

## Further thoughts about Australian spying on the Timorese

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China was the only major country to recognize the Democratic Republic of East Timor in 1975, and ties between Timorese politicians and the Chinese government go back at least 45 years. Far from me to try to demonize the Chinese government, an issue that would be subjectively irrelevant in this case.

This being said, we are only supposing by successive elimination that the target of Australian spying could have been to learn about Chinese activities, but it is still true that there is no suggestion, let alone evidence, that the spying activities resulted in any advantage for Australia in the CMATS outcome.

I see only two possibilities regarding a secret potentially discovered by Australian spies:

1. The secret was embarrassing for Australia: since East Timor obtained in CMATS almost three times what she was entitled to geographically, going from 18% to 50% of the revenue from Sunrise, which could be deemed a victory for East Timor, whatever secret there was that was embarrassing enough for Australia to lead to the Timorese vindication would have been made public by now.
2. The secret was embarrassing for East Timor: if East Timor thought she could get more than half the revenue from the Sunrise field, perhaps up to 100%, by hiding a secret from Australia (which would have been a treacherous display of bad faith), what was the secret discovered by Australian spies that shamed the Timorese into accepting only 50%, and, if such a dirty secret existed, why was the Timorese share not kept at 18%?

I would think that the first step, if anyone were really interested in resolving the case, would be to find out the nature of the secret obtained by Australian spies through the bugging of the Timorese team, and how this secret, if to the advantage of Australia, shamed East Timor into reducing her claim to 50% rather than 18%.

It is also plausible that Australian spies were rather investigating the cozy relationship between Timorese politicians, all of whom had far left sympathies, and Australian activists, all of whom were apparently aligned with the Labor Party, among them Kirsty Sword, Janelle Saffin (a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council until 2003 and a member of the Australian House of Representatives from 2007 until 2013), Steve Bracks (who was the Premier of Victoria at the time), Kim McGrath, and probably several others, at a time when the Australian Prime Minister was Liberal John Howard. After all, the Australian government could have had some reason to be alarmed by the sympathies of Australian activists who were acting against what could have been perceived as Australian core foreign policy interests. I make no judgement here on the legality or appropriateness of spying on Australian citizens.

While I don't see why spying on Chinese interference in East Timor could be a source of great embarrassment for the Australian government, I can see how the latter option could be considered a major political and legal embarrassment, perhaps potentially destructive for the Liberal Party.