

Social defence and the Indonesian military threat

“The problem of Indonesian militarism poses a serious dilemma for the Australian peace movement and supporters of disarmament.” BRIAN MARTIN looks at the possible Indonesian threat to Papua New Guinea and non military responses: social defence and “social attack”.

Australian military planners do not see Indonesia as a major military threat. They have assessed that the Indonesian military does not possess a sufficient navy or logistic support capability to seriously threaten Australian military defences.¹

Even so, many Australians see Indonesia as a threat. They fear an invasion by the Indonesian military, or perhaps by the Indonesian people as refugees. This fear is compounded of xenophobia, racism, fear of lowered living standards, and awareness of Indonesian military activities.

There are some quite valid reasons for being concerned about Indonesian military activities. While not an immediate military threat to Australia, the Indonesian military regime helps oppress the Indonesian people and, in conjunction with other similar regimes in South East Asia, endangers the stability of the region. Furthermore, the Indonesian military regime is being supported by the Australian government, which thus contributes to repression and regional militarisation.

The problem of Indonesian militarism poses a serious dilemma for the Australian peace movement and supporters of disarmament. Is there any alternative to military defence against a potential invader? What should opponents of war do about aggressive military governments? How can regional militarism be restrained?

Although the Indonesian military does not pose a threat to Australia currently, there is the possibility of an Indonesian military attack elsewhere, for example on Papua New Guinea. Such an attack would greatly increase paranoia among the Australian public, would help mobilise support for Australian military spending and intervention, and would put the peace movement on the spot to suggest a nonmilitary approach.

This article is an attempt to address some of these problems. First there is a summary of the Indonesian military threat, and then of the responses made by Australian governments. Some possible

alternative Australian government policy stances are presented. Finally, a nonmilitary approach to Indonesian militarism is outlined, based on social defence: nonviolent community resistance to aggression. To illustrate how this approach might operate, a hypothetical example is presented: social defence in PNG against an Indonesian military attack, and social attack by Australians to support antimilitary groups and initiatives within Indonesia.

Indonesian militarism

The military-dominated regime which currently rules Indonesia came to power in 1965, and since then has been ruthless in repressing opposition. Only a facade of democracy exists. Military control is used to prop up the existing systems of privilege and power, such as the exploitation of the peasantry by landowners and of factory workers by capitalists. Active opponents of the regime face imprisonment or death. In the countryside there is a general fear: fear of speaking to strangers, of becoming conspicuous, of political involvement.

The Indonesian rulers are strongly anticommunist, and hence obtain support from corporations and capitalist governments. Indonesian economic development is based on Western models: investments in modern technologies in the cities, and destruction of traditional cultures.

The Indonesian military mainly serves to maintain internal control, and to run the government. But the military has also fostered an aggressive nationalism, which in practice means state domination and repression of minority or regional groups which try to be independent. Provincial rebellions are ruthlessly repressed, and both West Irian and East Timor have been annexed by a combination of political and military aggression. The aggressive nationalism fostered by the regime serves to justify the dominance of the military internally, and also diverts attention from internal problems.

Australian government responses

Half a million to a million people were slaughtered in Indonesia in 1965-1966 when the present regime came to power, one of the most horrendous violations of human rights since World War Two. This massacre was virtually unremarked in Australia and the West generally. It is an example of what Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman call ‘constructive terror’



in that certain vested interests in the West were served by the bloodbath.²

Since Indonesian military forces invaded East Timor in 1975, Australian governments – both Labor and Liberal – have avoided taking any action. Rather than vociferously opposing the killing of over one hundred thousand East Timorese, the Australian government has provided de facto or de jure recognition of the Indonesian military takeover. Indeed, an important precondition for the invasion in the first place was the indication by the United States government and to a lesser degree by the Australian government that they would turn a blind eye to Indonesian intervention in East Timor.

