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## THE INDONESIAN TAKEOVER OF EAST TIMOR

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THE RECENT HISTORIES of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa are well publicized, especially those of Mozambique and Angola, but the events in Portuguese Timor (East Timor) from 1974–76 are little known<sup>1</sup> except for some newspaper accounts, mainly published in Australia. This story is filled with the modern themes of struggles for self-determination by small ethnic groups against the hegemony of artificial nation-states, the disorderly collapse of European colonialism into regional imperialism, the often self-defeating idealism engendered by the United Nations, and the manipulative evasion of responsibility by some, the irresponsible use of power by others.

J. Stephen Hoadley provides a lucid exposition of recent events in East Timor up to February 1975,<sup>2</sup> so in this article I will concentrate on what happened from then until July 1976—with a brief summary of significant events in 1974. There is some logic to these temporal divisions. The current history of East Timor began in mid-1974 when the Portuguese Junta de Salvação Nacional (Junta of National Salvation), established after the change of regime in Portugal on April 25, 1974, made clear that the new government intended to relinquish control over all Portuguese overseas territories. The first few months of 1975, with the short-lived coalition of the two major Timorese parties, saw the best opportunity for the establishment of an independent East Timor. The breakup of this coalition sealed the fate of East Timor and ensured the subsequent invasion and attempted takeover by Indonesia. The end of May 1976 saw an ill-attended, Indonesian-sponsored Peoples Assembly held in Dili, the capital of East Timor, come to an unanimous decision—after a short discussion—to formally request integration with Indonesia.

<sup>1</sup> For a brief historical survey and introduction see Donald E. Weatherbee, "Portuguese Timor: An Indonesian Dilemma," *Asian Survey*, VI:12 (December 1966), pp. 683–695.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stephen Hoadley, *The Future of Portuguese Timor* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1975), p. 10.



### Recent Developments

Soon after the April 1974 change of regime in Portugal three political parties were organized in East Timor. The Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente (Fretilin—originally Associação Social Democrata Timorese) demanded immediate independence and had support from junior civil servants, teachers, urban workers, and students. The União Democrática de Timor (UDT, originally Partido de União Democrática) wanted “progressive autonomy” but “always under the Portuguese flag.”<sup>3</sup> UDT consisted of the “higher civil servants (such as the mayor of Dili, Costa Mouzinho), the native chiefs who serve as petty territorial officers, villagers who regard the Portuguese flag as a mystical symbol, some Chinese businessmen, and of course the Portuguese community.”<sup>4</sup> The Associação Popular Democrática de Timor (Apodeti—originally Associação para a Integração de Timor na Indonésia) called for “an autonomous integration into the Republic of Indonesia in accordance with international law” on the grounds of ethnic and historical links.<sup>5</sup>

The leader of Fretilin is Francisco Xavier do Amaral, who had trained in Macao for the priesthood and was a customs officer in the Portuguese administration in East Timor before entering the political struggle. The founder of UDT was João Carrascalão, a wealthy planter who soon resigned his leadership due to his well-known association with unpopular Portuguese. He was replaced by Francisco Lopez da Cruz (who had fought for Portugal in Africa), though reportedly Carrascalão still wielded considerable influence in UDT behind the scenes. Apodeti was headed by Arnaldo dos Reis Araújo. Later in 1974 two other parties were formed: the Klibur Oan Timor Aswain (Kota), which advocated independence but with the continuation of the traditional princedom leaders, and the Partido Trabalhista, which favored independence under a Portuguese commonwealth system.

Gauging the relative popularity of political parties in undeveloped areas is difficult, but apparently UDT was initially popular since it represented legitimate authority in terms of village chiefs and town elites. But UDT's popularity rapidly diminished due to its continued identification with non-Timorese elements and to the energetic and persuasive recruitment campaigns of the fast-rising Fretilin movement. Funded from Indonesian Timor, Apodeti always ran a poor third, and its “fortunes . . . declined significantly when it became known that Indonesia would not grant autonomous status to Timor, but would integrate it as a province”<sup>6</sup>—meaning that Indonesians, not Timorese, would get administrative and civil service positions. Neither Kota nor Trabalhista has demonstrated a following of any significant numbers.

<sup>3</sup> *Manifesto*, UDT (Dili, May 11, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Hoadley, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Manifesto*, Apodeti (Dili, May 27, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hoadley, p. 6.

Initially Fretilin did not view itself as one of three (or five) parties but "as the only legitimate representative of the people of Timor,"<sup>7</sup> and for several months after their formation little cooperation existed between the parties. For example, in late 1974 Colonel Mario Lemos Pires, Portuguese governor of Timor, tried to set up an advisory government council including representatives of the three major parties. However, Apodeti refused to participate because it said it would negotiate only with Indonesia. Later Fretilin declined stating that the council already was packed with members from the former regime.

In the last few months of 1974 Fretilin began pragmatically altering its demands and reaching for wider acceptance of its legitimacy, especially by Portugal, Indonesia, and Australia. Fretilin announced its willingness to accept a Portuguese presence and a politicoeconomic tutelage for five to ten years before independence. It further stated that it would introduce Bahasa Indonesia as a school subject and would promote contacts between the peoples of the two sections of the island. José Ramos-Horta, one of the founders of Fretilin, began spending considerable amounts of time in Australia, where he was successful in gaining the support of some trade unions, church groups, and members of parliament.

