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Perpetuating Genocide

Intentional International Neglect in the East
Timor Crisis

Elizabeth Kingston
HNR499: Senior Thesis

Perpetuating Genocide: Intentional International Neglect in the East Timor Crisis

In 2002, Timor-Leste finally attained the independence that its people had declared twenty-seven years ago in 1975. In the years between these events, Indonesia invaded and occupied the small island, killing citizens, destroying infrastructure, and denying the Timorese the right to self-determination guaranteed by international law. For years, Indonesia operated with impunity, as economic interests with Indonesia and impotence caused major powers like the United States, Australia, Portugal, and the United Nations to intentionally neglect the situation. Telegrams, memorandums, recordings, and other internal documents show that both the U.S. and Australia had knowledge of the events occurring in East Timor but instead chose to believe the false information given by Indonesia in order to continue fostering a beneficial relationship with Indonesia. Had either the U.S. or Australia acted against Indonesia's invasion, the subjugation of the Timorese people could have been avoided. In the 1990s, increasing public information concerning East Timor as well as the growth in popularity of humanitarian philosophy finally outweighed economic interests of the U.S. and Australia. The resultant changes to the foreign policies of these governments led directly to East Timor finally becoming a sovereign nation.

Historical Background of East Timor

The Colonial Years

In the early sixteenth century, Portugal and the Netherlands sought to expand their empires through colonization of the many islands of the Indonesian archipelago. Both countries laid claim to Timor, an island rich in sandalwood located approximately 400 miles from the northern shore of Australia. Boundaries between the Dutch and Portuguese settlements were constantly disputed and redrawn over four-hundred years until final resolution in 1913 with the *Sentenca Arbitral*, drafted at the International Court of Justice. While Portugal had entered the

sixteenth century as a formidable international power, by the time of the *Sentenca Arbitral* its prosperity had steeply declined and domestic instability was on the rise. The treaty relinquished all Portuguese rights to the Indonesian archipelago except for the territory defined as East Timor, a small fraction of its original holdings.¹

Prior to and following the *Sentenca Arbitral*, Portugal's control over its colony was tenuous at best. Portuguese Timor was ruled indirectly through *liurai*, local kings who were given military rank and allowed to maintain rule as long as they remained loyal to Portugal. Despite this, cooperation from the *liurai* was often absent. This problem was exacerbated by Portuguese exploitation of rivalries between the *liurai*, creating lasting divisions among Timorese.² Still, despite these divisions, Timorese rose in rebellion against Portugal on several occasions: in 1710, causing the relocation of Portuguese control to the city of Dili; in 1861, against forced imposition of coffee cultivation; and in 1908, against a head tax.³ Timor's distance from Portugal, combined with declining sandalwood prices and the fall of the Portuguese monarchy, meant that as time progressed, fewer resources were dedicated to insuring peace or prosperity for the colony. Though Portugal maintained its colonial hold over East Timor in the *Sentenca Arbitral*, both its domestic tranquility and control over East Timor were in weak condition as the twentieth century progressed.

World War II

With the exception of the territorial push-and-pull between the Netherlands and Portugal, Timor had remained relatively isolated from the world for most of its existence. In 1942, however, this changed. World War II had begun and the island's unique location in the

¹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, *Chega!: The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR)* (Dili, Timor-Leste: CAVR, 2006), Part 3.2, 9.

² The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.2, 8.

³ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.2, 9.

Indonesian archipelago left the small government at the mercy of warring international superpowers. Though Portugal had declared its neutrality in the conflict, Allied forces feared that the Japanese would invade Timor to gain a base of operations where attacks against Australia could be easily launched. To stop this from happening, Australia, with limited support from the other Allied forces, committed a force of nearly five-hundred men to the defense of the island. In response, the Japanese military sent 20,000 soldiers, ousting the Allied troops and subjugating Portuguese Timor to brutal Japanese occupation until 1945.

Despite the large disparity in military force, the Allied troops were able to mount an extremely successful attack against the Japanese forces, losing forty of their own men but inflicting losses upwards of 1,500 men.⁴ Without the support of the Timorese people, many of whom not only supported but fought alongside with the Allied troops, this would not have been possible. Following the withdrawal of the Allied troops, the Timorese paid dearly for their role in resisting the Japanese forces: between 40,000 and 60,000 men and women were tortured and killed, with many women forced to join the wartime network of sexual slavery.⁵ The Japanese military force absorbed all available supplies of the island, leaving its inhabitants without food. Allied forces, since withdrawn from Timor, ordered successive bombing raids that killed many Timorese and few Japanese soldiers. Considering the damages that resulted from the Allied withdrawal, in terms of infrastructure and human loss of life, Australian veterans as well as the Australian public recognized the debt and gratitude they owed the Timorese for their support.⁶ Decades later, this relationship would spawn a grassroots movement supporting Timorese independence.

⁴ James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2003), 19.

⁵ James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence* (Longueville Media, 2003), 19-22.

⁶ Ben Kiernan, "Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide," *Critical East Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 167.

Following the close of Japanese occupation and the return to power of Portugal, tensions continued between Portugal and East Timor. Practices such as whipping prisoners, forcing them to “...stand on coral stone, hot from the scorching sun, with their feet shackled” led to another uprising in 1959.⁷ Following the uprising, liberation wars in its African colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau consumed Portugal’s attentions and resources. East Timor continued to slowly rebuild its infrastructure and economy from wartime destruction. Though Portugal declared East Timor a province of Portugal in 1963 and subsequently afforded a greater Timorese voice within government, overall no serious opposition to the established Portuguese dictatorship was allowed and severe censorship of the media continued.⁸ In these postwar years, East Timor had returned to its status as a low-priority, isolated extension of Portuguese power.

Uncertainty and Civil War

The expense of fighting wars on three different fronts throughout the 1960s drained Portugal’s resources and generated resentment among Portuguese people. Economic policies that enforced trade relations between these African colonies and Portugal also created a class of embittered business professionals who desired to focus on European investments instead.⁹ Ultimately, these wars and the associated negative consequences led to political turbulence within the country. A particularly frustrated class, soldiers formed the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA) around a series of democratic ideals and socialist reform. In 1974, the MFA successfully launched a bloodless military coup. In support of the MFA, citizens lined the streets and placed carnations in the barrels of unfired guns, leading to the coup’s designation as the “Carnation Revolution.” Soon after their seizure of the government, the MFA decreed that all colonies would be released from Portuguese control in accordance with the colonists’ right to

⁷ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.2, 11.

⁸ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 35.

⁹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.3, 13.

self-determination. Despite the fact that MFA was a military movement, its leaders recognized that the best way to end the African wars was with a quick withdrawal. Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau had actually attained military superiority over Portugal and there was little to no public or political support for continued warfare.¹⁰ Though these decisions were made in consideration to Portugal's African colonies, they had a dramatic impact for East Timor.

Prior to the Carnation Revolution, no political parties and a low amount of political activity existed in East Timor. Following the announcement of decolonization, however, three major political parties formed in East Timor: Uniao Democratica Timorese (UDT), Frente Revolucionara de Timor Leste Independence (FRETILIN, originally known as ASDT), and Associacao Integracao Timor-Indonesia (AITI, later known as APODETI). The two largest of the parties, FRETILIN and UDT, both advocated for independence for East Timor. Though they shared this common goal, their bases of popular support divided them. UDT drew support from government officials, tribal chiefs, Catholic Church officials, and other upper class members of society. Its leaders described the UDT not as a socialist party, but a "social democrat" party.¹¹ In contrast, FRETILIN held the support of the lower and middle classes. This support base, combined with its use of neo-Marxist rhetoric, lent to the perception of FRETILIN as a radical movement.¹² This perception would later be emphasized and distorted into purported evidence of FRETILIN's communist nature by Indonesia in an attempt to influence the actions of highly anticommunist countries like the United States and Australia. In reality, FRETILIN represented a philosophy unique to the Timorese people, often referred to as "mauberism" in the native Tetum language. Mauberism embodies a "...general struggle against poverty, illiteracy, and economic

¹⁰ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.3, 14.

¹¹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.5, 28.

¹² Stephen Hoadley, "East Timor: Civil War – Causes and Consequences," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1976): 412.

and political oppression.”¹³ While similarities can be drawn between mauberism and the theory of communism, the political links with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that many international actors feared Timor held never truly existed.

