

Extract from Syahnakri, K., Lieutenant General (Retd), *Timor Timur: The Untold Story*, Kompas, Jakarta. 2013. 86,000 rupiah (AUD 8.50)

Pp.110-115: **The Failed Dialogue (*Dialog yang Gagal*)** ((full translation of that section))

“After Operation Kikis at Mount Aitana, Fretilin’s physical strength was assessed as significantly weakened. From the data that we had, in that operation the Fretilin side had indeed suffered a large number of casualties. The Korem commander at that time – Colonel Rajaguguk, in his report to ABRI/TNI Headquarters had related in detail the results of Operation Kikis including the numbers of Fretilin personnel shot and killed, those captured alive, as well as the number of weapons seized. The numbers were indeed large considering the strength of Xanana’s forces at that time. ((footnote 7: “It’s indeed true that we suffered a lot of casualties. The number – both guerillas and civilian was quite large ! All the more so because I lost many military and political cadre of high quality. However, many of our armed groups were able to escape” – said Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao in a written interview with the Editorial Team in October 2012 in relation to the casualties suffered by Fretilin in Operation Kikis in 1981.)) However, that decline in strength was in fact only significant from the physical aspect. From the non-physical aspect – morale and fighting spirit, there was no decline. Regrettably, ABRI Headquarters only viewed those results from the physical aspect alone. There was no more comprehensive analysis to assess how Fretilin’s situation was seen from the non-physical aspects following their destruction at Santo Antonio in the Mount Aitana area.

Headquarters ABRI later responded positively to Danrem commander Colonel Sahala’s report in respect of the decline in Fretilin’s strength by significantly reducing support for the conduct of military operations in East Timor. Several TNI battalions were withdrawn from East Timor until there were only five battalions left – ie two organic battalions (Battalions 744 and 745) and three assigned battalions (from outside East Timor) – together with a Nanggala (Kopassus) Task Group commanded by Major Gatot Purwanto. The operational budget also experienced a drastic decline. At the same time, Colonel Sahala was promoted and moved to Jakarta. Later, he was promoted to become the commander (Pangdam) at Manado.

Actually, although foreseen by few, although Fretilin’s physical strength had declined dramatically, in fact its guerrilla activities continued. In Sector East and the Central Sector, they still often appeared and conducted ambushes or attacks against inattentive/unwary TNI posts. In fact, they were successful in achieving a good recovery. The impact - when considering the extent of East Timor’s territory and the inadequate forces assigned, was that the TNI/Polri units and Kopassus experienced difficulties, and were even overwhelmed.

In the middle of this situation, developments arose within the Kopassus Nanggala Task Group. In early 1983, through intelligence operations, Major Gatot Purwanto was successful in establishing communications with Jose da Conceicao – a Fretilin political assistant in Sector East at Los Palos. This opportunity was exploited as well as possible by Gatot in order to find a way to meet Xanana in the jungle. His principal objective was actually to check whether Fretilin’s strength had in fact truly declined dramatically or whether they were still a force that had to be taken into account.

Additionally, Gatot also wanted to sound out the possibilities of ending the conflict in East Timor through dialogue. Following a very tough and complicated process, finally Jose agreed

to bring Gatot face-to-face with Xanana. The first meeting between the two took place in thick and remote jungle located between Mount Bibiliu and Mount Mondo Perdido in Viqueque Regency. That location has been called “Gatot”, even up until now.

According to Gatot’s account, although that meeting was very tense, its outcome was very positive. The results of that meeting were immediately reported to the Danrem, who at that time was Colonel Poerwanto – having replaced Colonel Sahala Rajagukguk. The Danrem gladly welcomed this development. Along with strategic steps to resolve East Timor through dialogue, it appeared that the Danrem held the same views as Gatot. Meetings with Xanana were continued. After Gatot had met with Xanana two or three times in different locations, a meeting was quickly proposed between the Danrem and the top Fretilin leaders. A jungle meeting place was agreed. As agreed - particularly for his security, it was Xanana who determined the meeting locations at selected places in the East Timor jungle.

In the complex process of communicating at these meetings, relations between TNI and Fretilin entered a new stage. Through Gatot – regarded as Kopassus officer reliable in matters of combat intelligence, diplomatic access was opened. The opportunity to begin this dialogue later became known by the term “peaceful contact” between TNI and Fretilin. There was a positive hope to end the conflict through dialogue at negotiation meetings. According to Gatot, Xanana had the same perspective and hope as TNI for an ending such as that. ((Footnote 8: Interview with Colonel (Retired) Gatot Purwanto by the Editorial Team in Jakarta on 14 February 2012). There was a desire – even a yearning, to bring East Timor to a more humanitarian, peaceful and friendly situation for everyone. Base on the concept of Peaceful Contact, TNI combat operations against Fretilin subsided significantly.

On the other hand, it’s true that during the Peaceful Contact process, there was a consolidation of power within the Fretilin structure. Xanana was successful with this consolidating – even undertaking a reorganisation. His units in each of the sectors – and all elements of the resistance, especially the clandestine network, increased their activities. Communication between strike units, *celula* ((Fretilin political cadre)) and the clandestine network increased sharply until a large number of the populace and government functionaries – including Hansip members, had been influenced.

However, before there could be any concrete results from the Peaceful Contact, the Cararas [*sic* – ie Kraras] Incident occurred that brought the whole process into chaos. Cararas is a village about 15 kilometres from Viqueque Town. The incident had its origin in an invitation from one of the leaders of the Cararas community to a number of TNI [*sic*] members – including several officers from Viqueque, to attend a party at his home. So, in the atmosphere of the Peaceful Contact – and to maintain relationships with the local leadership, they attended. In the middle of the party atmosphere, an attack against those TNI personnel took place. A number of people suddenly emerged from the dark of night and sprayed bullets directly at the aforementioned officers. They were all killed – apart from one religious officer ((*rohani* – ie an Islamic “padre”)) who escaped by climbing the branch of a tree next to the site of the party. Up in the dark of the tree – the attackers of the party had used kerosene pressure lamps with very limited brightness, he witnessed how his friends met their end. He was saved and became a witness. Some time later, he suffered a psychological disorder as a result of his traumatic experience of directly witnessing the attack and the brutal murder of his friends.

The Cararas Incident resulted in the immediate collapse of the spirit and the positive thoughts about peace and dialogue. The Korem Commander – Colonel Poerwanto, was very disappointed and angered by the attack and cancelled the efforts for Peaceful Contact ((ie the Ceasefire)). According to retired TNI Brigadier-General Johanes Haribowo – who was the Korem chief-of-staff during the Peaceful Contact period, Xanana admitted that he did not know the reason for the attack and killings at Cararas. He truly was not involved in the incident. On the contrary, he suspected that a third party was behind that incident.

Moreover, it cannot be excluded that foreign forces were successful in infiltrating the Fretilin group and setting in motion the Cararas Incident. And so, the opportunity and hope to end the East Timor conflict through peaceful dialogue was obliterated. Peaceful Contact was in disarray and failed. Armed conflict, violence, and killing by both sides occurred again.”

Translation by Ernie Chamberlain, January 2013.