

East Timor – emergency risk management

Introduction

In February 2000, I attended a residential course called Understanding Emergency Risk Management at the Australian Emergency Management Institute at Mt Macedon Victoria. As a pre-course assignment, I clinically applied the Emergency Risk Management Planning Model to my 1999 peace-keeping deployment in East Timor. I was invited to expand upon this experience in an article and my subsequent delay in responding is due in part to my wish to confront and put to rest some raw and painful memories of this time.

I was a part of the unarmed fifty member strong first contingent of Australian Federal Police deployed to East Timor between July and September 1999, in support of the United Nations Mission to East Timor (UNAMET). The word 'assistance' was removed from the original mission title after an apparent objection from our Indonesian hosts; however, the letter 'A' remained embedded in the original United Nations mission acronym and foundation documents. Later as a member of the training team, I would jokingly explain to inductees that this 'A' was silent and referred to me (as in UN and "Alf's Mission to East Timor").

Before I continue further, it is necessary to detour for a short history lesson courtesy of the United Nations Department of Public Information (www.un.org/peace/etimor).

The United Nations General Assembly placed East Timor on the international agenda in 1960, when it added the territory to its list of Non-Self Governing territories. At that time, Portugal administered East Timor. Fourteen years later, in 1974, Portugal sought to establish a provisional government and a popular assembly that would determine the status of East Timor. Civil war broke out between those who favoured independence and those who advocated integration with Indonesia. Unable to control the situation, Portugal withdrew from the region. Indonesia then intervened militarily and later integrated East Timor as its twenty-seventh province. The United Nations never recognised this integration and both the Security Council and the General Assembly called for Indonesia's withdrawal.

Beginning in 1982, at the request of the General Assembly, successive Secretaries-

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General held regular talks with Indonesia and Portugal aimed at resolving the status of the territory. In June 1998, Indonesia proposed limited autonomy for East Timor with Indonesia. In light of this proposal the talks made rapid progress and resulted in a set of agreements between Indonesia and Portugal, signed in New York on 5 May 1999. The two governments entrusted the Secretary-General with organising and conducting a 'popular consultation' in order to ascertain whether the East Timorese people accepted or rejected a special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary Republic of Indonesia.

Against this back drop, in May 1999, the Australian Federal Police called for 'Expressions of Interest' from members willing to serve in a 'difficult environment' in a possible United Nations Mission to East Timor. A short time later, successful applicants were assembled in Canberra for comprehensive medical preparation and psychological testing during an intensive two-week pre-deployment course. Upon completion of this training phase, 1st Contingent members returned to their home states for a short leave break and to await the outcome of Security Council deliberations.

Phase 1—policy, procedures & terms of reference

On 11 June 1999, the 4013th meeting of the Security Council adopted Resolution 1246 (1999) which established the United

Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) to '...organise and conduct a popular consultation, scheduled for 8 August 1999, on the basis of a direct, secret and universal ballot, in order to ascertain whether the East Timorese people accept the proposed constitutional framework providing for a special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary Republic of Indonesia or reject the proposed special autonomy for East Timor, leading to East Timor's separation from Indonesia'.

Resolution 1246 authorised the deployment within UNAMET of up to 280 unarmed civilian police officers to act as advisers to the Indonesia Police in the discharge of their duties and, at the time of the consultation, to supervise the escort of the ballot papers to and from the polling sites.

Resolution 1246 stressed that it was the responsibility of the Government of Indonesia to maintain peace and security in East Timor in order to ensure that the popular consultation was carried out in a fair and peaceful way. It was to be conducted in an atmosphere free of intimidation, violence or interference from any side and to ensure the safety and security of United Nations and other international staff and observers in East Timor. Resolution 1246 also authorised the deployment within UNAMET of 50 unarmed military liaison officers to maintain regular contact with the Indonesian Armed Forces in East Timor in support of this Security Agreement.

The UNAMET also incorporated about 425 United Nations Volunteers deployed in electoral, information and political components. The electoral component was responsible for all registration and voting activities at 200 registration/polling



Figure 1: the main road through Manatuto heading west towards the capital of Dili.

sites distributed throughout the 12 regencies or districts in East Timor. The information component was responsible for explaining the popular consultation to the East Timorese people in an objective and impartial manner without prejudice to any position or outcome. Lastly, the political component was responsible for monitoring the fairness of the political environment for ensuring the freedom of all political and non-government organisations to carry out their activities.

Authority to plan

In June 1999, the leading elements of UNAMET were deployed to Dili, East Timor, as the main body assembled at the RAAF Base Darwin for documentation, induction and training. At this time, I was invited to join the United Nations Civilian Police Training Team who were tasked to induct and brief all civilian police being deployed into the mission area.

The UNCIVPOL training program involved briefings on the Mandate role and function of UNCIVPOL, the geography and climate of East Timor, the current political/social environment, personal health/physical security, fieldcraft and 4 wheel driving assessments. This was a very hectic period and the close support and assistance of the Australian Defence Force at this time was invaluable.