The more nationalistic leaders in UDT, such as Domingues Oliveira, decided their fortunes lay with Fretilin and persuaded the others to form a coalition, announced on January 22, 1975. Their program rejected Apodeti and integration with Indonesia, but they stated their desire for good relations with Indonesia and sent a delegation to the Indonesian Consul to reassure him on this point.

Indonesia, nevertheless, continued to set the stage for a takeover of East Timor and to prepare the Indonesian public for the forthcoming invasion. Hoadley's reading of the Indonesian press through 1974 (and mine through 1975) support his conclusion that "it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that the Indonesian public can see annexation of [East] Timor as an act of generosity, one which would save the Timorese from Portuguese colonialism, domination by outside powers, infiltration by communists, subversion by Chinese, deception by Fretilin, political instability, poverty and general backwardness."<sup>8</sup>

Martono Kadri, deputy chief of mission at the Indonesian Embassy in Australia, told a delegation from the Australian Union of Students in February 1975 that Indonesia feared a communist coup in East Timor. General R. Surono, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, stated in New Zealand in the same month that Indonesia was willing to annex Portuguese Timor if that was what its people wanted. And in March *Suara Karya*, the official organ of the Golkar, the ruling political party, warned that Indonesia would not

tolerate Portuguese Timor becoming a communist trouble spot.

Fretilin correctly read Indonesian intentions, and Fretilin-associated Timorese in Portugal sent a telegram to the Secretary-General of the UN as early as March 9, 1975, warning that Indonesia planned to invade East Timor.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the Fretilin-UDT coalition proceeded to prepare for some kind of transfer of power from Portugal and on March 2, 1975, announced its willingness to negotiate with Portuguese officials. Pires conferred with the Committee on Decolonization in Lisbon, and by the end of the month events seemed to be moving toward a peaceful transition of power from the Portuguese to the Timorese.

On May 7, 1975, Fretilin-UDT, Apodeti, and the Decolonization Committee met and proposed elections for a popular assembly in Timor in October 1976. This proposal, which provided for Portuguese rule until 1978, subsequently became Portuguese law in July. Later in May the Portuguese government proposed a meeting in Macao of all interested Timorese parties.

All prospects for the peaceful transfer of power became moot on May 29, however, when UDT announced its withdrawal from the coalition with Fretilin. In UDT's words, Fretilin threatened the political stability of the geo-political context of Timor.<sup>10</sup> The actual reasons for the split are not entirely clear. UDT leaders were receiving advice from various quarters just before they decided to withdraw, especially from the Portuguese and then in April from visits in Indonesia and with rightist elements in Australia.<sup>11</sup> They had seen Fretilin take away their initial popularity, and perhaps they wanted to negotiate in Macao as a more independent force, not part of a coalition. At any rate, Fretilin now refused to go to Macao because of the appearance there of Apodeti, which was regarded simply as a puppet of the Indonesian government.

The Macao meeting nevertheless was held on June 26-28, 1975, with the Portuguese (led by Major Vitor Alves), UDT, and Apodeti participating in a doomed effort to outline the mechanics of a transitional government for East Timor. However, after the meeting Portuguese Minister of Interterritorial Coordination Almeida Santos said that the decisions there could not be considered definite because of the absence of Fretilin.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, events were heating up back in East Timor. After the Fretilin-UDT split, Fretilin leaders joined others who had given up their regular jobs, organized "Revolutionary Brigades" (mainly with Dili students), and began intensive activities in the interior in the form

<sup>9</sup> Shown to me by diplomatic sources.

<sup>10</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), May 29, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Denis Freney, *Timor: Freedom Caught Between the Powers* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975), pp. 38-41.

<sup>12</sup> *Diário de Notícias* (Lisbon), July 2, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> *Fretilin: Manual e Programa Políticos* (Dili:n.d.), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Hoadley, p. 19.

of literacy campaigns and in setting up agricultural cooperatives. Fretilin was obviously preparing a base that could be used to win the proposed October 1976 elections or to conduct guerrilla warfare against Indonesia.

Early in June official Indonesian newspapers began reporting "thousands" of refugees crossing into Indonesian Timor to escape atrocities by Fretilin. On June 12 work officially started in Indonesian Timor on the construction of a 120-kilometer road to East Timor that had obvious strategic importance. In a visit to Jakarta on July 4, 1975, UDT leader de Cruz said that he would not reject the wishes of the East Timorese if they wanted to join Indonesia.<sup>13</sup> Soon afterward there were reports for the first time of armed clashes between Fretilin and UDT factions in Dili, in which six people were killed and 21 wounded.<sup>14</sup> Then in early August, after several days of meetings with Indonesian officials, including Lieutenant General Ali Murtopo, deputy head of Indonesian intelligence, and Brigadier El Tari, governor of Indonesian Timor,<sup>15</sup> the leaders of UDT announced that they had decided to follow a political line acceptable to Indonesia.

A few days later in a coup on August 11, 1975, UDT seized key installations in Dili, including the radio station, airport, and some administrative buildings, and demanded immediate independence for East Timor and imprisonment of Fretilin members. By August 13 the Portuguese government, after an initial denial, reported fighting in Timor. Some news reports said 100 people had been killed and 300 Portuguese women and children had been evacuated on a Portuguese freighter.