The Australian government has provided considerable economic and military aid to the Indonesian rulers, helping to sustain their rule and helping militarise Indonesian society. The basic theme in Australian government policy seems to have been to support the Indonesian government, no matter how brutal its actions, rather than Indonesian people's resistance to repressive policies.

in Australia and Indonesia.

- Welcome refugees from Indonesian government repression.
- Provide amnesty and haven for deserting Indonesian soldiers.

There are many other possible actions that an Australian government might take. The guiding principle should be to oppose Indonesian government and military repression and to support all grassroots forces for democracy.

Political practice is a different matter. The potential for regional military conflict depends a lot on positions taken by the major powers in the region, both in terms of their economic role – direct investment, foreign aid, tourist expenditures, exploitation of workers – and their political role and attitude. For Indonesia and PNG, this means mainly the United States and Australia, and to a lesser extent other powers such as Japan. Fretilin in East Timor was not a direct threat to capitalist interests, but was not supported since as an example of a successful liberation movement it could have jeopardised longer term capitalist exploitation. These considerations help to

A possible threat to Papua New Guinea

As an illustration of possible options, I will consider an Indonesian military attack on Papua New Guinea. Currently there is strong Australian military support for and collaboration with PNG military forces, and this is one reason why many informed observers feel an Indonesian military threat to PNG is out of the question.

But because of the strong Australian and United States government support for pro-capitalist political and military elites in Indonesia, it is possible that a change could occur in Australian military support for PNG, for example if the PNG government undertook a more independent foreign policy, or threatened the profitability of foreign investments. Some observers consider that an Indonesian military threat to PNG is quite a serious possibility, and point to the Indonesian government transmigration programme of settling Javanese in West Irian, the build-up of Indonesian troops in West Irian, border violations and repression of West Irian dissidents. Certainly within PNG there seems to be considerable concern both about an Indonesian attack and about the reliability of Australian government support in the event of an attack.⁴

Another reason to consider an Indonesian attack against PNG is to examine whether there are any alternatives other than dependence on the Australian military or on defence by professional military forces. Support from an external power cannot always be relied upon; on the other hand the problem with strong national military forces is that they are often sources of internal repression, as indeed they are in Indonesia. Nevertheless if there are no other options, then the arguments of peace movements are unlikely to carry much weight in the Third World.

How then could such an attack be deterred or opposed without depending on the Australian government or on defence by professional military forces? Whatever the likelihood of an Indonesian military threat to PNG, this example is used here only as an illustration of a more general problem: how to oppose military threats against communities which lack strong military resources and lack big-power support.

Social defence

The option I consider here is social defence: nonviolent community resistance to aggression using methods such as demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, noncooperation with orders, and setting up alternative institutions. Rather than discussing social defence generally and dealing with the standard objections – which are treated elsewhere⁵ – here I will mention one historical example before

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Not only is this type of policy morally bankrupt in terms of defending human rights, but it aggravates rather than reduces the potential Indonesian military threat within the region. By catering to Indonesian militarism and expansionism, the Australian government solidifies Indonesian military rule and contributes to a regional arms race. There is even the possibility of a regional nuclear arms race, made possible by Western export of nuclear research and nuclear power facilities to the Indonesian government.

The Australian government to the rescue?

If an Australian government wished to act decisively to restrain Indonesian military repression and expansion, and instead to support those groups in Indonesia favouring democracy and equality, there are many possible avenues for action. Here are some of the conventional possibilities.

- Make strong statements opposing Indonesian government violations of humans rights and opposing Indonesian militarism.
- End all military aid, supplies and training provided to the Indonesian military.
- Provide aid which helps build up self-reliance in Indonesian communities.
- Encourage exchanges and interchanges between community groups

explain the role played by the United States and Australian governments concerning the Indonesian invasion of East Timor.

More generally, governments put a much higher priority on maintaining their political and economic power than on opposing repression or militarism. The case of East Timor is only the most recent example near to Australia in which states have put their self-interest above stopping human rights abuses such as genocide.

