

An introduction to Vicente "Maubocy" Ximenes' efforts to peacefully change the Timorese political landscape

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The dominant figures in the East Timorese political arena are Xanana and Mari Alkatiri.

1. Xanana

Xanana is a well-known public figure, both domestically and internationally. He was a key figure of East Timorese independence. Due to his great intelligence, he has managed to rule the country since 2007 until now.

1.1. Xanana's party, CNRT, could not win a single majority in the 65 seat Parliament in four consecutive elections: 2007 (18 seats); 2012 (30 seats); 20017 (22 seats); 2018 early election (21 seats). However, he managed on each occasion to form a coalition government.

1.2. The ballot tallies for the last two elections in 2017 and 2018 suggest voters' discontent vis-à-vis the government, despite budget expenditures which have exceeded \$1 billion every year since 2007. Xanana has established a court of cronies, composed mostly of family members and friends, who are the main recipients of government largesse and handle mega projects worth millions of dollars in each fiscal year.

1.3. The public mistrust of Xanana's corrupt and self-serving practices has increased exponentially in the past several years.

2. Alkatiri

Xanana's rival is Mari Alkatiri. He is FRETILIN's Secretary General and one of the founders of the political party.

2.1. In the first election, which was held on August 30, 2001, FRETILIN won 55 seats in the National Assembly, out of 88. Vicente "Maubocy" Ximenes was one of the key players in that election. He led the Baucau District to victory and attained a record 72% of the vote for FRETILIN. The other 12 Districts never exceeded 65%.

2.2. Alkatiri then unilaterally appointed himself to the Prime Ministerial post without the endorsement of the Central Committee. Maubocy was at the time a member of FRETILIN's Politburo Standing Committee, but even in that position he was not aware of Alkatiri's maneuver until after it had happened.

2.3. As a consequence, Maubocy formed a group of 20 members of the Central Committee, called "*Grupo Renovador*" and later "*FRETILIN Mudansa*" as a Congress challenge to Alkatiri's arrogant and dictatorial attitude. The movement was so successful that it presented a huge threat to Alkatiri's authority and his chance to be re-elected in May 2006 to FRETILIN's Congress, so Alkatiri used coercive methods against the militants, bringing guns into FRETILIN's Congress to scare them, while at the same time winning his reelection by acclamation, a method which was totally antonymous to FRETILIN's democratic tradition of a free and secret ballot meant to prevent any kind of intimidation.

3. Mudansa

3.1. In the 2007 Presidential and Legislative elections, Xanana asked Maubocy's group to support him. Maubocy was actively involved in the campaign as one of the stage speakers alongside Xanana.

3.2. In the 2007 election, CNRT won 18 seats, while FRETILIN's seats dropped drastically from 55 down to 21.

3.3. As compensation, Xanana allocated to Mudansa 5 Members of Parliaments and 7 cabinet portfolios (2 Ministers and 5 Secretaries of State). Maubocy did not take part because he was at the time deeply involved in business and chose to avoid any conflict of interest.

3.4. In an early 2010 reversal, Alkatiri became good friends with Xanana again. Alkatiri immediately asked Xanana to neutralize the role of FRETILIN Mudansa. Xanana called a meeting on January 3, 2011, to discuss the future of Grupo FRETILIN Mudansa. His stance was that "*you guys go back to FRETILIN or join CNRT*". Maubocy replied: "*why did you not tell us right after the 2007 election? We are not going back to FRETILIN, and neither will we join CNRT. However, give us some time to think*".

3.5. After a month of deliberations, FRETILIN Mudansa met again and decided to form a new political party called "*Frente Mudansa*" (Front for Change).

3.6. Frente Mudansa competed in the 2012 election. Despite the limited time to campaign and meagre financial resources, it managed to get through the electoral threshold of 3% and obtained 2 seats in Parliament. Xanana's party could not get the absolute majority of 33 seats in the 2012 election, so he formed a coalition government with the Democrat Party (PD) and Frente Mudansa (FM).

3.7. In the 2017 election, Frente Mudansa could not pass the threshold, which meanwhile had been raised to 4%. FRETILIN won 23 seats and CNRT 22. FRETILIN formed a minority government which ruled only for 7 months. Maubocy personally went back to FRETILIN and was even welcome by Alkatiri. He is now an active militant of FRETILIN's again.

