

## Submission for the Foreign Policy White Paper

This submission addresses two of the issues raised in the Minister's call for submissions, namely an assessment of national interests and addressing strategic and security challenges in Australia's immediate region. The question was posed: "How can Australia best deal with instability beyond our borders?" My submission will focus on instability in Indonesia's Papuan provinces, which are the Indonesian provinces closest to Australia and which share a land border with Papua New Guinea. The 2016 Defence White Paper identified Papua New Guinea as part of Australia's immediate neighborhood the security of which constitutes the second 'Strategic Defence Interest' after the defence of Australia itself.

Although the two halves of the island of New Guinea have different systems of government - Papua New Guinea is an independent state while the two Papuan provinces are part of the Unity Republic of Indonesia – they have in common governance, human security and human development challenges in their societies' experience of rapid economic and cultural change.

The conflict between the Indonesian government and sections of Papuan society is the last and seemingly most intractable of regional conflicts Indonesia has confronted since independence in 1945. Papuan resistance to Indonesian rule has persisted since Indonesia assumed administrative control of the territory in 1963. Of all Indonesia's neighbours Australia has the greatest interest in a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Papua, but, paradoxically, is in a weak position to encourage the Indonesian government to adopt policies that have some prospect of facilitating resolution.

It seems that the Australian Government's voice has been incapacitated by the long shadow cast by Australia's role in the separation of East Timor from Indonesia in 1999 and the subsequent independence of Timor-Leste. On the occasion of President Joko Widodo's visit in February 2017, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull felt it necessary to reiterate Australia's commitment to Indonesia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also referred to the 2006 'Lombok Treaty', which was negotiated in the context of the Papuan asylum seekers crisis, as the 'bedrock of our strategic and security relationship'. It would be difficult to count the number of times Australian Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and other officials have made similar statements of recognition and respect for Indonesia's sovereignty in the Papuan provinces. The repetition of these statements seems to be inversely related to the credibility attributed to them by sections of the Indonesian government. The unspoken sub-text of Indonesian responses is that this is what Australia stated with respect to East Timor until Australian support mattered most to Indonesia in 1999.

In the years immediately after the fall of President Suharto in 1998, there was considerable optimism that the Papua conflict could be resolved. In response to Papuan demands for independence, the Indonesian government enacted the 2001 Special Autonomy Law, which granted a more generous distribution of authority and revenues to the provincial government in Papua than the regional autonomy laws for Indonesia as a whole.

The implementation of the Special Autonomy Law has itself become a matter of great contestation in Papua and between Papuans and the Indonesian government. In the context of this submission, it is sufficient to note that the manner in which the Law was implemented has not reduced the level or intensity of support for independence in Papua. Reflecting on the Papua policies of the democratically elected governments since 1999, the policies have vacillated from the repressive to the accommodative. At no time has Papuan resistance threatened Indonesian control of the provinces, but the means successive governments have chosen to assert their authority in Papua has been one factor that has fueled the desire for independence. Since 1998 the processes of democratization and decentralization in Indonesia have been remarkable. Nevertheless, the freedoms of expression and peaceful political mobilization remain significantly more restricted in the Papuan provinces than in the rest of Indonesia. The Jakarta-based policy think tank, IPAC, summed up the government's Papua policies in these terms:

“Indonesia's approach to the independence movement in Papua has been to try to crush it, persuade it, co-opt it, divide it, dilute it or smother it in a process called development. Nothing has worked, and it has proved impossible to eradicate. It is too powerful idea, backed by too much history and too many differences with the rest of Indonesia.” (*The Current Status of the Papuan Pro-Independence Movement*, IPAC Report No. 21, 24 August 2015)

The current policy settings and attitudes of President Joko Widodo's administration are unlikely to facilitate any resolution.

In response to the lobbying by Papuan activists with the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Islands Forum, Indonesia has succeeded in securing a seat at the table with Papuan activists, but it has shown no willingness to engage with the concerns about human rights abuses expressed by Pacific Island leaders both in regional forums and at the United Nations. Indonesia's great sensitivity reflects the failure of its policies in the Papuan provinces.

The resolution of the conflict in Aceh with the Helsinki Agreement and the Aceh Governance Law shows how regional interests and aspirations can be accommodated while preserving the territorial integrity of the Indonesian state. The Indonesian Institute of Sciences' "Papua Road Map" and the dialogue approach of the Papua Peace Network are policy frameworks that offer a way out of the often counter-productive policies of Indonesian governments since 1999.

The strategic importance of Indonesia to Australia has been clearly stated in Defence and Foreign Affairs White Papers since the 1980s and in the Strategic basis papers before then. As the Indonesian economy grows relative to Australia's in the coming decades, the balance of power in the bilateral relationship will shift in Indonesia's favour. Indonesia is likely to exercise more strategic, military and political influence in the region, where great power relations between the United States, China, Japan and India are also evolving. In a strategic environment where Australia's security and the security of its trading networks will be more dependent on Indonesia, it is all the more important that the conflict in the Papuans provinces is resolved peacefully. Consistent with its respect for Indonesia's sovereignty, Australia has a national interest in encouraging the Indonesian government to adopt policies that have some prospect of resolving the conflict rather than exacerbating the conflict and perpetuating instability.

The opinions and arguments expressed in this submission are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asia Institute or the University of Melbourne.

Dr Richard Chauvel  
Honorary Fellow  
Asia Institute  
The University of Melbourne  
28 February 2017