The build up, training and deployment of 261 civilian police (shortfall on 280) from 16 contributing countries was staged over 30 days to facilitate the controlled establishment and spread of UNCIVPOL throughout East Timor where local resources and facilities were limited or non-existent. On more than one occasion, I have had to explain to newly arrived civilian police that they were not going to Bali and not to expect hotels with air conditioning or western style restaurants. I suggested that they were going to 'Jenny Craig' Island where they may have to live in very basic conditions and forage for local food.

The UNCIVPOL Commissioner, Alan MILLS (formerly of the Australian Federal Police), decided that a UNCIVPOL member would be posted to each of the 200 registration/polling sites with two UN Electoral staff. A locally recruited driver and interpreter were added to this composite team which was then based within 1 hours drive of any given UN District HQ in each of the 12 regencies of East Timor.

Upon completion of this training role, I deployed to the mission area with my training partner Rick HARTEN of the



Figure 2: river crossing on the 'main' road to Soibada, 64km south-west of Manatuto.



Figure 3: coastal bypass road around Manatuto, looking west to where the river Laclo meets the ocean.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the lone Mountie who had served with the UN in the snow of Bosnia but had never been to the tropics). We declined a job in HQ and opted to be posted out to the 'bush' in the district village of Manatuto on the northern coast of East Timor where the local governor was apparently being difficult and uncooperative with the United Nations.

Upon arrival in the village of Manatuto, I took up the role of operations officer within the 12 member (6 nation) UNCIVPOL team. I assisted the Team Commander in planning daily patrol activities (confidence building measures), examining security arrangements and compiling the daily situation reports to UNHQ. I took an active part in planning local operations and enhancing local security arrangements by building useful informal networks within the local community and with the Indonesian police.

Establish planning committee

All 12 members of the Manatuto UNCIVPOL were consulted in the preparation and planning of local operations and security arrangements. Regular meetings and discussions were held with community groups/leaders, local government officials, Indonesian police and military commanders to establish and maintain liaison points. These meetings validated future planning to achieve the goal of Mandate 1246.

Establish the context

The UNAMET Mandate required free and unimpeded movement within East Timor to facilitate the popular consultation as set out in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1246, in order to ensure that the popular consultation was carried out in a fair and peaceful way and in an atmosphere free of intimidation, violence or interference.

Phase 2—profile the community

- about 30,000 East Timorese people in the District of Manatuto
- four United Nations Military Liaison Officers
- twelve United Nations Civilian Police Officers

Identify vulnerable elements and sources of risks

Reliable external agencies and United Nations security specialists in the Mission Area of East Timor provided accurate Emergency Risk Modelling based on intuitive understandings of behaviour and the changing built, physical and environmental elements. Risk evaluation criteria were developed with particular reference to legal obligations, political issues and geographical deployments (communications and transport barriers).

All Manatuto UNCIVPOL were vulnerable to the following priorities risks:

1. **Motor vehicle accidents** – patrolling on third grade rural road systems



Figure 4: typical highland village of Fatamacuerec, located about 30km south of Manatuto. Houses in the village are a combination of traditional and modern construction.



Figure 5: Sgt Alf Turketo and interpreter Joe Reiss on the hilltop shrine of St Antonio, overlooking the village of Manatuto.

particularly in the highlands, that are subject to degradation by monsoon weather (undercutting or slippage) and overuse from increased local traffic flow with the lifting of military restrictions on movement, combined with the influx of over 200 United Nations vehicles.

2. Health risks – insect borne diseases (malaria is endemic to the region), contamination of food and water, skin infections and environmental injury (such as heat exhaustion or heat stroke) combined with the absence of comprehensive medical support in the mission area.

3. Civil unrest – threats and acts of politically motivated violence intended to impede the UNAMET Mandate under Resolution 1246 or the disruption of the legitimate registration and polling process for the popular consultation.

Identify prevention, preparedness, response and recovery

Evaluate and select options, plan and implement treatments.

Pre-deployment training and briefings for UNCIVPOL were structured with the aim of minimising the exposure of this UN community to identified risk. This was achieved by involving UNCIVPOL mem-

bers in all steps of a systematic process, that included Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery options as follows:

1. The risk of death or serious injury from motor vehicle accidents was treated by requiring all UNCIVPOL members to pass a 4WD-competency assessment before being issued with a United Nations driving permit. In

addition to the provision of a detailed country briefing and good quality patrol maps, there was a graduated deployment into the mission area (to develop local knowledge). Finally, local East Timorese were hired as drivers/guides and interpreters to further reduce this risk.

2. The risk of death or serious injury from health risks was treated by providing all UNCIVPOL members with a detailed health briefing and an introduction to fieldcraft. Members were provided with personal first aid kits, anti-malaria medication, insect repellent, water purification tablets, dry rations, bedrolls, camp beds, mosquito nets and eating utensils. They were told to prepare for hardship.

