moresby.

A Legacy of History

As in so many developing parts of the world where entirely artificial borders were more likely to be drawn along geographic than cultural or ethnic lines, the situation of WNG's status is a colonial accident. And as in so many other parts of the developing world, however illogical those boundaries, for very practical reasons, there has been an extraordinary commitment to them in the absence of any realistic alternative. Because any threat to a colonial boundary anywhere is seen to be a threat to colonial boundaries everywhere, there has been a remarkable consensus or cement around these artificial international boundaries. For once colonial boundaries are questioned, huge parts of the world as we know it have the potential to unravel. This fear has been at the heart of the matter for the leaders of Indonesia since its independence in 1949 right up to the present.

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What precedent would an independent Aceh or Irian present to this 'nation' of a thousand islands and its national identity so hard won through 'unity in diversity'?

The Netherlands cut out its empire in the exotic east for the same reasons that all small, cold, northern sea-faring and trading nations did (there or elsewhere) from the 15th to the 19th centuries—for resources and for trade—and to prevent others from doing so in such degree as to upset the balance of power in Europe. One consequence was the division of the island of New Guinea, in one sense a homogenous ethnic whole for all the multiplicity of separate language groups within its Melanesian framework, and for all the dilution at the edges from different, passing or trading peoples.

The Netherlands East Indies staked its claim to WNG in 1606 and established its first settlement there in 1828. The 141st parallel in the middle of the island of New Guinea came to mark its eastern perimeter. Germany followed its commercial interests and went on to claim the north eastern section of the island (then called New Guinea) in 1884; only ten days later, the British, reluctantly and, after persuasion by the Australian colonies fearful of Russian, French or German domination of the critical trade routes to their north, declared a protectorate over the south east of New Guinea. (The Papua Act transferred the territory to Australia in 1906). After Germany's defeat in World War One, the League of Nations gave Australia the mandate for the administration of German New Guinea, which it administered along with Papua as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG). The TPNG, as Papua New Guinea (PNG), was to achieve self-government in 1972 and independence in 1975.

Once the European colonists had made their claims, there the matter mostly rested, at least for WNG, because this 'last unknown',⁸ was particularly remote and hostile and there was more incentive to concentrate their development effort—or more accurately their interests—elsewhere. But World War Two changed this state of affairs irrevocably. This was in part a consequence of the role the island played in that war, with Japanese occupation from 1941 followed by the allies in 1944 and with West New Guinea's magnificent harbour capital, Hollandia, providing shelter for the allied fleet. More significant, however, were the forces for change which that war unleashed. World War II and the role colonial people so often played in it, was a stimulus to the development of a determination to have more say in their own affairs and thus, eventually, to the momentum for movement towards self-government and independence sooner or later all over the colonised world. And WNG was no exception. For those exposed to external contact, indigenous political expression took the form of both pro-Indonesian and pro-Dutch political association⁹ before it eventually became pro-Papuan and, eventually, pro-independence.

In the Netherlands East Indies this resulted in a war of independence and the creation of the Republic of Indonesia in 1949. But for a complex set of reasons of its own, in part economic—WNG was known to be hugely resource rich—but perhaps also symbolic and psychological,¹⁰ the Dutch had chosen to hang on to this half island. Thus just one small part of the former NEI was excluded from the 1949 transfer of sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia with agreement that its future would be resolved by negotiation thereafter.

The new Indonesian Republic challenged this exclusion and campaigned in the United Nations and elsewhere for the return of WNG, eventually engaging in increasingly belligerent campaigns, including military sorties into the territory itself, to achieve its ends.¹¹

Paradoxically, however, Australia, which with great foresight given the attitudes and circumstances of the times, supported the Indonesian nationalists in their struggle for independence against the Dutch, for some time yet held out strongly against its claims to WNG.

Broader strategic calculations were to determine what followed. These included President Sukarno's flirtation with communism, and western reaction. They also included the generally declining security situation in south east Asia as a whole at a time when Indonesia was also building up to its *Confrontasi* of Malaysia and as western support, in the form of advisers and materials, had begun to be provided to South Vietnam. Australia feared the prospect of a war on three fronts (Vietnam, Malaysia and WNG).¹² Exhortations for support to its great and powerful friends for Australia's position on WNG fell on deaf ears as the focus of their attentions in this period of high Cold War were elsewhere. Meanwhile President Sukarno's increasingly belligerent rhetoric determined upon the return of WNG 'to the fatherland', Indonesia's developing association with the Communist bloc and his preparations for war increased the pressure on the Dutch to cede the territory. Australia had no choice but to change its policy from one of support for Dutch retention of WNG to support of Indonesia's claim.¹³ The territory was handed over to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) in October 1962 and to Indonesian administration in May 1963 pending an Act of Free Choice by 1969 which, as events turned out, was to go resoundingly in Indonesia's favour.

In history and in law, the Republic of Indonesia thus saw itself as the legitimate heir of the entire former Netherlands East Indies of which WNG formed a part. If there was any doubt about this, this was removed by the UN supervised Act of Free Choice, *Pepera*, in 1969. By the Indonesian process of *musjawarah*, (consensus) the approximately 800 000 people of the territory chose 1025 representatives in 8 *kabupaten* (regional) consultative assemblies to vote in the Act of Free Choice. In spite of the very questionable nature of that process¹⁴ which Indonesia claimed returned a unanimous vote in its favour, there was clearly no realistic alternative—no-one of any account was willing or able to stand in Indonesia's way¹⁵.

