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West Papua - Ambushed

Broadcast: 03/08/2004

Reporter: Antony Balmain



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Synopsis

On a tropical beach at Wewak on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, not far from the border of the Indonesian province of West Papua, a secret meeting has been called.



West Papuans leaders, some of whom are technically under "house arrest" for actions considered subversive by the Indonesian authorities have travelled for 14 hours in order to make important decisions about their future.

Foreign Correspondent has exclusive pictures of the meeting.

At the same time another long running story is coming to a head in West Papua.

After a two year investigation the American FBI accuses a West Papuan man, Anthonius Wamang, of murdering two Americans in an ambush near the giant Freeport gold and copper mine deep in the heart of West Papua's remote highlands.

The attackers are branded by the US Justice Minister as "terrorists" which raises the stakes because Anthonius Wamang has fought for the Free Papua Movement or OPM against the Indonesian military.

With Indonesia recently expressing interest in renewed peace talks with the West Papuans Reporter Antony Balmain takes a

look at this complex conflict on our doorstep.

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Transcript

BALMAIN: The eyes of the world are far from the small coastal town of Wewak on the north coast of Papua New Guinea.

The people meeting here are from across the border in West Papua. They want independence but they know that fighting for it over the last forty years hasn't worked.



To West Papuans, Septinus Paiki is a crusader. To Indonesia he's a criminal subversive, a former political prisoner still under house arrest.



PAIKI: I'm always being watched and followed. I needed to have strategies to get across the border and come here. I don't care if they arrest me later. What's important is I've done it for the cause.

BALMAIN: More Papuans arrive secretly. They've travelled fourteen hours from Indonesia's West Papuan capital Jayapura. It's been a lifetime journey and struggle for Petrik Hubi.

HUBI: I'm an eyewitness. At the border, many of my troops died in my arms. In Wamena on the 24th of April 1977, many people died. Around 75,000 mountain people died. They burnt them alive and stabbed them with hot irons. People were buried alive. Genitals were stabbed.

BALMAIN: It's impossible to know how many West Papuans have been killed during Indonesia's occupation. Estimates start at 100,000. Among West Papuan leaders there is a range of views from diplomacy to armed conflict.

GUERRILLA: [At meeting] Get the troops, I'll lead them. Raise the flag. Make the proclamation. If we die, we die.

BALMAIN: Wewak is a world away from the historic congress that charged the West Papuan capital of Jayapura four years ago. For the West Papuans a time for celebration, from Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid the offer of autonomy and a name change. What was Irian Jaya became Papua and the people again felt free to fly their beloved flag the Morning Star.

The two thousand congress united many disparate groups, reaffirmed the desire for independence from Indonesia and importantly West Papuans elected a new leader, Theys Eluay.

The euphoria of Jayapura was short-lived, so too Theys Eluay. Just over a year later he was killed by Koppassus, Indonesia's special military forces. The man who epitomised the West Papuan push for independence was strangled. Seven Indonesian soldiers including a senior officer are now in jail but the Indonesian military virtually got away with murder. They'll be free within a year or two.

Indonesia's fierce hold on West Papua is the politics of profit. Freeport's a gold mine. The world's biggest gold and copper mine and Indonesia's largest single taxpayer, pouring more than three billion dollars into Jakarta over the past decade.

It's no secret many Papuans deeply resent Freeport and the Indonesian Government for plundering its resources. But shrouded in mystery is what motivated the killers who lurked in the mountain mist on this remote road near the Freeport Mine.

In August 2002, two cars carrying schoolteachers were travelling along this mountain road, heavily guarded by Indonesian soldiers. The teachers worked for the international school, servicing the Freeport Mine.

PATSY SPIER: Unknown gunmen came out and opened fire into my husband's vehicle killing my husband and Ted Burgon our superintendent.

BALMAIN: During the forty five minutes of gunfire, three people were killed. Patsy Spier was shot in the back and foot.

PATSY SPIER: I wasn't screaming, I wasn't trembling with fear it was as though I knew that Rick was gone. I felt in my heart that he was gone and I just remember thinking after a while it was OK if they just came and put the gun through the window and shot me in the head.

BALMAIN: The Indonesian military immediately blamed the Free Papua Movement, the OPM guerrilla fighters for the attack. The military claimed they shot and killed this West Papuan but this manoeuvre backfired when a police autopsy revealed the man had been dead for at least twenty four hours before the shooting.

Initial Indonesian police investigations concluded the military played a part in the ambush. Then the FBI flew to West Papua.

