ASEAN Resistance to Sovereignty Violation

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The Indonesian Invasion of East Timor

On 12 December 1975, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) introduced Resolution 3485, ‘strongly deplor[ing] the military intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in Portuguese Timor’.\(^1\) This was followed by two diluted UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions introduced on 22 December 1975 and 22 April 1976, ‘call[ing] upon the Government of Indonesia to withdraw without delay all its forces from the Territory’.\(^2\) Resolution 3485 passed with 72 votes to 10, and 43 abstentions.\(^3\) Abstentions came from Europe, New Zealand and the US. The United Nations (UN) votes were indicative of the way Indonesian officials ‘correctly judged the balance of forces’ when planning their invasion of the former colony.\(^4\) They faced relatively little international condemnation, either at the time of invasion, during its aftermath, or indeed, for the majority of its 27-year occupation. In the view of both London and Washington during the 1970s and 1980s, East Timor was deemed ‘too small, backwards and isolated to survive on its own’.\(^5\)

During Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975, Indonesia was able to act with relative impunity. Despite UN Resolution 3485, Jakarta was supported in its actions by the member states of ASEAN, the US and Australia. Indeed, it can be argued that without external support, it is unlikely Indonesia would have invaded East Timor at that time. With regional and external power backing, Indonesia was able to resist international opposition in East Timor following the invasion, thus resisting any potential violation of its sovereignty at that time. In the case under investigation, Indonesia can be classified as the ASEAN vanguard state, having the most compelling interests at stake with regards to East Timor. From Jakarta’s perspective, decolonization of the territory represented a power vacuum, which could invite
unwanted attention from powers external to the region. It was also an opportunity for Indonesia to enhance its security, and maximize power regionally, by absorbing the territory within the archipelago. As the vanguard state, Indonesia was able to garner great power security commitments, and apply pressure on the ASEAN states to obtain unanimous support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy in 1975.

While Indonesia had an important role to play in this process, an equally important factor is the role played by external actors. In 1975, ASEAN’s ability to resist violations to the sovereignty of Indonesia from a UN-backed international coalition was a consequence of high interest convergence between Indonesia and the external powers, specifically the US and Australia. For the US, Indonesia was a key regional ally following defeat in Vietnam and retrenchment from the region. For Australia, Indonesia was a vital component in securing Australia’s Northern periphery, and allowing entry into regional organizations. In the context of a Cold War regional environment, there were clear interests for these external powers to support Indonesia. Ultimately, this would take precedence over self-determination for the people of East Timor.

The chapter will begin by describing the regional environment between 1970 and 1975, paying specific attention to Indonesia’s role in this environment. It will then consider the factors surrounding decolonization in East Timor and the subsequent civil war that occurred there. It will assess Indonesia’s interests regarding the territory, and how this led to the emergence of the ASEAN vanguard state. Subsequent analysis will consider the interests of both the United States and Australia in 1975, and how these interests converged with Indonesia’s with regard to East Timor, in addition to Indonesia’s role within ASEAN and the level of cohesion that developed in support of Indonesia’s East Timor policy. Following an assessment of the empirical record surrounding Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975, the chapter will detail the ways in which regional and external power interest convergence helped Indonesia to resist potential sovereignty violation from actors external to the region. The chapter will conclude with a theoretical assessment of the case study, and consider contending theoretical explanations for Indonesia’s ability to resist sovereignty violation following the invasion of East Timor in 1975.
Indonesia and the Cold War regional environment (1970–1975)

Why did Indonesia invade and annex East Timor? As one commentator noted, ‘the international geopolitical context … [created] favourable conditions for the invasion’. Therefore, a consideration of the regional environment is critical, and reflects the strong role played by Indonesian interests during that period. The year 1975 saw a number of communist advances in Indochina. On 17 April 1975, the communist Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia. In Vietnam, the North Vietnamese communists had overrun Saigon. By April 1975, the Pathet Lao took power in Laos, transforming the country into the Lao Popular Democratic Republic. Communist success in Vietnam was met with alarm in Southeast Asia, although the degree of alarm differed according to each state’s geographic location and external security guarantees.

Indonesia’s size, location and anti-communist leanings meant that it had a unique role to play in Southeast Asia’s Cold War environment. Indonesia’s President Suharto gradually assumed power in Indonesia following a military backed coup in October 1965. In the period following the coup, Suharto’s forces ‘organized and encouraged the killing of as many as one million real or alleged members of the PKI [Communist Party of Indonesia]’. Following the deposition of Sukarno, Indonesia’s sitting President at the time of the coup, Suharto established a new regime in Indonesia known as the New Order, which immediately received US and other Western state backing. In doing so, Western powers were able to help eradicate communist elements in Indonesia. The New Order was characterized by the dominance of a number of elite combat units, known as the Kopassus. Seeking to exert domestic control, Suharto’s regime focused on the danger posed by the resurrection of communist elements, which it believed could threaten both national and regional stability. By 1975, Indonesia suddenly found itself in ‘the limelight as the largest power in the region’. In this context, Suharto ‘appeared to be the greatest barrier to Communist advances in the region, and was thus an essential factor in the defense of Western interests’.
Decolonization in East Timor: emergence of the ASEAN vanguard state

Within this Cold War regional setting, the small territory of East Timor gained its independence from Portuguese colonial rule in April 1975. East Timor is the largest island of the Sunda island chain, with Western Timor forming part of the Indonesian archipelago. Its capital Dili is located 600 kilometres from Darwin, the closest Australian airport, and approximately 2,000 kilometres from Jakarta. In 1975, the population of East Timor was approximately 652,250 to 707,500. Following Portuguese colonial rule, a number of different indigenous factions began to emerge. The first faction was the Timorese Popular Democratic Association (Apodeti). Encouraged by Jakarta, Apodeti advocated integration with Indonesia. The second faction was the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT), which advocated gradual decolonization and continued links with Portugal. The final faction was the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN), which supported an independent East Timor with immediate effect. In addition to these three main parties, two smaller parties also emerged: the Klibur Oan Timur Aswain (KOTA), the Sons of the Mountain Warriors, and Trabalhista, a Labour Party. By mid-1975, FRETILIN had emerged as the dominant faction.

Indonesia’s General Suharto denied any aspirations to incorporate the former Portuguese colony into the Indonesian archipelago, instead arguing that the Timorese had the right to self-determination. At the same time, ‘political elites in Jakarta periodically suggested that East Timor’s future lay with Indonesia’. This suggestion was acknowledged by many Western elites, who ‘resigned themselves as a matter of policy to [East Timor’s] eventual absorption by Indonesia’. Indonesia’s subversive actions in Timor prior to Portuguese decolonization undoubtedly fuelled these speculations. In April 1972, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Adam Malik ‘stated that Indonesia would support an anti-Portuguese liberation movement if the Timorese people really wanted it’. By mid-1974, ‘unidentified Indonesian sources in Kupang began giving financial aid and radio broadcast assistance to Apodeti, apparently in the expectation that the organization would win popular support for a voluntary merger of East Timor with Indonesia’. By December 1974, ‘100 Indonesian commandos were sent to West Timor as part of the first phase of a campaign to destabilize East Timor’. According to Leifer, ‘Indonesia cloaked an evident interest in studied ambivalence … [which] persisted in declaratory policy even after overt military intervention had virtually decided the political
future of East Timor’. While reasons for Indonesia’s interest in East Timor have never been explicitly stated, evidence suggests two important factors at play. Both of these factors provided Indonesia with the most compelling interests at stake in the future of East Timor.

**Security and the communist threat**

First, there were basic security concerns. The territory of East Timor represented a power vacuum, geographically proximate to Indonesia’s border. Jakarta feared that this might invite increased communist diplomatic attention and influence in Southeast Asia. In a recorded meeting between Suharto and the Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in September 1974, Suharto argued that ‘if Portuguese Timor were to become independent, it would give rise to problems. It [is] not economically viable. It would have to seek the help of another country … there [is] a big danger that communist countries – China or the Soviet Union – might gain the opportunity to intervene’. Suharto’s claims are significant in that they reflect Indonesian regional-based fears that directly stem from the Cold War environment. Indonesia’s decision to become involved in East Timor occurred, ‘not because the Portuguese half of the island was perceived as an asset but because it was thought necessary to secure it in order to deny its uncertain utility to others’. Indonesia’s support for Apodeti can therefore be viewed in light of Indonesia’s concern with national security. This was especially necessary considering Jakarta’s ‘fundamental sense of territorial vulnerability, arising from geographic fragmentation and ethno-religious diversity, made acute by the dominant influence of the military and their perspective in government’. In Jakarta’s view, East Timor represented a potential ‘backdoor entrance’ for the spread of insurgency movements. The prospect of a FRETILIN controlled East Timor ‘was not taken lightly in Jakarta, particularly among the military, where great concern was expressed over the likelihood that a Marxist-led eastern Timor could become a support base for communist insurgencies and infiltration throughout Indonesia’. Even an East Timor controlled by the UDT was of little comfort. This was because the new Portuguese government ‘was seen as unstable and vulnerable to communist takeover’. As Suharto informed Whitlam in 1974, ‘decolonization in Portuguese Timor should not upset either Indonesian or regional security’.

