

Vandals target Australia with graffiti on walls of East Timor embassy

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Australia embassy in East Timor showing a vandal attack on an adjacent wall.

Vandals have targeted the Australian embassy in East Timor, spray painting a blood-stained parody of the Australian coat of arms with a kangaroo and emu sucking a barrel of "Timor oil".

Anti-Australian graffiti is increasingly common on Dili's streets as the dispute over the Timor gap oil and gas treaty and spying allegations simmer in the international court.



Anti-Australian graffiti on a wall at the Australian embassy.

The image painted on a concrete wall adjacent the embassy is the latest sign of local anger with Australia, a marked contrast from 15 years ago when Australian

troops led an international mission to secure the fledgling nation.

The graffiti also depicts a pair of crocodiles – the national symbol of East Timor – holding spears and attempting to drive away kangaroos.

Charlie Scheiner, a researcher from La'o Hamutuk in East Timor, said graffiti was common in Dili but only a small manifestation of local concern.

Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao decision to cancel a planned trip to Australia last month was far more significant, he said.

It is not the first time the embassy has been targeted in recent weeks. Protesters hurled rocks at the embassy in December soon after security agency ASIO raided the Canberra office of a lawyer representing East Timor in court proceedings at The Hague.

A spokeswoman said the Foreign Affairs department put the highest priority on the safety and security of staff, their families and clients overseas and closely monitored all developments affecting the security arrangements.

Asked what steps to had been taken to address any damage to Australia's reputation in East Timor as a result of recent history in this dispute, the spokeswoman said: "Australia continues to be a strong source of support for Timor-Leste, including through our substantial aid program, assistance to Timor-Leste's defence and security sectors and our co-operation in the development of the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea."

Australia's Defence department celebrated local graffiti during the 1999 intervention in East Timor, known as INTERFET, publishing a photograph of a boy shaking hands with an Australian soldier in front of a wall daubed "I love you military Interfeet forever".

Swinburne University's Michael Leach said Australians living in East Timor were unlikely to be affected by recent tensions, but there was no question official ties are at a low point.

"Oil revenue sharing, the allegations of espionage, and the issue of unsettled maritime boundaries has triggered nationalist sentiment, and united all East Timorese political parties," Dr Leach said.

"This is a country that fought for 24 years for independence. It's not going to give up easily, especially when their economic future is so dependent on oil and gas revenues."