In contrast, to East Timor Indonesia never had a similar claim. Divided as arbitrarily by colonial powers as the island of New Guinea, in this case between the Dutch in the west and the Portuguese in the east, Indonesia has and had no comparable claim—whatever the geographic, ethnic or strategic logic may suggest—to the eastern half of the island of Timor which they took over when it was so unceremoniously abandoned by the Portuguese in 1975. In this way Indonesia's action in seizing East Timor can be and was seen as an act of aggression in breach of international law. Indonesia's campaign to win back WNG before 1962, and its rule of it thereafter, however questionable in democratic

or other terms on the other hand, was ultimately accepted as no more and no less than the exercise of its legitimate sovereign right.

The Contribution of Dutch and Australian Policy to the creation of a West Papuan Nationalism

Having neglected WNG shamelessly—in 1945 there was next to no development at all in the territory beyond its harbour capital of Hollandia and one or two other coastal settlements—the Dutch changed tack. An airport at Biak and airstrips in the Baliem valley to assist its opening up, improved harbour facilities in Hollandia, dockyards in Manokwari and a slipway in Merauke—and housing for the growing expatriate community—came with the fifties. In addition, once the decision was made to hold on to the territory, efforts were made to accelerate the education of a small elite and to create a sense of West Papuan nationalism. This included, by 1961, the establishment of a Legislative Council with an indigenous majority and a ten year plan (the Luns Plan) to bring the territory to independence.

While Australian governments since 1962 have repeatedly and unequivocally supported Indonesia's claim to WNG, and continue to do so today, there was a time when this was not the case. In 1949, Australia had encouraged the Dutch to hold on to the territory when they had not yet determined to do so.¹⁶ In the early 1950s, Australia was also the prime mover in initiating a policy of administrative cooperation between the Dutch and Australian administrations in the island of New Guinea.¹⁷ This culminated in the 1957 Joint Statement on Administrative Cooperation between Holland and Australia which Australia's representative at the UN, Mr Walker, declared to be 'a solemn undertaking of a long-term policy nature'.¹⁸ The statement resurrected speculation about plans for the creation of a Melanesian Federation including PNG and perhaps also the Solomon Islands. A vocal proponent of the idea was the then Justice John Kerr.¹⁹ A Melanesian Federation continued to have currency in both the eastern and western halves of the island of New Guinea, as well as in sections of Australian opinion, long after events had moved on and it was clear that no such creation could ever be entertained.²⁰

Joint cooperation with the Dutch administration had begun with practical cross border liaison between Hollandia and Port Moresby early in the 1950s. The Statement formalised engagement in 'low key' joint cooperation arrangements including such issues as land law policy, the question of a common language, inclusion of indigenous people in the public service, sea and telecommunications links, study groups, student exchanges and even dedicated places for WNG students in Australian educational institutions.²¹ However pragmatically it had recognised the need to support Indonesia's independence movement, Australia had no wish to share a border with Indonesia in the middle of the island of New Guinea and for some time clearly pursued policies with another outcome in mind.

We need to recall the mood of the times and in particular contemporary attitudes towards Europe and Asia to fully comprehend this state of affairs. Notwithstanding fears raised by President Sukarno's erratic, strongly nationalistic and increasingly belligerent style, interestingly, a critical role in the unfolding WNG dispute was played by Australia's agricultural interests as much as its defence lobbies. At a time when there were five Country Party members and four farmers (one of whom was the Minister of Defence)²² in the Coalition Cabinet (from 1949–56), the threat to Australia's then major agricultural exporting interests of Indonesia's takeover of WNG was seen to be dramatic. Australia would share a land border in the island of New Guinea with Indonesia. There was a long history of concern over the danger of plant and animal diseases spreading from WNG and of the need to keep the island as a disease free buffer. This undoubtedly contributed to the decision to continue first to back Dutch retention of the western half of the island of New Guinea and then to engage in administrative cooperation in managing New Guinea affairs.

Both, however, were to be shortlived. As well as the pressures building up against the Dutch position in the United Nations, the US's determination to improve relations with Indonesia resulted in a shift from its position of neutrality on WNG to one which supported Indonesia's claim. West New Guinea was seen to be a small price to keep Sukarno out of the communist camp.²³ And Australia had no choice but to follow suit. Instructions went out to its patrol officers in the border regions of the TPNG to close the border and 'orient its peoples eastwards'. This was to be followed over the years by efforts to mark an impossible border in some of the most inhospitable terrain on earth so that, thereafter, the refugees who periodically crossed it (often with the Indonesian army in hot pursuit) could be sent back.²⁴

Indonesia's Contribution to the Development of West Papuan Nationalism

The policies of the Dutch and Australian governments in the 1950s contributed to the development of a sense of West Papuan nationalism by creating expectations of a future other than one incorporated in the Indonesian Republic, expectations which, in the event, could not be realised. But the tragedy of the territory's history is that this would have been unlikely to survive, at least in its militant or extremist form, if experience under Indonesian rule had been different. Indonesia had six years, between accession to its administration in 1962 and the Act of Free Choice in which to win the hearts and minds of the people. But Indonesia had a major distraction elsewhere in the form of Confrontation of Malaysia. It pulled out of the UN in 1965 and declared there would be no plebiscite in WNG. When Suharto replaced Sukarno and his Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, said that the Act of Free Choice would go ahead after all, the fact that Indonesia could not afford to lose the vote meant that repression still took precedence over development.

