

Introduction: East Timor, Indonesia, and the World Community

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East Timor is at last, and at terrible human cost, firmly on the road to independence. The significance of its passage to freedom is manifold.

East Timor's independence constitutes one of the final and most poignant moments in the long and bitter history of European colonization and decolonization. Once one of the Spice Islands of European trading lore, Timor under its Portuguese and Dutch masters was a virtual paradigm of the half-millennium of Europe's rise to domination of the world system -- and its eventual withdrawal from its colonies.

The struggle for independence did not, however, end with independence from Portugal in 1975. The 800,000 people of East Timor subsequently waged a courageous independence struggle that began with Indonesia's invasion that year and continued over a quarter century of resistance in the face of fierce Indonesian oppression.

East Timor under Indonesian rule was the clearest and most horrific instance of colonialism by a former colony. New Order Indonesia under President Suharto was a state dominated by a military which ran amok both in the wave of anti-Communist killings that took approximately one million Indonesian lives in the years after 1965, and an additional 200,000 in East Timor after 1975. For close to a quarter of a century, despite condemnation by successive United Nations resolutions, Indonesia enjoyed moral and material support from the United States, Japan, Australia, and other powers, facilitating its virtually unconstrained state violence. Indonesia's

colonial adventure in East Timor, like most New Order political projects, was decided in secret, carried out for the benefit of the few, burdensome to the Indonesian state politically, diplomatically, and economically, and devastating to the East Timorese.

Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor was a classic product of the Cold War. The Indonesian military dictatorship was supported by the United States and its allies virtually without question from 1965 to the early 1990s when, for reasons of strategic and economic interest, these nations began to lose confidence in Suharto. Washington's perennial fear of "communism" and radical nationalism, heightened by military defeat and military withdrawal from Indochina in 1975, led U.S. presidents from Gerald Ford to Bill Clinton to provide the weapons, training, money, and international respectability for Jakarta's war on East Timor.

The independence struggle exacted an enormous toll in lives, with the death of more than a quarter of the pre-1975 population in the initial years of conflict. In the paroxysm of Indonesian violence prior to and following the 1999 vote for independence, virtually the entire Timorese population was driven from their homes, with unknown numbers killed. Many were forcibly taken into West Timor or other parts of Indonesia, where at this writing, some hundred thousand remain, often in desperate circumstances and prevented from returning home. Many thousands are still missing and unaccounted for. Virtually the entire physical infrastructure of the country was deliberately plundered or destroyed by Indonesian troops and their militia clients as they withdrew.

The East Timor question is intimately involved in the political turmoil that flowed from the Asian currency and financial crisis, which unseated the Suharto dictatorship, gave rise to pro-democracy and nationalist movements throughout Indonesia, and led up to the election of Indonesia's fourth president, Abdurrahman Wahid. Events in East Timor have strengthened the drive for autonomy or independence in Aceh, West Papua, and other parts of Indonesia.

The struggle for East Timor, both during and after the Cold War, provides a litmus test for issues of international responsibility, posing questions of double standards in unusually clear-cut form. Not only does it reveal the active support by the United States, Japan, Australia, and other

powers for the military forces of Indonesia throughout the years of that nation's invasion and repression of East Timor, but in the case of the United States, some of that support continued in 1999, even as Washington belatedly criticized Indonesian human rights violations and lent its voice to the United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping force.

The protracted independence struggle offers important insight into the role of international solidarity and human rights movements whose determination to support demands for justice over many decades kept the issues alive until such time that the conjuncture of forces at the local and global levels made it possible for the Timorese cause to capture world attention and benefit from a shift in the balance of forces. Today, these same solidarity and human rights groups continue to monitor and support East Timor's passage toward a viable independence.

East Timor will provide an important test of the ability of the international community to contribute to outcomes that will facilitate the efforts of that nation-in-formation, which possesses extraordinary human resources but little else, as a result of the razing of its cities and towns and the plunder and destruction of its economy. For years the people of East Timor have striven to realize their ideals of democracy, community, and development; in the era of transition to independence the extent of international support for these ideals remains to be seen.

The essays in this volume address these themes. Those in Part I, *The Road to Independence*, seek to illuminate the dynamics of the long Timorese struggle for independence first from Portuguese and subsequently from invading Indonesian forces. The focus is on the contribution of two critical institutions in the years since 1975, the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) and the Catholic Church, while also illuminating the role of youth and students in the resistance.

Part II, *The United Nations, Indonesia, and the Independence Ballot*, provides four eye witness accounts of the 1999 ballot and the Indonesian military-supported militia violence before and following the overwhelming vote for independence. The writer-participants were involved with the United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET) or with independent international monitoring projects. The essays weigh UN contributions to independence against

the responsibility of the UN and the powers for the massacres. This section includes, too, the voices of East Timorese poets recording the pains of their long struggle and the joys of victory."

The third section on The United States, the World Community and East Timor, examines international dimensions of the struggle. Essays explore the role and responsibility of the international community -- particularly the United States and ASEAN -- and weigh the claims of international law, human rights, and *realpolitik*. The essays help to clarify and assess the reasons for the turnaround in the position of the powers in 1999, notably those by the United States, Australia, Indonesia, and Japan, as well as the pivotal role of the United Nations.

The fourth section on Indonesian Politics and East Timor looks at the changing character of the Indonesian state, at the troubled relationship between Indonesia and East Timor, and the sea changes taking place in Indonesian politics since 1997. It examines both how Indonesian politics have impacted on East Timor, and how the struggle for independence in East Timor has affected the outlook for the world's fourth most populous country, including the prospects for a society less dominated by the military and permitting greater autonomy for the regions that comprise this vast archipelago nation.

The essays in the final section, The Future of East Timor, consider the prospects for an independent East Timor, charting both the potential and some of the likely shoals that lie ahead on issues including economic development, security, language and ethnic differences, and social change while analyzing the possible responses of the relevant parties from the resistance forces to the Indonesian government, the United States, and the United Nations.

Our authors are social scientists, writers, poets, journalists, and activists (not mutually exclusive categories), many with lifelong specializations and long experience working on and in Indonesia and East Timor. Many of the contributors have recent, and in quite a few instances long-term, experience in East Timor and Indonesia. Several witnessed from different parts of East Timor the lead-up to the referendum. Many others among our authors have intimate knowledge of contemporary Indonesian and East Timorese politics, military perspectives, and economics.

Many of the essays in this book were published in earlier form in a special issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (vol. 31, nos. 1 and 2, Jan.-June 2000), written in the eye of the storm in the fall of 1999 and including several articles that could not be included in the present work. In addition to substantial revision and updating of the chapters included here, new essays have been commissioned, strengthening the attention to developments within East Timor.

The independence struggle of the East Timorese people has been at once inspiring and tragic, presenting important lessons for us all. We dedicate this volume to the hopes for an independent, peaceful, and prospering East Timor.