It is undeniable that following Vietnamese communist victory in Indochina, there existed a generalized fear of communist expansion
in Southeast Asia, so security-based concerns were a reality. Arguably, however, Suharto’s comments on East Timor were also an attempt to justify a power-maximizing Indonesian policy. This assessment is supported by the fact that, while states have to consider future expectations in formulating policy, there is little evidence of actual communist intent to intervene in East Timor. Indeed, Indonesia appears to have exaggerated the communist threat by ‘fabricat[ing] press reports [claiming] Chinese agents were orchestrating anti-Indonesian and pro-independence sentiment in East Timor and that Beijing was providing FRETILIN with arms and military preparation for a communist coup’. In an Australian government letter sent from Minister John McCreddie to First Assistant Secretary of South East Asia Division Graham Feakes in May 1974, McCreddie stated that ‘there is as yet no evidence that we are aware of regarding any significant communist activity in Portuguese Timor’. Similarly, in a telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia dated 20 September 1975, it was confirmed that ‘the Indonesians have assurances from the Russians of nonintervention’. Moerdani was ‘slightly less sure about the Chinese because of traffic between the substantial Chinese minority in Timor and Macau. In any event, there is little likelihood of effective Soviet or Chinese involvement’. This is a point emphasized by James Cotton, who confirms that ‘neither Australia nor even Indonesian policy makers spend much time on the grounds for this claim’. Indeed, Indonesia had expressed some desire to accommodate the Vietnamese communists. As Suharto informed Ford in 1975, there was the possibility that Vietnam, ‘will apply Communism just within their borders in order to improve the conditions of their peoples. If so, we are okay’.

**Indonesian expansionism and conquest**

The foregoing highlights the distinct possibility that Jakarta had interests in relation to East Timor that extended beyond securing state security in an uncertain regional environment. As Kiernan argues, ‘the major Indonesian goal was conquest’. With conquest as a goal, ‘Suharto secured US acquiescence in the territory’s prospective incorporation by Indonesia. The expansionist impulse would simply be denied; the excuse, the communist threat’. This analysis is supported by the view of Prime Minister Lee of Singapore, who informed Dr Kissinger in a 1975 meeting that ‘Indonesia wants to be a great military power’. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia was recognized as ‘the dominant and
hegemonic power’ with a ‘strong sense of proprietary entitlement to order inter-state relations’. Indonesia was aware that its position as regional hegemon, and its strategic location and pro-Western, anti-communist leanings, were vital for the US during and following its defeat in North Vietnam in 1975.

This sense of proprietary entitlement can be seen in Indonesia’s relations with neighbouring territories. According to Ramos-Horta, ‘West New Guinea was the first flagrant act of land-grabbing carried out by the Indonesian generals. Then as today, Indonesia, because of its vast natural resources and strategic location … managed to win the acquiescence of major powers to its empire-building’. While East Timor ostensibly appeared to be of little worth to Jakarta, seabed oil and gas reserves in the Timor Gap provided the possibility of rich future resources. Indeed, a seabed border agreement was negotiated between Indonesia and Australia in May 1971, which demarcated the area east of Timor. This area was roughly equidistant between the two countries, and contained a wealth of oil and gas deposits. This will certainly have factored into Indonesia’s decision-making when contemplating the future of East Timor.

What is apparent is that the annexation of East Timor satisfied two key Indonesian interests. First, it reflected a security-based goal of denying external communist forces a potential regional ally. Second, it satisfied Indonesia’s desire to maximize its regional power position through conquest and expansion. As a recently decolonized territory bordering the archipelago, Indonesia clearly had the most compelling interests at stake in the future of East Timor. These were arguably vital interests, affecting Indonesia’s regional security and sense of prestige and power. With clear interests at stake in the territory, Jakarta increasingly sought to influence the final outcome of East Timor’s bid for self-determination.

**Civil war in East Timor**

Due to weak support for Apodeti, the Indonesian government attempted to bribe or pressure the leaders of the various East Timorese parties to defend integration, although this failed to garner support. In light of the uncertain regional and international environment, FRETILIN and the UDT entered into a coalition in January 1975, a move supported by the Portuguese government. The aim of this coalition was to establish an independent East Timor. From the outset, Indonesia sought to undermine this coalition. It did so through a
‘campaign of de-stabilization’ called *Operasi Komodo*, which began not long after the legalization of the East Timorese political parties in 1974.\(^4^2\) *Operasi Komodo* specialized in the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation within the East Timorese territory, with the sole purpose of inciting tension between the factions.

An important change had occurred in East Timor by April 1975. The UDT, dominated by landowning families, felt increasingly threatened by a number of FRETILIN’s policies, such as land reform, which were increasingly popular with the Timorese citizens.\(^4^3\) These differences were seized upon by the Indonesian intelligence services, which ‘fomented suspicion and conflict’ between the parties.\(^4^4\) In early August 1975, the Vice President of the UDT travelled to Jakarta to meet with President Suharto’s aide, General Ali Murtopo, before travelling on to Australia.\(^4^5\) Evidence suggests that Murtopo, in conjunction with the Indonesian intelligence agency, was able to play on UDT fears, and convince the UDT ‘that FRETILIN was plotting an uprising to impose a ‘communist-styled’ regime on the island.’\(^4^6\) The UDT leaders ‘apparently concluded that Portuguese Timor’s hopes for independence now depended upon curbing FRETILIN influence’.\(^4^7\) The UDT visit to Jakarta also angered FRETILIN leaders, who accused the UDT leadership of ‘securing clandestine Indonesian support for UDT against FRETILIN in return for future Indonesian support in Timorese affairs’.\(^4^8\) Based on the information provided by Murtopo, the UDT leaders ‘counter-charged that FRETILIN was acting in the interests of the Portuguese Communist Party’.\(^4^9\)

By May 1975, the UDT had left the coalition. In July 1975, Suharto publicly stated that ‘East Timor could not be independent, due to the alleged inviability of the territory in economic terms … and that the future of East Timor lay in integration with Indonesia’.\(^5^0\) By August 1975, it was clear to policy makers in Australia that ‘Indonesia was determined to invade East Timor, all that was wanting was an appropriate pretext’.\(^5^1\) Within East Timor, tensions increased throughout 1975. From March to July, the Portuguese authorities staged local village elections, with FRETILIN consistently gaining between 50-55 percent of the East Timorese vote.\(^5^2\) The results of the Timorese election prompted the Indonesian military to act, ‘to check the Front’s growing popular support’.\(^5^3\) The military orchestrated a UDT coup, which was launched on 11 August 1975.

In a show of force, members and supporters of the UDT coup seized key points in Dili and Baucau. In addition to weapons seized from the police arsenal, UDT also received Indonesian ground, air and naval gunfire support, which allowed the capture of Timorese districts such
as Balibó and Maliana. There were also ‘unconfirmed reports that Indonesia was providing vehicles and advisors to UDT forces … and that areas falling under UDT control were being integrated into the administrative structure of West Timor’. Within days of the Dili coup, policy makers in Australia became aware that ‘the coup makers acted with the foreknowledge of BAKIN, the Indonesian State Intelligence Organization’. Adam Malik reportedly pledged ‘Indonesia’s “full support, quietly or openly” to the four anti-FRETILIN parties, sometimes collectively referred to as the “Timorese anticomunist movement” in the Indonesian press’.

On 20 August, FRETILIN forces defeated a UDT force at Aileu, before moving onto Dili, which was captured seven days later, and Baucau, which was recaptured ten days later. FRETILIN were supported by troops from the Portuguese colonial army, which facilitated the establishment of Falantil (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor), a pro-independence military wing. Civil war raged between the UDT and Fretilin, with violent fighting leaving a predicted 2,000-3,000 people dead. On 23 August, the Portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs contacted the UN, stating that ‘the situation had deteriorated … conditions in the capital had become chaotic; hundreds of inhabitants, including women and children, had been murdered’. The Portuguese administration withdrew from Dili on 27 August, retreating to Atauro Island. In doing so, it surrendered all authority and responsibility for the territory. From the beginning of September 1975, Fretilin had secured military control of the majority of East Timor. These events left Jakarta with two options: to accept an independent, FRETILIN-controlled East Timor at the Indonesian border, or to forcefully intervene and integrate the territory into the archipelago.

ASEAN vanguard state – external power interest convergence

Despite having clear interests at stake following the decolonization of East Timor, Indonesia had been reluctant to launch a full-scale invasion of the territory. As will be shown, Indonesia was in receipt of economic, military and domestic support from Western powers, which it was not willing to place in jeopardy. It therefore became vital to obtain great power acquiescence prior to invasion. As the vanguard state, Indonesia set out to obtain support from these major powers. Evidence will show that Australia and the US supported Suharto’s East
Timor policy ‘so as not to offend the Soeharto [sic] government and because the West did not wish to see another piece of Southeast Asia fall to “communism” so soon after the fall of Saigon’.  


By 1975, the ‘domino theory appeared more real than perhaps at any time during the Cold War’. For the US, an expansionist Soviet Union consolidating power in Southeast Asia was a significant threat. Successive US governments viewed Indonesia as ‘a bastion of anti-Communism and stability, a crucial source of resources, and one of the fastest growing sites in the world for US private investment’. Kissinger confirmed the US position towards Indonesia in July 1974, stating that it needed ‘Indonesia to play a more active stabilizing role in light of the reduction of our own presence in Southeast Asia’. Between 1966 and 1974, Washington had averaged over $200 million per year in economic aid to Jakarta, and more than $20 million in military assistance. Seeking strong allies in the East, Kissinger and Ford embarked on a ‘renewed search for regional strongmen that Suharto skilfully exploited’. This is evident in US military aid to Indonesia, which increased from $20 million in the 1960s and early 1970s, to nearly $43 million in the year 1976. Between 1976 and 1979, the US furnished Indonesia with total military assistance of over $250 million.