Unfortunately, the differences between FRETILIN and UDT proved to be extremely divisive. Indonesia, while it outwardly portrayed a nominal interest in self-determination for the East Timorese, covertly manipulated the rivalry into civil war in order to weaken the pro-independence movement. For Indonesia, an independent East Timor within its archipelago could have inspired separatist sentiments from Indonesia’s other islands. Indonesia also feared a leftist government existing in such close proximity. In August of 1975, UDT was given information by the Indonesian government detailing an imminent power grab by FRETILIN. UDT responded by staging a coup to take control of East Timor. When the violence ended, UDT had lost and had been pushed into the western side of the island.¹⁴ Estimates place the loss of lives totaling anywhere between two- and three-thousand Timorese.¹⁵ The Indonesian government did not intend to limit itself to these clandestine activities to ensure East Timor’s integration, however. As early as January 1975, evidence exists that Indonesia was considering direct military action. In February on the island of Sumatra, the Indonesian military performed a rehearsal for a full-scale invasion of East Timor.¹⁶ Additionally, though it enjoyed the least amount of Timorese support of the three major parties, APODETI drew most of its support from the Indonesian government. Unlike FRETILIN and UDT, APODETI supported the integration of East Timor with Indonesia. The Indonesian government, in turn, put resources into the hands of APODETI in an effort to manipulate the self-determination of the East Timorese people.

¹³ Hoadley, 413.

¹⁴ Joseph Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 50.

¹⁵ Noam Chomsky, “The Plight of East Timor,” *Australian Institute of Policy and Science* 51, no. 1 (1979): 49.

¹⁶ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.6, 33.

1975: The Invasion

Though the actual invasion of East Timor did not occur until December of 1975, FRETILIN's disposal of UDT during the internal infighting and assumed administration of East Timor beginning in September spawned the first skirmishes between FRETILIN and the Indonesian military. Portuguese administrators who had left during the civil war returned in this period to aid in decolonization but were ultimately powerless and unsuccessful in providing any sort of aid or structure to the events.¹⁷ Swamped by internal political conflicts as well as bloodshed in its former African colonies, Portugal, in reality, had no control over what was occurring in East Timor. With few obstacles, the Indonesian military proceeded to attack the small island: on October 16th, the town of Balibó was captured, killing several Timorese as well as five Australian journalists in the process; on November 28th, the town of Atabe fell to the Indonesian military following two weeks of intensive bombing.¹⁸ FRETILIN, drawing on its assumed power, unilaterally declared independence during this period of strife, perhaps hoping to draw international attention and support.

Nine days later, the Indonesian military launched a full-scale invasion of the island. Death toll estimates from December of 1975 to February of 1976 range from 55,000 to 100,000 people.¹⁹ The Indonesian military engaged in severe brutality, killing not only resistance fighters but unarmed men, women, and children. East Timor's ethnic Chinese minority was also specifically targeted. When the Indonesian military forced FRETILIN from the city of Aileu, its troops used machine guns to kill every remaining person in the city, sparing only those under the age of four.²⁰ This type of brutality was widespread throughout the territory.

¹⁷ Chomsky, 50.

¹⁸ Chomsky, 50.

¹⁹ Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 211.

²⁰ Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 211.

The Occupation

Full-scale war continued in East Timor until 1980, although Indonesia formally announced its integration of East Timor in 1976.²¹ After four years of intensive fighting, FRETILIN's command structure was finally crippled. Small gangs of resistance fighters would continue to operate from the hills and mountains and employ support networks through the towns, but as an organization, FRETILIN struggled to survive.²² Divisions among those who remained also inhibited the power of the organization.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian military continued its mass killings. In 1978, five-hundred citizens were shot and killed after submitting their surrender. In 1981, four-hundred were killed, nearly all of whom were women or small children. In 1983, "...sixty men, women, and children were tied up and bulldozed to death."²³ By this time, nearly 120,000 people had been murdered or had fallen victim to starvation by tactics enforced by the military. Many of these victims consisted of the Chinese minority that had been present in the territory – of the 20,000, only a few thousand remained by 1985.²⁴

Throughout the occupation, Indonesia isolated East Timor, refusing to let any third party onto the island. Therefore, Indonesia became the sole source of information about what was occurring in East Timor. In the 1980s, Indonesia sought to portray East Timor as happily integrated with the rest of the archipelago, the nuisance resistance crushed. Most of the international community was willing to believe this fallacy. In 1982, it held "free elections" where, unsurprisingly, ninety-nine percent of Timorese were said to have voted for President

²¹ Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 203.

²² Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 221.

²³ Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 221.

²⁴ Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia," 221.

Suharto's political party, Golkar.²⁵ The Indonesian government followed this charade with falsified reports claiming that only small amounts of violence and resistance continued to occur on the island.

Though a ceasefire was negotiated in 1983 between the Indonesian military and FRETILIN resistance, violence quickly returned to the island. Both parties accused each other for the breakdown of the ceasefire: Indonesia cited the FRETILIN attack of Indonesian combat engineers while FRETILIN pointed to the Indonesian killing of Timorese citizens during the ceasefire. Regardless of the truth behind the breakdown of the ceasefire, the island was once again engaged in conflict. The Indonesian military continued to neglect to direct their brutality on only members of the resistance. In the village of Viqueque, all men were seized and shot to death. Women and children were arrested, transported, and summarily executed in a nearby village, bringing the death toll for this single event upwards of two hundred.²⁶ With hostilities between FRETILIN and the Indonesian military renewed, this type of violence again became commonplace. Additionally, because of Indonesia's isolation of East Timor, there was no chance of third party intervention on behalf of the victimized Timorese.

Growing Resistance and the Dili Massacre

Toward the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, FRETILIN began to grow in strength. This was largely due to the emergence of a youth movement and the lessening of control on the island by Indonesia. Believing that East Timor was finally subdued, Indonesia moved away from eliminating the resistance completely to attempting to rebuild the area from the damage that had been done from the scorched earth policy of the Indonesian military. This lessening of control – though East Timor arguably still retained characteristics of a war zone – allowed for greater

²⁵ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.16, 103.

²⁶ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.16, 105.

movement of FRETILIN among the masses. Additionally, through Australian journalists and resistance activists, information was smuggled out of the island and into the public realm.

On October 28th, 1991, a young Timorese resistance member was killed in an altercation with the Indonesian military. The military had received information about a resistance meeting in Motael Church and showed up at the meeting. During the confrontation, an integration activist was killed and Sebastião Gomes, a young resistance member, was dragged out of the church by Indonesian soldiers and shot to death. Due to rising tensions after this killing, the Portuguese delegation scheduled to visit East Timor and engage in talks with FRETILIN and Indonesia was cancelled. Despite this cancellation, several members of the delegation and news media remained in the city of Dili. On November 12th, the resistance movement held a funeral ceremony in memory of the murdered man. Several thousand attended and during the march from church to cemetery, pulled out pro-independence banners and signs. This was the most visible protest of Indonesian occupation in Timorese history. The protest was orderly and peaceful, with banners and songs as the main medium of displaying discontent.

Indonesian soldiers responded to this demonstration by open firing into the crowd of unarmed men, women, and children. Those that were lightly injured in the following chaos were later bayoneted to death, not only in the protest area but also in their homes where they had returned to hide hours after the event.²⁷ At least two-hundred people were killed, with two-hundred and fifty more missing. In its usual fashion, Indonesia attempted to cover up the extent of the violence, claiming that only approximately nineteen people died in the skirmish.

Fortunately for the Timorese people, however, the journalists who had originally arrived in East Timor to document the Portuguese delegation were present at the march and taped the violence. Upon release, these tapes put East Timor on the forefront of international attention.

²⁷ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.18, 116.

Finally, the United States, Australia, and other international players were forced to choose humanitarianism over economic concerns. Evidence of the cruelty of the Indonesian military had sponsored great public support for East Timor's independence, especially in Australia. This support was the turning point for the history of East Timor, as it enabled the United Nations to act on behalf of East Timor.

Independence

In August of 1999, the United Nations sponsored a referendum giving Timorese the chance to vote for independence or integration with Indonesia, finally fulfilling international law's promise of self-determination that had been denied in East Timor since 1975. In the months leading up to this referendum, Indonesian brutality skyrocketed. In February, lieutenant-colonel Yahyat Sudrajad ordered the killing of all pro-independence leaders and their families. The following month, the Indonesian-appointed governor Abilio Soares ordered the killing of all nuns and priests in the territory.²⁸ As the ballot date approached, Indonesian militias sought to destabilize the process. On the day of the vote, two men were decapitated and their heads were put on display in a public Timorese center to intimidate would-be voters.²⁹ The actions of the militias were ultimately futile, however: 98.6% of registered Timorese voters visited polling centers that day.³⁰

Despite all of violence and intimidation leading up to the vote, seventy-nine percent of Timorese voted for independence in the referendum. Following this vote, Indonesian militias rampaged. Hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly deported or fled the violence. At least one thousand citizens were murdered and up to eighty percent of homes in East Timor were

²⁸ Kiernan, "Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide," 175.