UDT's ultimatum was rejected by Portuguese authorities, and by August 22 Fretilin's counter-offensive had taken an ordinance depot and army headquarters in Dili. Portuguese forces virtually collapsed, and all Timorese members deserted to join the warring factions, most apparently joining Fretilin.<sup>16</sup>

Carrascalão claimed that the aim of the UDT coup was to rid East Timor of the communists,<sup>17</sup> but Indonesia did not immediately come to UDT's aid since it did not yet want to appear to be involved, and UDT's military situation rapidly deteriorated. After a five-day battle, in which refugees said that about 200 persons were killed, Fretilin gained complete control of Dili. It was reported that Indonesian President Suharto "asked Portugal for assurances that Lisbon won't oppose Indonesian takeover of Timor."<sup>18</sup> In words to be often paraphrased by other Indonesian officials, Murtopo told reporters in Jakarta that "we do not want to be a naughty boy in this case. We are willing to help to

bring about peace there, but I can assure you that we will not use force to settle the problem. But neither does Indonesia want to sacrifice its stability over the issue. In fact, it is a simple problem: the people there belong to the same clan as those on Indonesia islands around Timor."<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile fighting increased throughout East Timor, and hundreds of refugees concentrated in Dili's port zone, still tenuously held by Portuguese authorities. Although the Portuguese called upon the International Red Cross, Australia, and Macao to help with evacuation efforts, little could be done to ease the suffering of the people. On August 27, 1975, Pires and his remaining garrison withdrew to the island of Ataúro, and for all practical purposes Portuguese control of Timor had ended after some 450 years. Indonesia offered to move in and restore order, but on September 1 Portugal rejected this proposal.

The month of September saw a high level of diplomatic activity, mostly by Portugal in the person of Santos, but decisions could not be made as Portugal was undergoing a cabinet crisis. In October UDT and Apodeti, along with Kota and Trabalhista and under the tutelage of Indonesia, joined together in a coalition called Movimento Anti-comunista (MAC, Anti-Communist Movement) and announced their program—from Indonesian territory.

Meanwhile Fretilin, seemingly in effective control of most of East Timor, set up a "transitional administration," and Indonesia complained of Fretilin attacks on Indonesian Timor border villages. Indonesia's Foreign Minister Adam Malik and Malaysia's Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak began issuing statements about Timor's becoming a base for communist subversion.

By the middle of October there were reports of bombardments from Indonesian warships at Balibó, Baucau, the second largest town in East Timor, and at Atabae. However, MAC forces, heavily supported by Indonesian troops, had difficulty moving under these barrages. Citing the lack of legal order from Portugal and the Indonesian bombardments (which resulted in the loss of Atabae to MAC), Fretilin announced on November 28, 1975, the independence of East Timor from Portugal and renamed the territory the República Democrática de Timor Leste (Democratic Republic of East Timor). The new regime was denounced in Lisbon but recognized as a government by Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Sao-Tome and Principe, Cape Verde, Guinea, and Albania. China, Vietnam, and Angola all recognized Fretilin as the representative party of the East Timorese people.

One day after Fretilin declared independence MAC declared East Timor a part of Indonesia. On December 1, 1975, Malik said that the solution to the Timor question now "lay on the field of battle." And on December 7 Jakarta radio reported that Dili had been "liberated" by the "people's resistance spearheaded by the Apodeti, UDT, Kota

<sup>13</sup> Summary of World Broadcasts (BBC), July 8, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Berita Yudha, July 7, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, August 13, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Summary of World Broadcasts (BBC), August 22, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> The Australian, August 20, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Melbourne Age, August 26, 1975.

<sup>19</sup> The Press (Christchurch), August 27, 1975.

and Trabalhista" and "supported by Indonesian volunteers." The Indonesian government claimed to have found it difficult to "prevent these volunteers from supporting their brothers in liberating Dili from oppression and Fretilin's terror."<sup>20</sup> On the same day Portugal broke off diplomatic relations with Indonesia, accusing Jakarta of military aggression against East Timor.

In a letter dated December 7 Portugal informed the UN of the invasion and said, "In the present circumstances, Portugal is unable to restore peace in Timor or to ensure that the decolonization process is accomplished through peaceful and negotiated means" and urged a meeting of the Security Council. Discussions in the 13th Session of the Fourth Committee of the UN held on December 10 indicate that Indonesia tended to place blame on Portugal for not discharging its obligations as administering power, for withdrawing to Ataúro, and for leaving firearms to certain political parties, claiming that only Indonesia was there to ease the terror and famine and restore order.

As a result of the December 7 Portuguese letter the UN Security Council met five times between December 15 and 22. In these debates Anwar Sani of Indonesia emphasized that when fighting broke out in East Timor, Portugal was unable to restore order, that local parties asked for Indonesian help (claiming that Apodeti, Kota, UDT, and Trabalhista—i.e., MAC—represented the majority of the people), that over 50,000 refugees had poured into Indonesian Timor, and that the potential of a prolonged civil war in East Timor would invite outside interference.<sup>21</sup> However, on December 22, 1975, the Security Council called on Indonesia to withdraw troops from East Timor and requested that a Special Representative of the Secretary-General be sent to assess the situation. Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi, the Under-Secretary-General and Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, was appointed and arrived in Jakarta on January 15, 1976, on route to Timor.