In 1973, the US suggested that ‘Indonesia should play a larger role in Southeast Asian regional defence and that the US should begin increasing military assistance commensurate with that role’. This suggestion was well received by Suharto, who in a meeting with Kissinger and Ford stated that his main goal was to combat communism, and he ‘consistently (if mistakenly) described the independence movement of East Timor (FRETILIN) as communist-dominated’. In light of recent events in Indochina, Ford and Kissinger were inclined to accept the veracity of Suharto’s claims. By mid-1975, Suharto was able to use the US defeat in Vietnam to negotiate increased economic and military aid. During a meeting between General Suharto and President Ford at Camp David on 5 July, Ford informed Suharto that the US was ‘able to make available some military equipment items to help you in your situation – four naval vessels … some tanks, aircraft such as C-47, and four C-123 transports’. Suharto elaborated on Indonesia’s regional problems, highlighting his concerns regarding communist military strength, ‘fanaticism and ideology’. Suharto requested that
the US agree ‘to strengthen the [Indonesian] national resilience … the most important need is not in the military field but in the economic area. This is where we must build the nation’. Ford agreed, stating that the US would do ‘what we can do to supply those needs’.

Having secured increased economic and military aid, Suharto turned the conversation to East Timor, stating a preference for ‘carrying out decolonization through the process of self-determination’. However, Suharto went on to state that ‘with such a small territory and no resources, an independent country would hardly be viable … if they want to integrate into Indonesia as an independent nation, that is not possible because Indonesia is one unitary state. So the only way is to integrate into Indonesia’. Suharto summarized his concern, stating 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 … I want to assert that Indonesia doesn’t want to insert itself into Timor self-determination, but the problem is how to manage the self-determination process with a majority wanting unity with Indonesia’.

Having sown the seeds of communist threat in East Timor in the minds of Kissinger and Ford, ‘Suharto returned from Washington on July 8 and made his first public statement suggesting that an independent East Timor was not viable’. It was only a few days later when UDT leaders launched their coup to suppress FRETILIN.

The United States as a silent ally

The US largely followed Indonesia’s lead with regard to events in East Timor, opting for a silent partner approach. Concerned about the possible communist sympathies of Timorese political factions such as FRETILIN, the US deemed absorption into Indonesia to be the only viable policy available. As early as February 1975, US officials were aware that Indonesia had made the ‘basic decision that an independent Timor, susceptible to communist influence would be [an] unacceptable threat to Indonesia’s security, and that integration of Timor into Indonesia [was the] only acceptable long term solution’. US recommendation at that time was a posture of ‘maximum … silence, avoiding any basis for suggesting either US encouragement or discouragement of Indonesian actions’. In a memorandum from WR Smyser of the National Security Council Staff to Dr Kissinger on 4 March 1975, Smyser surmised ‘the Indonesian Government fears that a hasty Portuguese pullout will leave a weakened Timor subject to the Left Wing instincts of a few leaders of
the independence movement, leaders whom the Indonesians fear to be influenced by Peking’. According to Smyser, ‘President Suharto has developed programs to increase Indonesian influence in Timor through low-key political operations’. However, ‘these programs have not been very successful. Because of that, there has been mounting pressure in Indonesia for direct military action’. According to Indonesian reports obtained by the US, ‘preparations for such action are proceeding, and there is one report that Suharto has ordered incorporation of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia by no later than August, 1975, by force if necessary. Portuguese officials have told us they will not resist any Indonesian use of force’.

With events unfolding rapidly, US Ambassador Newsom ‘recommended a general policy of silence … arguing that we have considerable interests in Indonesia and none in Timor. If we try to dissuade Indonesia from what Suharto may regard as a necessary use of force, major difficulties in our relations could result’. During a Secretary of State’s staff meeting in Washington on 12 August 1975, Habib confirmed this approach, stating that ‘I think it is a situation in which we should just do nothing. It is quite obvious that the Indonesians are not going to let any hostile element take over an island right in the midst of the Indonesian archipelago’. Similarly, in a Secretary of State meeting on 8 October 1975, Habib confirmed that ‘it looks like the Indonesians have begun the attack on Timor … I think what we are doing is like Jack – keeping our mouth shut about the thing’. When asked by Kissinger if that was conceivable action to take, Habib replied ‘we’ve been doing it, so I think it’s quite conceivable’.

However, Suharto still remained cautious about launching a full-scale invasion. Suharto’s main concern was that invasion might jeopardize ‘the long-term US military assistance that the armed forces were counting on to undertake their plans for military modernization’. This stance was confirmed in a telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State on 16 August 1975. The telegram confirmed Suharto’s ‘apprehension’ over the US reaction, with General Murdani of the Indonesian army intelligence stating that the President ‘realized that if Indonesia invaded Timor, [the] results of [the] Camp David meeting would be lost’. Murdani was informed that the ‘US [was] not opposed to incorporation of Timor but hoped peaceful alternatives could be found’. In a meeting between Dr Kissinger and Adam Malik on 5 September 1975, Kissinger sympathized with the Indonesian position, informing him that he ‘had always assumed that in about ten years or so Indonesia would take over Portuguese Timor – for symmetry! I will not spend any sleepless nights over it’.
stressed that ‘in Timor things are moving very quickly. We could use your help … with the Portuguese. Maybe you could talk to them … we hope the non-communists will come out on top … the delegation will be going over our military needs and our priorities’. Kissinger concluded that he had ‘always been in favor of a decent military aid level for Indonesia. You can count on it’.

**Ford and Suharto meeting, December 1975**

Relations between the US and Indonesia continued to develop positively, with the establishment of a joint US-Indonesian Consultative Commission signed in November 1975. This culminated in a meeting between General Suharto, President Ford and Dr Kissinger on 6 December 1975. Dr Kissinger prepared President Ford for this meeting in a memorandum sent 21 November 1975, informing Ford that ‘your Jakarta visit will be a dramatic reaffirmation of the significance we attach to our relations with Indonesia, the largest and most important non-Communist Southeast Asian state’. The US goal was therefore to ‘focus our dialogue increasingly on broader issues of continuing major interest of the two governments: the US role and US interests in East Asia, both for their own sake and to balance Soviet and PRC [People’s Republic of China] pressures’. Kissinger continued to state that ‘in the post-Vietnam environment, US interests in Indonesia are based both on its present position in the region and, especially, on its anticipated future role … its geographic location and resources are of major strategic importance in the region’.

With regard to East Timor, Kissinger stated that ‘Jakarta has become concerned that the backward and resource-poor colony would attain what the Indonesians expect would be a weak, unviable independence leaving it susceptible to outside – especially Chinese – domination … a merger with Indonesia is probably the best solution for the colony if the inhabitants agree’. Having been suitably briefed by Kissinger, Ford met Suharto on 6 December. The meeting specifically focused on US and Indonesian uncertainty following the end of the Vietnam War. Suharto turned the conversation to East Timor, asking Ford for US ‘understanding if we deem it necessary to take rapid or drastic action [in East Timor]’. Ford replied that ‘we will understand and will not press you on the issue. We understand the problem you have and the intentions you have’. Kissinger highlighted the US concern regarding Indonesian use of US arms during the invasion, but ultimately stressed
that ‘whatever you do succeeds quickly. We would be able to influence the reaction in America if whatever happens happens after we return’. This conversation highlights US concerns regarding the regional environment, and the importance of Indonesia to the US in its regional strategic calculations. Evidence suggests that Indonesia sought to maximize its regional power, commensurate to that role. Clearly, the US made a conscious decision to aid Indonesia in its policy towards East Timor. The US ‘was grateful for political support and corporate access to what President Nixon called “by far the greatest prize in the South-East Asian area” and was glad to do a painless … favour for a loyal friend’. The meeting between Ford and Suharto was instrumental in removing any residual concerns Suharto had regarding a potentially negative response to invasion by the US government.