After the Act of Free Choice in 1969 came the need to manage the local reaction to it, including the flight of refugees across the border into the TPNG. The '70s therefore continued to be years of tension and the territory was closed to the outside world. Then

came *transmigrasi*, the importation of people particularly from the overcrowded island of Java to settle on land in WNG²⁵ and the economic exploitation which followed. This was symbolised by the huge developments of the world's richest goldmine (at Freeport) and of logging in forested areas second only to those of the Amazon basin.

Refugee movement into Papua New Guinea continued to be an issue well into the 1980s and one reason now suggested was transmigration. A Republic wide policy to ease population pressure in Java, it was also seen to have development, integration and border control as its motive.²⁶ Under Indonesia's third five year plan of 1979–84, 59 700 transmigrants went to WNG. For the plan period 1984–89 this number was to rise to from 500 000 to 700 000.

These numbers were not, in the event, achieved. Nor, it seems, were the attempts proposed to accompany it of more sensitive policies taking into account Papuan interests, including those for parallel development and greater attention to environmental protection.²⁷ Another ten years on, by the end of the Suharto era, development policies which exacerbated the divide between Jakarta and its regions had clearly not changed. In WNG this still meant the exclusion of Papuans either from participation in development or a flow back income. It meant continuing environmental costs of non-sustainable development, in particular in the forestry and marine sectors. And it meant the failure of efforts that were made to increase the standard of living in rural areas because the policies were designed in Jakarta taking no account of local circumstances and excluding the participation of local communities.²⁸

History had forced perhaps the two most incompatible peoples on earth—the one animist or Christian, pork-eating, often *koteka*²⁹ clad primitive Melanesian inhabitant and the other Islamic, elitist, traditionalist and usually Javanese—to live side-by-side. Even without political repression and economic exploitation, the relationship would always have been exceedingly difficult. Indonesian policies undoubtedly created the conditions for the continued activities of the *Organsasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM), the free Papua Movement. The fall of President Suharto provided the catalyst for its latest militance.

What Choices for Indonesia, Australia and Papua New Guinea Now?

Indonesia

There is without doubt a persistent nationalist movement in WNG, the strength or cohesion of which has never been reliably established. But it has been robust enough to continue creating problems for Indonesia for almost 40 years.

That said, the bottom line remains the same. WNG is, for Indonesia, in some key senses more critical than Timor ever was because it was an intrinsic part of the former NEI to which the Indonesian Republic is rightful heir and successor. As well, its Freeport mine has apparently become the biggest single source of revenue to the Republic of Indonesia.³⁰ Just as importantly, independence for WNG would set a powerful precedent for Aceh, for the Moluccas or for any other dissatisfied extremity of Indonesia's empire. And for this very reason, it cannot, like Timor, be let go. Timor, for the western observer, must be separated out as a one-off and the distinction be strongly made between its very different status from that of WNG—or Aceh, or any other part of the Indonesian Republic. Indonesia cannot and will not cede independence to any of these movements.

With all the other issues confronting a democratising Indonesia, Indonesia cannot, either, afford to continue to respond to its WNG problem with what had become a heavy hand with all its costs and consequences. In spite of its now much greater multicultural character, its use of Bahasa Indonesian and its ethnically mixed population, almost half of which is not Papuan, WNG's continuing capacity to cause embarrassment or worse to Jakarta suggests that policies other than those adopted by Jakarta to date are long overdue, especially in the present circumstances of perhaps greater national fragility. What Indonesia needs to do is to work with the peoples of WNG to relieve their grievances against Jakarta, to include them in their own governance and, simultaneously, to improve their standard of living.

Indonesia's recent commitment to legislation to ensure that there is a substantial economic return to resource rich provinces may be too little too late, but it has to start somewhere. It is significant that West Papuan nationalism is strong in the mining area. Parallels could perhaps be drawn with the situation that unfolded at the Bougainville mine in Papua New Guinea.³¹ Indonesia needs to recognise the problem and make enough compromises and commit to real development to convince the people of WNG of a new approach. This may need to include greater devolution to the regions, significant local autonomy—or even by a return to some form of the federal arrangement that Indonesia so briefly inherited from the Dutch.

Indonesia could also consider the establishment of cooperative development councils including representatives of those with a keen interest in the successful integration of WNG as the 26th province of the Republic of Indonesia. PNG would have a lot to offer as a like-minded Melanesian culture, including with lessons from Bougainville, as would Australia with its history of involvement with this part of the world. But the latter, at least, is unlikely to be welcome in the short-term and in the wake of Australia's involvement in East Timor. Resentment of Australia's role in Interfet shows little sign of abating as reaction, particularly in the Indonesian armed forces, to Australia's recently released defence green paper ('Australian regional military triumphalism') reveals.³²

The International Crisis Group suggests that the international community could facilitate a dialogue on WNG, for example by providing neutral venues and financial support. Offers of substantial financial support for post-resolution economic rehabilitation might provide

additional incentives for the parties to reach agreement.³³ And an obvious candidate for this is the Netherlands where there is residual sympathy (and possibly investment interest) in the territory. Practical support might also come from likely large aid donors, including Japan which is probably now the largest donor to the region, from the World Bank and from the US with its interest in the stability of this fourth largest country on earth.

But the invitation must come from Jakarta.