Meanwhile an East Timor radio station seized by pro-Indonesian forces said in a December 8 broadcast, "If you see where the Communists are, you must show them to our Indonesian brothers who are here." It promised to "tear out the liver" of Fretilin president do Amaral.<sup>22</sup> Fretilin sources said the Indonesian invasion of Dili consisted of 2,000 Indonesian paratroopers and marines supported by 20 warships and had resulted in over 500 casualties. Australian sources gave much higher figures.<sup>23</sup> In his first interview after the Indonesian invasion, Malik admitted that Indonesian marines had been used in the initial operation but denied that Indonesian troops were still there, saying, "if we had our forces there, there would be no problem to withdraw them, but these are volunteers and it is up to them to withdraw."<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the rest of December and the first half of 1976 East Timor was a battleground. Reliable sources on the war are not immediately available. Indonesian reports are infrequent and not detailed. They usually claim complete control of the entire island and downplay the Fretilin resistance as a ragtail group of a few hundred soldiers. One would suspect, however, that Indonesia was surprised by the stout resistance of Fretilin and considerably disappointed that MAC forces were not able to take over the territory with only token Indonesian help. The ferocity of the initial Indonesian onslaught in Dili suggests that they had hoped for a quick knockout. In fact, they had to stage a second invasion on December 25.

After their initial plans failed to materialize Indonesia and MAC moved quickly on political and military fronts. Oé-Ocussi Ambeno was officially incorporated into Indonesia in a ceremony in the Indonesian Timor capital of Kupang on December 15, 1975. On December 17 MAC named Araújo of Apodeti as the Chief Executive Officer with a full mandate to govern the newly created Provisional Government of East Timor.<sup>25</sup> In early January he presided over a ceremony on Ataúro Island lowering the Portuguese flag and raising the red and white flag of Indonesia. Speaking in Baucau on January 8, 1976, Araújo declared that the future of East Timor lay with Indonesia. He reminded the people that the island of Timor was one and inseparable and was located within the Indonesian Archipelago. He further said that since it was clear that the people of East Timor wanted integration with Indonesia, it was not necessary to hold a plebiscite.<sup>26</sup> The next day Malik left Jakarta for a brief visit to Dili. And a week later Malik also declared that since the Provisional Government of East Timor had invited Indonesia to declare its sovereignty over the territory, there was no longer any need for an election to decide the future of East Timor. Malik said integration could be done simply by a presidential decision, a special session of the Indonesian Parliament, or by a people's consultative assembly.<sup>27</sup>

In late January the Provisional Government of East Timor dissolved the existing political parties, and merged them into an organization apparently called the Functional Corps of the Provisional Government. And in a letter that took effect on February 1, 1976, Araújo officially banned the formation of all political parties,<sup>28</sup> thus ending the only period in modern history—about 20 months—when East Timor had experienced free political activity.

The military picture remains unclear, but apparently Indonesian forces are not winning all the battles since official Indonesian reports have claimed the capture of the same towns at various different times, suggesting that Fretilin has been able to recapture territory. Indonesia

<sup>20</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), December 4, 1975.

<sup>21</sup> *UN Chronicle*, January 1976, pp. 6–14.

<sup>22</sup> *Financial Times* (London), December 10, 1975.

<sup>23</sup> *Guardian* (Manchester), January 9, 1976.

<sup>24</sup> *Reuter*, December 12, 1975.

<sup>25</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), December 17 and 30, 1975.

<sup>26</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), January 10, 1976.

<sup>27</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), January 15, 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Shown to me by diplomatic sources.

