The East Timor Humanitarian Crisis

At the time of Indonesia’s 1975 invasion and occupation of East Timor, and in the two decades that followed, the US and Australia maintained consistent support for the Suharto regime. Despite UN condemnation of Indonesia’s actions with respect to East Timor, these external powers sought to mute international criticism, whilst strengthening relations with a state deemed to be of continued strategic significance. However, a sea change was in evidence by the late 1990s. While Indonesia maintained the backing of the ASEAN states, it had lost support from the US and Australia, its key external power allies. In the context of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Indonesia was pressured by these powerful non-ASEAN states into allowing a popular consultation in East Timor in 1999. The subsequent humanitarian crisis resulted in these external powers, in conjunction with the UN and wider international community, forcing Indonesia to accept external intervention by way of a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force. This act significantly undermined ASEAN autonomy. Had external intervention not occurred, it is unlikely that Indonesia would have permanently withdrawn its forces from East Timor.

Through analysis of the humanitarian crisis in East Timor, evidence will be provided to support the hypothesis that in 1999, ASEAN’s failure to resist violations to the sovereignty of Indonesia was a consequence of low interest convergence between Indonesia and the external powers. During this period, Indonesia continued to have the most compelling interests at stake in the future of East Timor, having incorporated the territory as the archipelago’s 27th province in 1976. As the vanguard state, Indonesia was able to apply continued pressure on the ASEAN states to obtain strong regional support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy, and to portray a united ASEAN front in the face of
external intervention. However, the key factor explaining Indonesia’s failure to resist sovereignty violation in 1999 resides in the critical role played by external actors.

Following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, the regional repercussions of Indonesia’s economic and domestic instability generated concern in the US and Australia. Interest divergence led these external powers to apply pressure on Indonesia to elicit change over East Timor. In a weakened state, Indonesia was coerced into accepting an international peacekeeping force in East Timor, despite asserting that such a force would constitute an unacceptable breach of its state sovereignty. Critically, ASEAN institutional cohesion alone was not sufficient to prevent Indonesian sovereignty violation. This supports the view that, as a collection of weak states, ASEAN is unable to affect the international security landscape on its own. Indeed, as one commentator noted, the crisis consolidated the view held by many that ASEAN was ‘chronically incapable of taking meaningful action even when its own interests are directly engaged’. As this chapter will attempt to show, ASEAN autonomy is much more contingent than currently portrayed in much of the existing non-realist literature.

The chapter will begin with an assessment of Indonesia’s position in the post-Cold War regional environment. During this period, which was characterized by a continuation of human rights abuses in East Timor, Indonesia continued to receive support from external powers such as the US and Australia. Interest convergence between Indonesia, Australia and the US regarding the former’s East Timor policy remained high. Indonesia was also able to maintain pressure on the ASEAN states to support its East Timor policy, thus spearheading a united ASEAN front. The discussion will subsequently show the devastating impact of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis on Indonesia’s economy and domestic system. At this time, there was a loss of confidence in the Indonesian regime, and a divergence in interests between Indonesia, Australia, and the US. Despite this external power interest divergence, ASEAN maintained its support for Indonesia during a period of great regional economic instability. This support was ultimately to the detriment of the Association.

The chapter will then examine the pressure external powers placed on Indonesia to accept a process of consultation in East Timor after the financial crisis. It will consider East Timor’s subsequent vote for independence, the devastating humanitarian crisis that ensued, and the international community’s responses to the crisis. Particular attention will focus on the additional pressure placed on Indonesia, which ultimately paved the way for external intervention in the territory.
The analysis will then address Indonesia’s failure to resist sovereignty violation by way of a UN mandated peacekeeping force, and the period of UN sovereignty in East Timor approved by the Security Council in October 1999. The chapter will conclude with a theoretical assessment of the findings and consideration of the contending arguments for the humanitarian crisis in East Timor.

**Indonesia in the post-Cold War regional environment**

In the period after 1975, Indonesia was largely successful in keeping East Timor off the international agenda. This was due to two reasons. First, as will be shown, Indonesia maintained the support of key external powers such as the US and Australia. These powers were proactive in deflecting negative attention away from Indonesia’s East Timor policy. Second, Indonesia was able to ban foreign journalists from entering East Timor, thus cutting the region off from the international community. When journalists were allowed to enter the region, this was always in the company of Indonesian officials.

East Timorese cultural and political resistance increased through the 1980s. Fighting between FALINTIL, the military wing of FRETILIN, and Indonesian armed forces continued throughout this period. The severity of FRETILIN resistance led Indonesian President Suharto to increase troop levels in East Timor to 14,000–20,000 in 1984, and to declare a state of emergency in the region on 9 September 1985. Suharto attempted to normalize Jakarta’s control in East Timor in 1988, when he declared that the territory had equal status with Indonesia’s other 26 provinces. As such, East Timor was provided with a government structure identical to Indonesia’s other provinces. Travel restrictions were also lifted, which allowed East Timorese to leave the region, and Indonesian and foreign visitors to enter. This was exemplified by a visit from Pope John Paul II in October 1989.