Whether Indonesia can rise to the very demanding and long-term challenges in WNG with or without international support is the greatest of tests for President Wahid and his successors—and immediate signs are mixed.

Signals of a positive change in Indonesia's approach to its 26th province include its recent commitment to legislation to ensure that there is a substantial economic return to resource rich provinces. President Habibie introduced legislation in April 1999 both to promote regional autonomy and to balance finances between central and regional governments.³⁴ There have also been commitments to human rights monitoring in the province³⁵ which, if acted upon, could go some way towards convincing Papuans that Indonesia is genuine in its attempts to change. Perhaps most importantly 'in contrast to Soeharto's heavy reliance on repression, the Abdurrahman Government, like the Habibie Government before it, has emphasised the need for dialogue and a political approach'.³⁶ But results have yet to be seen and meanwhile Wahid has been forced to backtrack.

Unsurprisingly, Vice President Megawati Sukarnotputri—daughter of the President who made return of WNG so central a plank in his own nationalist campaign—dissuaded President Wahid from opening the Papuan Congress.³⁷ Following its dramatic results, President Wahid went on to discuss the meeting as illegitimate since it failed to represent all opinion in the territory and to assert that Indonesia's security forces would react decisively to security threats.³⁸ A number of the principals behind the organisation of the Congress have subsequently been questioned and, according to the official Antara agency, face possible life imprisonment for treason.³⁹ The Indonesian navy recently announced plans to build a 3000 man naval base at Sorong and, according to the Far Eastern Economic Review of 6 July, the military has been quietly strengthening its intelligence gathering capabilities in the province.

Australia

As already noted, consistent with a now very longstanding policy, in the context of reaction to the Papuan Congress statement of determination upon independence, Australia has again categorically ruled out support for WNG's independence. This came in the context of Foreign Minister Mr Alwi Shihab's claim that several Australian non-government organisations who had attended the Congress were stirring up independence sentiment.⁴⁰ Australia made a pragmatic decision a long time ago that it has no choice but

to support Indonesia's sovereignty in WNG and this will not change. On account of the elements in Jakarta which appear to be unconvinced of this state of affairs, Australia will need to continue to make this abundantly clear.

Australia will also need to continue to make it abundantly clear that it has a vital interest in the stability of Indonesia overall and thus in any implications for that stability of developments in West Papua.

That said, Australia's interest is also driven by residual sympathies across the border in Papua New Guinea, by its own political constituency which includes elements likely to be vocal in the face of allegations of human rights abuses in WNG and because of the unavoidable strategic import of the territory to Australia, including through Australia's defence links with Papua New Guinea (See Appendix B). Coral Bell has recently written of the profound normative shift in the society of states over the last fifty years over which the WNG drama has been played out.⁴¹ This, she argues, has induced a new international focus on minorities and on issues like the environment which reduces what was the absolute sovereignty of nation states to act at will at least inside their own borders. Taken to its logical conclusions, this suggests that neither Indonesia nor Australia will be able to 'manage' the WNG problem away, largely by denying it exists, as they have been inclined to do in the past.

In addition, and its support for Indonesian sovereignty notwithstanding, Australia could not stand idly by if the situation in WNG deteriorated dramatically and there was increasing use of force by the Indonesian military. Fifty years on, there is also a different expectation of the role Australia will play in the maintenance of the peace and security of the South West Pacific region. As in the Timor situation where it did take up the challenge, and as in the Fiji and Solomons situations, where it did not, there is an expectation of Australia playing a leadership role in the management of these sorts of disturbances in the South West Pacific region.⁴²

But the WNG question is, in some ways, a much more complicated issue for Australia than was Timor. This is because of the role it did play in the past which may be contributing to current suspicions of its motives in Jakarta and because of its defence links with Papua New Guinea. This, however, leaves it with few choices but to continue to strike a balance between support for the sovereignty of Indonesia and seeking to re-develop good relations with Indonesia on the one hand and, on the other, encouragement of the kinds of policies most likely to weaken the hold of extremist nationalists in Papua.

An Australian role in a deteriorating WNG situation for the foreseeable future, therefore, will not mirror the role it played in East Timor. Because of the limits of its defence capability, but more importantly because of the exigencies of its relationship with Indonesia, that role is likely to be more effectively played economically, diplomatically and regionally. Australia should be saying as often as possible at the highest levels that what it wants is a unified, secular and stable Indonesia. In spite of difficulties in the

relationship which from time to time must be expected to occur, it should also point to the strategic interests that Australia and Indonesia share.

Thus there aren't really any choices for Australia either. While not wanting to exacerbate the very difficult situation that the Indonesian Government is in, Australia could quietly acknowledge its history and, indeed, seek to use it to convince Jakarta that it has a contribution to make. Australian decision-makers need to put an enormous effort into convincing Indonesia of its commitment to Indonesian sovereignty and to its stability. Recognising that so much of Indonesian stability generally could hinge on economic progress, this could include a major diplomatic effort to generate practical support for Indonesia as it seeks to meet the demands, in particular, of its Papuan, Moluccan and Acehese constituents.