²⁹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 7.4.8, 245.

³⁰ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.20, 143.

destroyed.³¹ In the days following the vote, targeted killings of pro-independence activists, U.N. officials and volunteers, and journalists continued. Women who fled to seek sanctuary from the violence in Fohoren Nossa Senhora do Rosario Church were forcibly removed and taken to a police station, where they were beaten, stripped, burned with cigarettes, and sexually harassed.³² As one journalist described the events, this "...was ethnic cleansing Indonesia-style."³³

Weeks later, Indonesia bowed to international pressure and allowed the U.N. to send a multinational peacekeeping force, called the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), into East Timor to restore order to the area. INTERFET was able to establish order as well as a temporary democratic government. On May 20, 2002, it officially handed responsibility over to the new, independent state of Timor-Leste. After nearly thirty years of violence and denial of self-determination, the Timorese people finally triumphed over Indonesia. Questions still remain, however, as to why it took decades for international actors to support the cause for Timorese self-determination and decry the brutality of the Indonesian military.

US-Timor Relations

Prior to the decolonization of Portuguese Timor, the United States was already extensively involved with Indonesia. Following the conclusion of World War II, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union declined into a tense ideological conflict described today as the Cold War. For decades, the two superpowers were in constant competition, with the U.S. seeking to stop the spread of the communist ideology and with both superpowers attempting to gain military superiority over one another. The relationship between the U.S. and Indonesia developed as a result of this conflict. U.S. officials viewed Southeast Asia

³¹ Kiernan, "Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide," 175.

³² The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 7.4.8, 240.

³³ Nicolas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, "East Timor and the New Humanitarian Interventionism," *International Affairs* 77, no. 4 (2001): 817.

as a region rich with mineral wealth and investment opportunities but also as a weak region particularly vulnerable to the influence of the U.S.S.R.³⁴ Just as with Vietnam and Laos, the U.S. government aimed to stop communism from infiltrating Indonesia at all costs. Through its alliance with Indonesia, the U.S. was able to remove any influence from the U.S.S.R.

Following the end of Dutch colonial rule over Indonesia, a government emerged under President Sukarno that was extremely nationalistic, neutral, and anti-imperialistic. As this combination of ideals was clearly not compatible with U.S. intentions regarding the region, the U.S. began to support a rebellious movement that was growing within the military. Ultimately, in the mid-1960s, General Suharto of the Indonesian military led his U.S.-armed militia against the Sukarno government and established the New Order regime that would control Indonesia until 1999. Anywhere from 500,000 people to greater than one million people were murdered in this takeover, in particular those belonging to the Indonesian Communist Party and those loosely related to it, like participants in labor unions and women's groups.³⁵ The U.S. support of this massacre, particularly its focus on Cold War goals in neglect of human rights, would repeat itself in the East Timor crisis. As 1975 approached, a critical year in the history of East Timor, the U.S. had already allied itself with Indonesia at great human cost.

The new government of Portugal had announced its intentions to decolonize all overseas assets immediately after its ascent to power in 1974. The arrangement of the process of self-determination had yet to be determined by the Portuguese in 1975, yet the future of the small colony was already being decided elsewhere by the Suharto regime. In a meeting on July 5th between Suharto and U.S. President Gerald Ford, Suharto introduced the issue of decolonization.

³⁴ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 48.

³⁵ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 48.

After assuring President Ford that Indonesia fully supported self-determination for the Timorese people, he proceeded to describe the situation wholly inaccurately:

“The problem is that those who want independence are those who are Communist-influenced. Those wanting Indonesian integration are being subjected to heavy pressure by those who are almost Communists. The Communist elements practically sabotaged the recent meeting in Macao.”³⁶

This exaggeration of FRETILIN, the main political party of the island that supported independence, as “Communist-influenced” aligned the U.S. against them. Though Marxist rhetoric was used by FRETILIN often, their political philosophy was distinct from that of the Communist Party and they had no diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. This distinction was of little importance to Indonesia, which had already recognized that Timorese independence could increase separatist sentiment within the archipelago.³⁷ At this point in time, the easiest way to ensure U.S. aid was through red fear. This is precisely the tactic that the Indonesian government used. Publicly, however, the Indonesian government claimed to be seeking to reunite two ethnically similar peoples divided by the cruelties of colonization.³⁸

As the months progressed, Indonesian intentions involving East Timor became clear: despite Portugal’s attempts to negotiate new leadership in East Timor, Suharto would not cooperate with this plan. Instead, he sponsored the training of militias and military exercises on the island to prepare for invasion.³⁹ Though the U.S. would later deny any knowledge of these actions, documents remain showing CIA observation of military activity in the area, such as the acknowledgement of the entrance of two Indonesian special force groups into Timor in September.⁴⁰ The attitude of top-level officials to this growing tension was exceeding cavalier. As

³⁶ 5 July 1975, Presidents Ford and Suharto, Memorandum of Conversation, National Security Advisor Memoranda of Conversations, Gerald R. Ford Library, 6.

³⁷ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 49.

³⁸ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.4, 21.

³⁹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.6, 34.

⁴⁰ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 51.

a State Department official recalled, when questioned about the matter, General Scowcroft, President Ford's National Security Adviser, dismissed the idea of supporting the Timorese because "...it made no sense to antagonize the Indonesians...East Timor was not a viable entity."⁴¹ Similarly, President Ford declared that the U.S. had "no interests in East Timor" and should "follow Indonesia's lead on the issue."⁴² Considering that the Suharto government referenced killed nearly one million innocent people on its rise to power and the majority of Timorese supported the opposing independence party, FRETILIN, in East Timor and not integration, it is an easy conclusion to draw that the integration of the island would not be a peaceful one.

A crucial turning point in the relations between Indonesia and East Timor came with FRETILIN's victory over UDT and APODETI and subsequent declaration of the independence of East Timor on November 28th, 1975. Following this declaration, Indonesia committed to invasion of the island. Before it did, however, a meeting was convened by President Suharto to speak with President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger. The meeting commenced on December 6th, one day before the full-scale invasion of East Timor took place. Once again, Suharto phrased his intention to integrate East Timor as a result of Indonesia's concern for the "security, tranquility, and peace of Asia" and asked them for "...understanding if we deem it necessary to take rapid or drastic action." President Ford replied, "We will understand and will not press you on the issue. We understand the problem and the intentions you have." Sensing the legal issues that would arise with Indonesian use of U.S. supplied weaponry, a clear violation of the terms with which the weapons were supplied, Kissinger added that Suharto should wait to commence action until the two men returned to the U.S., as it would allow them to "...influence

⁴¹ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 315.

⁴² Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 76.

the reaction in America.”⁴³ Through this conversation, Kissinger and Ford gave Suharto approval to proceed in invading East Timor.

This approval came the day after Ford’s receipt of a desperate letter from FRETILIN describing the false charges Indonesia had waged against it, including that the people of East Timor desired Indonesian integration. The letter perceptively concluded, “My government believes these baseless charges are a prelude to open warfare.”⁴⁴ Despite this evidence, the U.S. chose to believe the assessment of the situation proposed by Indonesia: that FRETILIN was a Communist-influenced government enforcing its will against the desires of the people.

The approval was also a violation of U.S. law. As Kissinger alluded to in the conversation with Suharto, the U.S. had supplied nearly 90% of Indonesia’s existing military equipment through the U.S. Military Assistance Program (MAP), a program designed to provide equipment only for economic and social development.⁴⁵ This equipment could specifically only be used for these developmental uses or for the defense of a country. As was seen with the Cyprus crisis and Turkey’s unauthorized use of U.S. arms, this violation was a serious offense.

It was impossible to deny the use of U.S. arms in the Indonesian invasion. As the State Department summarized, “There is no doubt U.S. Military Assistance Program equipment was used, and we could be in for part of the blame if the operation is not a quick success.”⁴⁶ Congressmen recognized this violation of MAP equipment and following the invasion, a six-month suspension of U.S. arms was imposed where no new orders were taken. However, existing orders, including for war materials designated to crush Timorese rebellion to the occupation, continued to be filled. Between the invasion and 1979, Indonesia received over \$178 million in

⁴³ 6 December 1975, Presidents Ford and Suharto, Memorandum of Conversation, Gerald R. Ford Library, State Department Telegrams, 10.

⁴⁴ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 3.10, 60.

⁴⁵ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 51.

⁴⁶ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 316.

U.S. military aid.⁴⁷ Obviously, this Congressional resolution against Indonesia was wholly ineffective, just as Ford and Kissinger had intended.

