

23 Jan 2014

East Timor Aid Scandal Not The First

By Lee Rhiannon



The East Timor spying scandal currently in the Hague is the latest in a long history of Australian aid being used as a cover for intelligence agencies, writes Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon

Still reeling from the Coalition's election-eve announcement of a [\\$4.5 billion cut](#) [6] to the aid budget (now the subject of a [Senate Inquiry](#) [7]), our country's beleaguered foreign aid program is now having its reputation dragged through the mud.

Australia is at the Hague, trying to defend itself against its reprehensible behaviour in East Timor, where aid was used as a front for spying. Even if only a handful of aid workers are actually guilty, the rest of them will not escape suspicion.

The case appears to be clear-cut. Australia apparently used its spooks against one of its poorest neighbours for reasons of [naked commercial advantage](#) [8]. It should be obvious but apparently it needs saying: AusAID should stand for poverty reduction, our moral values expressed in assistance for those in need.

Aid workers should not be seen as convenient cover identities for our spies. Attacks on humanitarian workers are already at near-record levels with [116 killed](#) [9] so far in 2013. Despots need few excuses to resort to violence; aid workers spying hands them an opportunity on a plate.

This is not the first time that the conduct of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service has come under scrutiny.

In 1999 The Age reported allegations in relation to an Australian Government aid contractor, Lansell Taudevin, who led a team in East Timor for three years. Taudevin [says in his book](#) [10] that, "before I even arrived in East Timor I was asked by the political branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra and Jakarta to provide reports on what I saw in East Timor".

More famously, ASIS has come under repeated attack for its role in the Chilean coup against the elected President Salvador Allende in 1973. With the CIA banned from the country, Australian spooks were working as their proxies, "in destabilising the Government of Chile" [according to former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam](#) [11].

Australians also appear to have spied on Serbia during the Kosovo conflict, though not apparently for the Australian Government. Two individuals — one of whom was a former officer in the Australian army — working for CARE Australia were believed to be [spying for NATO](#) [12]. Their denials were not helped by a later Canadian Government contract signed by CARE Canada which agreed to help gather intelligence [as part of their aid work](#) [13].

This, of course, is not uniquely Australian.

Following the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan two years ago reports began to circulate that the CIA had been operating a fake polio vaccination program in order to gather information and determine his whereabouts. At the time Pakistani General Nadeem Ahmed [expressed his anger](#) [14] at this. "No intelligence agencies are supposed to be using NGOs or implementing partners to get some information — this is principally, morally, legally incorrect," he said.

Pakistan remains one of only a handful of countries where polio has yet to be eradicated. The reasons are complex but it cannot help that polio workers continue to be targeted and killed by the Taliban [15] who see them as cover for international espionage.

Spies – wherever they are from and whoever they work for – should never be part of our aid program.

The Greens will continue to call [16] for an inquiry into East Timor spying-aid scandal; as a first step in cleaning up the intelligence agencies and making them properly accountable to parliament for their actions.

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Links:

- [6] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-06/an-coalition-aid-cuts-reax/4940604>
- [7] http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Overseas_aid/Terms_of_Reference
- [8] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-03/asio-raided-lawyer-representing-east-timor-in-spying-case/5132486>
- [9] <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/report/summary>
- [10] http://www.duffyandsnellgrove.com.au/titles/east_timor.htm
- [11] <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3DId%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1977-05-04%2F0098%22>
- [12] <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/former-aid-workers-sue-care-australia/2005/08/02/1122748610984.html>
- [13] <http://atimes.com/oceania/BB10Ah01.html>
- [14] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-07-19/general-ahmed-speaks-to-abc/2799780>
- [15] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25361887>
- [16] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-11/an-east-timor-raids/5148360>