Indonesia and Australia: a most important neighbour

Australia’s positioning in relation to Indonesia meant that a friendly relationship was vital to Canberra’s security and defence. In the 20th century, Indonesia has been instrumental in providing ‘a strategic shield to Australia’s vulnerable and sparsely populated northern approaches’. At the height of the Cold War, this strategic shield was of significant importance, preventing potential intervention from external powers. Because Indonesia had the ‘capacity to disturb or enhance the regional balance of power, because Indonesia can facilitate or check Australia’s entrée to regional political forums and because of great power interests in Indonesia, Australian diplomats have been loath to offend Indonesia’. Instead, Australia has been confronted with the challenge of how to ‘reconcile its Western origins with its Asian geography in creating a viable security identity’. Australia has sought to address this issue through stable relations with Indonesia. Within Canberra, it was believed that maintaining Indonesia’s territorial integrity was ‘the best way of maintaining geopolitical ‘stability’ in Australia’s corner of Southeast Asia’. In such a diverse nation, Suharto’s firm control of the archipelago, especially his anti-communism and intolerance of separatism, was accepted as the key to Australia’s own territorial security. Indonesia was ‘viewed as a staunch anti-communist regime that was a positive force for regional stability and moderation’. Richard Woolcott, who became Australian Ambassador in March 1975, admitted taking a ‘pragmatic or realist approach to international affairs’ in his dealings with Indonesia. Woolcott argued that if Indonesia were ‘intent on a policy of [East Timor] absorption … Australia [was] in no
position to deny that intention, any effort [would] only cause harm to a bilateral relationship so important to Australia’s security’. 97

While a positive bilateral relationship with Indonesia was an important interest for Australia, this does not mean that Canberra did not have wider geopolitical concerns regarding the Cold War regional environment in 1975. In an Australian government memorandum regarding the strategic significance of Timor to Australia and its relation to a major power threat, it was stated that ‘access specifically to Portuguese Timor by a major power would: greatly facilitate the application of strategic pressure against Indonesia to make additional base areas in eastern Indonesia available to it. Indonesia might well be susceptible to such pressure; seriously prejudice the potential military capability of Australia or its allies to support Indonesia against such pressure; and enable the development of air bases which would enhance a major power’s operational capabilities’. 98 Canberra was also of the opinion that endorsing Indonesian actions in East Timor would open the Australian government to oil and gas drilling rights in the region’s waters. 99 As Minister in the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, John McCredie stated that ‘Indonesian absorption of Timor makes geopolitical sense. Any other long-term solution would be potentially disruptive of both Indonesia and the region. Its [absorption] would help confirm our seabed agreement with Indonesia’. 100 As previously highlighted, the Timor Gap is rich in oil and natural gases. The seabed border agreement negotiated between Indonesia and Australia in May 1971 to delimit the area east of Timor held the promise of vast future gains. 101 It is apparent from Australian documents that Timorese oil was a major interest. In a submission to Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Don Willesee in May 1974, it was confirmed that Australia had direct interests in Timor, with oil specifically referred to at that time. 102

As will be shown, successive Australian governments assumed a position on Indonesia’s East Timor policy that conformed to these core state interests. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam made it clear to Suharto that he supported the integration of East Timor into the Indonesian archipelago. Despite a succeeding Fraser government initially criticizing this approach, once in office, there was little change to this policy. Australia’s geo-strategic interests were to take precedence over independence for East Timor.
The Whitlam Government (December 1972–November 1975)

Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam played a vital role in supporting and enabling Suharto’s East Timor policy. Within Canberra, ‘Timor policy was … Whitlam policy’. Whitlam had a ‘principled aversion to mini-states’, and believed that it ‘was better to have one neighbour [Indonesia] to deal with than a proliferation of small countries’. According to this view, an independent East Timor would only succeed in destabilizing the region and its neighbours. Whitlam also perceived ‘the separation of West and East Timor as a legacy of colonialism, and indicated he was prepared to dismiss East Timorese claims for independence in order to rectify this “colonial accident”’. As part of an East Timor enquiry conducted by the Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Whitlam testified that he had inherited his view of East Timor from preceding governments. The Menzies government (1949–66) believed that Portuguese Timor would inevitably become the object of Indonesian attention, and that this was only a matter of time and could not be prevented. Mr Whitlam told the Committee that analysis of this period ‘came to the same conclusion, that East Timor was non-viable politically and economically’. This belief underscored Whitlam’s approach to East Timor, which was articulated in a meeting with President Suharto in September 1974. Prior to Whitlam’s meeting with Suharto, Senator Willesee, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, ‘approved a policy that gave emphasis to self-determination for the East Timorese people’. At the meeting, however, Whitlam took a different line to the brief. This was to have significant consequences for Australia’s future East Timor policy.

At the September meeting, Whitlam informed Suharto that ‘first, he believed that Portuguese Timor should become part of Indonesia. Second, this should happen in accordance with the properly expressed wishes of the people of Portuguese Timor’. Whitlam emphasized ‘that this was not yet Government policy but that it was likely to become that’. Whitlam stated his belief that ‘Portuguese Timor was too small to be independent. It was economically unviable. Independence would be unwelcome to Indonesia, Australia and to other countries in the region, because an independent Portuguese Timor would inevitably become the focus of attention of others outside the region’. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs prepared a background paper, dated 11 September 1974, to take account of the approach adopted by Whitlam during his meeting with Suharto. In the paper, it
stated that Australia ‘shares [Indonesia’s] belief that the voluntary union of Portuguese Timor with Indonesia, on the basis of an internationally acceptable act of self determination, would seem to serve the objective of decolonization, and at the same time the interests of stability in the region’.\textsuperscript{110} Whitlam ‘dismissed advice that by acquiescing in Indonesian demands he was in fact encouraging a hardline faction led by Ali Murtopo and other generals’.\textsuperscript{111} This was despite evidence that ‘already for some months previously the Indonesians had settled on a policy of incorporation’.\textsuperscript{112}

Whitlam met with Suharto again in April 1975, at Townsville, Queensland. At this meeting, Whitlam told Suharto that ‘he still hoped that Portuguese Timor would be associated with or integrated into Indoneisa; but this result should be achieved in a way which would not upset the Australian people’.\textsuperscript{113} He informed Suharto that ‘the majority of the people of Portuguese Timor had no sense of politics, and that in time they would come to recognize their ethnic kinship with their Indonesian neighbours’. President Suharto informed Whitlam that while Indonesia ‘had no territorial ambition to include the territory of Portuguese Timor into the Republic of Indonesia’, Jakarta had ‘concluded that integration with Indonesia was the best solution’.

In a bid to support Jakarta, Canberra refused to assist the FRETILIN administration that was established in Dili following the UDT coup.\textsuperscript{114} José Ramos-Horta, Foreign Minister and founder of FRETILIN, travelled to Australia with the hope of getting the Australian Consulate in Dili reopened, only to be informed by Canberra that this would not be possible, as it would offend the Indonesians.\textsuperscript{115} As Ambassador Woolcott confirmed in a letter dated 24 September to Canberra Times journalist Bruce Juddery: ‘the alternatives now seem to be a de facto FRETILIN Government or the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. Neither will involve a genuine act of self-determination … basically, this situation is Portugal’s – not Indonesia’s – fault. Given this Hobbes choice, I believe Australia’s interests are better served by association with Indonesia than by independence’.\textsuperscript{116}

Similarly, in a leaked August 1975 telegram, Woolcott stated that ‘we leave events to take their course, and act in a way which would be designed to minimize the public impact in Australia and show private understanding to Indonesia of their problems. I am recommending a pragmatic rather than a principled stand but that is what national interest and foreign policy is all about’.\textsuperscript{117}

Australian support for Indonesia was not merely tacit in nature. From the Whitlam government onwards, a pro-active role was taken
whereby Australia “‘neutralized” negative public opinion about Indonesia … and aided Indonesia in the diplomatic sphere’.118 One example of this is Australia’s continued support for Indonesia following the killing of five Australian journalists at Balibó in 1975. In the process of monitoring Indonesian military radio, Australian intelligence had become immediately aware that Indonesia’s Kopassandha troops were responsible for the attack. These troops, among others, had received substantial military training by the Australian, British and US governments.119 Nevertheless, ‘far from criticizing Indonesia or demanding a proper investigation of the killings, Australia sought to deflect attention from the available evidence’.120 Canberra ‘publicly accept[ed] the false Indonesian claim that the “Balibó Five” had been caught in the crossfire during a battle between FRETILIN and UDT forces’.121 According to James Dunn, ‘the fact that … we did not even protest was to the Indonesian military a green light’.122 Dunn confirmed that Whitlam ‘astonished the Indonesians by making it very clear [in 1974] that his preferred solution was that East Timor go to Indonesia … the Indonesians didn’t expect Australia to be so generous. Whitlam’s words encouraged the military to believe that this was the way to go’.123

The Fraser Government (November 1975–March 1983)

By 11 November 1975, Malcolm Fraser had been appointed to replace Whitlam as Prime Minister. According to Whitlam, this change in leadership constituted ‘the last refraining influence on Indonesian action’.124 After this date, ‘Australia had a Government which, in Indonesian eyes, shared its suspicion of communist insurgency, and would plainly welcome any action to supress it’.125 Indeed, Fraser did appear more concerned about communist influence than Whitlam. Fraser depicted ‘the Soviet Union as bent on preponderance’, and argued that ‘the Soviet Union still seeks to expand its influence throughout the world in order to achieve Soviet primacy’.126

Despite an apparent joint concern with Indonesia regarding communist influence in the region, the Fraser government set out to publicly distance itself from Indonesia’s actions in East Timor. On 26 November 1975, Mr Fraser indicated that his caretaker government ‘would do nothing about reported Indonesian bombings in East Timor … the tragic events that were occurring were a direct result of the barrenness of the foreign policy of the Whitlam Government, which the caretaker Government had to continue’.127
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Andrew Peacock, also ‘initially took a pro-independence stand and was highly critical of the Whitlam government’s handling of the entire East Timor issue and acquiescence in Indonesian policy’. However, evidence suggests that this was little more than public posturing. On 2 October 1975, Peacock stated in Parliament: ‘we understand Indonesia’s concern. The events of the civil war in Timor are taking place in an area at the end of the Indonesian island archipelago. Who can doubt the concern that Indonesia must feel’. The Indonesian government ‘took the statement as an assurance that an incoming Fraser government would maintain continuity with the Timor policy of the Whitlam government’.