Throughout the decades of Indonesian occupation, individual Congressmen and third party organizations attempted to enact change to the U.S. policy supporting Indonesia. In order to combat this opposition, successive administrations sought to limit the information about the East Timor crisis that came into the hands of the legislature and the public. Foreign policy goals supporting Indonesia dictated that public opinion should be controlled. In 1976, the National Security Council even went as far as to plan to subvert a potential Congressional decision limiting or ceasing military arms supply to Indonesia. In a memorandum dated February 18th, Thomas Barnes detailed potential plans of action, including manufacturing weapons in other countries under U.S. license, coproducing weapons in Indonesia, or selling the weapons through “straight commercial sale.” Barnes indicates specifically that helicopters and M-16 rifles would be good objects for coproduction.⁴⁸ Nowhere within these documents is there an indication of administrative intent to listen to the voice of representatives or the public realm.

The unauthorized use of arms during the 1975 invasion was the first issue to sponsor resistance against U.S. official policy. One of the first to stand up for East Timor was Representative Tom Harkin of Iowa, who introduced an amendment in 1976 to eliminate \$19.4 million dollars of military aid to Indonesia. After the failure of the amendment, Harkin frankly reflected: “It is a shock...to see how utterly expendable human rights considerations are in our dealings with the government of Indonesia.”⁴⁹ The lack of Congressional support for such an amendment should not come as a surprise, however. Successive administrations sought to limit

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 316.

⁴⁸ 18 February 1976, Memorandum from Thomas J. Barnes to Brent Scowcroft, “Contingency Planning for Military Supply to Indonesia,” The National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 174, 1.

⁴⁹ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 52.

the information provided to Congressmen. In 1977, Congressman Fraser made repeated requests for the release of the memorandum of conversation from December 6th of 1975, where Ford and Kissinger had given U.S. approval for the Indonesian invasion. Mike Armacost of the National Security Council soundly disapproved of giving Fraser this information, stating that "...if he gets hold of it, this will become a public issue" which would also hinder relations with Indonesia.⁵⁰ Based upon this reasoning, the National Security Council withheld information from publicly elected officials.

As far as concerns the media, the East Timor question was wholly invisible to the average U.S. citizen during this time. Just as the administration limited information available to the legislature, even less information was granted to the public. East Timor, as only a fraction of a small island somewhere in the Indonesian archipelago, did not sponsor unique interest to the American media. Indonesian silencing of the Timorese as well as the U.S. government's withholding of critical information also worked against Timorese hoping to gain U.S. support. In 1975, *The New York Times* printed six columns concerning East Timor. In 1976, annual coverage dropped to half a column.⁵¹ In 1977, there was no mention of East Timor.⁵² Based on its unique situation of power and influence over Indonesia, the U.S. was one of few countries with the capacity to sponsor change in the Timor situation. Unfortunately, the U.S. government showed no desire to support the Timorese people and, through censorship of information, ensured that the American public had little idea of what was truly happening in East Timor.

Hopes for an increased U.S. role in policing the Indonesian occupation of East Timor rose with the beginning of the Jimmy Carter presidency. Carter's commitment to promoting

⁵⁰ 6 July 1977, Memorandum from Michael Armacost to David Aaron and Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Request from Don Fraser for MemCon on President Ford Meeting with President Suharto," The National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 174, 2.

⁵¹ Chomsky, 54.

⁵² Kiernan, "Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide," 173.

human rights, however, ultimately did not extend to East Timor. Though some punitive measures were taken, they were rarely enforced and usually disproportionate to the crimes committed. One example of this was the previously discussed six-month probationary period placed on the sale of U.S. weapons to Indonesia. Just as happened in the Ford Administration, during the Carter Administration documents related to East Timor continuously reference the importance of Indonesia to the U.S.: its position in Southeast Asia, large size and population, high amount of U.S. investment, and abundant natural resources.

The new leadership of President Carter certainly did little to change the beliefs of the National Security Council. In 1977, the Council drafted a memorandum to be sent to the President requesting that he “ease up on the human rights pressures directed at Indonesia,” the extent of these pressures being a slow response to Indonesian requests for aid. The National Security Council advised that:

“The Department of State should be instructed to expedite various Indonesian requests in view of recent evidence of its intent to move positively on the human rights question. In addition, we should seek to persuade Congressman Fraser to cease hearings on the Timor question. The Indonesian decision is irreversible. The USG has accepted it. Continued Congressional hearings are regarded as unwarranted and mischievous interference in their domestic affairs.”⁵³

Again, the National Security Council mentions Congressman Fraser’s attempts to bring national attention to the East Timor issue and disparages these attempts. Additionally, this memorandum introduces a new argument against getting the U.S. involved into East Timor: East Timor, by this point, was officially integrated into Indonesia per the Indonesian government and had been accepted as a *de facto* part of Indonesia by the previous U.S. government administration. Because of this integration, any issues surrounding East Timor were now internal issues of Indonesia and did not merit U.S. involvement. Additionally, though it would continue to commit

⁵³ 14 June 1977, Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, “Initiatives to Deepen Relations with Indonesia,” National Security Archives Staff Materials, Far East Files, Box 4, Carter Library, 2.

mass violence against the Timorese, the Indonesian government claimed that it would improve human rights conditions in East Timor.

While the U.S. government withheld much of the information surrounding East Timor from the public and legislature, some information was released. These reports, however, often presented manipulated or obviously untrue statistics. In the Congressional hearings on East Timor, Robert Oakley, a senior official of the Carter Administration, testified, “We would judge that the number of total casualties, civilian, military, everything else, is probably under 10,000.” He also described the difficult nature of estimating the death toll given that no hard figures existed. This stands blatantly in contrast to the report the Administration had received from the Catholic Church concerning the events from August 1975 to March 1976. As Catholicism was the most prominent religion within East Timor, the Church officials on the island were uniquely positioned to record the results of the Indonesian invasion. The report that the Church sent at the end of 1976 stated that within these eight months, as many as 100,000 people had been killed.⁵⁴ The U.S. government, however, was determined to continue in ignorance, believing only the reports submitted directly to them from the Indonesian government. Even the U.S. Human Rights Report, drafted by the State Department, neglected East Timor. In 1977, East Timor was never mentioned. In 1978, the report claimed that following the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia, “The Indonesian Government withdrew and disciplined offending units guilty of individual excesses [during the invasion], but most of the human losses in East Timor appear to have occurred prior to Indonesia’s intervention.”⁵⁵ It was true that the human losses had actually begun with civil war between the political parties in East Timor in the year prior to the invasion. The report neglects the fact that through covert missions, Indonesia exacerbated the tensions

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 318.

⁵⁵ As quoted in Chomsky, 60.

between these parties to increase violence and dissent in the community. Months before Indonesian troops committed the full-scale invasion of Timor, smaller military conflicts had taken place. While the months including and immediately following the invasion consisted of the greatest amount of bloodshed, by 1978 Indonesia still faced resistance in East Timor and reacted to it with more violence. By no means was East Timor the peaceful picture of accepted integration that various government bodies implied through their official documents and announcements.

In the years following the initial invasion, the Indonesian government sponsored an amnesty program for the Timorese that had fled into the hilly countryside to avoid the violence or continue to sponsor FRETILIN resistance. A September 1978 report described the process: once a citizen had accepted amnesty, they were placed in a “relocation area” for three months or more and then were permanently resettled per Indonesian instruction. During an ambassador’s visit to East Timor, they watched people who had received amnesty the day before being given clothing and food. The ambassador noted in his report that this was likely “...a show obviously set up for our benefit, but we have no reason to believe that this is not the usual procedure.”⁵⁶ On the contrary, per the Suharto regime’s violent and brutal history, the U.S. should have had suspicion that this was not the typical process. Additionally, considering East Timor’s poor infrastructure and lack of food, the conditions of “relocation camps” were dubious as well.

Though the U.S. had as of yet done very little to improve the conditions in East Timor, during the Carter Administration it began pressing the Indonesian government to grant permission for third party welfare organizations to enter the island. During a meeting between Vice President Walter Mondale and President Suharto, Mondale requested that the Catholic

⁵⁶ 14 September 1978, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “Ambassador’s Visit to East Timor: GOI Policy and Possible U.S. Response,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 4.

Relief Services (CRS), an international humanitarian agency of the Catholic Church, or similar organization be allowed into East Timor. Suharto responded negatively, claiming that “negative attitude [existed] toward that organization in East Timor” and it would have negative effects on the situation.⁵⁷ With approximately ninety-eight percent of East Timorese subscribing to the Catholic religion, it is unclear what “negative attitude” the citizens would have toward the CRS. At any rate, Suharto used this reason to limit the entry of any other organization in East Timor.

