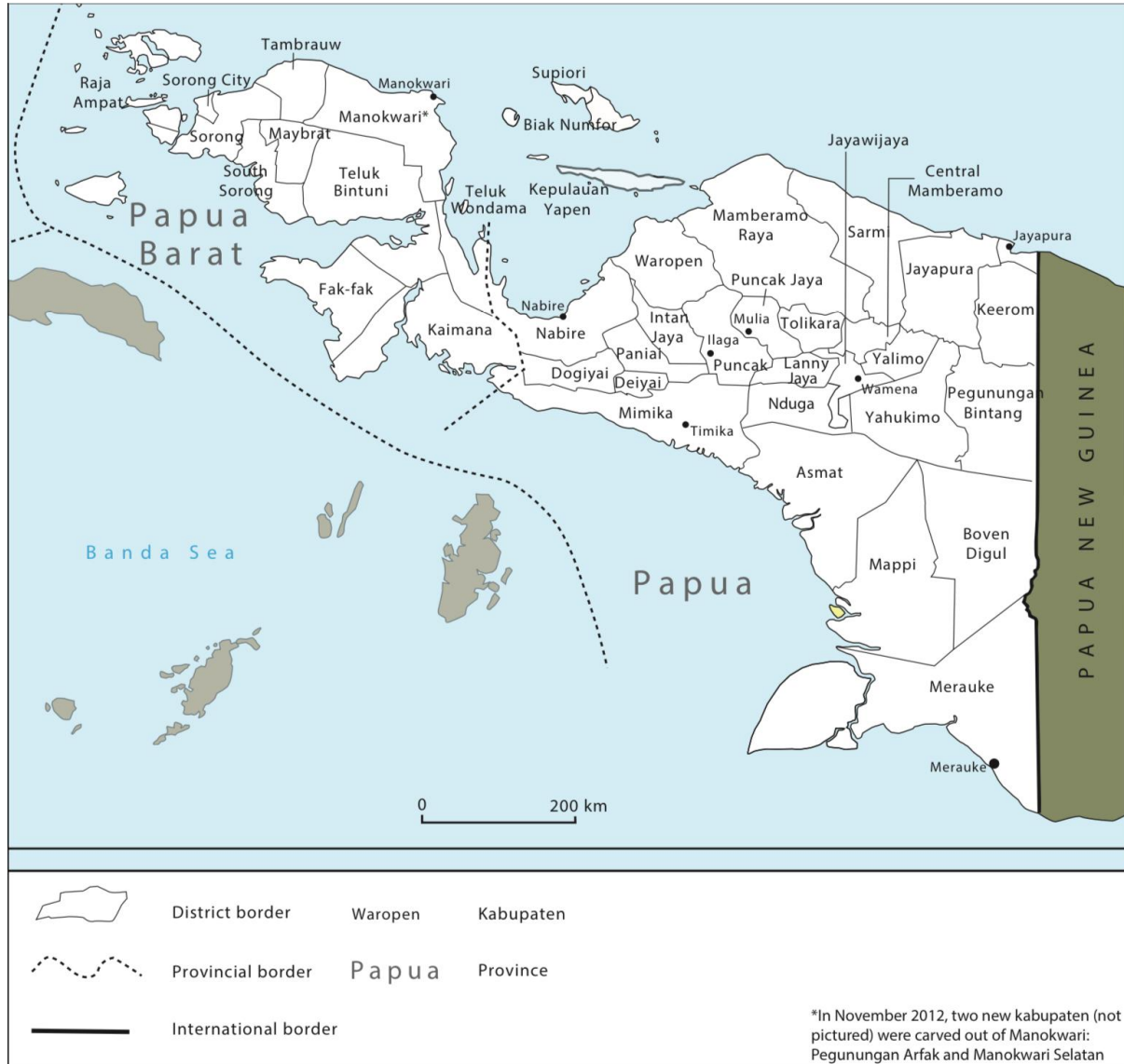


The Question of Indonesia - Papua New Guinea Relations

Security Council (SC)

Written by James Dalglish



Background

Indonesia is a nation comprising thousands of islands, New Guinea among them. The country has a history with colonialism, being a Dutch colony from the 15th to 20th centuries. Under the New York Agreement of 1962, the last Dutch colony, West New Guinea, was left to Indonesian control (Indonesia having become independent in 1949). The claim for West New Guinea is controversial, and began in 1954 when Indonesia successfully disputed it with the United Nations. Since Indonesia is a large country,