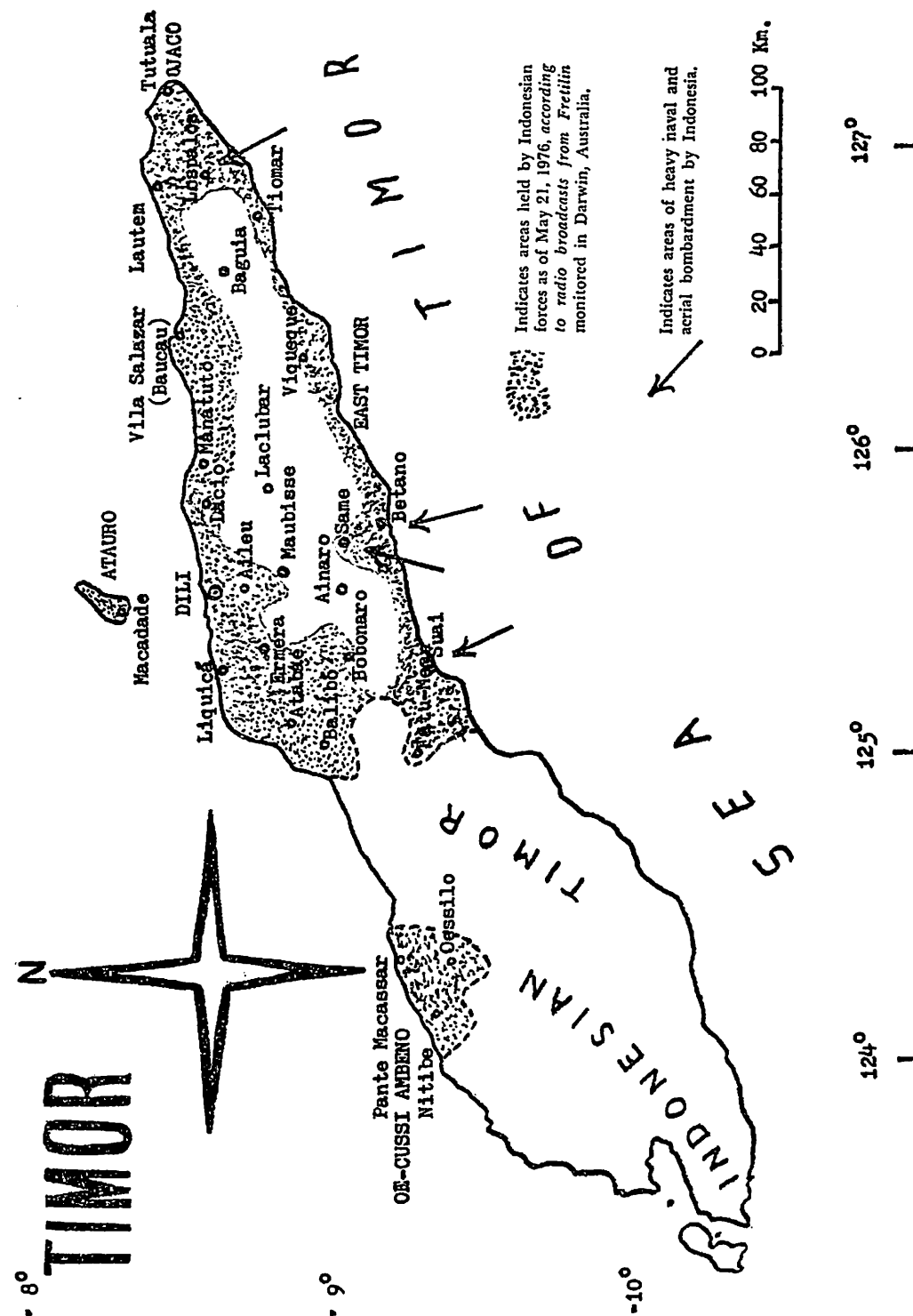


launched a major offensive in late December 1975 with 15,000 to 20,000 troops from Java. They took Baucau in the north and attacked Liquiçá to the west of Dili. On December 29 Fretilin announced that Aileu, a Fretilin stronghold south of Dili, had fallen to Indonesian troops. According to Horta, the Fretilin government then established headquarters in the mountain town of Ainaro.<sup>29</sup>

Australian intelligence analysts report that more than 450 Indonesian troops were killed in the first four weeks of the Indonesian invasion, and that the 15,000 to 20,000 Indonesian force failed to subdue large areas of East Timor or to find and destroy the 3,000 or so Fretilin troops.<sup>30</sup> Beginning in late January and continuing at least through May, Indonesia intensified its bombardments of coastal towns, especially along the southern coast at Suai, Betano, and Tiomar. In February, Indonesian troops apparently landed at Betano, took the town, and advanced toward Same, which has an airstrip. In March, Indonesia took Same and in April Lospalos in the eastern part of the Island. By July 1976, when East Timor was formally merged with Indonesia, the pro-Indonesian forces controlled the entire coastal area but not much of the interior highlands (see map).

In February, da Cruz, then deputy chairman of the provisional government, said that about 60,000 persons had been killed in East Timor since August 1975.<sup>31</sup> Although this figure may well be inflated, this admission by a member of the pro-Indonesian government triggered a major policy statement by Fretilin. In a letter to the President of the UN Security Council dated March 4, 1976, Horta cited reports from Fretilin of the Indonesian use of napalm and biological warfare, saying "hundreds of people have died in the region of Lospalos as a consequence of the deployment of biological bombs which cause intense diarrhea and diseases as yet unidentified by Fretilin health authorities." The letter claimed that as of March 1, three months after the Indonesian invasion, Fretilin held 80% of the territory and had the loyalty of 95% of the population, and "Indonesian forces control only town-centers, the small permanent populations of which either fled from the invaders or have been massacred."<sup>32</sup> Horta declared that Fretilin "will fight wherever we find support, and that includes Indonesian Timor, where there is tremendous reaction against the Javanese troops."<sup>33</sup>

Throughout these activities a minor sideshow in the person of UN Special Representative Winspeare entertained the international legal community on the periphery of the action. In late January, under tight security, Winspeare visited towns in East Timor that the Indonesians



<sup>29</sup> Personal interview with José Ramos-Horta, March 6, 1976.

<sup>30</sup> *Guardian* (Manchester), January 10, 1976.

<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, February 15, 1976.

<sup>32</sup> Letter dated March 4, 1976, shown to me by diplomatic sources.

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview with Horta, March 6, 1976.

had held for several months, such as Dili and Manatuto. Fretilin was anxious to have Winspeare visit its territories, but the Australian government first seized the Fretilin radio transmitter in Darwin, making communications difficult, and then refused on the grounds of safety to fly Winspeare to Fretilin-held territories of East Timor, though Fretilin then held four airstrips in Con on the northwest coast, and in Same, Suai, and Viqueque.