This issue was raised once again in a 1978 ambassador visit with Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja. Just as President Suharto had done two years earlier, Mochtar refused the idea of private organizations coming into East Timor. He showed particular disdain for the International Red Cross, as their entry into the island had been part of the resolution that FRETILIN was attempting to introduce into the United Nations. Ultimately, Mochtar felt outside aid “...could best be channeled through the GOI or the Indonesian Red Cross.”⁵⁸ In summarizing the Indonesian feelings toward this matter, U.S. Ambassador Edward Masters stated that since the Indonesian government had control over the island, “...they will not want to imply that they have to call in foreign personnel to meet their basic needs...for a time at least the GOI will probably insist that it be Indonesians who are in direct contact with Timorese...”⁵⁹ Missing from this document is the obvious analysis that if the Indonesian government was the sole party able to interact with the Timorese, it meant that the Indonesians could act as they pleased with no worry of international response or critique. Without third party inclusion, the only information coming out of East Timor besides that dictated by the Indonesian government was extremely

⁵⁷ 10 May 1978, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “Summary of Vice President’s Meeting with Suharto,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 37.

⁵⁸ 1 November 1977, Action Memorandum from Charles William Maynes, Richard Holbrooke, Herbert J. Hansel, and Patricia M. Derian to Mr. Habib, “UNGA Resolution on East Timor,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 6.

⁵⁹ 14 September 1978, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “Ambassador’s Visit to East Timor: GOI Policy and Possible U.S. Response,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 7.

minimal. By isolating East Timor, Indonesia ensured that it had complete authority over the island and also that it was not answerable for its actions there to any other entity. Despite this, the U.S. government continued to believe the information provided by Indonesia and ignore the occasional report smuggled out of the island by FRETILIN supporters or Australian media.

U.S. support of Indonesia also extended into the United Nations. For the first few years after the Indonesian invasion, FRETILIN proposed resolutions for the General Assembly to adopt, stating that their right to self-determination had been violated and also listing the human rights violations that Indonesia had committed in their occupation. In 1977, FRETILIN severely censored their proposed resolution in the hopes that by omitting the more grisly details, they would gain the support of the U.S. Though 1977 brought the support of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the U.S., Australia, and all ASEAN states remained supportive of Indonesia. Overall, the resolution was viewed as "...marginally better than the one we [the U.S. delegation] voted against last December, in that it omits reference to Indonesia's military intervention and does not call on Indonesia to withdraw its forces from the territory."⁶⁰ Without the support of major players in the U.N. such as the U.S. and Australia, FRETILIN could not secure the aid of the U.N. Not only did the U.N. refuse to help the Timorese achieve self-determination, but it would be several years before East Timor made it onto the agenda of the Human Rights Commission.

During the 1980s, violence increased in East Timor after a swell of activity by FRETILIN. The foreign policy approach of the U.S. to East Timor, however, did not change. This lack of response was not due to a lack of information about the rising tensions within East Timor. In 1983, a revealing report from the Jakarta Embassy detailed the conditions within East Timor: "...there have been house to house searches for FRETILIN supporters and

⁶⁰ 1 November 1977, Action Memorandum from Charles William Maynes, Richard Holbrooke, Herbert J. Hansel, and Patricia M. Derian to Mr. Habib, "UNGA Resolution on East Timor," Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 1.

weapons...new troops have been introduced...one estimate spoke of up to ten thousand new soldiers. Allegedly, all access to East Timor has been closed.”⁶¹ The report clearly describes the escalation of military force within the island through a renewed push to eliminate all FRETILIN supporters. After the initial invasion of the island, FRETILIN had managed to continue its resistance activities through small networks of supporters within villages and towns. A large proportion of the supporters also fled to the hills on the island, making it impossible for the Indonesian army to capture them. Due to this clandestine nature of the resistance, the searches performed by the army often violated privacy rights of Timorese citizens and endorsed the use of torture for information leading to more supporters.

The forced relocation of Timorese who accepted amnesty increased during the early 1980s as well. The same 1983 embassy report describing the unwarranted house searches references this trend with concern: “Without knowing where Timorese have been moved, it is difficult to speculate about their conditions, but based on past performance, _____ it likely that preparations, including housing and places to plant, may be inadequate.”⁶² Alluding to the exclusion of any third party in East Timor, the report acknowledges that the true conditions of the relocation camps may not be as the Indonesian government described them. Additionally, the report shows that the U.S. government did have a degree of cognizance of the human rights abuses that were taking place in East Timor. Specifically, the phrase “based on past performance” indicates that not only was the U.S. concerned about current poor treatment of the Timorese, but also that they were aware or had factual knowledge concerning past treatment. Importantly, despite U.S. doubt regarding Indonesian information pertaining to the violence and

⁶¹ 9 September 1983, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “_____ Views on East Timor Developments,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 4.

⁶² 23 September 1983, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to State Department, “Developments in East Timor,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 14.

related events on the island, the U.S. did not take action. Instead, the U.S. continued its policy of supporting Indonesia in its endeavors to complete the integration of the island and destruction of FRETILIN while mildly pressing for third party intervention.

Throughout the 1980s, U.S. Congressmen continued to attempt to pressure the executive branch to change its policy on East Timor. In 1982, 102 Congressmen requested a more in-depth look at the East Timor policy. Later that year, seventy-five of these Congressmen drafted a letter to President Ronald Reagan expressing their concerns about the “Timor tragedy.” In 1988, 182 Representatives requested that the administration address human rights issues in East Timor.⁶³ This growing Congressional concern was fueled by human rights watch organizations and East Timor lobbyist groups. Unfortunately, neither the Reagan nor the Bush Administrations effectively responded to these pleas to reassess the East Timor policy. Instead, military assistance to Indonesia continued to increase.

Noticeable change in U.S. policy finally occurred when President Bill Clinton took office in the 1990s. Like the Carter Administration, the Clinton Administration claimed a commitment to promoting human rights throughout the world. Unlike the Carter Administration, however, the Clinton Administration assumed office following the horrific Dili Massacre, an event that had brought much negative international attention onto Indonesia. Videotapes of the funeral procession that turned into a peaceful protest against Indonesian occupation and the Indonesian army’s open fire into the crowd of unarmed citizens made it out of the island and created a media firestorm. This event, while tragic, allowed the U.S. to show public disapproval of Indonesia’s actions. Other worldwide events also helped to create the conditions necessary for international intervention. One of the most important of these was the dissolution of the Soviet Union. With this, red fear ceased to be a motivating factor for supporting Indonesia. Indonesia was no longer

⁶³ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 320.

the last line of defense of democracy in a part of the world viewed in danger of falling to communism. Additionally, the liberation of various peoples under the Soviet Union brought unique attention to the Timorese and their dilemma. Finally, by this point in time, the Persian Gulf War had commenced. The conflict began with Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. Undeniable parallels existed between the Gulf War conflict and East Timor's integration, with Saddam Hussein at one point even justifying his annexation of Kuwait by referencing East Timor.⁶⁴ By defending the right of self-determination for the people of Kuwait by military means, the U.S. made it less possible to continue to ignore this principle as concerned East Timor.

In 1993, the U.S. co-sponsored a resolution in the U.N. Human Rights Commission that was critical of Indonesia's human rights record in East Timor. Specifically, this resolution looked to the Dili Massacre and its aftermath. Resistance supporters that survived the shooting were given long prison sentences but the soldiers who, unprovoked, shot into the crowd and killed nearly three-hundred unarmed people, were simply reassigned or given an extremely light punishment.

Though the U.S. did sponsor this critical resolution, it did not by any means seek to limit its relationship with Indonesia. While the fall of the Soviet Union meant that Indonesia was no longer needed as a bastion of democracy in an uncertain area of the world, the abundant natural resources and U.S. investment into Indonesia meant that alliance was still critical. Because of this, though the U.S. increased its pressure on Indonesia to improve human rights conditions in East Timor, it did not enforce this pressure with any sort of ultimatum or incentive. As a State Department telegram in 1993 summarized:

⁶⁴ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 339.

“The current emphasis of U.S. efforts is to press the Indonesians A) to fully account for those still missing in east Timor, B) to reduce the harsh sentences given civilian demonstrators compared with the comparatively light sentences given members of the military involved and C) to grant greater international access to East Timor.”⁶⁵

The U.S. government recognized the lack of access to East Timor as a potential danger for the human rights conditions of the Timorese people. This new policy is a clear reaction to the Dili Massacre, specifying that the resistance members’ punishments should be reduced. Notably, the U.S. did not ask that the soldiers involved in the shootings receive harsher, more appropriate sentences. Additionally, after President Suharto delivered a public expression of apology for the actions taken by the Indonesian military in Dili, U.S. officials decreased their efforts to achieve these new goals for East Timor.

