ADA AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
Legislative Newsletter

Legislative Representatives
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Vol. 8, No. 7
December 15, 1979

EAST TIMOR: THE OVERLOOKED ISSUE

In September 1979, almost exactly four years after the Indonesian Army invaded the Portuguese colony of East Timor, a team of important U.S. officials which included the American ambassador in Jakarta and the acting director of the Disaster Relief Office (USAID), visited the territory to investigate persistent reports of mass starvation and disease. The result of their inspection was additional aid of $1.1 million to the $1.7 million already pledged for emergency humanitarian relief administered by Catholic Relief Services and the International Red Cross(ICRC). Prior to announcement of this program, the U.S. had sent aid to East Timor, but it was only military aid used by the occupying Indonesian forces to decimate a people fighting for the right of self-determination.

To date, between one-sixth and one-third have been killed. At the time of the Indonesian invasion the number of people in the colony was estimated to be 700,000. The ICRC estimates that 200,000 of those still alive are in very bad condition. Of these, 20,000 to 40,000 probably will die, despite the beginning of a major relief effort.

After being banned from the island since late 1975, the ICRC and Catholic Relief Services are going to East Timor with U.S. food, medicine and equipment. Why now? The answer is simple: After four years of brutal warfare the Indonesians have been able to reduce significantly the effectiveness of FRETILIN, the resistance force struggling for East Timorese independence. Acording to recent reports, fighting now appears to be scattered and the Indonesians have consolidated their control over much of the territory.

Why did the U.S. government support the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, supply ever-increasing amounts of military assistance to the war effort, and thus become partner to the barbarous treatment inflicted upon the island's people? The answer remains a mystery which Congress must investigate. This paper simply attempts to show the crucial relationship between the Indonesian war and the armaments supplied by the West, in particular, the U.S..

1975: The Invasion

Cross-border incursions into East Timor from Indonesian West Timor, conducted by elite Indonesian commando units, began in September 1975. On October 16, Indonesian regulars seized the towns of Balibo and Maliana in the important rice-growing border region. In Balibo, five Australian television reporters caught filming the attack were murdered in order to prevent evidence of Indonesian aggression from reaching the outside world.

By late November the Indonesian forces, supported by aircraft and warships, had penetrated more than ten kilometers into East Timor. The fall of the town of Atabae led FRETILIN leaders to declare East Timor an independent nation on November 28 in the hope of bringing a charge of aggression before the United Nations. On December 1, Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik (now Vice-President of Indonesia) declared:

A SUMMARY OF CAPITOL HILL EVENTS, LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS, AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
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"Diplomacy is now finished. The solution to the East Timor problem is now on the battlefield."

FRETILIN appealed to President Ford on December 3, asking him to prevent the imminent Indonesian invasion. Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger arrived in Jakarta on December 4 for meetings with Indonesian President Suharto. Kissinger told reporters that the U.S. would not recognize East Timor. He stated that the United States "understands Indonesia's position on the question."

On December 7, twelve hours after the Presidential party left Jakarta, Indonesian troops attacked Dili and other coastal towns. This removed any doubt about the Suharto government's intent to annex the territory.

Nobody, including the State Department, denies that the first weeks of the December invasion saw widespread, indiscriminate killings by Indonesian troops. Refugees who witnessed the killings later reported in Portugal that large numbers of noncombatants--including East Timorese who supported integration with Indonesia--were wantonly shot down in the streets or lined up and shot one by one on the wharf at Dili harbor. The Chinese were a particular target.

FRETILIN's Central Committee had withdrawn from Dili before the December invasion. Troops, as well as food and supplies, were dispersed throughout the interior in an attempt to resist. These forces, estimated to number more than 25,000, were equipped with weapons that the Portuguese had used to arm their colonial units. In the face of this resistance, which proved harder to defeat than Jakarta had expected, Indonesia in late December augmented the 6,000 combat troops that had taken part in the initial attack with 15,000-20,000 additional men.

(In July of 1977, a U.S. State Department official would acknowledge that "roughly 90%" of the weapons used by Indonesia during the invasion were of U.S. origin).