Peacock reinforced this statement in a meeting with Mr Harry Tjan of the Jakarta Centre for Strategic and International Studies, and Mr Lim Bian Kie of General Moerdani’s Special Operations Group, on 24 September 1975. An Indonesian record of the meeting stated: ‘Mr Peacock and his party would not protest against Indonesia if Indonesia is forced to do something about Portuguese Timor, for example to “go in” to restore peace there … basically he respects Whitlam’s policy in this Portuguese Timor problem, and he is personally of the same opinion’. This disclosure by Indonesian officials of ‘the accommodating nature’ of Peacock, while on holiday in Bali in September 1975, ‘was strongly denied by Peacock when he was questioned about the matter in the federal parliament’.

In addition to support from Peacock, a message from Prime Minister Fraser, delivered to President Suharto on 25 November 1975, ‘had been taken by the Indonesians as supportive of their actions in Timor’. The message referred to ‘the great importance which Mr Fraser attaches to Australia’s relations with Indonesia’. It went on to say: ‘the Prime Minister … recognizes the need for Indonesia to have an appropriate solution for the problem of Portuguese Timor’. Suharto is reported to have ‘greatly appreciated’ the Prime Minister’s message, stating that ‘Indonesia too attached great importance to its relations with Australia’. With regard to Timor, Suharto stated that ‘he was very pleased Mr Fraser recognized the need for Indonesia to have an appropriate solution of the Timor question. He said there was ‘no change’ in Indonesian policy. Portuguese Timor should be decolonized ‘properly’. Indonesian interests however needed to be taken into account’.

According to Whitlam, ‘from 11 November Indonesia knew that any “anti-Communist” action she took would have support in Canberra’. Whitlam also alleged that Fraser knew beforehand that Indonesia planned to invade East Timor. This was a ‘result of his
knowing that Australians were evacuated a couple of days before’. Fraser and the Leader of the National Country Party, Mr Anthony, stated ‘if one thing was better calculated than anything else to incite the Indonesians to take action … it was the fear that there would be communist control in East Timor’.

**Summary: Indonesia obtains great power commitments**

What is clear from the foregoing discussion is that obtaining Washington and Canberra support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy gave Suharto the confidence to act. As the vanguard state, Indonesia was able to utilize the environment in Southeast Asia in 1975 to gain great power commitments to secure its own interests. Both the United States and Australia relied on strong relations with Indonesia, to secure their own vital interests in an uncertain Cold War regional environment. Stable relations with Indonesia enhanced regional security and offered gains with respect to enhanced power. The securing of vital interests took precedence over the independence of a territory believed to be ‘too small, backwards and isolated to survive on its own’. By late November 1975, Jakarta was confident that a full-scale invasion of East Timor would not result in an international backlash, or any external power interference.

**ASEAN institutional cohesion**

It was not only external power backing that Suharto was anxious to obtain in advance of a full-scale invasion of East Timor. Regional support was also a vital component in Indonesia’s plans. By obtaining unanimous support within ASEAN, Suharto could portray a united regional front with respect to Indonesian actions in East Timor. A united ASEAN could help to deflect any unwanted international attention, and lend the invasion an appearance of legitimacy. As early as 1974, Suharto took steps to realize this goal. To understand ASEAN state responses to Indonesia’s East Timor policy, it is beneficial to consider the history of the Association, and the regional environment in which it found itself in 1975.

Suharto began his presidency with a desire to establish improved relations with neighbouring states, as evidenced by the creation of ASEAN on 8 August 1967, less than six months into his presidency. The establishment of the Association also came one year after President
Suharto ended former President Sukarno’s policy of *Konfrontasi* with Malaysia. For the remaining founders of ASEAN, the formation of the Association was a way to draw Indonesia ‘into a limited security community’, therefore preventing another ‘confrontation’ occurring between Indonesia and the ASEAN states. Indonesian intervention in East Timor came only eight years after ASEAN’s establishment. There was the possibility that open criticism of Indonesia could jeopardize improved regional relations. As such, any ASEAN state unease regarding Indonesia’s East Timor policy was ‘muted by the dictates of realpolitik’.

An uncertain regional environment compounded this problem. Vietnamese communist expansion, with Soviet backing, was a primary fear for the ASEAN states. In June 1975, two months after US defeat in North Vietnam, Philip Habib visited Southeast Asia. In a memorandum from Dr Kissinger to President Ford summarizing the trip, Kissinger stated that ‘in each country it is believed that Hanoi’s success in Indochina has brought about a fundamental power shift in the region. All the Southeast Asian countries fear Hanoi, which they now see as a major force in the sub-region with plenty of arms, revolutionary zeal and the momentum of success’. A vulnerable and independent Timor could invite intervention by external powers, and as such was met with much regional consternation.

As early as September 1974, Malaysia had been in support of Indonesia’s policy of integration with East Timor. Officials argued that if an independent East Timor ‘becomes a communist stronghold, it will endanger the security in the Southeast Asian region’. The Indonesian invasion was also supported by the Philippines, which stated the belief that ‘the people of Portuguese Timor had invited Indonesia to help them’ and cautioned that a ‘power vacuum … would threaten peace in the region’. According to ASEAN officials, ‘Chinese and Soviet support for the FRETILIN group in East Timor might slow the growing friendship between ASEAN countries and the two communist nations’. As such, the ASEAN members ‘were closely watching moves by China and the Soviet Union on the Timor issue, to see if these would be followed by material assistance, including arms’.

It is also important to note that the annexation of small neighbouring territories was not an unusual occurrence in the Southeast Asian region. Indonesia annexed Aceh in 1949 and West Papua in 1969. This resulted in independence movements and attempts at secessionism, which represented an internal and external threat. Secessionism of various ethnic groups, such as the Patani United Liberation
Organization (PULO) in Southern Thailand, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Southern Philippines, have also waged long-running campaigns for independence. This meant that many regional states could relate to Indonesia’s predicament following decolonization in East Timor, and had some sympathy for Indonesia’s situation. Indeed, evidence suggests that Malaysia’s staunch support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy was due to designs Kuala Lumpur had on neighbouring Brunei. Malaysia believed Brunei should become another state in its own federation, despite Brunei’s strong opposition to the plan.\textsuperscript{148} Brunei’s integration with Malaysia was attractive to Kuala Lumpur, due to ‘Brunei’s awkward geographical position in the middle of Malaysia’s north Borneo territories’, and because ‘it possesses oil reserves … and the Sultan holds very substantial sterling cash reserves’.\textsuperscript{149} It was reported in Australia that ‘the possibility of a Malaysian takeover of the state may cast some light on recent Malaysian statements on the crisis in East Timor. One Government spokesman recently described the FRETILIN party, which has the upper hand in East Timor, as ‘communist’ and said the Government supports Indonesia’s position’.\textsuperscript{150}

For Malaysia to realize its territorial ambitions in Brunei, ‘Indonesian approval would be a necessity. The Malaysian stand on Timor might be seen as part of an exercise in mutual self-help’.\textsuperscript{151} This view is supported in a telegram sent from the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur to the Secretary of State in Washington in September 1975, in which Australian and US officials expressed the view that ‘GOM [Government of Malaysia] would back Jakarta politically … in addition to close military-security ties maintained between GOM and GOI since Suharto came to power, Malaysians in past two years have given increasing indications of wanting to absorb Brunei at some future date thus would find it in own interests to support Timor take-over’.\textsuperscript{152}

According to Gough Whitlam, Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Andrew Peacock ‘had been under the illusion that Indonesia could be influenced through her partners in ASEAN … the ASEAN countries soon disabused him … It had become clear to me that ASEAN would not become involved after I had spoken to Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore on 8 August 1975 and to Tun Razak in Canberra in mid-October’.\textsuperscript{153} During a meeting with Lee Kuan Yew in August 1975, Whitlam reportedly asked ‘whether Australia and Singapore, as members of the Five-Power Agreement and the Commonwealth, and as neighbours of the area, should confer about East Timor’.\textsuperscript{154} However, ‘Mr Lee would not have anything to do with the proposition’.\textsuperscript{155} The October 1975 meeting between Razak and Whitlam was summarized in a telegram
from the Embassy in Canberra to the Secretary of State in Washington. It stated: ‘Both Whitlam and Razak expressed support for eventual Indonesian takeover of Timor. Both agreed not to criticize recent Indonesian military steps and expressed regret that [Indonesia] hadn’t acted more promptly following Portuguese pull out’.  

In its bid to aid Indonesia, Malaysia hosted Apodeti leadership, the Timorese political faction advocating integration with Indonesia. Malaysia also disseminated anti-FRETILIN propaganda, and supplied weapons to Indonesian special force troops. Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, and Malaysia’s Prime Minister Razak began issuing statements about Timor becoming a base for communist subversion. Malaysia ‘even broadcast support for the decision of Indonesia to send troops to East Timor’. A telegram from the Indonesian Embassy to the Secretary of State in Washington summarized the ASEAN response to events in East Timor. It stated that ‘ASEAN neighbours would probably react mildly, perhaps even expressing “understanding” of Indonesian concerns … (indeed, there are reports Malaysia has urged [Indonesia] to seize Portuguese Timor quickly)’.  

Ultimately, concerns regarding the regional environment, coupled with a desire to maintain good relations with Indonesia, meant that the ASEAN states were not going to oppose Indonesian actions in East Timor. Support for Indonesia could also help achieve regional state interests regarding other neighbouring territories. The various ASEAN states voiced their support for Indonesia, and coupled with external power support, Suharto was now in a position to act and launch a full-scale invasion of East Timor.

**Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor (December 1975)**

East Timor’s civil war provided Indonesia with the pretext it had been waiting for to intervene in the territory. Blaming the civil violence on FRETILIN, and wary of losing East Timor to independence, Suharto began preparations for a full-scale military intervention. It was reported, on 4 September 1975, that special Indonesian troops had been sent into East Timor to fight FRETILIN, infiltrate and organize UDT and Apodeti, and to encourage pro-Indonesian sentiments. On 7 October, Indonesia captured the border city of Batugadé, as well as nearby Balibó. In an effort to prevent Indonesia from furthering its plan of annexation, FRETILIN unilaterally declared independence for the Democratic Republic of East Timor on 28 November. It
received recognition from twelve nation-states, but not the Portuguese government. This meant that the UN continued to recognize Portugal as the legitimate administrative authority in East Timor.\textsuperscript{162}

Two days after East Timor’s declaration of independence, the Indonesian government influenced members from four East Timorese parties: the UDT, Apodeti, the KOTA and Trabalhista, to sign the Balibó Declaration, which sought integration with Indonesia.\textsuperscript{163} Indonesia was therefore able to use the Balibó Declaration to justify its occupation of East Timor as being in the interests of the Timorese majority. Indonesia launched a full-scale invasion of East Timor on 7 December 1975, less than 24 hours after Suharto’s meeting with President Ford in Jakarta. By noon, Indonesian troops had taken Dili, after combat with FALINTIL, the armed military wing of FRETILIN. Observers stated that ‘warships shelled Dili before dawn [on 6 December] … Indonesian paratroops began shooting down people in the streets as soon as they landed’.\textsuperscript{164} A second invasion on 10 December led to the seizure of Baucau, East Timor’s second largest town. By April 1976, some 35,000 Indonesian soldiers, one-tenth of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), occupied the Portuguese colony and further subjected it to Indonesian rule.\textsuperscript{165} Ninety percent of Indonesian armed forces utilized US equipment at this time.\textsuperscript{166}

Heavily outnumbered, FALINTIL troops fled to the mountains, where they began guerrilla warfare operations. In the first year of Indonesian occupation, it is believed 60,000 East Timorese were killed, averaging 10 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{167} According to Kiernan, the invasion and subsequent occupation took the lives of 21–26 percent of the country’s population.\textsuperscript{168} It is believed that the majority of these deaths occurred in the first five years of occupation, with between 116,000 and 174,000 killed.\textsuperscript{169} The list of atrocities carried out by the TNI is vast, including massacres, public executions, rape, torture, starvation, political imprisonment, forced sterilizations, enforced marriages, and destruction of fields and villages using bombs and napalm.\textsuperscript{170} During this period, nearly all of the major FRETILIN leaders were killed or captured. Indonesia’s ‘extensive and indiscriminate killing’ succeeded in alienating the population, ‘giving FRETILIN wide popular support’.\textsuperscript{171} James Dunn, former Australian consul in East Timor, reported that refugee accounts ‘of Indonesia’s behaviour in East Timor, suggest that the plight of these people might well constitute, relatively speaking, the most serious case of contravention of human rights facing the world at this time’.\textsuperscript{172}
Indonesian incorporation of East Timor as the 27th province of the Republic was formally completed on 18 July 1976. Ali Alatas, Indonesia’s Ambassador to the UN and future Foreign Minister, summarized the Indonesian position, stating that Indonesia only entered Timor, ‘after Portugal’s precipitate abandonment of the territory and its failure to fulfil its responsibilities as administering authority, and in the face of FRETILIN’s mounting reign of terror against its own people’. For the next 25 years, the Indonesian government would claim that the majority of East Timorese supported integration, a claim unverifiable due to a ban on foreign journalists.

**Invasion repercussions: Indonesian resistance to sovereignty violation**

The Indonesian invasion of East Timor violated two principles of international law: the principle that states shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state; and the principle of self-determination of peoples. According to a representative of Portugal, Indonesian military aggression in East Timor ‘had abruptly altered the course of the decolonization process which should and could have been concluded peacefully’. Portugal chose to sever diplomatic relations with Indonesia, and to call for an end to Indonesian intervention. On 12 December 1975 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3485 by a recorded vote of 72 to 10 with 43 abstentions. Within this Resolution, the General Assembly ‘strongly deplored the military intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in Portuguese Timor [and] called upon Indonesia … to withdraw without delay its armed forces from the territory’.

The Portuguese Government also requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council, ‘to bring an end to the military aggression by Indonesia and to establish conditions that would enable the decolonization process to continue’. The Security Council considered the question of Timor at five meetings held between 15 and 22 December 1975. José Ramos-Horta, who said he was speaking on behalf of the Central Committee of FRETILIN and of the Government of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, said that he did not deny the existence of a certain common cultural and ethnic origins of the peoples of East Timor and Indonesia, but he refused to consider it as sufficient reason for integration of the territory into Indonesia. Ramos-Horta called on ‘the Security Council to
condemn Indonesia’s aggression and to send a fact-finding mission to assess the situation in East Timor and enforce the decisions of the United Nations’. The Security Council adopted Resolution 384, which ‘deplored the intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in East Timor’. The Council also ‘requested the Secretary-General to send urgently a special representative to East Timor to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation and to establish contact with all the parties in the territory and all states concerned in order to ensure the implementation of this resolution’.

On 12 March 1976, Special Representative, Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi, entered East Timor to assess the situation and to establish contact with the parties. Winspeare noted that the Government of the Democratic Republic of East Timor ‘had suggested a referendum with a choice between independence and integration with Indonesia … Indonesia had maintained that the decision of the Provisional Government for integration with Indonesia should be subjected to ratification by East Timor people’. In the UN General Assembly, the US ‘abstained in 1975 and voted against every East Timor resolution for the next seven years’. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan, US Ambassador to the UN in 1975–76 confirmed in his memoirs, the US ‘wished things to turn out as they did [in East Timor], and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success’. This approach, adopted by a number of influential Western powers, prevented the UN from providing an effective response to the crisis. Between 1977 and 1980, ‘the US and other supporters of Jakarta … worked to remove East Timor from the agenda of the UN decolonization committee’.

Despite UN resolutions remaining in force throughout Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor, from 1982 onwards, consideration of the East Timor issue was effectively muted. Very few states came out in support of East Timor. China, which ‘was still committed to supporting anti-colonial movements in the developing world’, endorsed FRETILIN’s declaration of independence. After the invasion, the FRETILIN leader, Xavier do Amaral, ‘declared that China would henceforth speak on behalf of East Timor at the UN’. Although China went on to act as ‘East Timor’s primary patron’, supplying diplomatic and financial support, even this had ‘waned by 1978 when it [China] needed ASEAN support to fight the Vietnamese’.

The Ford government’s initial response to Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor was to delay any further arms sales pending a review by the State Department.\textsuperscript{190} Use of US arms in the invasion of East Timor violated a 1958 treaty between the US and Indonesia limiting the use of US-supplied weapons to ‘legitimate self-defence’.\textsuperscript{191} Kissinger and his officials were aware that the invasion of East Timor did not fall within the scope of the arms treaty. Kissinger complained: ‘And we can’t construe a Communist government in the middle of Indonesia as self-defence … I know what the law is but how can it be in the US national interest for us to … kick the Indonesians in the teeth?’\textsuperscript{192} In accordance with Kissinger’s view, military equipment continued to flow to Indonesia.\textsuperscript{193} During the six-month review period undertaken by the Department of State, the US ‘made four new offers of military equipment sales to Indonesia including maintenance and spare parts for the Rockwell OV-10 Bronco aircraft, designed specifically for counterinsurgency operations and employed during the invasion of East Timor’.\textsuperscript{194} In a February 1976 memorandum to Brent Scowcroft, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, Ambassador Newsom’s concerns were expressed with regards to military supply to Indonesia. It stated that ‘congressional action could end … military assistance to Indonesia’, and as such the state should ‘undertake a discreet survey of possible alternative measures to insure that Indonesia would still have access to American equipment’.\textsuperscript{195} In the Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting on 17 June 1976 Mr Habib stated that the US had ‘not objected in UN Security Council debates’, and as such the Indonesians were ‘quite happy with the position we’ve taken. We’ve resumed, as you know, all of our normal relations with them; and there isn’t any problem involved’.\textsuperscript{196} Kissinger replied, ‘not very willingly. Illegally and beautifully’.\textsuperscript{197}


The Carter administration largely continued the Ford Administration’s East Timor policy, despite a ‘professed commitment to human rights’.\textsuperscript{198} The US Congress criticized Indonesia’s invasion and occupation of East Timor as being illegal. However, Michael Armacost of the US National Security Council Staff stated in June 1977, that ‘the Indonesian decision is irreversible … the US government has accepted it. Continued congressional hearings are regarded as
unwarranted and mischievous interference in their [the Indonesians] internal affairs’. In mid-1977, Carter administration officials blocked attempts made by US Congressman Don Fraser to obtain a copy of the Ford-Suharto meeting in 1975. In April 1977, a congressional delegation led by Lester Wolff visited East Timor. Indonesian military officials escorted Wolff on a ‘staged tour of the capital, Dili, during which they were greeted by cheering crowds and met with hand-picked Timorese collaborators’. Upon returning to Washington, Wolff blamed Timorese deaths on FRETILIN guerrillas, stating that ‘the Indonesians should have entered the fray much earlier and perhaps more lives could have been spared’.