The U.S. efforts during the Clinton Administration did not extend to supporting independence for East Timor. It did, however, begin to recognize the impossibility of East Timor’s peaceful integration with Indonesia. A telegram from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta in 1993 detailed the “smoldering resentment” of the Timorese toward the Indonesian military’s “omnipresence...paternalism, corruption and domination of the local economy as well as their cruelty.”⁶⁶ With this sentiment persistent on the island, peaceful integration was extremely unlikely. As the telegram succinctly noted, “Integration will never be palatable as long as it is demanded at gunpoint.”⁶⁷ For twenty years, the Indonesian army had kidnapped and murdered Timorese citizens suspected of supporting the resistance. Unsurprisingly, the brutality that the Indonesians showed to the Timorese did not sponsor support or acceptance of integration.

⁶⁵ 9 February 1993, Telegram from the State Department to U.S. Mission Geneva, “UNHRC: Contingency Paper on East Timor,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 3.

⁶⁶ 5 March 1993, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “East Timor and Human Rights in Indonesia: A Fresh Look,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 2.

⁶⁷ 5 March 1993, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to the State Department, “East Timor and Human Rights in Indonesia: A Fresh Look,” Freedom of Information Act Release to the National Security Archive, 7.

Unfortunately, this telegram did not go as far as to propose a secondary plan of action for East Timor. The State Department did, however, rule out independence as a viable future of East Timor, citing its underdeveloped economy and structure. Despite East Timor's declaration of independence prior to the invasion, a clear indication of the will of the people, the U.S. did not believe independence should be granted. With these paternalistic views, the U.S. instead attempted to ease integration by attempting to improve the relations between East Timor and Indonesia.

With growing international concern over human rights relations and an increase in information coming out of East Timor, the U.N. began to take a more active interest in the future of the island. After a severe economic decline in 1997 and 1998, coupled with growing political opposition, President Suharto was forced to resign from Indonesian government. Suharto's fall allowed for the U.N. to sponsor an agreement between the new Indonesian government and Portugal to allow for the East Timorese to vote for their independence. After a clear vote for independence, Indonesian militias reacted with extreme violence, destroying most of the infrastructure of East Timor as well as killing and displacing many thousand Timorese. Per the this increase in activity by the U.N., the U.S. policy towards East Timor became more supportive. In a public statement during 1999, President Clinton declared that "...nobody is going to want to continue to invest [into Indonesia] if they are allowing this sort of travesty to go on."⁶⁸ In this statement, Clinton referenced not only the importance of U.S. investment into Indonesia for their economy, but also the ability of the U.S. to hinder Indonesia's acquisition of IMF and World Bank loans. Under U.S. influence, the IMF and World Bank ultimately did

⁶⁸ Statement by President on East Timor, 9 September 1999, as quoted in Nicholas Wheeler and Tim Dunne, "East Timor and the New Humanitarian Interventionism," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, no. 4: 77 (2001): 819.

suspend their programs of aid to Indonesia in what was one of the key factors in Indonesia allowing an international peacekeeping force onto the island to establish order.

U.S. actions in 1999 and the years following show how much influence the U.S. wielded over the Indonesia-East Timor crisis. Had the U.S. acted differently and refused support for Indonesia's initial invasion in 1975, it is likely that East Timor would have peaceably developed into an independent republic per Portugal's original plans. Through its close alliance with Indonesia, the U.S. supplied nearly all military weaponry and also supported the Indonesian economy with large investments. These contributions to Indonesia gave the U.S. a unique place of influence over the Suharto government that could have been used at any point to restrain Indonesia.⁶⁹ Additionally, without U.S. interference, President Suharto and the New Order regime would have been unable to assume power.

Throughout the East Timor crisis, U.S. government officials provided many different reasons for their continued support of Indonesia. The U.S. had concerns for their financial investments. Its support of Indonesia was also directly related to the Cold War. The U.S. sought to preserve and strengthen Indonesia so it would not fall to the Soviet Union. Per the domino theory, many believed that if Indonesia fell to communism, the surrounding East Asian states would as well. Because of this, the U.S. wished to strengthen their alliance with Indonesia, something that resisting Indonesia's plan to integrate East Timor surely would not do. However, at this point in time, the Suharto Indonesian government was too weak to take any punitive actions towards the U.S. It is unlikely that there would have been any economic repercussions had the U.S. pressured Indonesia not to invade East Timor.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 315.

⁷⁰ Nevins, *Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor*, 76

The U.S. preserved its support of Indonesia's invasion by preventing information surrounding the events secret from the public and from most government officials. Instead of investigating reports that were smuggled directly out of East Timor by Church officials or Australian press, the U.S. chose to believe the clearly edited reports given by the Indonesian government. As historian Chomsky accuses:

“At every crucial point, the US government, with the press trailing loyally in its wake, has denied or concealed the atrocities committed by its Indonesian ally and has taken the position that whatever minor improper actions may have occurred in the past, it is now a matter of history and no useful purpose is served by questioning Indonesian control of East Timor.”⁷¹

By continuing to supply arms to Indonesia and refusing to apply pressure on the East Timor situation, the U.S. perpetuated the subjugation of the Timorese people. As several government documents have shown, the U.S. was aware of human rights violations taking place but chose to view the situation as an internal issue of Indonesia and remain ignorant to the truth of the situation.

The Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (CAVR) was established in 2001 to gather information on what truly occurred during the years of Indonesian occupation in East Timor. Prior to its dissolution, CAVR published a report, *Chega!*, which contains detailed descriptions of Indonesian violations of human rights principles, international involvement, and many statistics concerning the occupation. In discussing the role of the U.S. in the crisis of East Timor, *Chega!* concluded:

“...the support given by the United States to Indonesia was crucial to the invasion and continued occupation of Timor-Leste. This was so not only because weapons and equipment purchased from the United States played a significant role in Indonesian military operations in Timor, but also because it never used its unique position of power and influence to counsel its Indonesian ally against embarking on an illegal course of action.”⁷²

⁷¹ Chomsky, 48.

⁷² The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 8.6, 92.

The “unique position of power and influence” of the U.S. over Indonesia is difficult to argue. Economically, the U.S. controlled millions of dollars of investments into Indonesia and also had the ability to manipulate IMF and World Bank action. Militarily, the U.S. supplied approximately ninety percent of the weaponry used to subjugate East Timor. Without the support of the government that supplied these things, Indonesia would have been unable to control East Timor and deny its people self-determination. Had the U.S. been more concerned with the human rights of the Timorese and refused President Suharto’s invasion proposal in 1975, thirty years of occupation – brutal for the Timorese and unsuccessful for Indonesia – would have been avoided.

Australia-Timor Relations

The U.S. was not the only country whose actions, or lack thereof, perpetuated the subjugation of the East Timorese people. Despite Australia’s proximity to Timor, its political policy concerning the struggle for Timorese independence and Indonesia’s occupation of the area clearly reflected that of the United States. Like the U.S., Australia used an anticommunism rationale to justify the occupation. As Australian anticommunist activist B.A. Santamaria described, “...a government dominated by the Fretilin would extend the tentacles of Communist subversion to Australia’s doorstep.”⁷³ Australia also sought to avoid confrontation with Indonesia because it was, with the help of U.S. military aid, a powerful militarized neighbor. Support of this kind was viewed as crucial.

Though East Timor’s proximity to Australia caused alarm for those who feared a FRETILIN rise to power, it presented another opportunity for Indonesia to coerce Australian support in its occupation of East Timor. For years, the maritime boundary between East Timor and Australia had been debated. The sea bed located between the two islands contained several

⁷³ Kiernan, “Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide,” 172.

mineral, oil, and gas deposits. Though the exact extent of these deposits was unknown in the 1970s, Australia hoped to gain a favorable boundary that enabled it to acquire some of these deposits. As soon as Indonesia expressed a desire to integrate East Timor, and to have Australia's support in the matter, the Australian government recognized that this future could have great economic benefit for them. Namely, Australia believed that it could receive a more beneficial maritime boundary through negotiations with Indonesia than negotiations with East Timor. As a telegram from Richard Woolcott, Australian ambassador to Indonesia, in August of 1975 states:

“We are all aware of the Australian defence interest in the Portuguese Timor situation but I wonder whether the Department has ascertained the interest of the Minister of the Department of Minerals and Energy in the Timor situation. It would seem to me that this Department might well have an interest in closing the present gap in the agreed sea border and this could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia by closing the present gap than with Portugal or an independent Portuguese Timor.”⁷⁴

Even before the invasion of 1975, top officials in Australia's government recognized the potential economic benefit of supporting Indonesia as concerned the maritime boundary. Oil lobbyists and others with a stake in the outcome of determination of the maritime boundary made their opinions clear to the Australian government as well.