Now following a lengthy inquiry, the FBI has charged a West Papuan with the murder of the two Americans.

WAMANG: My name is Anthonius Wamang. I am thirty two years old.

BALMAIN: The accused is Anthonius Wamang from the Tembagapura area near the Freeport Mine. The ABC has not been allowed into West Papua but Foreign Correspondent has obtained this interview with Anthonius Wamang, now in hiding since being branded a terrorist by the United States.

INTERVIEWER: Did you also participate in the events of the killings near Tembagapura on the 31 August 2002?

WAMANG: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know the people in the car were American teachers?

WAMANG: I didn't know.

BALMAIN: Anthonius Wamang claims along with fourteen others he ambushed the cars believing they contained TNI, Indonesian soldiers. A member of the OPM for twenty years, Anthonius Wamang denies that he was acting on orders from the Free Papuan leadership.

WAMANG: My feeling is that Freeport came in and destroyed the environment, destroyed nature and destroyed the places where we live. They pay the TNI and the TNI come and kill us all. They make us suffer.

BALMAIN: Since the mine opened back in 1967, Freeport's enjoyed a cosy relationship with the Indonesian military. The army's been paid handsomely, tens of millions of dollars, so much that Freeport's critics claim Indonesian soldiers act as the mining giant's private security force.

WAMANG: Freeport vehicles are usually used by TNI. So I thought it was TNI driving when I fired.

BALMAIN: Adding to the intrigue, Anthonius Wamang has admitted to doing deals with the Indonesian military.

WAMANG: I had a relationship with them, a business relationship for purchasing ammunition.

PATSY SPIER: Innocent people were killed and that is wrong and we've got to find out why it happened. Something positive has to happen from my husband's death because it's not just an unfortunate incident. It was well planned and people died and lives were changed forever.

WAMANG: It was a wrong target so I regret it. I apologise to the victims and their families of the victims and I'm ready to take responsibility.

BALMAIN: Human Rights activist John Rumbiak believes there's much more to the murders. He claims there's evidence incriminating the Indonesian military and its militia gangs.

RUMBIK: Anton Wamang and his followers being trained and armed by militias and Indonesian military.

BALMAIN: So if this is true, why didn't Anthonius Wamang say this to the FBI?

RUMBIK: He'd be dead. He was trained and he was warned by the militias and the Indonesian military and if he did that, then they target not only him, his family and everyone that involved.

INTERVIEWER: Are you also ready to surrender to the Indonesian military or police?

WAMANG: No I don't want to.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you want to?

WAMANG: They don't enforce the law properly that's why. I don't trust them.

BALMAIN: But Anthonius Wamang says he's willing to give himself up to the FBI.

PATSY SPIER: The people that carried out that ambush that day wanted to kill somebody. It doesn't matter what organisation they were with, they were going to kill someone that day. We need to have a legitimate trial. We need to find out what is going on that would cause people to want to kill others.

BALMAIN: Patsy Spier is maintaining her fight to bring her husband's killers to justice. She's still lobbying the US Congress, today Republican Joel Hefley to continue its ban on funding military aid and training within Indonesia.

PATSY SPIER: I heard that the US wanted to re-establish that fund and I just couldn't believe it, that if the Indonesian police had implicated the Indonesian military, why would my government want to give money to that military?

BALMAIN: Even before the FBI branded the Free Papua Movement, OPM, as terrorists, Papuan pro-independence leaders decided on a new strategy of peace and dialogue.

For senior West Papuan leaders like Albert Kaleile it's a radical departure from forty years of violent conflict.

KALIELE: The answer is peace but we're going to be independent. We have to struggle peacefully until we're independent.

BALMAIN: It's not Sudan or the Congo but up to fifteen thousand West Papuans live in refugee camps like this one just outside Wewak. Rika Waromi typifies the alienation of her people. She's spent the last twenty five years living in exile.

WAROPA: We're Melanesians. We want to be independent, free of Indonesian colonialism.

PAIKI: I still remember Ali Murtopo. He was the Indonesian Minister for Information. This is what he said - we don't need, we don't need Papuans. We need land. If Papuans want independence, they can go and build a country on the moon, on the sun, a star or a planet.

BALMAIN: Having lost East Timor, Indonesia is in no mood for compromise over West Papua. The Free Papua Movement's new strategy of non-violence will do little to change Indonesia's view that the unique culture and identity of the West Papuans is subservient to the territorial integrity of Indonesia.

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