# Cover note for retyped text of David Scott and Richard Tanter, *Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia*, March 1978*.*

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The original document was written up and typed by Richard Tanter following discussions with David Scott, following a request from Jose Ramos Horta. Horta requested that the existence of the document be kept confidential.

The original document contains a number of typographical errors and misspellings. For ease of reading these have been corrected in this retyped text.

Original pagination as noted as below.

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15 May 2022

# Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia.

p. 1:

We want to take this opportunity to give you a realistic indication of the state of support for FRETILIN and East Timorese independence in Australia. We feel it is necessary to describe our viewpoint fully, and to make judgements which are sometimes harsh, firstly, because of your isolation from this country, and secondly, because of the urgency of a change in strategy that is needed here in Australia. Essentially, we believe that there is a large reservoir of public support for FRETILIN and the East Timorese people, but it has proved very difficult to convert that latent support into political action.

Before we can discuss the problems and opportunities for assistance and support for FRETILIN in Australia, we will review the state of the struggle in East Timor as we see it, We feel that it is absolutely essential that you understand the way the war looks from here. We have only the limited sources of information well known to you — Radio Maubere; Australia and international press reports; information from support groups and friends of FRETILIN in Europe and the U.S. , information obtained from Indonesian sources; Australian government (especially intelligence) sources ; and of course, FRETILIN sources outside East Timor.

It is possible that you judge the situation inside East Timor differently from us, because your knowledge of what is happening is far greater. Please understand that here we are attempting to offer an objective and realistic judgement of what is actually happening, based on our limited information.

p.2:

If you do not agree with our analysis, understand that we write as we do because of our commitment to FRETILIN and the people of East Timor. We believe an assessment free of rhetoric and prejudice is vital, even if painful at times.

The state of the war in East Timor.

The power of the East Timorese people and of the Democratic Republic of East Timor to resist the Indonesian invasion has been remarkable, although not surprising to those who knew the truth about FRETILIN. Those who were surprised by the strength of the people 's resistance for the past two and a half years — the Indonesian invaders, the governments and intelligence services of the U.S. , Australia, Japan and other Western countries — made grave errors of judgement. However, it is clear that the struggle for East Timor is now stalemated a stalemate that involves continued brutal aggression and resistance, with bitter fighting in many parts of the country.

On the one hand, Indonesia has utterly failed in its invasion. Its control is limited to the main towns and administrative centres, and most major roads ; most of the countryside and the bulk of the population lie outside its control, except for terrorist attacks. on the other hand FRETILIN and the D.R.E.T. have shown an effective capacity to limit the extent of the invasion; to maintain the loyalty of most of the population; and to deepen and extend their effectiveness as a revolutionary government in the D. R. E.T. zones. However it is clear that the military capacity of the D.R.E.T. is not of a kind to be able to re-take Dili and Baucau and throw the invaders back across the border.

p.3:

Despite numerous renewed offensives by the Indonesians, that has been the state of the war since roughly mid-1976. FRETILIN'S ability to resist so successfully has been due to its popularity amongst the people; its initial military organization and NATO armaments; and its subsequent ability to expand its guerrilla army; the skilled use of military tactics appropriate to a people's war in very rugged terrain; and to weaknesses on the Indonesian side: their inability to encircle the dispersed population, the corruption and cynicism amongst the officer groups; poor morale amongst troops; surprisingly poor military organization in logistic and strategic matters; and increasingly important, the growing awareness within Indonesia itself that the situation in East Timor is far worse militarily, morally and politically than the government has previously said.

Al this is well known to those who have followed the situation closely. However, it is our great concern that the position of FRETILIN may begin to deteriorate now. Three matters lead us to this fear - the continued blockade; some recent reports from East Timor; and reports from Indonesia.

The worst obstacle to a FRETILIN victory is the Indonesian naval and air blockade of the territory. No significant supplies of arms, medicines, food or clothing have reached FRETILIN zones from other countries (Indonesian black-market and captured goods aside) for two and a half years. We are aware of FRETILIN successes with traditional medicines, captured and stockpiled arms, and re-organized food production.

However, we believe that the blockade, if maintained, must be very serious over time. It may be that there are still supplies of which we are not aware. We feel it is extremely unlikely in

[p.4:]

the present international climate that any of D.R.E.T.'s allies will risk providing material (rather than moral and token political) support in the form of weapons and medicines.

Mozambique, D.R.E.T.'s closest ally has the weapons and possibly the shipping, but distance rules it out. Vietnam seems to be in a similar position, and in any case, appears to be

adopting a relatively accommodating position towards the ASEAN nations, including Indonesia. Cambodia is engaged in a border war, and is probably not in a position to provide a great deal without support from other socialist neighbours. China, while it has been a great political ally of FRETILIN, for its own reasons (particularly fear of Soviet influence in Jakarta) seems unlikely to risk a potential state-to-state confrontation with Indonesia.