The pro-Indonesian Provisional Government of East Timor also refused to guarantee the UN envoy's safety to Fretilin territories. The Portuguese—still in the eyes of the UN the legal administrative authority in East Timor—had offered two corvettes, the Oliveira e Camo and the João Roby, along with a radio transmitter to make contact with Fretilin, but Malik warned that any ship carrying the UN envoy risked being sunk if it attempted to enter disputed areas of East Timor.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Indonesia immediately bombarded all areas suggested by Fretilin as landing places for Winspeare.

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Andrew Peacock said that he deeply regretted that Winspeare had been unable to talk with Fretilin in their territories of East Timor,<sup>35</sup> but claimed the mission was a success since Winspeare had met with Horta in Darwin. Answering questions at the Press Club in Canberra during a three-day visit to Australia ending February 11, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim said that the UN had been presented with a "fait accompli" in East Timor. And in early March 1976 Winspeare returned to Geneva, and the remainder of the UN mission to New York City. It was reported that Araújo had told Winspeare that the integration of East Timor with Indonesia was "already a tangible fact."

Meanwhile the war goes on in East Timor. Fretilin radio is still monitored in Darwin. According to a report on May 21, 1976, Fretilin and Indonesian troops had clashed on the road between Ermera and Aileu, in the Ermera region itself, around Baucau, along the Indonesian-East Timor border, and on the road between Same and Maubisse (see map). By mid-year, the Indonesian dry season (April-November) offensive apparently had resulted only in the capture of Atabae and Ermera,<sup>36</sup> and in some areas the Indonesian penetration of the interior of East Timor seems to be limited to the range of its naval guns.

On the political front the Indonesian-sponsored Provisional Government of East Timor invited the 23 embassies in Jakarta to send observers to a Peoples Assembly held in Dili on May 31. Only seven embassies accepted—New Zealand, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria—and the absence of the United States, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Papua New Guinea must

<sup>34</sup> *The Times* (London), February 4, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> Photocopied text released by the Australian Mission to the United Nations, February 8, 1976.

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview with Fretilin sources, June 8, 1976.

have been embarrassing for Indonesia. A June 1, 1976 report in the *Washington Post* expressed skepticism about the authenticity of the Peoples Assembly and said that the diplomats and journalists were allowed only three hours in East Timor and could not meet any of the 28 representatives to the Assembly—which voted unanimously to request integration with Indonesia. On July 17, 1976, President Suharto signed a bill incorporating East Timor into Indonesia, two days after the Indonesian parliament had passed the bill.

### *International Response*

*Reactions in Australia:* The Australian government and some trade unions differed widely in their views of events in East Timor. The Labor government under former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and the caretaker and the new conservative government installed in December, both under Peacock, have avoided antagonizing their large neighbor to the north. A glance at the map showing Indonesia spread like an umbrella over Australia suggests that this timidity is probably well advised since Indonesia could conceivably easily harass Australia by banning Australian aircraft from Indonesian airspace.

However, Australia's policy of non-interference assumed a quick, silent Indonesian takeover—which did not occur. Instead Timorese movements, especially Fretilin, stirred up Australian interest and support, partly by reminding Australians that the Timorese had been instrumental in stopping the Japanese just short of invading Darwin in World War II. The Australian press headlined the government's timidity in dealing with Indonesia along with graphic stories of the brutality of Javanese troops in East Timor. Indeed, casualties among Australian journalists themselves were high. It has been reported that the five Australian journalists killed in October 1975 in Balibo were executed by the UDT or by Indonesians after they had obtained evidence of Jakarta's direct involvement. They were reported as accidentally killed; the bodies were burnt beyond recognition and were handed over to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. The Australian government did not pursue the matter.

In contrast some Australian trade unions supported Fretilin and opposed Indonesian moves. In March 1975 the trade unions sent a delegation to East Timor to assess the situation. As early as August 1975 the Waterside Workers' Federation in Darwin refused to load the Timorese evacuee ship Macdili because of the likelihood of the cargo going to UDT. Perhaps in response to trade union pressures, the Labor government in August moved reconnaissance aircraft and long-range transport to an isolated World War II airstrip near Darwin, dispatched two destroyers from Perth to Timorese waters, and the Australian ambassador in Jakarta warned Indonesia not to act prematurely.<sup>37</sup> These

<sup>37</sup> *The Australian* and *Guardian*, August 25, 1975.



moves, however, seem designed primarily for consumption by the Australian public.

Indeed, the Australian public was well aware of events in East Timor; in August and September 1975 about 2,500 refugees from East Timor flowed through Darwin. And in late October 1975 an Australian fact-finding mission of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid spent ten days in East Timor, reporting that Indonesian helicopters were guiding artillery attacks against Fretilin and that Indonesian soldiers had been captured in East Timor. The mission further reported that Fretilin effectively controlled East Timor.<sup>38</sup> Finally, on October 30, 1975, Don Willessee, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Labor government, said in Parliament that the government condemned the use of armed force and objected to Indonesian intervention.<sup>39</sup> This was the first open criticism by the Australian government. But no further criticisms were forthcoming from the caretaker or the new government.