Indonesia was not unaware of the issue of this maritime boundary and used the issue to its advantage. As an oil-rich state itself, Indonesia's need for the undetermined resource deposits in the Timor Gap was negligible. What Indonesia needed was Australia's affirmation of their integration of East Timor. In 1979, Indonesia renewed negotiations for the Timor Gap Treaty with Australia, under one condition: Australia must recognize officially Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor. Faced with this choice, Australia chose to recognize Indonesia's integration of East Timor and received out of this an extremely favorable treaty. In this deal, East Timor lost

⁷⁴ Joseph Nevins, “Contesting the Boundaries of International Justice: State Counter-mapping and Offshore Resource Struggles between East Timor and Australia,” *Economic Geography*, no. 1:80 (2004): 9.

hope of a potential *savoir*. Without consent, it was also forced to give up land and resources through the Timor Gap Treaty.

Just as in the U.S., media and government misinformation was found throughout the occupation period in Australia. In Australia, however, the media outlets concerned were typically conservative forces. *News Weekly*, a publication founded by Santamaria, went as far as to directly attack FRETILIN in 1975, attributing horrors like “the beheading of babies and small children” and other mass murders to the resistance group.⁷⁵ Decades later, this misinformation had not subsided. In 1995, *Quadrant* published an article stating, “...there is little evidence that the majority of East Timorese want independence...The majority who have benefited greatly from very large Indonesian expenditure on roads and other infrastructure...are by all disinterested accounts not dissatisfied.”⁷⁶ Just four years later, nearly eighty percent of Timorese, despite the risk to their safety, voted for independence. Additionally, articles like this gave the impression that Indonesia had improved upon infrastructure and health in East Timor for the benefit of Timorese. In reality, roads were constructed for easier movement of Indonesian troops throughout the island. Food manufacturing equipment and crop fields were simply restored, as Indonesian troops had purposefully destroyed these in an attempt to starve the Timorese into submission in the late 1970s. Despite these facts, many facets of the conservative media, in an attempt to support Australia’s alliance with Indonesia, continued to publish articles that misconstrued what was really happening in East Timor.

Though close proximity to Indonesia had provided many reasons for the national government to support Indonesia, it made awareness of the events occurring in East Timor much harder to hide from the general population. Attempts to keep the public ignorant, as displayed in

⁷⁵ Kiernan, “Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide,” 171

⁷⁶ Kiernan, “Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide,” 175.

publications like *News Weekly* and *Quadrant*, were ultimately unsuccessful. Unlike within the United States, a large public backlash against the national government's support of Indonesia formed. Denis Freney of the Communist Party of Australia (C.P.A.) established the Campaign for an Independent East Timor (C.I.E.T.), an organization that was extremely active in retrieving information from East Timor and distributing it to the Australian people, much to the displeasure of the national government. C.I.E.T. smuggled six radio transceivers to FRETILIN in 1975 and after these were destroyed by Indonesian troops, continued to sponsor radio transmissions through the help of wharf laborers, Communist activists, and the Timorese themselves. The federal police sought to end these transmissions, leading to what activists later described as "years of wild emu chases through the outback", for the "crime" of informing the public what was truly occurring in East Timor.⁷⁷

In addition to the efforts of C.I.E.T. were the small group of journalists who were able to smuggle themselves into East Timor over years of the occupation. In October of 1978, *Canberra Times* carried the story of a group of Australians who had entered Dili harbor in East Timor. They described the harbor as full of "frigates, patrol boats, barges crammed with Indonesian soldiers, and many aircraft and helicopters" and "were left without doubts that Dili was still a war zone."⁷⁸ Reports like these sponsored widespread grassroots support within Australia. The Australian Labor Party, unions, and independent religious organizations also joined together with the public to support the Timorese cause.

Under this extensive public and organizational support of the Timorese, eventually the government was unable to sustain their support for Indonesia. From 1975 through 1998, Australia had given small tokens of recognition to this support base, such as signing the U.N.

⁷⁷ Kiernan, "Cover-Up and Denial of Genocide," 164.

⁷⁸ Chomsky, 48.

resolution in 1975 that supported East Timor's right to self-determination. At the same time, however, Australia fought to have references to the brutality of the Indonesian military and the call for their immediate withdrawal removed from the resolution.⁷⁹ Though Australia was ultimately unsuccessful in that goal, this process shows how even Australia's occasional support for the Timorese was dominated by its larger goal of a continued alliance with Indonesia. In 1999, just as in the U.S., major changes came to Australia's foreign policy with Indonesia. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer authorized direct consultations with the East Timorese and called for the release of prominent resistance leader Xanana Gusmão. Prime Minister John Howard supported Downer in this, believing that through direct consultation, Australia could help secure autonomy for East Timor *within* Indonesia. This plan, however, simply reignited the independence movement within East Timor and its supporters within Australia.⁸⁰ U.N. actions were finally taken in 1999 and the years following, with Australia often at their forefront. Ultimately, Australia led the International Force in East Timor, protecting the U.N.-mandated referendum on independence and helping to ensure that the results of this vote were followed by Indonesia.

Though Australia did not enjoy the particularly great position of influence over Indonesia that the U.S. did, the government's actions not only supported the illegal occupation of Indonesia but at times completely ignored the call of its citizens to support the East Timorese. The Australian government subscribed to irrational fears that FRETILIN's rise to power in a small, underdeveloped island, would lead to the spread of communism throughout Southeastern Asia. Officials also saw the advantage of perfecting the Timor Gap Treaty with Indonesia as opposed to East Timor. Because of this, Australia acknowledged the integration of East Timor into

⁷⁹ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Chapter 7.1, Part 2.4.3, 30.

⁸⁰ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Chapter 7.1, Part 2.4.3, 31.

Indonesia and, though it occasionally brought up the issue of human rights in discussions with the Indonesian government, made no move to pressure Indonesia into actually improving these conditions. Australia's proximity to East Timor allowed information about what was happening on the island to reach the public, however, and this created a public support base for the Timorese that grew as the years went on. Eventually, this support transformed Australia into the leading member behind the U.N. independence referendum and associated resolutions.

Portugal-Timor Relations

Though the military coup of 1974 in Portugal successfully overthrew the standing authoritarian government, it inherited a nation with dwindling international powers and several internal issues. Because of this weak state, Portugal was ultimately unable to properly administrate the decolonization of East Timor. In an attempt to transfer East Timor from its power in an orderly fashion, Portugal held a Decolonization Commission to determine the island's future. The Commission created a detailed plan for East Timor that terminated Portuguese authority within three years, planned for popular elections to occur by 1976, and attempted to balance the power between FRETILIN, UDT, and APODETI.⁸¹ Following this Decolonization Commission, however, civil war erupted among the Timorese political parties. Once FRETILIN emerged as the victor, Indonesia invaded East Timor and established its occupation. Considering the crises occurring in Portugal's African colonies of Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau, the new and feeble government had little ability to punish Indonesia for violating the decolonization plan, which in had the full force of Portuguese law. Additionally, many of the authoritarian placements into the territorial governments were not replaced during the Carnation Revolution, meaning that the Portuguese leaders of East Timor were unsupportive and often at odds with the new Portuguese government.

⁸¹ Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, 86.

Unlike the U.S. and Australia, Portugal remained committed to the principle of self-determination for East Timor throughout the occupation. Though they did not have the ability to remove Indonesia from the island, Portugal refused to recognize East Timor as part of Indonesia. In the 1970s and early 1980s, this was a passive commitment for the Portuguese, provoking José Ramos-Horta, the current president of East Timor, to blame the “erosion of the voting block in support of the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination” in the early 1980s on Portugal’s “criminal negligence and political cowardice.”⁸² In 1986, however, Portugal joined the European Economic Commission (E.E.C.) and the European Parliament. Portugal used their participation in the E.E.C. to develop support from other European countries and was the driving force behind the 1993 U.N. Commission of Human Rights resolution that supported East Timor’s right to self-determination.