[p.5:]

The most recent Radio Maubere reports (March 4th) have confirmed and enlarged a slight but consistent concern felt by a number of those following the progress of the war closely The tone of Alarico Fernandes warning about the future of the radio transmitter, and the cost of resisting the current Indonesian tactics of encirclement and annihilation were particularly worrying. In Australia, it is of course very difficult to analyze the Radio Maubere reports reliably, but the current Indonesian offensive , which has been surprisingly long, has raised fears that there may be a new factor operating.

This concern emanating from interpretation of recent Radio Maubere reports is connected with reports from Indonesia itself, particularly in the area of new arms purchases. Alarico Fernandes for sometime has been regularly mentioning the use of the squadron of OV-10 counter-insurgency planes. To date D.R.E.T. spokesmen have argued that such technologically advanced weapons are no rea1 threat to the people of East Timor - e.g. because they depend on troop and/or population concentrations to be effective.

The RM reports indicate that the OV-10's are being used in a terribly damaging manner -on the population in the liberated zones and on crops and property.

[p.6:]

Moreover, since Fretilin controls most of the population and territory, there must be some moderate concentrations of population - e.g. some of the large towns and villages held by Fretilin, as well as numerous hamlets and crop-growing regions affected by defoliants.

But, this is not all. Besides the OV-10's, the Indonesian invaders have been expanding their arms purchases (either in cash or in the form of aid for their Australian or U.S. military allies). Some of these purchases are important for the war in East Timor - the Nomad Sea-sea patrol planes from Australia; the three types of naval patrol-boats from Australia and South Korea; the F-5E planes from the U.S; the C.A.S.A.-12 light planes and Aerospatiale helicopters now assembled in Bandung; troop-carrying planes and ships supplied by the U.S.

These weapons do enlarge the capacity of the Indonesians to inflict great suffering on the Maubere people. Not all have been used yet; they do not need to be, if their presence elsewhere in Indonesia allows other troops and equipment to be brought into the war.

The people of East Timor, under the leadership of Fretilin, have shown a heroic resistance greater than anyone imagined. Undoubtedly, new ways of resisting the enemy will be found. Undoubtedly, the well known lack of morale and coherence on the Indonesian side will weaken their effectiveness.

But we feel, as outsiders with limited knowledge, that we must give an objective judgment.

Consequently, we feel, unless either the blockade is broken or the Indonesian political picture changes unpredictably, that the Fretilin position must begin to deteriorate in the near future.

Parallels cannot be drawn over time with the Vietnamese, Chinese, Cuban or Cambodian revolutions, nor with the successful struggles for independence of Angola, Guinea-Bissau or Mozambique.

[p.7:]

East Timor is unique. There is no other example of an isolated resistance being maintained for colony in such a constricted area; having no land boundary with any other country than the aggressor; having no capacity to maintain sea-communications; and having a limited, and probably reducing, capacity to maintain a slender radio communication link with the outside world.

Until now, we have felt that time has been on the side of the Maubere people. Now we feel that time, at least in the short-term, may no longer be with the forces of resistance.

In the long-term, we feel sure that the strength of East Timor, and the tensions inherent in Indonesia, will lead to eventual victory - but that time is far away, and heavy in cost. If the Indonesian invasion forces are prepared to practice systematic genocide, without international interference, then there may be few East Timorese alive to witness that final victory.

Options:

This is the background for our consideration of the actions before the government of the D.R.E.T. A greal deal obviously depends on events in Indonesia, as well as in East Timor. The current round of discontent will probably result in the removal of Suharto, sooner or later. The nature of his replacement - almost certainly another military person - will strongly affect the future options of Fretilin.

The options seem to be:

(a) Fretilin forces maintain their present capacity and control and within the foreseeable future repel the invaders across the border.

This seems unlikely. To date, Fretilin's strategic military capacity has been mainly defensive. Without some unknown factor, it is hard to imagine successful and sustained assaults on Dili, Baucau, etc.

[p.8:]

(b) Fretilin and Indonesian forces maintain their positions roughly as they are now.

While the war is in rough equilibrium, we feel that it is likely that, as things are now, the advantage in a war of attrition will pass to Indonesia.

(c) Indonesia crushes Fretilin completely.

This seems most unlikely although the Indonesian Army's relentless pursuit of remnants of the PKI in Central and East Java should be remembered.

(d) Discussions between Fretilin and Indonesia as a stage in the independence struggle.

On 5/4/77, Ministers Alkatiri, Araujo and Ramos-Horta issued

a statement which concluded:

"We reaffirm our readiness to establish a relationship. A co-operation with all neighbourly states, including Indonesia, based on a principle of equality, reciprocity of benefits, mutual respect for the sovereignty and independence and non-interference in the domestic affairs of each state."