3. The risk of death or serious injury from civil unrest was treated by providing all UNCIVPOL members with a detailed political briefing and ongoing updates as the mission gathered momentum. Each district in East Timor conducted a daily review that was forwarded to the UNHQ for immediate follow up by liaison officers if required. The Head of the UNAMET Mission, being the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) was required to provide progress reports to the Security Council every 14 days. A '5-Stage' Security Plan was developed and implemented with stage-1 being unrestricted daily operations and stage-5 being the evacuation of the mission.

Phase 3—decision

The local operations and security plan for Manatuto CIVPOL was subject to constant review and revision as UNAMET progressed towards the popular consultation with voter registration and education being completed, notwithstanding threats and isolated acts of intimidation from the local militia and rogue elements within the Indonesian security forces. Civil unrest became the first priority risk, the health risk was a close second (with over 70 cases of malaria) and motor vehicle accidents a distant third risk as the need for routine daily travel diminished. It should be pointed out that a substantial number of the Indonesian security forces and police personnel were locally recruited East Timorese who may have felt that their safety would be in jeopardy should the popular consultation reject the autonomy package being offered within the Republic of Indonesia.

Despite an extremely tight timetable, a high level of tension, East Timor's mountainous terrain, poor roads and difficult communications, UAMET registered 451,792 potential voters among a population of over 800,000 in East Timor and abroad.

On the voting day, 30 August 1999, some 98% of registered voters went to the polls to stand and queue in the blazing sun to cast their vote. I cannot accurately describe the looks of pure joy and elation on so many faces, both young and old, as the local East Timorese lodged their votes in the ballot boxes at the polling station where I stood guard on behalf of the United Nations.

At the end of the voting day, the ballot boxes were sealed and secured until they could be airlifted back to UNHQ for counting under international observation. With the completion of the ballot all UN Volunteers/electoral staff were withdrawn from Manatuto District and other districts, with the majority being withdraw from East Timor within 48 hours. All UNCIVPOL personnel concentrated in their District HQ's with restrictions on movement (Security status grade-3 'no move').

On the morning of Saturday 4 September 1999, the local Indonesian radio broadcast the results of the popular consultation and announced that by the margin of 94,388 (21.5%) to 344,580 (78.5%) the people of East Timor had rejected the proposed autonomy.

Following the announcement of the result, pro-integration militias, at times with the support of elements of the Indonesian security forces, launched a

systematic campaign of violence, looting and wanton destruction throughout the entire territory. The Indonesian authorities did not respond effectively to the violence, despite clear security commitments made under Resolution 1246. Many East Timorese were killed and as many as 500,000 were displaced from their homes, about half leaving the territory, in some cases by force. The local family with whom my 'Mountie' partner and I boarded in Manatuto was removed and their house destroyed along with 85-90% of the village and local infrastructure.

After a very tense and hectic 72-hour

period, all UNCIVPOL trapped on the eastern end of the territory were evacuated from Baucau by an RAAF C-130 transport and returned to the safety of Darwin. Unfortunately, I left many trusting East Timorese friends behind to an unknown fate. After debriefing, I realise that our risk management planning could not reasonably predict the extent and magnitude of the systematic violence that overtook UNAMET in the backlash to the rejection of Indonesia. I also understand that some East Timorese quietly accept the sacrifice of this generation to achieve independence.

In conclusion, I cannot condemn all of the Indonesian security forces for inaction. I did meet and work with Indonesian policemen of honour who endeavoured to discharge their duties during the popular consultation in a fair and impartial manner. However, they too were overwhelmed by the wave of violence that swept across the territory.

The views expressed by the writer are his and do not reflect the views of his organisation.

Conference Announcement

Global Disaster Information Network (GDIN) – 'Scoring Goals'

Canberra, Australia, March 21-23, 2001



Emergency Management Australia (EMA) is hosting the fourth annual conference of the Global Disaster Information Network—GDIN2001.



Conference

Receiving the right information, in the right format, in time to make the right decision is of paramount importance for disaster managers. The focus of GDIN2001 therefore is to advance the understanding and collaboration between disaster managers and providers of information. It will bring together representatives from all areas of disaster information management, including:

- Government officials—National, Provincial, Local
- United Nations and regional organisations
- academics and researchers
- disaster managers
- non-Government and community organisations
- information managers
- industry—information technology, remote sensing, geographic information systems, software, hardware and equipment suppliers
- consultants
- journalists

Approach

- working group discussions
- plenary and parallel presentations
- forums
- poster sessions
- technical displays

Conference aims

- share information about achievements in disaster information management—'the goals that have been scored'
- progress the development of GDIN
- build closer relationships among users and providers of disaster management information
- identify further projects that will have a global impact in saving lives and property and in protecting the environment

Cost

- full registration fee: \$550
- daily registration fee: \$275
- cocktail party: \$30 (*guest only*)
- conference barbecue: \$35 (*guest only*)

Registration

Registration and Sponsorship brochures are available through EMA. Electronic copies including electronic registration is available through the EMA website or the GDIN International site

Conference details

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