Meanwhile, following the Indonesian takeover of Atabae, a meeting of national maritime unions in Sydney on November 27, 1975, banned all Indonesian-registered ships in Australia and any ships carrying war materials to Indonesia. Nevertheless, on December 1, 1975, the Australian government refused to recognize the newly formed Democratic Republic of East Timor under Fretilin. In reaction Horta said, "All Australia had to do was to warn the Indonesian Government against invading Timor. It's unbelievable that such a wealthy country as Australia has done so little."<sup>40</sup> And the president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions said that the government should stop providing military assistance to Indonesia. (It had promised to supply Indonesia with \$26,000,000 worth of military equipment over the next three years.) Consequently the Metal Workers Union employed at the government aircraft factory in Melbourne banned all work on Sabre jet engines bound for the Indonesian air force. And as of mid-July 1976, the Postal Workers Union, the Seaman's Union, and the National Waterside Workers Federation were still maintaining a ban on all goods and services to and from Indonesia.

One of the most explicit acts of the Australian government was the seizure on January 25, 1976, of the Fretilin radio transmitter in Darwin, which was unlicensed but which had been in undisturbed operation for seven weeks. It was seized at the time it was being used to try to arrange a visit by the UN envoy to Fretilin-held areas of East Timor. Tony Bello, the radio operator, said in a newspaper interview that he had spoken by radio to Winspeare in Jakarta on the night before and that Winspeare had said he was willing to meet Fretilin leaders and

<sup>38</sup> *Reuter*, October 28, 1975.

<sup>39</sup> *The Australian*, October 31, 1975.

<sup>40</sup> *The Australian*, December 6, 1975.

asked whether it would be possible for an Australian pilot to fly him from Darwin to Fretilin East Timor. Bello was on his way to transmit the envoy's message to Fretilin when he was stopped. The Australian Foreign Affairs Department claimed they were not informed about the pending seizure.<sup>41</sup>

Peacock repeatedly said that he "deeply regretted" the course of events in Timor, but he made it clear that Australia would play no major role in the situation. Peacock, in refusing to risk Australian airplanes to fly Winspeare to Fretilin East Timor, said that since Portugal had legal control of East Timor, it should take responsibility for getting Winspeare there.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, trade union pressure apparently prompted Peacock on February 11, 1976, to blame former Prime Minister Whitlam for the bloodshed in East Timor. Also, Fretilin began using another radio transmitter again. According to Horta, the police are not expected to confiscate this one because to do so would cause trouble with the trade unions.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, in mid-1976 the Australian government seemed to cool its attitude toward Indonesia, as indicated by its declining to send any diplomatic observers to the Peoples Assembly in Dili on May 31.

*Reactions in Indonesia:* Hoadley discounts the possibility that an independent East Timor could pose a threat to Indonesia, especially as a conduit for communism.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, this is the major reason the Indonesian government offered to its own people for the annexation of East Timor. (It is true that if Portugal had recognized China, the Chinese communist government would have demanded the Republic of China's [Taiwanese] Consul General office in Dili). Perhaps the clearest official Indonesian statement on East Timor is provided by a letter in the *New York Times* from Samsi Abdullah, Counselor of the Indonesian Embassy: "Indonesia has no territorial claim on Portuguese Timor (despite the fact that it is in the heart of Indonesian territory). . . . The Portuguese exploited their colony thoroughly; there is nothing left for Indonesia to 'exploit.' There is, however, much for Indonesia to give to a people that is ethnically and culturally Indonesian. Indonesia will not take over Portuguese Timor but will accept integration, should the people of the area democratically, and without terrorists' guns pointed at their heads, choose this course."<sup>45</sup>

Indonesia emphasizes the cultural similarities between the two halves of the island, and Fretilin emphasizes the differences, pointing out that 450 years of different colonial histories have surely had their

<sup>41</sup> *The Australian*, January 27, 1976.

<sup>42</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), January 28, 1976.

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with Horta, March 6, 1976.

<sup>44</sup> Hoadley, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, January 11, 1976.

impact and that Bahasa Indonesia is unknown in East Timor. The argument focuses on a matter of degree and unfortunately cannot be settled by any empirical measurement. The empirical situation is that for Indonesia the possibility of a protracted guerrilla war in East Timor must be repelling; in 1942 some 400 Australian commandoes, with Timorese support, pinned down more than 20,000 Japanese troops in these same mountains. And Indonesia already has its problems with secessionist movements in Sumatra, West Irian, and South Moluccas.

This is the first time that Indonesia has seized territory outside the original Netherlands East Indies, and it may prove to be a long-term problem. Despite the discouraging effect that the Indonesian government has on public debate there is apparently some Indonesian criticism of the takeover of East Timor. An article in the January 13, 1976, *Daily Merdeka*, for instance, charged that Jakarta had too quickly branded Fretilin as communist without considering that it might be nationalistic.