In addition, while Australia must perhaps be philosophical about the inevitable agitation of those few who will inevitably latch onto human rights abuses in WNG to argue their preference for the coincidence of nation and state, i.e. self-determination for peoples along ethnic lines, these arguments cannot be ignored.⁴³ Canberra needs to convince Jakarta that reference to this matter should not detract from the importance of the relationship overall. There is also a very strong argument to work with Indonesia to make WNG a very central priority for Australia's aid program.⁴⁴

Papua New Guinea

There has always been residual sympathy in Papua New Guinea for the people of WNG and for their difficulties under Indonesian administration and this is hardly surprising.⁴⁵ Its very first self-governing elite were often themselves among the schoolchildren who had gone on the cross border exchanges encouraged under Dutch-Australian administrative cooperation arrangements. In addition, those who live in the border regions know full well that the refugees who came across in numbers in the lead up to the Act of Free Choice and periodically thereafter, were not always the nomadic peoples who moved across the often unmarked border for traditional reasons, or the economic refugees looking for a better life in a more advanced PNG which both Australian and PNG governments were inclined to describe them to be. They were as well, the educated elite fleeing political persecution; it is these who sought, and were granted, permissive residence in PNG, where many of them remain today.

The situation in WNG and the refugee movement that occurred as a result of it caused some tension in particular in PNG's early days of independence. But PNG governments, like their Australian counterparts before them, understandably and inevitably eventually came to take a pragmatic view. PNG has no choice but to get on with its very large neighbour across the border; refugees were and are mostly sent back and no support was or is offered to the OPM.

But PNG governments, too, must expect that a shared Melanesian heritage will make for continuing sympathy, such as that expressed by John Tekewie, a PNG provincial governor who attended the May Congress, who called on Australia, the Netherlands and the US to take up the cause of Papuan independence.⁴⁶ PNG could be caught up in what appears to be a resurgent Melanesian identity throughout the South West Pacific, as expressed in Fiji and the Solomons. However, like Australia, in spite of—or perhaps because of—the exigencies of managing its own national unity and expectations of development, PNG must work hard to convince Indonesia of PNG's commitment to Indonesia's national integrity and seek to contribute what it has in particular to offer, namely a Melanesian perspective on the development of neighbouring WNG.

Conclusions

Apart from continuing support from groups in Holland,⁴⁷ a little sporadic concern expressed by US Congressmen and the odd Australian MP,⁴⁸ the West Papuan cause, was never to capture the international attention of a Timor, at least to date. This is unlikely to change, even in the present situation in which it is being considered alongside Aceh and the Moluccas as a test for the democratising regime which replaced President Suharto. What is likely to change in present circumstances is WNG's capacity to be a greater irritant in the body politic of Indonesia which will not be easily or quickly managed.

Australia has at times been deeply involved in the history of West New Guinea and, from Indonesia's point of view, not always on the right side of the equation. Events in WNG played a very significant part in the evolution of Australia's own foreign policy by assisting its understanding of the limits of alliance association when greater interests are at stake. Australian protestation that retention of WNG in Dutch (or friendly western) hands was a vital national interest counted for nothing when there were bigger issues at stake (keeping Sukarno out of the communist camp). The ramifications of an international dispute over the territory of WNG also had a dramatic effect on what was to become Papua New Guinea, accelerating what, until then, was a much more leisurely timetable for the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea to move towards self-government and independence.

In 12 short years, the Dutch did create an expectation of a future for WNG other than as part of the Republic of Indonesia. Subsequent Indonesian mal-administration ensured that WNG nationalism survived and grew as, perhaps, some might argue, did Australia's refusal to concede that there was a problem of mal-administration at all. So central had become the determination of good relations with Indonesia, that Australia chose to turn a blind eye to the deteriorating situation in WNG, sending back the waves of refugees who fled across the border into TPNG and encouraging a subsequent independent Papuan New Guinea to do similarly.

It can therefore be argued that as well as the logic of propinquity and region, Australia has a more than usual responsibility to seek to mitigate the worst effects of what at best can be described as an unfortunate history. Paradoxically, how this can be done, or even whether this can be done, will depend on the strength of the relationship it builds up with the new Indonesian administration which has shown the first signs of tolerance and enlightenment in WNG, albeit within the clear limits of the union of the Republic. Perhaps the greatest challenge for Australia is to win the confidence of Indonesia on the question of WNG so that it can play a constructive role.

So is West Papua another Timor? Yes and no. The answer to the question is 'yes' in that, in the worse case scenario, WNG could become just such a continuing conflict as much, or even more, a reason for tension in the Australian-Indonesian relationship. To avoid the development of such a circumstance, decision-makers in both Jakarta and Canberra, and also in Port Moresby, should be giving this situation the highest possible attention and preferably also in tripartite consultation.

The answer is also 'yes' because, like Timor, developments in WNG, or perceived policy failures in WNG, especially if these lead to any diminution of the nation, or the unity of the nation, will either build on the pressure mounting against President Wahid or contribute to the campaign to undermine him. Its significance for the stability of Indonesia as a whole, therefore, cannot be underestimated any more than its significance for Australian-Indonesian relations themselves.

The answer to the question is 'no' because the nature of the situation is different. In East Timor, Indonesia invaded a territory in breach of international law. In WNG Indonesia has sought, and seeks, to maintain its sovereign territorial integrity. However resource rich this land of now approximately two million people, it is the Republic of Indonesia's sovereign integrity which remains the vital issue, but this at a time when sovereignty alone is no longer the primary or sole determinant of the way international relations are played.