For these reasons, it is unlikely that an Australian government would actually undertake effective steps against Indonesian militarism. For example, although several of the above lines of action and similar ones were part of the Australian Labor Party platform adopted in 1982, once in government in 1983, actual ALP practice has pandered to rather than opposed Indonesian militarism. This has been graphically revealed in the 'Strategic Basis' document leaked to the *National Times*, which suggests among other things that the Australian government should encourage the PNG government to repress West Irian rebels.³

While pushing for Australian government initiatives against Indonesian militarism is important, it is not a dependable path. Since reliance cannot be put on governments, it is important to consider what individuals and community groups can do to oppose repression both locally and transnationally.

turning to the possible use of social defence in PNG.

In Guatemala in 1944 the ruthless dictatorship of General Jorge Ubico was toppled by nonviolent means. Ubico had been in power since 1931, relying on secret police and brutal repression of opposition. In 1944 resistance began mildly when 45 lawyers petitioned Ubico for removal of a judge from office; a newspaper was allowed to print articles by the lawyers; teachers then boycotted an obligatory parade and were fired; a manifesto was circulated announcing formation of the Social Democrat Party; university students made strong demands and threatened to go on strike; Ubico thereupon declared a state of emergency; school teachers went on strike; 311 prominent Guatemalans asked Ubico to resign; nonviolent demonstrations were held and police beat and arrested many people; women mourning the brutality were attacked and one was killed; this incident fueled the opposition; workers struck; businesses closed; the streets were deserted; eventually Ubico stepped down.

The toppling of Ubico did not by itself end all further repression in Guatemala, as the further history of the country has shown. But the example nevertheless illustrates that nonviolent resistance has the potential to overcome repressive rule. Other examples include the collapse of the Kapp Putsch in Germany in 1920, Gandhi's campaigns in India against the British in the 1920s and 1930s, nonviolent resistance to the Nazis during World War Two in Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, the collapse of the Algerian Generals' Revolt in Algeria and France in 1961, the Czechoslovak resistance to the 1968 Soviet invasion,⁶ and the Iranian Revolution.

In most of these and other historical examples, the nonviolent resistance has been organised without advanced planning or training. Social defence has not yet been used as a pre-organised method for resisting aggression in place of military defence. It seems certain that planning and training would greatly increase its effectiveness, just as planning and training increase the effectiveness of military defence.

Social defence in PNG

What would be required for social defence in PNG?⁷ First, there would be widespread planning and training by PNG people in methods of noncooperation, including strikes, boycotts and 'going slow' or 'misunderstanding' of orders. For example, since there are some 700 local languages spoken in PNG, people could pretend to be unable to speak anything other than their own local language. Evacuation or emigration is a classic method of noncooperation. Most people could prepare 'fallback' positions: temporary villages away from roads, which would be difficult for the

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Indonesians to reach easily. Furthermore, most of the roads could easily be sabotaged since the terrain is so rough. Bridges and passes could be gelignited.

Second, there would be planning and preparation for reducing the economic advantages of Indonesian occupation. The PNG people are about 85% subsistence farmers, many of whom obtain a small cash income from sales of cash crops or surplus food. The cash economy is dominated by two large foreign-owned mineral enclave projects, which could be sabotaged easily by destroying or immobilising power stations, mining trucks and pipelines. Even torture by Indonesian soldiers could not then help restore production. Provision however would have to be made to repatriate mine workers to safe areas or they would starve.

Most of the rest of the foreign exchange comes from cash crops. The factories for these are low cost and if destroyed could be rebuilt by Indonesian invaders quite easily and cheaply. One option would be to poison or chop down the cash crop trees, which could easily be done if the people were determined. It would take 5 years or more for the trees to regrow.

On the administrative side, PNG records could be destroyed or hidden. Important people – likely targets for Indonesian repression – could blend back into the villages and thus be very difficult to locate.