Indonesia’s request for military aid in 1978 ‘amounted to twice the quantity of aid the Ford administration had supplied’. US Vice President Walter Mondale met with Suharto in May 1978, with Suharto reported to have ‘very much appreciated [US] approval of the F-5 sale … but of more immediate importance, it needs a squadron of A-4s and a light arms factory’, all of which Mondale confirmed had been approved. With regard to East Timor, Mondale ‘reaffirmed that the Carter administration accepted the position of its predecessor and that it does not question the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia’. Mondale noted however, ‘that there are problems on how to deal with our mutual concerns regarding East Timor and how to handle [the] public relations aspect of this problem’. In this respect, Mondale advised Suharto to allow a ‘private voluntary organization to be permitted to send people into East Timor … this would have a beneficial effect on US public opinion’.

Testifying in February 1978 before the House of Representatives International Relations Committee hearing on human rights, Robert Oakley, a senior Department of State official, reframed Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor as counter-insurgency, stating it was a legitimate response to ‘armed groups such as FRETILIN who are employing armed forces against the government’. This gave US military aid a ‘façade of legitimacy’. Ultimately, the US continued diplomatic, economic and military support to the Suharto regime following its invasion of East Timor. Coupled with the government’s attempts to manipulate events in Congress and at the UN, this prevented any intervention in East Timor, from the UN or powers external to the region. As Secretary of State Cyrus Vance confirmed, ‘now, insofar as speaking out on human rights issues abroad is concerned, we will speak out when we believe it is desirable to do so … In each case we must balance a political concern for human rights against economic and security goals’.
One country notably in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution 3485 was Australia. This was despite the Fraser caretaker government implying to Suharto in advance of the East Timor invasion that it would follow an acquiescent policy, as implemented by the previous Whitlam government. For the Fraser government, ‘the choice was between silent acquiescence or the encouragement of an active role by the United Nations which would keep the spotlight on the issue and would embarrass Indonesia in view of the heavy United Nations majority opposed to its actions in Timor’. While Australian support for UN Resolution 3485 appeared to be a sign of Australia moving away from Indonesia’s East Timor policy, this was undermined by the ‘ineffectiveness’ of Australia’s actions with respect to the UN envoy, Dr Winspeare-Guicciardi.

As part of the UN Security Council Resolution 384, Winspeare was sent to East Timor to make an assessment of the situation there. Winspeare therefore sought access to FRETILIN controlled areas. However, Australian actions largely hindered this access. Australia began by shutting down a FRETILIN controlled radio in Darwin, citing that this was ‘an illegal transmitter’ and not appropriate for purpose. The Australian government then declined to fly the envoy to FRETILIN territory, claiming this could ‘be done only when security for the aircraft and its mission was assured’. Australian Foreign Minister Peacock reacted to criticism that the Australian government had given in to Indonesian pressure to deny Winspeare access to East Timor, stating that ‘the uncertainties of the security situation precluded the sending of any Australian aircraft into the war zone in Timor’. However, ‘pro-FRETILIN elements in Australia claimed that a high-level source in DFA [Department of Foreign Affairs] “confirmed” that … Peacock had agreed during his recent meetings with … Malik in Indonesia to block Winspeare’s attempt to reach FRETILIN-held areas in Timor from Australian territory’. This was an allegation that Peacock strongly denied, ‘both publicly and privately’.

According to the findings of the Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, the Fraser government developed a twofold policy regarding East Timor: ‘Wanting to differentiate the new government’s position from that of the Whitlam government, which was described as “acquiescent”, on the grounds that Australia could not afford to condone Indonesia’s use of force in incorporating East Timor’. On 4 March 1976, Australia’s Foreign
Affairs Minister Peacock called ‘for a cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of Indonesian troops, [and the] implementation of a genuine act of self-determination’. At the same time, however, Peacock stated: ‘Australia should not think of taking unilateral action against Indonesia over the East Timor issue … it would not serve Australia’s interests to embark on a collision course with Indonesia’. Peacock believed ‘damage to Australia-Indonesia relations could be kept at a tolerable level if both sides respected each other’s interests and agreed to differ over Timor’.

However, during Fraser’s visit to Jakarta in October 1976, ‘the Indonesians made it clear that they would no longer accept the Peacock formula: continued Australian government criticism of the integration process would be regarded as a display of hostility toward Indonesia’. It was therefore concluded that ‘Australia’s interests lay in hastening, not obstructing, the spread of Indonesian control’. The meeting ‘represented the end of official, albeit ambiguous, Australian opposition to the Indonesian invasion’. Following the meeting, the Fraser government began ‘a phase of tacit support for the Indonesian policy of eliminating all East Timorese resistance’. Notably, neither Fraser nor Peacock reiterated the policy expressed by Peacock on 4 March, ‘although they were pressed to do so on many occasions’. In a statement to Parliament on 20 October 1976, Peacock said ‘the Government had not recognized Indonesia’s incorporation of East Timor, but had to accept “certain realities”’. Australia had to take into account ‘Indonesia’s view that East Timor is now part of Indonesia and that this situation is not likely to change’. Australia abstained from the UN Resolution on East Timor held in 1976. On 20 January 1978, Peacock ‘announced that the Australian government had decided to ‘recognize de facto’ that East Timor was part of Indonesia, even though Australia remained ‘critical of the means by which integration was brought about’. In March 1978, it was announced that Australia and Indonesia had agreed to negotiate a permanent seabed boundary south of East Timor. On 15 December 1978, Peacock announced that ‘Australia would give de jure recognition of Indonesia’s sovereignty over East Timor early in 1979’.

ASEAN capitulates to Indonesia

With the exception of Singapore, all the ASEAN states voted against UN General Assembly Resolution 3485. Singapore’s abstention, seemingly at odds with ASEAN solidarity, can arguably be explained
by ‘an inability to endorse Indonesia’s conduct without appearing to prejudice its own vulnerable independence’, where ASEAN solidarity ‘would not be permitted to obstruct the defence of national interests’. Lim Bian Kie, aide to Indonesia’s Ali Murtopo, confirmed on 24 December that ‘Suharto is ‘furious’ over Singapore’s abstention on UNGA [UN General Assembly] Timor Resolution when all other ASEAN countries joined Indonesia in opposing it. Suharto thought he had obtained Lee’s ‘understanding’ of Indonesian position on Timor during early Sept[ember] Bali meeting, and Singapore vote came as very cold shower’. Bien Kie stated that there was speculation that ‘Suharto will seek reason to abort planned ASEAN summit, and it [is] certain that [Indonesia] is much less likely to be amenable to increased intra-ASEAN economic cooperation which Singapore favours’. Bien Kie explained ‘that only rationale [Indonesia] can see for Lee’s action is Brunei, where Singapore opposes Malaysia’s territorial ambitions. Indonesian leadership was chagrined that GOS [Government of Singapore] apparently considered Brunei more important than relationship with Indonesia’.

Tan Boon Seng, Singapore’s Deputy Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that Singapore’s decision to abstain on the vote on Timor was taken ‘at the highest level’. In explaining this decision, Tan confirmed three basic reasons why Singapore abstained. First, ‘for reasons related to its own national security, the GOS was fundamentally opposed to armed intervention by any country … GOS felt it must be consistent in supporting this principle, and did not believe it could make an exception even when it involved action by a friendly ASEAN colleague’. Second, ‘the forcible take-over of Timor by Indonesian forces would provide a bad precedent and could conceivably encourage Malaysia in a similar take-over of Brunei, it could encourage at some future time possibly hostile regimes to take aggressive action against Singapore’. While Tan admitted Singapore is ‘in a considerably more secure position than odd colonial remnants like Brunei or Timor … in geographical size Singapore was smaller than both of them’. Third, Singapore felt that Indonesia ‘must understand that Singapore was not prepared to go along automatically accommodating and supporting every twist and sudden turn of Indonesian diplomacy. GOS support should not be taken for granted and the sooner Indonesia realized this the better off Indonesian/Singapore relations and ASEAN would be’.

However, this position was not a sustainable one. Angered by Singapore’s actions, Indonesia deliberately sought to boycott Singaporean initiatives within ASEAN. Singapore’s efforts to promote
an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) were not accepted by Indonesia, and were not adopted at the ASEAN Bali Summit in 1976. Singapore was also excluded from ‘security and intelligence briefings’. By late 1976, Singapore bowed to Indonesian pressure and joined its Southeast Asian neighbours in support of the East Timor invasion. During an unofficial visit made by Suharto to Singapore in November 1976, ‘personal rapport’ was re-established between the two leaders. As Lee later confirmed, ‘I [told Suharto] Singapore … accepted Timor as part of Indonesia, but we could not publicly endorse its invasion and occupation. He [Suharto] accepted my position that if we had voted with Indonesia we would have sent the world a wrong signal about our own security’. Singapore ultimately joined its Southeast Asian neighbours in helping with the dissemination of anti-FRETILIN propaganda.