After making the decision to decolonize East Timor in the 1970s, Portugal owed a responsibility to the Timorese people to ensure that their right to self-determination was preserved. The failure of this responsibility occurred in 1975 and for years afterward, as Portugal did little to ensure that the rights of East Timor were recognized. Unlike all other major players in the East Timor crisis, however, Portugal never recognized Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor as integration. In the late 1980s and onward, Portugal used its growing influence to gather support for East Timor.

United Nations Inaction

Under Chapter IX of the United Nations Charter, the U.N. pledges to uphold equal rights and self-determination and requires its members to promote the advancement of peoples defined as living in colonies or non-self-governing territories. As a Portuguese territory, East Timor fell clearly under this regulation. Beginning in 1975, after the initial Indonesian invasion, until 1982,

⁸² The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 7.1, Section 2.2, 15.

the U.N. passed an annual resolution in the General Assembly supporting East Timor's right to self-determination. These resolutions were kept alive largely by Third World or socialist states and enjoyed only miniscule Western representation consisting of Portugal, Cyprus, Greece, and Iceland.⁸³ In 1982, the General Assembly passed the matter on to the Secretary-General in order to find a solution to the problem. This effectively deferred consideration of the matter every year based on the progress report of the Secretary-General.⁸⁴

Fortunately for East Timor, the discussion of the crisis, though no longer assessed by the General Assembly, was being kept alive in specialty groups such as the Commission on Human Rights and the Decolonization Committee. These groups contributed to the spread of knowledge about the crisis, which Indonesia had done its best to prevent, and helped to garner support for the Timorese cause. Finally, in 1999, President Suharto was forced to resign from Indonesian government. His interim successor, President Habibie, pressured by these U.N. groups as well as the Indonesian civil public, announced that he would recommend separation of East Timor from Indonesia.

The U.N. mandated a vote by the Timorese to decide whether they desired integration with Indonesia or independence. To protect the legitimacy of the ballot and ensure voters' safety, the U.N. created the United Nations Mission in East Timor (U.N.A.M.E.T.), comprising of U.N. volunteers, military liaison officers, civilian police, and local staff. With U.N.A.M.E.T. overseeing the process, 78.5% of East Timorese voted for independence.

The benefits and detriments of the U.N. as an organization were displayed throughout the East Timor crisis. With major superpowers intent on allying with Indonesia in the early stages after invasion, placing economic interests above human rights conditions, the U.N. was of little

⁸³ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 7.1, Section 6.4, 121.

⁸⁴ Ian Martin and Alexander Mayer-Rieckh, "The United Nations and East Timor: From Self-Determination to State Building," *International Peacekeeping*, no. 1: 12 (2005): 126.

use to the Timorese people. Though resolutions were passed yearly, no sanctions were approved for Indonesia and emergency humanitarian assistance was never offered to East Timor. At the same time, however, these resolutions gave East Timor an international legal basis that later played a critical role in helping East Timor to achieve independence. While actions were taken to stop the potential of Indonesian violence after the vote, U.N.A.M.E.T. was ultimately incapable of containing the Indonesian militias. In response, the U.N. sponsored a force team to support U.N.A.M.E.T. called the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET). The U.N. refused to deploy this team without the express permission of the Indonesian government, however, and because of this their deployment was delayed for 16 days. Once again, though U.N. action was ultimately necessary and beneficial to the Timorese people, its process of commitment was time-consuming and costly.

Timor Today

Today, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste is a sovereign nation. The devastating effects of the last century – Japanese occupation and Allied bombing in World War II, strife with the mother country Portugal in the 1960s and 1970s, Indonesian occupation and the struggle for independence from 1975 to 2002, and rioting throughout the last decade – have contributed to place this new republic at the low number of 147 on the Human Development Index.⁸⁵ Of all countries residing in what is considered the East Asian and Pacific Region, Timor-Leste ranks above only three other countries. Of all nations recognized by the U.S. government, Timor-Leste is above only seven in terms of public access to internet.⁸⁶ As has been seen in the 21st century, the internet is not only a vehicle for information and education but a tool of social change and revolution.

⁸⁵ “Human Development Index (HDI),” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>.

⁸⁶ “CIA – The World Factbook,” CIA.gov, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

Timor-Leste has also struggled, like many former colonies, with a turbulent political environment. Prior to Indonesian occupation, East Timor had been ruled by local kings and communal violence. Though democracy has replaced this system, political violence is still high on the island. Nearly seventy percent of Timorese men are involved in these gangs, most of which are associated with political groups or particular officials. Corruption within the government is also an issue, especially with frequent practice of nepotism.

Despite these setbacks, the future is not completely bleak for Timor-Leste. In 2005, its economy had positive growth. Both of Timor-Leste's elected presidents have avoided external debt, decreased inflation, and sought local food security.⁸⁷ Australia has also renegotiated the Timor Gap Treaty with Timor-Leste with extremely favorable terms to the new country. Of the lands designated as joint territory, Timor-Leste receives ninety percent of the profits and Australia only ten percent. Recently, international efforts have also been refocused on Timor-Leste, providing much needed infrastructure rebuilding and economic aid. On March 17th, 2012, East Timor held a peaceful, democratic election to choose its third publicly-elected president.

Conclusion

For nearly thirty years, the right to self-determination of the Timorese was suppressed through the actions of the Indonesian government. Fearful of the affect an independent, supposedly communist nation would have on Indonesian islands harboring separatist sentiments, Indonesia ignored Portuguese law and the declaration of independence by East Timor and invaded the area in 1975. Indonesia occupied the territory until 1999 through fear and brutality. The Indonesian military used tactics such as torture, forced deportation, and starvation through the destruction of food sources in order to eliminate Timorese independence and resistance

⁸⁷ Damien Kingsbury, "TIMOR-LESTE: The Harsh Reality After Independence," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2007): 368.

groups. Violence was not limited to those who resisted the occupation: studies show that 88.7% of non-fatal violations of human rights occurred against civilians who were not a part of the resistance.⁸⁸ In order to foster international support for the occupation, Indonesia submitted false information to governments and gave away resources and territory belonging to East Timor. It was not until the fall of President Suharto and the New Order regime in 1999 that Indonesia acknowledged that the self-determination of the Timorese people had been violated.

Though it stood in a unique position to influence Indonesian action, the United States acquiesced to the invasion. Fearing FRETILIN was a communist-oriented group, high ranking officials believed that if FRETILIN came to power, other nations would fall to communism. The U.S. also looked toward its monetary investments into Indonesia, Indonesia's resources, and the establishment of the New Order regime that had received U.S. aid in order to assume power. These economic interests were ultimately viewed as more important than the humanitarian issue of ensuring self-determination and ceasing the killing and torture of Timorese citizens. As a result, the U.S. chose to believe the false Indonesian reports concerning Timor despite the evidence submitted to the contrary and did not pressure Indonesia on the Timor crisis until the 1990s. Although the U.S. could have pressured Indonesia into an alternate course of action with little economic consequence, especially considering its knowledge of the invasion plans prior to December of 1975, it chose not to do so.

Similarly, Australia considered its own economic interests in the reassessment of its maritime boundaries with East Timor and took little action against Indonesia for the invasion or following occupation. While the government viewed East Timor as an unviable independent state, Australian citizens over the years formed a support network for the independence movement. Journalists fought to have information smuggled out of East Timor and dispersed to

⁸⁸ The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Part 6.3.2, 24

the public, increasing public support for the Timorese people. Eventually, this support from everyday people forced the Australian government to sponsor change for East Timor through the United Nations.

Portugal also takes its share of the blame in the Timor crisis, as it neglected to enforce the Timorese right to self-determination after deciding to decolonize the island. This irresponsible action on the part of the newly formed Portuguese government left the Timorese completely vulnerable to continued Indonesian occupation. Considering how weak the country was during this time period, however, it is possible to say that Portugal attempted to support the Timorese as best as they could. Portugal consistently supported East Timor in the United Nations, refused to recognize Indonesia's integration of the territory unlike many other countries, and attempted to foster support from other countries for the Timorese.

Finally, until the 1990s, the United Nations was wholly ineffective at enforcing national law of self-determination. Without the support of major powers like the United States or Australia, the U.N. could do little to support the Timorese people. Through the 1990s and 2000s, however, the U.N. was essential in arranging a referendum for independence and protecting the stability and security of the vote.

Unfortunately for its people, East Timor garnered no support from international entities supporting its right to self-determination. Action by any of these actors in the crisis – the U.S., Australia, Portugal, or the U.N. – could have prevented or at the least decreased the severity of the crisis. The U.S. and Australia placed their economic interests above the human rights of the Timorese people, while Portugal and the U.N. proved to be powerless without the support of other major powers. Because of this lack of support for East Timor, Indonesia was able to invade and occupy the island with unchecked brutality.

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