For Australia, while also driven by a particular history and, to some extent by public reaction to perceptions of human rights abuses, interest in Timor is interest in regional security and stability. It is also acceptance of international expectation to play a contributing role to that end. In WNG it is different. Here Australia has a national interest because of history, geography, political responsibility and, significantly, because of its relationship with PNG across the border, including in defence.

This being the case, a primary challenge for Australia's Government is to de-link the situation of East Timor and of West New Guinea in the public mind. Just as the Government's policy on East Timor as it unfolded particularly from 1999 was to expressly exclude the question of East Timor from any other possible separatist claim in Indonesia, so it needs to continue to make this distinction clear to its domestic constituency, and to the international community at large, including Indonesia.

Endnotes

1. A detailed account of the troubles which followed the end of the Suharto era can be found in Human Rights Watch, December 1998.
2. Examples of recent incidents include Indonesian troops firing on 2000 demonstrators at Timika, near Freeport in December 1999 resulting in 55 wounded and 30 arrests, while 15000 were alleged to have gathered in Jayapura to commemorate the anniversary of the declaration of an independent West Papua 38 years ago, AP, 'Irian protest ends bloodily', *The Australian Financial Review*, 3 December 1999. There were subsequent troubles in Fak Fak the following March and the burning of the Indonesian Governor's waterfront office in Jayapura in May.
3. Peter Hartcher, 'West Papua shaping as Howard's next East Timor', *The Australian Financial Review Weekend*, 10–12 June 2000, p. 9, and Lindsay Murdoch, 'Our enemies in Jakarta are telling tales', Comment, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June 2000, p. 13.
4. Lindsay Murdoch and Andrew Kilvert, 'Golkar youth funding separatists: Indonesia', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 June 2000.
5. Ibid., see also Michael Maher, 'Melanesian Meltdown: Papua', *The Bulletin*, June 27 2000, p. 39. The SBS's *Dateline* program of 5 July 2000 also presented a substantial case on the use of Timor-like tactics and noted that the current Governor, General Musiran, was an intelligence operative in East Timor. A pro-Indonesian militia, Satgas Mera Puti, is said to have received funds from Jakarta to oppose the Satgas Papua, the pro-independence militia, and to be infiltrated by Pemuda Pancasila, the terror organisation used by Suharto to undermine his opponents.
6. Amien Rais, the Speaker of the Indonesian Parliament (and Presidential candidate in the 1999 election) was reported to say in a recent TV interview that the problem of Papua is bigger than Indonesia's economic crisis because it threatens national integration. Geoff Mulherin, 'Zigzag act over Papuan choices', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 2000.
7. Indonesia did, however, consider that it had a legitimate claim for its presence in East Timor after invasion in 1976. While not accepted by most nations or by the UN, Australia gave de jure recognition to Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor in February 1979, see Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the Nineties*, Second Edition, Melbourne University Press, 1995, p. 200.
8. A description coined by Gavin Souter, as the title of his book, *New Guinea: The Last Unknown*, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne 1964.
9. See Paul W Van der Veur, 'Political Awakening in West New Guinea', *Pacific Affairs*, vol-XXXVI, No1 Spring 1963, pp. 57–73.
10. This thesis is developed by Arendt Lijphart in, *The Trauma of Decolonisation: The Dutch and West New Guinea*, Yale UP, 1966.
11. This is described in chapter 5 of *Australia Papua New Guinea and the West New Guinea Question 1949–69* 'The WNG Dispute from February 1959 to August 1962: Brinkmanship

- Internationalisation, Escalation, and Settlement', by J. R. Verrier, PhD Thesis, Monash University 1976.
12. This was made clear in a statement made by Prime Minister Menzies on defence expenditure in 1963, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. 38, p1669.
 13. J. R. Verrier loc. cit., Chapter 6, 'Australia's West New Guinea Policy from February 1959: Dispute, Settlement and Defence Development'.
 14. Writing after observing the first act at Merauke, Australian journalist and author, Peter Hastings, reported that 'every conceivable instrument available to the Indonesian Government—the good and the bad—was brought to bear on the people in the south west corner of West Irian'. There was bribery—clothes, cigarettes, consumer goods—all these things rushed to the territory before the Act to persuade the people of Indonesia's good intentions, along with promises of the high positions and rewards that would follow. There were cheer squads at the meetings reminding some of Sukarno's days and other festivals with flags, bunting and dancing 'brilliantly managed somewhat like a last minute giant cargo cult', *The Australian*, 16 July 1969.
 15. Writing in *A Thousand Days: John F Kennedy in the White House*, Andre Deutsch, London 1965, p. 466, Arthur Schlesinger Jr concluded that critics could plausibly attack the settlement as 'a shameful legalisation of Indonesian expansion, and indeed it was; but the alternative of a war over West New Guinea had perhaps even less appeal.'
 16. H. Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, Cornell UP Ithaca, New York 1962, concludes that the LCP government of Menzies 'waged an exceedingly active diplomatic campaign in favour of the status quo in the territory since it came to office in 1949.
 17. The issue was raised by Foreign Minister Spender on a visit to The Hague as early as 1950 and press speculation at the time reflected this (*Canberra Times* 23 and 30 August 1950). The issue is explored in J. R. Verrier op. cit., Chapter 2, 'Australian-Dutch Administrative Cooperation in New Guinea from 1949 to 1957.'
 18. Addressing the General Assembly on 21 November 1957, *Current Notes on International Affairs* (CNIA) vol. 28, no. 11 (November 1957), p. 898.
 19. Kerr gave a paper to this effect at the 1958 Political Science Summer School. It appears as chapter four of *New Guinea and Australia*, AIPS Summer School, Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1958, pp. 138–163.
 20. In 'The New Guinea Villager', F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne 1965, p. 7, C. D Rowley observed wryly '... the proposed Melanesian Federation had its day, until reality burst in with Soekarno'.
 21. This was indicated by the statement released before the first annual conference on administrative cooperation following the Joint Statement which took place (in camera) in Canberra, CNIA, vol. 29 no. 10 (October 1958) pp. 654–655.
 22. The CP Members were Fadden, McEwan, Page, Anthony and Cooper, the farmers were McBride, McEwan, Anthony and Cooper, and the Minister for Defence was McBride.