1976

It would appear that by March 1976 (the State Department's date) the Indonesians had consolidated control over the northern coastal strip. On May 31, the Provisional Government convened an Indonesian-appointed "Regional Popular Assembly" which unanimously approved a petition requesting integration into Indonesia. The General Assembly of the U.N. has rejected this act on three occasions, and it will certainly do so again during its current session.

During the summer of 1976 FRETILIN began a major counteroffensive. Although Indonesian forces occupied the main towns of Dili and Baucau, together with some of the larger villages, they were unable to extend control beyond these areas. In addition, they experienced difficulty resupplying their garrisons, and subsequently lost key villages.

During 1976, the Indonesian military began to make use of the first of 16 Rockwell OV-10 "Bronco" counterinsurgency aircraft supplied by the U.S.. This plane, equipped with infrared detectors, bombs, rockets, napalm and machine guns, is specifically designed for close combat support against an enemy without an effective anti-aircraft capability.

1977

What evidence we have indicates that during most of 1977 there was a stand-off between FRETILIN and the Indonesians. According to Australian Liberal MP Michael Hodgman (The Liberal Party is the conservative party in Australia), in August the Indonesians moved 10,000 fresh troops into Dili. This coincided with President Suharto's much publicized amnesty offer to FRETILIN troops and their followers (most of the population).

Intensified Indonesian ground operations were accompanied by air attacks on Timorese in the interior and bombardments from Indonesian warships, with great loss of life on both sides. Indonesian military tactics clearly showed that its operations were premised on the view that it was fighting an entire population; its tactics were increasingly genocidal.

Denis Reichle, a French photo-journalist, visited East Timor clandestinely during September. He made a "safe estimate" that 70,000 to 75,000 people had been killed in the 18 months of war. He also claimed that the Indonesian army's operations were "systematically wiping out" the populations of villages known to support FRETILIN, or those suspected of such support.

During the autumn a poignant letter from a priest on the island was smuggled to Portugal by two nuns:

> Military aircraft are in action all day long. Hundreds of human beings die daily...If bullets don't kill us, we die from epidemic diseases; villages are completely destroyed...The barbarities (understandable in the stone age), the cruelities, the looting, the shooting of people without any justification, are now part of everyday life in East Timor.

The U.S.-supplied "Broncos" were beginning to have their deadly effect.

Despite massive loss of life inflicted by the Indonesians during this period, they did not really make significant gains on the ground, and the war was exhausting their supplies. A Western diplomat in Jakarta was quoted in a November 25 Los Angeles Times article: "They are running out of military inventory. The operations in Timor have pushed them to the wall." The Carter Administration response is revealed by the following chart.

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES AGREEMENTS
(in thousands of dollars)

1978 (Dec. 1976)	1979 (Dec. 1977)	1980 (Dec. 1978)
3,101 ('76-Actual)		
25,000 ('77-Est.)	5,853 ('77-Actual)	
25,000 ('78-Prop.)	125,000 ('78-Est.)	112,078 ('78-Actual)
	125,000 ('79-Prop.)	40,000 ('79-Est.)
		30,000 ('80-Prop.)

The columns in the chart represent the figures for FMS agreements in the Congressional Presentation Documents (CPD) for the years 1978-1980. The rows are the actual, estimated, and proposed FMS agreements for that year. CPD's are issued during the year preceding the fiscal year they are projecting. They represent the thinking of the Administration in December of the year before the books are released. Hence the CPD for FY 1978 reflects Administration policy as of December 1976.

The FMS agreements projected in 1976 for FY 1977 were $25,000,000, with the same amount estimated for the following fiscal year. However, during 1977 only $5,853,000 in new FMS agreements were contracted. By December 1977 the Carter Administration had dramatically stepped up its authorization of arms sales. Its estimates for FY 1978 were drastically revised from $25,000,000 to $125,000,000. By December 1978, $112,078,000 worth of sales had been approved.

This chart suggests that the Administration was willing to rearm Indonesia after it had used up its supplies by the end of 1977, as noted by the Los Angeles Times correspondent. The reports of Indonesia's barbarous war in East Timor apparently were of little concern to the White House, notwithstanding its professed commitment to human rights.

