

WEST PAPUA MASSACRE COVER-UP CONTROVERSY IN AUSTRALIA

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SYDNEY, Australia (June 4, 2001 – Sydney Morning Herald/PINA Nius Online)—Australian government officials are accused of burying a crucial intelligence report about a 1998 Indonesian massacre in the West Papua town of Biak, the Sydney Morning Herald reported.

This was allegedly because Australia did not want to offend Indonesia so soon after it had thrown off the Suharto dictatorship.

The Sydney Morning Herald said Australian Defense Force intelligence officer Andrew Plunkett says the suppression of the Biak report all but encouraged Indonesia to arm and train pro-Jakarta militias in East Timor.

“We were saying Indonesia’s behavior in Biak was acceptable by turning a blind eye and not raising an official public protest,” it quoted Captain Plunkett, who served with Interfet in East Timor, as saying. “We were giving a green light to their subsequent actions.

“Biak was a dress rehearsal for the TNI [Indonesian army] in East Timor.”

The Sydney Morning Herald said 14 months later East Timor was aflame as militias attacked, murdered and dismembered hundreds of civilians while the TNI looked on.

Canberra’s response to the Biak massacre of July 6, 1998 – in which more than 20 people were killed and up to 200 were beaten, tortured or raped – was muted, the Sydney Morning Herald reported.

A Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) spokeswoman was quoted as saying Foreign Minister Alexander Downer had raised media reports of the massacre with his Indonesian counterpart, Ali Alatas.

But Mr. Downer did not know the extent of the slaughter because the official intelligence report had not been compiled by Major Dan Weadon, an intelligence officer attached to the Jakarta embassy. It took five months before DFAT publicly expressed “grave concerns” at the massacre, the Sydney Morning Herald said.

It said Captain Plunkett made his comments after The Sun-Herald newspaper received copies of confidential e-mails he exchanged with Major Weadon.

Major Weadon, who did not authorize the release of the e-mails, was sent to Biak from July 11 to 14 to investigate the slaughter, gathering eyewitness accounts and interviewing Colonel F.X. Agus Edyono, the chief of the local military command.

DFAT classified his report “confidential” instead of the usual “restricted,” so it would not embarrass Indonesia, the Sydney Morning Herald said.

When Greens Senator Bob Brown asked the government to release it, Senator Jocelyn Newman, representing then Defense Minister John Moore, refused, saying the report was “a highly classified document,” the newspaper reported.

“Although some of the information given in the report is already in the public domain,” she said, “the report provides far greater detail and amalgamates a number of sources of information. I believe, therefore, it provides a mass of information that in its totality would be very damaging to our international relations.”

But Major Weadon said: “In all probability [it] was capable of being downgraded, probably to unclassified.”

Major Weadon described Edyono as “polite and friendly, but obviously very suspicious and wary that my visit was going to discredit ABRI [Indonesia’s armed forces]/Indonesia,” the Sydney Morning Herald said.

“Anyway,” he wrote, “I think I summed up the info by saying it was almost certain ABRI had responded in a very heavy-handed manner on 6 July 98, and ... were likely to have beaten, killed and tortured many people.

“From my point of view, the whole Javanese/Indonesian culture is to blame. They honestly believe they did the right thing and cannot understand why we criticize them for putting down traitorous primitive and racially inferior subversives.”

Indonesia calls West Papua its province of Irian Jaya. West Papuans have been campaigning for independence since Indonesia occupied the former Dutch colony in 1963 after heavy pressure on the Dutch, who had also been

the colonial power in Indonesia. Indonesia then claimed West Papua after a controversial "referendum." The West Papuans say the referendum was a sham with only a small group of people taking part under Indonesian intimidation.

Human rights activists say thousands of people have died in years of fighting between Indonesian security forces and pro-independence West Papuans. Tens of thousands of mainly Muslim Asian immigrants from Indonesia's heavily populated main islands have been moved to mainly Christian and Melanesian West Papua.

West Papua is resource rich and has one of the world's largest copper mines, run by Freeport McMoRan of the United States.

<http://pidp.org/archive/2001/June/06-05-02.htm>

GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA
Department of Foreign Affairs And Trade
Canberra, Australia

NEWS RELEASE
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BIAK SUPPRESSION CLAIM IS BASELESS

A claim in today's Sun-Herald newspaper that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade sought to suppress a report on an incident at Biak in Irian Jaya on 6 July 1998 is completely without foundation.

Even the most cursory examination of the facts would show the allegation to be completely spurious.

The Biak incident occurred on 6 July 1998. The Minister for Foreign Affairs raised it with both Mr. Alatas (then Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs) and General Wiranto (then Commander of ABRI) during his visit to Jakarta from 8-10 July 1998. In his meeting with Mr. Alatas, Mr. Downer raised the reports of protesters being killed the previous week in Irian Jaya and urged ABRI to exercise restraint.

On 10 July 1998, Mr. Downer gave a briefing on his visit to Australian media representatives in Jakarta. He told them he had raised the reports of violence taking place in Irian Jaya with General Wiranto and expressed his concern.

The report on the Biak incident was given the appropriate security classification, which ensured it went to senior officers in all relevant Departments and agencies.

All these facts were made clear to the Sun Herald reporter before his story was published. Yet he chose to act on misinformation from a source, which has already proven neither credible nor reliable.

<http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2001/june/06%2D06%2D22.htm>

<http://www.biak-tribunal.org/west-papua-massacre-cover-up-controversy-in-australia/>