Third, careful planning and practice would be undertaken to develop and implement ways to undermine the morale of Indonesian soldiers: the policy of fraternisation. Because the Indonesian government is a repressive and brutal one, fraternisation is of vital importance. Many Indonesian soldiers have joined the army for lack of better prospects elsewhere. A concerted effort to win over Indonesian soldiers could well lay the basis for undermining the Indonesian military government itself.

Fourth, efforts to communicate the justice of the PNG cause, and the nonviolence of the resistance, would be vital to a programme of social defence. This communication, by personal contact, letters, articles and radio, would not only serve to unite the resisters, but also gain the support of people in other countries, including Indonesia. Widespread communications to the peoples of the world is one of the most effective ways of opposing repression. This is why communications blackouts

have been imposed in cases of military aggression or takeovers, as in the cases of Poland in 1981, or East Timor since 1975. Outside pressure can be quite effective in restraining repression, as the experience of Amnesty International shows.

There are also some difficulties with this plan for nonviolent resistance. Reducing the economic advantages of invasion might not make much difference, since there would be little economic advantage to Indonesian rulers in the first place. For example, the East Timorese invasion has almost certainly cost the Indonesian government more than it has gained economically. But economic measures in resistance would have two important political effects. First, they would help to mobilise and unify the PNG people's resistance, by symbolising the refusal to cooperate. And second, they would help publicise the people's resistance to potential supporters overseas, including those within Indonesia.

Another difficulty involves fraternisation. Many Javanese consider themselves superior to other races, and many Javanese soldiers would be contemptuous of pleas from PNG villagers. Clearly it would require much effort in advance to try to win some degree of support for humanitarian ideals, going beyond racial prejudices, among Javanese civilians and soldiers. Another problem is that the many ethnic, cultural and other divisions among the PNG people could be exploited by the Indonesian invaders to weaken the resistance.

Could an entirely nonviolent resistance by the PNG people successfully defeat an Indonesian military invasion? There are no guarantees, just as there are no guarantees of success in military defence. But even taking into account the obstacles, it would seem that the impact of a unified people's resistance, with shutdowns of all industrial and other activity useful to the Indonesian government, plus a concerted campaign to undermine the morale and loyalty of the Indonesian military forces, and a massive communications effort exposing the blatant aggression of the Indonesian government against an unarmed populace, would be potent indeed.

There is no doubt that the PNG sense of village and local identity is sufficiently strong that if Indonesian forces invaded, there would be many decades of strong violent and nonviolent opposition all over

the country. A lot of people would fight violently: that is a traditional thing to do. They would be very ineffective on the military level, as the West Irian guerrillas are, because they have very few modern weapons.

Actually, social defence has many similarities to guerrilla warfare.⁸ In both modes of resistance, the primary focus is on political mobilisation. Indeed, guerrilla campaigns have often involved extensive use of nonviolent methods by rural and urban supporters, such as passive hostility to aggressors, refusing information to the enemy while providing it to supporters, provision of support and shelter to guerrillas, and nonviolent occupation of land. Another key component of the success of many guerrilla campaigns is encouraging opposition within the population of the aggressor state, which for example played a major role in the United States military withdrawal from Vietnam.

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Social defence uses all these techniques, but with some advantages.

- Casualties and suffering are to be expected in mounting social defence, but are likely to be less than with military defence.
- The methods of social defence allow greater and more equal participation in the resistance, such as more involvement by women.
- The use of only nonviolent methods encourages more support from within the aggressor forces and from nonparticipant countries.
- Should the resistance* become repressive and militaristic,

Social defence as outlined here would be far more devastating to the aims of the Indonesian rulers than military or guerrilla resistance, and also less dangerous to most people in PNG since individuals could not easily be singled out for reprisals. If such a defence were prepared and trained for, it might well be sufficient to deter any planned Indonesian military invasion. After all, the consequence might even be an uprising by the Indonesian people against the Indonesian rulers. The message of nonviolent resistance is most potent by the example it sets for repressed people everywhere.