1978

In addition to the $112,078,000 in FMS sales to Indonesia in 1978, commercial sales included 15,000 M-16 rifles and ammunition costing more than $5 million. Also in 1978, Indonesia took delivery of 16 Bell 205 UH-1H helicopters from earlier sales.

With the new ordnance provided by the West, the Indonesian military continued to expand its campaign in East Timor during the first three months of 1978. Much greater emphasis was placed on search-and-destroy missions employing large, mobile troop concentration ferried by helicopters. Heavy aerial bombardments of civilian targets in the countryside continued to be an integral part of this strategy.

Nevertheless FRETILIN resistance continued, so in May Indonesia threw an additional 10,000-15,000 fresh troops into the fighting. The East Timorese nationalists appear to have withstood this new onslaught; in July the Chairman of the East Timor Regional Peoples Assembly acknowledged in the Indonesian press that only large towns were securely held. However, by the end of the year, FRETILIN's strength had been seriously eroded, due to the overwhelming forces the Indonesians could commit to the battlefield, constant aerial attacks, destruction of crops in the rich food-producing mountain valleys, and FRETILIN's severe shortage of supplies.

The Indonesians appear to have had more success during the autumn. One example--symbolically the most important--was an operation lasting from December 11 until December 31, 1978, on which day FRETILIN President Nicolau Lobato was killed. That operation involved 2,500 Indonesian troops who were wisked from place to place by helicopters, probably of U.S. origin.

This period also witnessed the beginning of the mass movement of some 300,000 people from the mountains to Indonesian-controlled areas. These people, who had fled with FRETILIN to Timor's rugged interior at the time of the invasion or soon after, had been living in conditions of extreme deprivation for up to three years (FRETILIN did not have a single doctor and lacked even basic medicines). The State Department has often asserted that these people were forced by FRETILIN to remain in the mountains, but in fact they seem to have held out as long as possible, until the combination of Indonesian

saturation bombing, search-and-destroy missions, and crop destruction forced them to return to the lowlands in search of food, medicine, clothing, and shelter.

The group of ambassadors and journalists (including U.S. Ambassador Masters) who visited East Timor in September 1978 were appalled by the conditions they observed in "transit camps" set up by the Indonesians to control these displaced people. Due to corruption and the priorities of their war effort, the Indonesians appear to have been incapable of providing any significant assistance to the refugees. Consequently, conditions in the camps deteriorated, and each month the death toll rose.

One of Indonesia's purposes in allowing the ambassadors to visit East Timor was to encourage foreign aid. However, Jakarta demanded that donor nations acknowledge Indonesian soverignty over East Timor and that aid be administered by the Indonesian Red Cross. Jakarta refused to allow the International Red Cross direct access to the territory until March of this year, perhaps because they were unwilling to admit foreigners until the remaining armed resistance had been reduced. Consequently, a whole year has been lost, and conditions in East Timor have gone from bad to unthinkable.

Thousands more have died. Even now, with the ICRC and Catholic Relief Services beginning the first serious relief effort, outsiders are still extremely limited in their access to East Timor.

When one observes the clamor of Western governments and press over the need for assurances that aid to the starving in Cambodia be meticulously administered, one wonders where was the outcry over the Indonesians' demands for control over relief aid in East Timor?

1979

Recent reports from East Timor have focused upon the humanitarian situation. Surviving refugees are still coming down from the mountains to the towns, where food and medicine are still extremely scarce. The recently announced USAID relief aid program may begin to meet the desperate needs of some of the 200,000 people in the camps, but there will be a demand for continuing assistance for a long time.

Continued fighting has been reported, but by all indications it is much reduced. An East Timorese who supports Indonesia was quoted recently in Le Monde that although the FRETILIN guerillas have been "routed," thousands remain.

The Indonesians have announced that the 200,000 refugees who have come down from the mountains during the past year will not be allowed to return to their homes. Although this policy is explained in terms of the inability of the land to support traditional agricultural practices, one suspects that it is also based on the need to separate the people from the remaining rebels.

B.P.C. and Jeremy Mark

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