

East Timor guerrilla leader returns, demurs on presidential ambitions

by Rajiv Chandrasekaran
The Washington Post

DILI, East Timor -- First as a guerrilla leader and later as a political prisoner, Xanana Gusmao led East Timor's independence fight for 18 years. Now that East Timor has become the world's newest nation, Gusmao has returned from seven years in exile as a larger-than-life hero, a charismatic and articulate man whom many East Timorese see as their first president.

But Gusmao is being coy. Asked at a news conference Saturday if he wants to lead this country after what is expected to be two or three years of United Nations control, he said "it will take time" to decide.

What is clear, though, is that Gusmao wields enormous political power. He and his lieutenants are in a position to significantly influence the rebuilding of East Timor, which was ravaged by pro-Indonesia militias after residents voted overwhelmingly on Aug. 30 to separate from Indonesia. The United Nations, whose Security Council could decide as early as Monday to assume full administrative responsibility for East Timor, has had extensive negotiations with Gusmao about the scope and direction of its operations.

"There's almost nothing in the planning process that hasn't been bounced over to his staff," said a U.N. official.

Gusmao, 53, is the president of the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT), the once-outlawed political arm of the Falintil rebel group, which he headed from 1981 until his capture by the Indonesian army in 1992. He was sentenced to life in prison, but was released after the independence vote.

Washington and other Western capitals last month to build support for a peacekeeping force. He even addressed the Australian Parliament.

CNRT officials have been meeting in Darwin, Australia, to plan their involvement in the transition. Gusmao has divulged few details other than to say, "CNRT will be on

members, many of whom likely would be from CNRT.

Already, aid workers frequently ask CNRT leaders to dole out rice and high-protein biscuits, reasoning that the council knows best which enclaves most need the emergency supplies, and because most Indonesian-appointed local government officials have fled.

Although he has received a passionate welcome from people here -- more than 5,000 showed up with less than two hours notice to hear him speak Friday -- Gusmao appears to want a low-key public role. "I'm not a savior," he said at Saturday's news conference. "I didn't come to solve all of the problems."

He said he is proud to be a member of Falintil, but that he never wanted to be president of CNRT. And explaining his appearance in a camouflage Falintil uniform, he said: "When I was arrested I was a guerrilla fighter. I am coming back as a guerrilla fighter."

Despite the military posture, he said he remains committed to ending the violence. After an Australian-led peacekeeping force landed in East Timor last month, Falintil fighters have largely stayed inside their camps. But Gusmao did not commit to disarming Falintil -- a condition set down by the peacekeepers. "It is our business," he said.

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-U.N. official

Born Jose Alexandre Gusmao, he adopted the nom de guerre Xanana after joining Falintil in 1975, when Portugal decided to jettison its colonies. A former journalist, he fled to the mountains after Indonesia invaded later that year. Within a few years, Gusmao rose to become Falintil's top commander.

After he was captured in 1992, he used his trial as a forum to push for a vote on East Timor's independence, saying at one point, "Whoever is afraid of the referendum is afraid of the truth."

Since his release from prison, Gusmao has been East Timor's de facto head of state. He traveled to

hand whenever it is needed and we will play a role wherever it becomes necessary."

They have been discussing issues such as an official language and a currency for the country, which was a Portuguese colony for 400 years before Indonesia invaded in 1975. Gusmao wants the language to be Portuguese, although most of the population speaks a language called Tetun.

U.N. officials expect the CNRT to create a high-level council that will regularly consult with U.N. administrators. The United Nations is planning to set up a provisional legislature, perhaps with 40 or 50

AFTERMATH OF IRENE



PHOTO BY KEITH JACOBS-KRT

Tommy Chadwell bails water out of hot tub at the Spa Place in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Heavy rains from Hurricane Irene caused water to quickly rise October 17th, causing flooding in some areas of Horry County.

Another market bombing

The Washington Post

On Aug. 28, 1995, a Serb mortar shell landed in the marketplace of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Three dozen civilians were killed instantly. CNN broadcasted devastating images of the carnage, and millions of people around the world were outraged. The marketplace attack helped push NATO finally to intervene to end the war.

On Thursday of last week, Russian missiles landed in the marketplace of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. A nearby maternity hospital also was reported hit. More than 140 people were killed, including children and teenagers, new mothers and their infants. But there are very few television crews or foreign correspondents in Chechnya; images of carnage were not beamed around the world; outrage is decidedly muted.