spanning 1,904,560 square kilometres, and with thousands of distinct ethnic groups, unification has been a challenge. The Free Papua Movement is an extreme example of rebellion against Indonesian authority, focused in West New Guinea, which has been conducting a low-intensity guerilla war against Indonesia since 1963. The FPM primarily targets police, the military, and civilians. Indonesian retaliation has been extensive and highly militarised, resulting in an estimate of 100,000 to 300,000 Papuan deaths. As of 2023, up to and beyond 500,000 deaths is more likely. Human Rights Watch has described this as a “genocidal” campaign. The suppression of Papuan freedom of expression and killing of citizens is of concern to the Security Council, considering the inequality of a state - ranked in the top 15 of the Global Firepower Index - concentrating their resources on machine warfare against an independence movement of their own people. Furthermore, West New Papua is a part of an isolated island remote from the rest of Indonesia and indeed the world, making it unclear how extensive the damage is and how far Indonesia has gone to suppress political dissidents.

Overview of Current Issues

Indonesia’s criminal code has a section entitled “Crimes Against the Security of the State,” which authorises prison terms of up to twenty years for the offences of “makar,” an Indonesian law provision which best translates as “rebellion.” Makar is the most cited law for arresting citizens persecuted for separatism. An unknown number of political prisoners are incarcerated for expressing support. Papuans not involved in armed insurgency are often caught up in anti-separatist sweeps and arrested for peacefully expressing their political views - a right protected by basic international free speech guarantees. The issue is underreported in the world, allowing Indonesia to continue their imbalanced attack against civilians. The atmosphere of mutual suspicion due to excessive Indonesian military presence is unstable and has resulted in various breakout attacks from the FPM. Most recently the Oksibil attack, Nduga Hostage Crisis, and various burnings and shootings throughout 2023 have paralysed aspects of the Indonesian economy and fighting has severely damaged both sides without any apparent progress for either. Indiscriminate violence terrorises Papuans. There seem to be political motives for Indonesian assault: the background threat of violence helps security forces obtain extra funding for “insecure areas” and the authorities can use staged “surrenders” of alleged FPM leaders as proof that such funding produces results. Sporadic violence also helps justify extra funding for securing local and national elections. Moreover, Indonesia and the nations of the West, particularly the USA, have an economic interest in West Papua since it is home to the Grasberg gold mine, one of the largest in the world and owned by the US company Freeport McMoRan. Freeport McMoRan is Indonesia’s biggest taxpayer. Grasberg is of

estimated value up to \$100 billion. All this is in stark contrast to the liberation's mission statement, as Benny Wenda, the leader of the ULMWP (United Liberation Movement for West Papua, a group that formalises the region's many fringe independence groups), has said that he seeks a free and fair vote on secession from Indonesia. "We have never exercised our right to self-determination, that has been denied us. We are not seeking violence, we seek out rights peacefully, to decide for ourselves our future. Let us vote."

Relevant Organisations / Countries

Indonesia is an archipelagic country which includes one half of **New Guinea**. It strongly dislikes external inspection of its affairs, especially in relation to the Free Papua Movement, regarding **West Papua** as an integral and indivisible part of the Indonesian state. In 2019, the **Pacific Islands Forum** debated human rights violations in West Papua, and Indonesia reacted strongly, saying that the debate would create a "negative precedent to openly discuss the domestic affairs of other countries."

The **Organisasi Papua Merdeka**, or OPM, is an umbrella term for the pro-independence movement engaged since 1965 in a struggle for Papuan independence. While its name literally translates as the Free Papua Organisation, it is best understood as a highly decentralised movement, composed of factions working as much in competition with one another as in coordination. There is no single armed front that reports to a political wing nor any shared strategy. It is commonly known as the Free Papua Movement in English.

Freeport McMoRan is an American company that owns the \$100 billion Grasberg gold mine and has a vested interest in cooperating with Indonesia. This may be linked to the lack of Western news coverage of the region, masking the extent of Indonesian retaliation against peaceful and non-peaceful protests alike. Considering **American** involvement in the area is also crucial considering the New York Agreement which the Kennedy administration signed to promise Indonesian reunion with West New Guinea. The US ambassador to Jakarta in 1961 had proposed a seven-point plan to "prevent Indonesia from falling under communist control and to win it over to the west," ultimately leading to US businesses dominating Indonesian natural resources such as Grasberg.

Possible Solutions

Indonesia may grant a vote to Papuans for them to determine their future peacefully. They may opt for soft-power methods, offering jobs and better opportunities for Papuans instead of engaging in combat with them. UN surveys of the area to assess the real extent

of the damage would get a clearer picture, and international demand for such transparency may change the behaviour of both sides. To review the effectiveness of freedom of speech laws - and the extent of the true “threat” the FPM poses to Indonesia - would determine whether Indonesia is committing crimes against humanity. Ultimately, it is up to the Security Council to offer their solutions to the crisis and try to resolve what has been described as “a genocide in slow motion.”