4. The February 2015 reverse coup d'état

4.1. In February 2015, Xanana and Alkatiri connived to transfer the prime-ministership from Xanana to an Alkatiri proxy, Rui Maria de Araújo. Additionally, Alkatiri was to take quasi-unlimited charge of the exclave of Oecusse, while Xanana became the economic guru, in charge of all investment responsibilities. There was no electoral pressure for a power transfer, and certainly no mandate from the people, which had elected Xanana to be prime minister in a race against Alkatiri.

4.2. Surprisingly, not only did the plot succeed to the satisfaction of both politicians, but also the whole international community warmly applauded, to the sole exception of the bemused author of this paper, who still wonders whether the international community would have unanimously cheered a British Conservative prime minister who would suddenly decide single handedly and for no apparent reason to hand over the keys to 10 Downing Street to an unelected individual in the opposition Labour Party, not even a Member of Parliament at that.

4.3. Beside the perplexing lack of legitimate reaction from international commentators, it was found later that the charade was a political maneuver imagined by Xanana to domesticate Alkatiri with a gift of \$500 million for Oecusse projects. Alkatiri bowed down to Xanana and exited Timorese central politics for a while, to become the de-facto Rajah of Oecusse with its multi-million dollar budget. Xanana became the "*Minister of Planning and Strategic Investment*".

The material rationale for the swap was to:

- 4.3.1. Seduce Alkatiri into instructing FRETILIN's Members of Parliament to approve the billion dollar annual budget as Xanana wanted it;
- 4.3.2. Extinguish any criticism from FRETILIN's Members of Parliament regarding corrupt practices;
- 4.3.3. Reinforce Xanana's power on the overall Tasi Mane development process.

4.4. Xanana expected with great assurance that in the 2017 election CNRT would win over 40 seats, based on the benchmark 2012 election in which CNRT rose from 18 seats to 30 seats

4.5. However, he was greatly disappointed and frustrated when the number of CNRT seats dropped from 30 to 22 in the 2017 election. Xanana never expected that the voters would punish him so severely when they withdrew their trust in him.

5. Public perception of Alkatiri and Xanana

5.1. The two gladiators are deeply entrenched. Alkatiri has been leading FRETILIN for 19 years, even as he lost 4 consecutive elections. A democratic leader would resign immediately after losing an election, but he didn't. As a descendent of Yemeni immigrants, he seems to embody would-be despotism and would like nothing better than to become the Sultan of East Timor after having been for a while the Rajah of Oecusse.

5.2. Alkatiri's old dream of using again FRETILIN as a springboard to power has become a fantasy, due to his arrogance and ethnic and religious backgrounds. Within FRETILIN circles Alkatiri is not acceptable anymore, owing in part to the fact that he was incapable of forming a government for as many as 3 times, even when FRETILIN had won a single majority. Alkatiri's departure from FRETILIN leadership is only a matter of time.

5.3. Meanwhile, Xanana's image and reputation at grassroots level are still strong. However, increased access to education and information has led a new generation among poor families to recognize the reality of ongoing poverty and of development issues which Xanana hasn't tackled yet, despite his having spent \$14 billion since 2007, with very dim results.

5.4. The outcome of recent elections reflects the real feelings of a majority of Timorese, and confidence in these two legendary figures for the future of East Timor has all but vanished.

6. Strategies to shape a new landscape

In order to reshape the political landscape, devising new ideas, coupled with the right and accurate strategies, is of paramount importance.

6.1. To counter Xanana, a powerful instrument is needed, which can only be FRETILIN, due to its historical and significant role in the whole process of revolution and liberation. Xanana was part of FRETILIN, but he is now a single and isolated individual, while FRETILIN is an institution.

6.2. To challenge Xanana, the priority is to oust Alkatiri from FRETILIN's leadership. Once this task has been successfully discharged, FRETILIN militants will spread out, "*back to the barracks*" and FRETILIN will be strong enough to defeat Xanana's CNRT in the 2023 legislative election.

6.3. Currently Maubocy is the mover and shaker of a movement called "*revitalizar a FRETILIN para encarrar os desafios*" (revitalize FRETILIN to meet the challenges). Beyond that, Maubocy is organizing what he calls a "*debate club*"

with Timorese academics, educated in Portugal, Indonesia, East Timor, Australia, the UK, New Zealand, Japan, or the U.S. The objective is a future in which the law is upheld and good governance and the values of democracy are promoted.

6.4. The only effective way to counter dictator prone rulers is through rational ideas and the promotion of political awareness.

6.5. The social, economic, and political revolutions of the end of the 18th century were the natural outcome of the Age of Enlightenment. We believe that a similar but rejuvenated intellectual movement is needed in East Timor if things are to change in a peaceful fashion.