

East Timor: Mari Alkatiri's unseating

Friday 15 September 2006, by [HEARMAN Vanessa](#) (Date first published: 13 September 2006).

Major Alfredo Reinado and 56 other men escaped Dili's Becora Prison on August 30. On that day, a report by David O'Shea and John Martinkus on SBS's *Dateline* alleged links between President Xanana Gusmao and military defectors Reinado and Commander Railos.

Reinado led a band of deserters in May after a demonstration protesting the treatment of soldiers from the Western part of the country was shot at. Reinado became vocal in demanding the resignation of then Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri. He was arrested for unlawful possession of weapons on July 26.

Railos was given star billing on ABC's *Four Corners* report by Liz Jackson for testifying that Alkatiri knew of the existence of Fretilin hit squads. No charges were laid against Alkatiri relating to this allegation.

Martinkus and O'Shea argued that behind the removal of Alkatiri in July lay an intricate network of domestic and international interests. They alleged that preparations for a political coup to remove the Fretilin government began prior to the violent May-July Dili crisis and that late last year Armed Forces chief Taur Matan Ruak and highly respected ex-Falintil commander Falur Rate Laek were approached by Timorese and English-speaking foreigners, possibly Australian or US, to unseat the government.

Dateline detailed efforts by the Catholic Church to remove the Fretilin government because Fretilin was "completely alien and cut off from the roots of our cultural, social and historic realities". Church leaders and signatories to the April 2005 letter sent to the parliamentary speaker, arguing for the removal of Alkatiri, refused to be interviewed. High-level military commanders also reported being urged by church leaders to unseat Alkatiri.

In the online magazine *New Matilda*, Martinkus noted the existence of a handwritten note from Gusmao dated May 29 giving instructions to Reinado of where he and his men should base themselves upon the arrival of Australian troops. Like church leaders, Gusmao refused to be interviewed by *Dateline*.

Martinkus and O'Shea also suggested that Democratic Party leader Fernando de Araujo relied on support from former Indonesian Special Forces operative Rui Lopes and former militia leader Nemecio de Carvalho. The Democratic Party organised some of the anti-Alkatiri mobilisations and circulated allegations of mass graves run by government forces.

Dateline reported that Railos and Reinado were involved in provoking and starting armed clashes in Fatu Ahi and Taci Tolu. Reinado opened fire first in Fatu Ahi, which was captured on camera by O'Shea for SBS.

Timorese Prosecutor General Longuinhos Monteiro confirmed that Railos had been found to have started an armed clash in Taci Tolu on the western outskirts of Dili.

Police Commander Paulo Martins was also found to have handed out weapons to police reserves units in Liquica, Aileu and Dili - three districts with a high concentration of anti-Fretilin forces.

These weapons are not fully accounted for.

Unlike the fanfare that greeted ABC TV's *Four Corners* when it aired Railos' allegations, reporting regarding *Dateline* focuses on Reinado's threat to shoot at anyone who tried to recapture him. In a phone call to O'Shea, broadcast on *Dateline* on September 6, Reinado indicated his dissatisfaction with the way he has been treated by the Jose Ramos-Horta government, suggesting that his own role was crucial to the change at the top.

Alkatiri concluded that his independent stance on oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea could have led to attempts to unseat him from within the country and without. He told *Dateline*, "*The only prime minister in the world that was really 'advising me' quote-unquote, to step down, was the prime minister of Australia*".

P.S.

* From Green Left Weekly, September 13, 2006.