*Reactions in Southeast Asian and Pacific Nations:* In the UN General Assembly vote deploring Indonesian actions, Thailand and Malaysia voted with Indonesia while Singapore and Papua New Guinea abstained. Malaysia even broadcast support for the decision of Indonesia to send troops to East Timor.<sup>46</sup> The only official support for Fretilin came in the form of a letter of solidarity from Ton Duc Thang, president of Vietnam.<sup>47</sup>

The only other nation in the area that could conceivably support Fretilin is Papua New Guinea, which is having difficulties of its own, especially with secessionist movements in New Britain Island and copper-rich Bougainville Island. The Minister for Corrective Institutions Pita Lus denounced Indonesia's intervention in East Timor as "imperialist expansion," and asserted that the people in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian western part of the island of New Guinea, were living a nightmare under Javanese rule.<sup>48</sup> On January 29, 1976, in Sydney Horta claimed, "Papua New Guinea is the next objective of Indonesia's expansion after its virtual takeover of East Timor. Fretilin troops in Timor have captured documents which prove Indonesia [is] behind the Bougainville secessionist movement and other civil unrest in Papua New Guinea."<sup>49</sup>

*Reactions Among World Powers:* The response to events in East Timor in the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union has been rather muted. The U.S. typically has been accused of intervention through the CIA and the oil companies, but even the most radical critics have been able to do little else except place John Baker, an American executive of the

U.S. Oceanic Exploration Company, in Dili both at the time of the UDT split with Fretilin and during the UDT coup.<sup>50</sup> A conspiracy theory is unconvincing here. It is a fact, however, that the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia commenced only twelve hours after President Gerald Ford had ended a two-day state visit to Jakarta. The White House said that President Suharto did not inform Ford of the impending action in East Timor, but the invasion force was partly equipped with American weapons and a proposal for more military aid to Indonesia was pending in the U.S. Congress. Also, according to Jakarta radio, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had assured Indonesia that the U.S. government would not recognize Fretilin's proclamation of independence.<sup>51</sup>

On March 3, 1976, the U.S. House of Representatives did approve a \$4.8 billion foreign aid authorization bill and in so doing voted down an amendment that sought to cut aid to Indonesia, both for its takeover of East Timor and the lack of civil rights in Indonesia. The amendment, by Tom Harkin of Iowa, would have eliminated the \$19.4 million grant military assistance authorization to Indonesia, though this would still have left \$23.1 in foreign military sales credits, \$2 million in the Foreign Military Training Program, and \$13 million in excess defense articles. Military assistance to Indonesia then is expected to increase in fiscal year 1976 to \$57 million over the actual expenditure in fiscal year 1975 of \$23.8 million.

China condemned Jakarta in a December 9 article in the *People's Daily*, saying, "The struggle of the people of East Timor for national liberation and independence is an integral part of the 'third world' people's struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonism."<sup>52</sup> This tough stance is apparently a matter of principle since Peking has wanted to improve relations with Indonesia. Although it makes a distinction between state-to-state ties and moral support for liberation struggles, China knows how warily Southeast Asian governments view Chinese support for subversive movements. Nevertheless, Chinese Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua gave a banquet in Peking on December 19, 1975, for the delegation of the Democratic Republic of East Timor led by Rogerio Tiago de Fatima Lobato, head of the Fretilin armed forces. As for the Soviet Union, Pravda only expressed "concern" over the affair and support for Timorese self-determination—without openly denouncing Jakarta.

## Conclusions

There are few heroes in this tale. Perhaps nothing would have prevented an eventual Indonesian takeover; it may be the inevitable continuation of Javanese expansion. However, the longer the Indo-

<sup>46</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), December 15, 1975.

<sup>47</sup> Shown to me by Horta, March 6, 1976.

<sup>48</sup> *Reuter*, December 18, 1975.

<sup>49</sup> *The Press* (Christchurch), January 30, 1976.

<sup>50</sup> Freney, pp. 30–31.

<sup>51</sup> *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC), December 8, 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, January 28, 1976.

nesians would have had to wait, the more powerful and legitimate would have become the East Timorese entity. If "wrong" steps were taken (for the East Timorese), it was the UDT leaders who took them. Ill-advised at best, self-destructive at worst, these leaders at first seemed to be playing a minor role in a situation controlled by Indonesians and their Apodeti cohorts. By May even former Apodeti leader Araújo had been replaced as head of the Provisional Government of East Timor by Tomodok, former Indonesian consul in Dili, and it was reported that former UDT leaders had been imprisoned.<sup>53</sup>

Nothing Portugal could have done would have redeemed its 450 years of exploitation and neglect in East Timor, but one might have reasonably expected some sort of act of gallantry from the new, relatively progressive government. Instead what was forthcoming was vacillation, favoritism to UDT, withdrawal, and finally inaction.

At the end of its long, sad colonial adventure in Southeast Asia Portugal's only contribution was to fulfill the legal fiction of the hegemony of the nation-state—a concept strongly fostered by U.N. actions. So while Portugal had no power and all the responsibility, Australia and Indonesia, who had all the power but could conveniently evade "legal" responsibility, manipulated the situation to satisfy only their own internal needs. And Australia once again walked away from its obvious status as a major Southeast Asian power.

Meanwhile the East Timorese have disappeared into the bureaucratic labyrinth that passes as the Republic of Indonesia. Under the modern concept of the nation-state, where only legal structures exist, not peoples, it seems doubtful that the world will ever again have an opportunity to closely examine the struggles and sufferings of the Timorese.

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<sup>53</sup> *Canberra Times*, May 21, 1976.