Social attack by the Australian people

What could the Australian people do to help deter or oppose an Indonesian military attack on PNG, whether the

resistance was violent or nonviolent? One thing would be to promote social defence in Australia, and so provide deeper knowledge, training and an example for adopting social defence elsewhere. Besides this, Australians could undertake what can be called 'social attack': taking the initiative against political and military repression by communicating to people in other countries and taking action to support them. Essentially the idea would be to take the ideas of nonviolent resistance to the Indonesian people, and encourage them to oppose the repressive and aggressive activities of their own government.

How could Australians communicate with Indonesians? There are many ways: talking with Indonesians who are living in or visiting Australia, sending messages with tourists in Indonesia, sending letters and cassette tapes to people in Indonesia and beaming radio broadcasts to Indonesia. Special attempts could be

made to appeal to opposition groups, such as among students, Muslims, workers, peasants and the media. Also important is transnational communication: publicising throughout the world the existence of repression and of nonviolent resistance within Indonesia.

Another possibility would be to station independent observers in Indonesia, or on the Indonesian-PNG border, to provide independent eyewitness accounts, which could be publicised around the world. There is also the possibility of sending 'peace brigades' – peace activists trained

in nonviolent conflict resolution techniques – to sensitive spots such as the Indonesian-PNG border. Workshops in nonviolent action skills could be run for Indonesians visiting Australia.

Australians also could organise boycotts of Indonesian goods or of companies or governments supporting the Indonesian rulers. Trade union and independent worker action in particular could be effective against Australian and foreign companies aiding Indonesia.

Conclusion

Social defence and social attack provide a relatively untried alternative to military defence and to government monopoly on foreign policy. The specific techniques of nonviolent resistance in social defence provide a way of resisting aggression and repression that allows for widespread participation and which reduces suffering. But it is not enough just to defend. It is necessary to take campaigns against military and government repression to wherever this repression occurs, and to mobilise people's resistance to repression in their own countries.

In this article I have dealt with how social defence and social attack could operate if they were implemented. How to implement them – how to mobilise grassroots support for and participation in social defence programmes – is another and perhaps more difficult problem.⁹

Many present military and government policies placate and indeed encourage repression, aggression and militarism, as in the case of Australian government policy in relation to the Indonesian government. By such policies, the military and state-based perspectives provide their own justification, by fostering the problems of militarism which they are supposed to be restraining. Social defence and social attack are not a final solution, but they do provide some positive directions for action.

Footnotes:

1. Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Parliament of Australia, *Threats to Australia's Security: Their Nature and Probability* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1981).
2. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume 1: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).
3. Brian Toohey and others, 'The Strat Basis papers', *National Times*, 30 March–5 April, 1984, pages 3–7, 23–30; 6–12 April, 1984, pages 3–7, 21. See also Marian Wilkinson, 'The Russell Hill papers', *National Times*, 12–18 August, 1983, pages 23–30.
4. See for example Jack Waterford, 'PNG fears little support in war', *Canberra Times*, 23 September 1983, page 19. See also Nonie Sharp, 'West Irian, East Timor – Papua New Guinea . . .?', *Arena*, number 61, 1982, pages 95–102.
5. Adam Roberts (editor), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance*

to Aggression (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974); Johan Galtung, *Peace, War and Defense. Essays in Peace Research, Volume Two* (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1976); Gustaaf Geeraerts (editor), *Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe* (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1977); Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1980).

6. On these and many other cases of nonviolent action see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).
7. Many of the following specific points on PNG are taken verbatim from insightful comments by Chris Harwood, for which I am greatly indebted.
8. See Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974).
9. On this see Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984, to appear), chapter 3.

*be successful, there is less chance that the government of the resisting country will