Russian leaders and military brass at first denied the attack, then said their troops could not have been responsible, then admitted responsibility but denied there were civilian casualties. The target had been an "arms bazaar," they said, and only criminals and terrorists could have been killed. Or maybe the Chechens had blown themselves up to make Russia look bad -- some officials tried that one, too.

It should come as no surprise that the Russian government would lie in such a blatant way. It lied just as brazenly during its previous war against Chechnya, back in 1994-96, even though at that time a sizable Russian and foreign media presence in Grozny routinely debunked the official version of events. Now, with a diminished media presence, no fiction is too ludicrous for Moscow to put forward.

Something else has changed since the last war, too. The Russian public is eager for a military victory and ready,

at least for now, to believe that success can be achieved at little cost. Many Russians do not flinch at articles like the one in the official newspaper *Rossiskaya Gazeta* that talks about the "criminal scum" in Chechnya and concludes: "To wipe the terrorist rabble off the face of the earth and rid life of fear and violence seems like the only solution."

Such yearning for simple solutions is understandable, if not pretty. Chechnya is, or was, a province of Russia on its southern border. Much of its Muslim population, having resisted Russian conquest for more than a century and then been nearly wiped out in Stalin's terror, never accepted Moscow's domination. Its government declared independence in 1991 and eventually fought the Russian army to a humiliating defeat, with President Boris Yeltsin agreeing to live with an autonomous, if not formally independent, Chechnya. But attacks from Chechnya into other parts of Russia, and terrorist bombings that Russian officials blamed on Chechens, led Mr. Yeltsin to renege on his agreement and launch a new war.

It is understandable, too, that Russian officials want to hold their country together. But the only apparent strategy of this latest war is to kill many Chechens and force many more to flee. Officials count at least 170,000 refugees having crossed one border alone, almost certainly an understatement. This is not an "anti-terrorist operation," as the Russian government maintains, but a crime against humanity. The Clinton administration was eloquent in its condemnations of Slobodan Milosevic's attacks against civilians. It was reassuring to hear Secretary of State Madeleine Albright beginning this weekend to express similar criticisms about the Russian operation.

Clinton returns to Social Security offensive

by Robert A. Rosenblatt
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON -- Sparring with Republicans over the volatile issue of Social Security, President Clinton said Saturday that he will ask Congress to pass a rescue plan that would use future budget surpluses to bolster the massive retirement program.

Members of both political parties have been maneuvering to position themselves as friends and defenders of the 40 million Americans who receive monthly Social Security benefits.

Republican leaders in Congress had indicated that the President's original Social Security plan had no chance of passage this year.

But Clinton returned to the political offensive Saturday, offering a new variation of the plan that he said would take "the first big step toward truly saving Social Security. It will take the trust fund out beyond the life span of the baby boom generation," he said, referring to the huge group of Americans born between 1946 and 1964. The oldest of them, a group that includes the President, will be eligible to collect full retirement benefits in the year 2012.

GOP leaders insist the President's plan won't work.

"Republicans will not allow the President's desire for a legacy to supersede the needs of the American people," said Rep. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., chairman of the House GOP conference.

Clinton's new plan drops his earlier proposal to use a portion of the surplus for investment in the stock market, which offers a higher rate of return than Treasury securities. Current Social Security surpluses are invested in special Treasury bonds.

However, Republicans said Congress would never allow the government to invest directly in the stock market, for fear this could eventually lead to government control of corporations.

Instead, many Republicans have favored allowing workers to divert a portion of their payroll taxes into individual accounts. But this plan is unacceptable to the President and congressional Democrats, who believe that individual accounts are too risky and could jeopardize the health of the Social Security system.

The result, after months of debate and private meetings involving the President and members of Congress, has been a stalemate. Nearly everyone had agreed the chances for legislation this year seemed slim at best.

The Republicans have been scor-

ing some political points recently with claims that they favor a "lockbox" that would keep Social Security surpluses untouchable, and they accused the Democrats of backing spending plans that would eat into the surplus.

Saturday's radio address was an opportunity for the President to return the political fire, claiming that he and his party are stronger supporters of Social Security than the GOP.

"If we value the financial well-being of our parents and grandparents, if we believe that all Americans deserve to retire with dignity, if we want to make sure we don't place an unfair burden on the backs of the next generation of young parents, then we must seize this moment of unprecedented prosperity and budget surpluses to extend the life of Social Security," Clinton said.