On 13 December, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry issued a statement which ‘blamed Timor’s troubles on Portuguese neglect and abandonment of responsibility, [and] noted that “therefore there is no legitimate authority capable of maintaining peace and order in the territory”’. It went on to state that the Malaysian government ‘accepts the decision of the Indonesian government to allow Indonesian volunteers to enter Portuguese Timor at the invitation of the moderate groups in order to assist them to restore law and order’. Similarly, it was reported in the Straits Times that ‘the morality of the Indonesian action is under fire from certain quarters but Jakarta simply could not stand idly by and let the leftist FRETILIN seize power unilaterally … Jakarta could not be expected to allow the threat of insurgency at its doorstep’.

By 1976, all ASEAN states were in support of Indonesia’s policy towards East Timor. This is clearly evidenced by the Joint Communiqué released following the Ninth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Manila on 24–26 June 1976. Present at this meeting were all five founding members of ASEAN, who expressed the view that Indonesian actions in East Timor ‘correspond[ed] with the provisions of, the United Nations Security Council Resolutions No.384 … and No.389’. The meeting expressed the view that ‘the solution of the East Timor question would contribute positively to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Southeast Asian region’. The ASEAN states also lobbied to have the discussion dropped from the Decolonization Committee, claiming it ‘constituted interference in Indonesia’s internal affairs’.
Theoretical assessment of Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor (1975)

The 1975 case is an example of ASEAN vanguard state success of resistance to sovereignty violation. The foregoing analysis has attempted to show how the uncertain regional environment of 1975 acted as a catalyst for interest convergence between Indonesia, the US and Australia with regard to Indonesia’s East Timor policy. As the vanguard state, Indonesia had the most compelling interests at stake regarding East Timorese independence. East Timor’s proximate location to Indonesia’s border, and the vacuum that it represented, constituted a threat to Indonesia at that time. A further Indonesian interest was the desire to maximize power regionally through expansion and conquest. Indonesia actively sought external power approval for the invasion of East Timor and the integration of the territory into the archipelago. As evidence suggests, this was a dynamic process, where Indonesia actively sought great-power commitment to regional policies, which were consistent with the interests of both Indonesia and the US and Australia. Jakarta had an active and substantial role in resisting sovereignty violations from other external powers.

For these external powers, positive relations with Indonesia and the security of a key regional ally were important interests that took precedence over independence for East Timor. Clearly, there existed symmetry of interests at this time. Cooperation occurred as a response to regional threat,243 in the form of an aggressive and expansionist communism, and for the pursuit of gains,244 as evidenced by Indonesian and Australian joint oil exploration in the Timor Gap. These external powers actively supported Indonesia, providing weapons, military aid, and actively seeking to deflect diplomatic attention away from Indonesia’s invasion.245 Indonesia also actively sought ASEAN state support, applying pressure where necessary, in order to show a united ASEAN front for Indonesia’s East Timor policy. This was achieved, and evidenced by the Joint Communique released following the Ninth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

The Indonesian invasion of East Timor violated two principles of international law. Despite this, Indonesia was supported in its actions, regionally by the ASEAN states, and externally by the US and Australia. Although condemned by the UN and a large proportion of the international community, Indonesia was not subjected to any sovereignty violation by way of external power intervention in East Timor, which became the archipelago’s 27th province in 1976.
Analysis of the regional environment in 1975 supports the hypothesis that an increase in interest convergence between the Indonesian vanguard state and designated external actors caused the success of Indonesian resistance to sovereignty violation, from powers external to the region.

**Contrasting theoretical arguments**

Interestingly, Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975 is largely absent from the constructivist literature on ASEAN. Indonesia’s invasion represents a direct challenge to the view that a strong ASEAN norm of non-interference exists. It would also appear to contradict the view that ASEAN’s norms and institutions have a largely positive impact on state behaviour. There is no mention of Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in Acharya’s *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*,246 *Whose Ideas Matter?*247 or Ba’s *[Re]Negotiating East and Southeast Asia*.248 Jürgen Haacke briefly mentions the invasion, acknowledging that ‘at no point following Jakarta’s intervention in East Timor in 1975 had the issue formally featured in any ASEAN meeting’.249 This, he argues, is due to Indonesian President Suharto’s rejection of ‘anything that smacked of interference in Indonesia’s internal affairs’.250 Haacke stresses that the non-interference norm is part of a set of norms, conceptualized as a diplomatic and security culture, ‘that has guided the interaction of state/government leaders and senior officials representing the member states of ASEAN’.251 However, at face value, Indonesia’s blatant disregard for the non-interference norm when it invaded East Timor would appear to contradict this interpretation.

One response to the relative silence on East Timor in the constructivist literature is that East Timor was not a member of ASEAN when Indonesia invaded the territory in 1975. As such, technically, Indonesia’s actions do not constitute deviation from the Association’s norms. This is alluded to in Haacke’s discussion of intervention in East Timor, where he states that ‘Indonesia had only been prepared to challenge the principles of the “ASEAN Way” indirectly, by not ascribing to them the status in relations with non-ASEAN countries that they enjoyed at the level of intramural relations’.252 However, Indonesia could have pushed for East Timor’s admission into ASEAN rather than choosing to invade, consolidating an anti-communist bloc of ASEAN states at a time of regional instability. That it did not do so raises serious questions about the importance attributed to ASEAN’s norms by one of ASEAN’s largest and most prominent states.
Like the constructivists, David Jones and Michael Smith pay little attention to Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975. However, their reasons for doing so differ dramatically. For Jones and Smith, one of the outcomes of US retrenchment from the region was ‘that it gave the ASEAN states a new latitude in policy formulation, thereby affording the insecure member states the illusion of international significance’. A joint declaration of sovereignty by Indonesia and Malaysia in 1971 ‘indicated the increasing assertiveness of ASEAN states. Indonesia in particular, as the largest member of ASEAN and aspiring to regional leadership, wished to stake out its various interests in the area’. However, ASEAN initiatives during this period merely revealed ‘the organization’s continuing ambivalence’. This was because the ASEAN states ‘remained ultimately dependent upon the continued American security commitments’. In this view, Indonesia’s increased regional assertiveness is subordinate to the role played by great powers, specifically the US. Similarly, Leifer argues that ‘American policy towards Southeast Asia is an integral, if subordinate, aspect of a wider design in Asia in which the prime object is to ensure that the strategic balance … is not disturbed dramatically, either in a general sense or in respect of a particular sector of the region’. US policy in Asia was therefore focused on ‘a strong flexible military presence to help maintain the balance of power’.

Leifer and Jones and Smith’s emphasis on the role of external powers in the region provides little agency for a state such as Indonesia. However, while evidence suggests that external powers did indeed play a vital role during this period, there is also evidence to suggest that Indonesia played an active role in securing its own interests. Indeed, Suharto was astute enough to utilize external power concerns to his advantage. Leifer does state that Indonesian actions in Timor were to ‘protect her interests’, and that Indonesia’s regional neighbours ‘have been obliged at least privately to come to terms with Indonesia’s way of securing her and their priorities’. However, these interests are not considered in conjunction with external power interests. Jones and Smith also minimize the role of ASEAN, which is described as a ‘community of evolving ambiguity’. This is despite a united ASEAN being a vital component in Suharto’s plan to legitimize his actions in East Timor. While the existing realist assessment of the regional environment is apt, their primary focus on external powers at the expense of regional powers leaves a gap in their analysis of Southeast Asia in the mid-1970s.

According to Lee Jones, ‘Indonesia’s invasion and ASEAN’s support is best explained by the fear that a leftist state would emerge after
Timor’s decolonization, providing a possible base for communist “subversion”. According to this view, Indonesia’s fears ‘were conditioned by the conflicts that had given rise to the Suharto regime, the social order it was attempting to defend, and the likely effects of Timorese independence on that order’. Jones also argues that this was ‘further exacerbated by the rise of communist regimes and insurgencies across Southeast Asia, and by the worst social unrest in Indonesia since Suharto had seized power’. ASEAN collaborated with Jakarta because it also shared these concerns. Jones’ argument therefore rests on the regional fear of communism, principally because of the effect that an independent East Timor would have on ‘socio-political and economic order within Indonesia’.

However, this view disregards evidence which suggests that Indonesia was well aware that there was little communist influence in East Timor. The communist factor is important, but not for the reasons Jones claims. This was a factor played upon by Suharto to receive external power acquiescence and support for his plans to invade the territory. FRETILIN is described by Jones as a ‘left-wing independence movement’. This is despite the existence of a large number of moderates within the FRETILIN party, which was largely recognized, even by external powers, as having little communist influence. Jones discounts the possibility that Indonesia had expansionist designs with regard to East Timor. For Jones, Sukarno’s aggressive foreign policy was less to do with territorial ambitions and more to do with managing social conflict. Similarly, in his view, Malaysian support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy was due to the ‘recent upsurge in its domestic communist insurgency’, and fears of a ‘leftist takeover of Brunei’. Nonetheless, the fact that Suharto was apparently aware that there was little communist influence in East Timor, yet still wished to annex the territory, suggests the existence of other, more compelling explanations, with territorial gain the most convincing.

A preferred approach to those presented here is one based upon interest convergence between an ASEAN vanguard state and external powers. According to this approach, the important role played by external powers is stressed, without denying the agency of Indonesia, which clearly pursued a strategy to secure its own interests with respect to East Timor in an uncertain regional environment. Indonesia was able to use external power Cold War concerns to secure support for its East Timor policy. This increase in interest convergence caused an increase in Indonesia’s ability to resist sovereignty violation from actors external to the region.
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