23. 'Just as Cold War considerations influenced the US to intervene in the years of 1949 and 1958, so this would be the lever in 1961–62'. F. P. Bunnell, *The Kennedy Initiative in Indonesia 1962-63*, PhD Thesis, Cornell University, September 1969, p. 37.
24. Minister Hasluck had been concerned about border demarcation for some years and it was not until July 1962 that he obtained Cabinet approval to start aerial mapping of the international border in NG. There remained doubt as to where the border was at the time of the Indonesian takeover and for sometime afterwards. P. Hasluck, *A Time for Building*, Melbourne University Press, 1976 p. 369.
25. One result is reported to be that Papuans make up 1.3 million of the province's 2.2 million population today, *Pacific News Bulletin*, February 2000, p. 10.
26. Peter Hastings, 'National Integration in Indonesia: The Case of Irian Jaya', in *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, edited by Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 1984, p. 141.
27. Ian Bell, Herb Feith and Ron Hatley were optimistic about a more enlightened approach to WNG in their article 'The West Papuan Challenge to Indonesian Authority in Irian Jaya: Old Problems New Possibilities', *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVI, no. 5 May 1986, pp. 548–555.
28. See 'Rural Community Development in Irian Jaya: In Search of an Appropriate Model' by Cliff Marlessy, chapter 13 in *Indonesia Assessment 1995* edited by Colin Barlow and Joan Hardjono, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 1996, especially pp. 245–248.
29. The *koteka* is the penis gourd traditionally worn in WNG.
30. I am indebted to the comments of Dr Ron May Senior Fellow Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Island Studies, Australian National University for this observation.
31. *ibid.*
32. Paul Daley, 'Defence plans rile Indonesia', *The Age*, 7 July 2000.
33. 'Indonesia Crisis: Chronic But Not Acute', *International Crisis Group Indonesia Report no. 2*, Jakarta/Brussels, 31 May 2000, p. 33.
34. This is described in *Information and Research Services Current Issues Brief no. 17 1999–2000 'Indonesia's Future Prospects: Separatism, Decentralisation and the Survival of the Unitary State'* by Grayson Lloyd.
35. AFP, 'Indonesia promises probe into rights in Irian Jaya', *The Canberra Times*, 11 June 2000 reported 'an initiative to increase efforts to investigate human rights violations in the territory with Human Rights Minister, Hasballah Saad, suggesting that a special team would be established for this purpose.'
36. *ICG Indonesia Report no. 2*, *op. cit.* p. 16.
37. This occurred following her visit to the province, Lindsay Murdoch and Andrew Kilvert, 'Independence meeting to defy Jakarta's warnings: Papua', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 2000.

38. President Wahid was reported to warn of a military crackdown in Papua and against international interference in the province's affairs in Lindsay Murdoch, 'Military threat to curb self rule move: Papua', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 2000, p. 10.
39. AFP, 'West Papua activists face life sentences', *The Canberra Times*, 21 June 2000.
40. Lindsay Murdoch, 'Australians blamed for violence: Papua', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 31, 2000. This has been more recently repeated by Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, in an address to the Sydney Institute on 17 July, AAP, 'Australia will not support secession in Irian Jaya', *The Canberra Times*, 18 July 2000, p. 2.
41. Coral Bell, 'A Mixed Bag of Dilemmas: Australia's Policy-Making in a World of Changing International Rules', *Information and Research Services Research Paper no. 24 1999–2000*, DPL, Canberra, 2000.
42. This was made perfectly clear by US Defence Secretary, William Cohen, visiting Australia in the lead up to Australia's defence white paper which will establish the framework for Australian defence for the future. He said that the US saw Australia as a key anchor of its Asia-Pacific regional defence strategy and looked to Australia for leadership on important issues such as a fall-out from Fiji's hostage crisis. Editorial, 'The message from America', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 2000, p. 16 and AAP, 'US flags role for Australia in space defence', *The Canberra Times*, 17 July 2000.
43. Foreign Minister Downer made this point in an address to the Sydney Institute on 17 July when he urged Jakarta to proceed 'with full regard' to human rights in dealing with sectarian strife in WNG and elsewhere. He acknowledged that it was too late to redraw colonial boundaries and instead advocated the development of multicultural, tolerant societies within them. Alexander Downer, 'Three ways to answer outraged cries of "do something"', [This is an extract of a speech the Minister for Foreign Affairs delivered in Sydney last night], *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 18 2000, p. 17.
44. While Indonesia has been cautious about Australian development assistance programs to Eastern Indonesia generally, AusAid does support a number of NGO's in WNG but limits these to non-political areas such as rural water supply and agriculture, see Barlow and Hardjono, op. cit., p. 249. Australia has also engaged in joint projects with other international agencies in WNG. For example, \$3 million was provided from July 1991 to Sept 1997 through World Vision to improve Dani women and children's health and nutritional status through the Women and their Children's Health (WATCH) project in the Jaya Wijaya district (Baliem Valley). AusAid also worked with Indonesian authorities and the ICRS to help with drought relief, including with Blackhawk helicopters, in 1998, (*Focus* July 1998).
45. Even Michael Somare, who went on as Chief Minister to develop a much more pragmatic view, in debate in the Papua New Guinea House of Assembly leading up to the Act of Free Choice, then took the view that: 'we are the same people and, therefore, we have every right to talk about these problems which are so close to us and are concerning the people who are brothers to us'. He was echoed by many more of the then PNG's first representatives, e.g. Angmai Bilas, 'I am very sympathetic towards the West Papuan people, the West Irianese, who are the same race of people as we Papuans and the New Guineans' and Tei Abal 'these people in West Irian are the same as us and are our 'wantoks" see House of Assembly Debate, vol. II no. 5 pp. 1346–1442, 25 and 27 June 1969.