"Unfortunately, so far, instead of making the tough choices to save Social Security and extend its life to 2050, the Republican majority in Congress, especially some of the House Republican leaders, have been accusing the Democrats of spending the Social Security surplus," he added. "They've also been claiming that their budget doesn't spend the Social Security surplus. As it happens, neither claim is true."

Hurricane Jose wallops Caribbean Islands

by Carol Rosenberg
and Martin Merzer
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico -- Hurricane Jose walloped Antigua and a string of other Caribbean islands with a direct hit Wednesday, Oct. 20, and threatened to deal at least a glancing blow to the Virgin Islands Thursday, Oct. 21.

Forecasters said the powerful storm could brush past Puerto Rico without inflicting much damage. Nevertheless, residents stripped stores of supplies and canceled everything from bridal showers to school openings. Flights farther south also were canceled.

Long-range forecasts suggested that Jose soon would curve out to sea and

present no threat to the mainland. By Saturday morning, it should be parallel to Florida -- but 900 miles away in the Atlantic. Good thing, too. -- it could be on the verge of becoming a major Category 3 hurricane by then. On Wednesday, Oct. 20, Jose brought its 100 mph winds to Antigua and other islands, ripping roofs from houses, tearing down a newly built church in Antigua and flinging debris through deserted streets.

At the Yetton Beach Resort outside the Antigua capital of St. John's, a ferocious wind howled through cracks in boarded-up doors. A ceiling collapsed in a two-roomed unit of the hotel. No one was hurt in that incident.

Storm-weary islanders in neighboring St. Kitts, where a few homes remain

roofless from last year's devastating hurricane season, prepared as Jose bore down. In a television broadcast, acting Prime Minister Sam Condor told residents of St. Kitts and Nevis to "prepare for the worst." In Puerto Rico, still reeling from last year's pummeling by Hurricane Georges, the National Guard went on alert, deploying dozens of forces to reinforce 15 penitentiaries and juvenile detention facilities against escape, according to Maj. Frank Soto. Shoppers stripped stores of water, diapers, batteries and flashlights. Residents protected waterfront businesses and apartments against breakage.

In the old cobblestone San Juan, which has withstood countless hurricanes, manager Ada Otero boarded up

the entrance of the chic Chef Marisoll restaurant, not against the weather, but against possible looting in the event of power outages.

"Sometimes the vandals come," said Otero, who canceled all dinner seatings for Wednesday and Thursday. "This is just in case. If everything goes fine, we'll open on Friday." Jose Crespo, 20, an engineering student at the University of Puerto Rico, said he wasn't disappointed that a hurricane named for him could turn out to be a wimp, at least in the capital of this 100-mile long island.

"Georges was a beast, it tore the island in half," he said. "Jose doesn't worry me. It's a baby compared to Georges."

IBM loss could put 218,000 students through Harvard

by George Gunset
Chicago Tribune
October 22, 1999

With the market value that IBM lost when its stock plunged Thursday, Oct. 21, its shareholders could have bought more than 85,000 Bentley Azures -- the world's most expensive car -- at \$350,000 a copy.

The stockholders of International Business Machines Corp. may be grim for a while following the stock retreat of 15 percent, which knocked more than \$29.9 billion off the value of Big Blue, the world's largest computer maker.

But they should put the loss in perspective. After all, it was less than the gross domestic product of Sudan -- \$31.2 billion. And IBM's new, reduced market capitalization -- \$170 billion -- still far exceeds the \$70 billion of Microsoft Corp. stock owned by the software giant's chair-

man and world's richest person, Bill Gates. Of course, Microsoft's stock market value, \$475 billion, far exceeds IBM's.

IBM stockholders also might take comfort in the fact that the government's gold stockpile at Fort Knox, KY., at market prices, totals \$44.9 billion, some \$15 billion more than Thursday's IBM loss. IBM shares, totaling more than 1.86 billion outstanding, dropped \$16 to close at \$91 following a dreary earnings forecast.

Put another way, the IBM stock loss was enough to finance 218,000 students for a full four years at Harvard University, an average of \$137,000 per student, based on the current college year's tuition and other estimated costs. Those of a more nautical bent would calculate that \$29.9 billion would pay for close to 60,000 Hatteras 50-foot yachts selling at about \$500,000.