The Ministers stressed that any discussions could only be initiated by the Central Committee of Fretilin, and could only be based on the two principles established in success sive U.N. resolutions, namely, unconditional withdrawal of Indonesian troops, and recognition of the right of the East Timorese people, to independence.

[p. 9:]

Following the precedent of the Vietnamese and Korean revolutions, there is no in-principle objection to discussions while the war continues. Discussions, leading possibly to a negotiated settlement, can only proceed if each side sees that it has something to gain, and that discussions can be conducted without compromising fundamental political principles.

Of course, it may be that an independent nation’s actual negotiating position is quite different from that which it publicly proclaims. The following exploration of possibilities keeps this in mind and is based on the assumptions that negotiations are firstly a temporary stage in a strategy, and secondly, Fretilin's military capacity remains unimpaired at any stage.

It is assumed that the D.R.E.T. would publicly denounce any proposal short of complete victory. The actual, 'un-negotiable' D.R.E.T. position could possibly be roughly as follows:

* rapid withdrawal of bulk of Indonesian troops;
* maintenance of Fretilin weapons in cease-fire situation;
* international observers;
* International Red Cross;
* treaty mechanisms that guarantees self-determination and which provide Fretilin a reasonable chance for eventual dominance in the East Timorese government, e.g. a plebiscite and/or elections under international supervision.

Similarly, Indonesia would publicly condemn any proposal that implied loss of ‘sovereignty’ over East Timor. The actual negotiations position would differ, particularly if a post-Suharto government had sufficient reason to get out of Timor, and could see a relatively inexpensive way of doing so. In such circumstances, the actual negotiating position could be roughly as follows:

[p. 10:]

* assurances regarding future D.R.E.T. policy and conduct regarding West Irian and the other Nusa Tenggara irredentism;
* assurances of neutrality concerning establishment of sovereign bases in East Timor;
* no immediate recognition of defect or ‘error’;
* military guarantees of the above, e.g. restriction of East Timorese contact with the rest of Indonesia.

These negotiating positions are plausible only within a situation of U.N. or other internationally convened negotiations, where each party sees it has something to gain. Our basic hope would be to see a U.N. supervised withdrawal of most Indonesian troops under cease-fire as a prelude to a U.N. conducted plebiscite in which the East Timorese once again determine their future.

Radio Maubere and other sources have confirmed the antagonism between former U.D.T. members and the Indonesians. Excepting the possibility of coercion in Indonesian-held areas, any plebiscite would undoubtedly result in a re-affirmation of independence and the D.R.E.T. Fretilin's domestic dominance would be undesirable.

Fretilin and the East Timorese people would gain a great deal from such a negotiated settlement if it could be achieved:

* ultimate independence;
* an end to the killing, atrocities, hunger and exploitation;
* create the possibility for national economic re-construction and full implementation of Fretilin's program throughout the nation;
* enable greater contact with the outside world, permitting entry of medicines, clothing and other supplies; create a greater international awareness of the justice of D.R.E.T. claims, and of the reality of Fretilin's support.

[p. 11:]

* by building on the diplomatic successes of Fretilin officials to date, create greater international pressure on Indonesia to prevent future invasion.

The difficulties are obvious. The most immediate, as a starting point, is the withdrawal of Indonesian troops. Need all Indonesian troops be withdrawn? Could some, token, forces remain, with U.N. observers, for a fixed period - until the results of the plebiscite are known, and for as a token guarantee of East Timorese compliance with non-interference with Indonesia?

Since November 28, 1975, East Timor has been a sovereign republic. Fretilin will never consider any option that does not guarantee de facto independence in the short-term, and de jure independence shortly after. The question of whether a way through this problem

of a period in which formal East Timorese claims to sovereignty are held in abeyance for the present will be most difficult. Yet unless Fretilin is able to exert any great pressure on Indonesia, it will be equally difficult to force them into immediate admission of less de jure control over the territory. A great deal here would depend on the strength of Fretilin's diplomatic alliance as well as the military situation.

We do not know the opinion of the Fretilin leadership on these issues. It may be felt this is presumptuous of us to make this suggestions, but we believe it is best that you realise the extent of our concern, a concern made more real by our commitment to Fretilin and the people of East Timor.

The will of the people of East Timor to independence eventually will mean victory - but for a people to live to enjoy a long-term victory, they must be able to choose the most judicious path, and the least costly one in terms of death and suffering. 'Independence or death' is a cry that we admire in the freedom fighters of East Timor, but we do not believe they are real options for all of the people; the Indonesian invaders may be prepared to exact the price of total annihilation in return for East Timorese freedom - for those alive to enjoy it.

In solidarity

David Scott

Richard Tanter