46. Lindsay Murdoch, 'Australians blamed for violence: Papua', op. cit. Tekwie's wife is West Papuan.
47. A seminar on West Papua on 20 November 1999 organised by the Foundation for Studies and Information of Papuan Peoples led the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, J. J. van Aartsen, to agree to an investigation into circumstances of WNG's incorporation into the Republic of Indonesia. *Pacific News Bulletin*, December 1999, p. 3.
48. The left wing of the Labor Party, e.g. Senators McIntosh and Gietzelt, raised a series of questions on the issue in the Australian Parliament in the lead up to Act of Free Choice in 1969 and on through the refugee problems in the 1970s and 1980s. Most recently WNG has featured in Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary debates in the form of a motion on notice on West Papuan self-determination placed by Senator Bob Brown in November 1999, which received no support, Senate, *Debates* 23 November 1999, p.10423.

Appendix A

Resolution from the Papuan People's Congress.

Following a lengthy preamble, the Port Numbay Resolution of 4 June 2000 declared:

"We the people of West Papua want to separate ourselves from the Unitary Republic of Indonesia to be fully sovereign and independent among other nations in the world."

Recognising the importance of respecting and protecting the civil rights of every citizen of West Papua, including minority groups;

Further recognising the importance of adopting a constructive attitude to ventures for capital investment in West Papua, where such ventures respect the environment and the rights of the indigenous people;

The 2nd Papuan Congress formally adopts the Numbay Resolution 2000 and calls on the United Nations, the governments of the Republic of Indonesia, the Netherlands, the United States of America and all other members of the international community to undertake urgent action, jointly and severally, to:

Accept responsibility for a resolution of the situation in West Papua and for the life, liberty and security of the people of West Papua;

Immediately revoke United Nations resolution 2504 of 19 December 1969;

Facilitate recognition of the aspirations of the people of West Papua for truth, justice, peace and self-determination;

Facilitate a just and enduring settlement of the political status of West Papua through meaningful negotiations between the legitimate representatives of the people of West Papua, the governments of Indonesian, the Netherlands, and the United States of America, conducted under the auspices of the United Nations;

Facilitate the establishment of a framework for political negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations to resolve the legitimate political and sovereign rights of the people of West Papua;

Investigate thoroughly the crimes against humanity which have been committed against the people of West Papua and bring those responsible to account before a competent international tribunal;

Investigate their involvement in the annexation of West Papua by Indonesia and to provide a report on their investigations to the people of West Papua by 1 December 2000;

The Second Papuan Congress confirms the mandate of the Presidium of the Papuan Council:

To undertake coordinated efforts to gain the international community recognition of the sovereignty of the people of West Papua and to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for crimes against humanity in West Papua;

To establish an independent team to undertake peaceful negotiations with Indonesia and the Netherlands under the auspices of the United Nations to prepare for a referendum to recognise the sovereignty of the people of West Papua; and

To report on progress in the pursuit of the above-mentioned tasks by 1 December 2000.

Appendix B

Australian Papuan New Guinea Security Cooperation

The *Joint Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations Between Papua New Guinea and Australia* (JDP) signed 9 December 1987 includes the principles:

- Security co-operation will continue to be conducted with mutual respect for each country's independence, sovereignty and equality.
- Exchanges and other forms of co-operation will be based on the principle that national security is primarily a national responsibility; take full account of capacity, resources and needs in both countries: ensure reliability, consistency and quality; and be based on full participation by both countries.
- Both Governments retain the right to determine whether or not to supply requested equipment or resources to the other, bearing in mind their respective foreign and strategic commitments and their policies, principles and values.
- Both Governments recognise each other's right to develop and strengthen relations, including security links, with other countries.

Expectations of Australian assistance in the event, for example, of the situation in WNG leading to a significant increase of refugees could create problems because of the comparatively small size of the Australian Defence Force, the current Defence budget crisis and lack of any other similarly capable agency in the Southwest Pacific region. This point has been made by IRS defence specialist, Derek Woolner, who, in his comments on an earlier draft of this paper, noted:

Providing human and material relief to large numbers of refugees in the Western Highlands, for example, would over tax the air assets of the RAAF and Army and create budget management problems with possible long-term effects for the development of the Australian Defence Policy—especially if it occurred in the next 2–3years while ADF remains actively involved in East Timor.