Despite normalisation, East Timorese political factions staged public protests while engaging in support for FALINTIL. One such demonstration against the Indonesian government occurred at the Santa Cruz cemetery in the East Timor capital of Dili on 12 November 1991. More than 2000 unarmed East Timorese were present at the cemetery, to commemorate the death of an underground member killed by Indonesian security forces. The memorial procession was attacked by Indonesian troops after the demonstrators chanted slogans, displayed independence banners and unfurled the FRETILIN flag.
The official death toll was initially declared at 19 and later revised to 50. Local activists claimed as many as 273 deaths, with many more injured, and up to 255 missing after large-scale arrests. For some commentators, the massacre was the ‘critical turning point in East Timor’s path to independence’. The relaxation of the ban on foreign journalists in the area meant that many witnessed and recorded the violence. Max Stahl, an activist journalist, was filming at the cemetery when Indonesian troops opened fire. Stahl was able to hide this film and smuggle it from the country with the assistance of a foreign aid worker. As Kingsbury notes, when the footage aired, Indonesia’s ‘woeful human rights record was back in the international spotlight’, putting ‘the question of East Timor firmly back on the international agenda’.

The death of an Australian human rights activist during the massacre came as a particular embarrassment for the Australian government, which had officially recognized Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor in December 1989, by signing the Timor Gap ‘Zone of Cooperation Agreement’, allowing for joint exploration of Timor Gap natural resources. As international condemnation of Indonesia increased, the government went into ‘public relations damage control mode’, where an inquiry was held and a regional commander relieved of his post. However, this did little to silence Indonesia’s critics. These changes in events culminated in the Nobel Peace Prize for 1996 being awarded to the East Timorese Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo and Foreign Minister in exile José Ramos-Horta, for ‘their work towards a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict in East Timor’. This was specifically intended to ‘spur efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict in East Timor based on the people’s right to self-determination’.

While the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991 was an important event in Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor, it is important to note that, despite worldwide condemnation of Indonesia, there were no serious calls for intervention following the massacre. Despite evidence of ongoing and serious human rights abuses against the East Timorese people, it would be eight more years before the international community would attempt to intervene in East Timor. This suggests that while the Santa Cruz massacre was an important factor in East Timor’s eventual independence, it was not the ‘critical turning point’ claimed by some. There were no calls for intervention in 1991 because Indonesia maintained the support of two important external powers: the US and Australia. With external power support, Indonesia was able to maintain its control over East Timor for the majority of
the 1990s. It would take a catalytic event before Indonesia lost this external power support, an event that would directly impinge on external power state interests.

**Indonesia-state interest convergence in the post-Cold War period**

In the wake of the Santa Cruz massacre, US Senators Claiborne Pell, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and David Boren, chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, visited Indonesia. There, they stated that despite being concerned by the killings, any specific steps to reconciliation with the East Timorese ‘were a matter for the Indonesian government to decide because this was an internal affair of the country’. Similar sentiments were echoed by the US Ambassador in Jakarta, Robert Barry. In 1994, Mr Barry stated that ‘the human-rights issue will not be detrimental to the future of ties between the US and Indonesia’, and that his government ‘from the start accepted [East Timor’s] incorporation into Indonesia’.

From March 1992, US support for the Indonesian regime came under greater Congressional scrutiny. Both the US House of Representatives and the Senate within US Congress placed restrictions on the supply of arms and military aid to Indonesia. However, in 1997 the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee ‘heard administration testimony that the Pentagon sold Indonesia military training without congressional notification or consent throughout 1996’. In 1998, released Pentagon documents showed that ‘US Army and Marine personnel had trained Indonesian soldiers under the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program every few months since 1992’. As part of this training, ‘Indonesian troops were trained in air assault, urban warfare, and psychological operations thirty-six times [italics in text] between 1992 and 1997 without congressional knowledge or approval’. Much of this training went to Indonesia’s Kopassus troops, widely acknowledged as having instigated numerous human rights violations during the invasion of East Timor.

In addition to military training, the US continued to sell arms to the Indonesian government. In the year immediately after the Dili massacre, ‘the State Department licensed more than 300 military sales to Indonesia’. President Bill Clinton met with Suharto annually from 1992 to 1998, at which times he would always raise the issue of human rights in East Timor. However, this stance was undoubtedly undermined by continued arms sales and continued joint military
training. The foregoing analysis suggests that despite intense pressure from Congress, and despite acknowledged human rights abuses in East Timor, the US government’s policy towards Indonesia and its occupation of East Timor had not significantly changed in the pre-1997 period.

*Indonesia-Australia interest convergence*

Like the Clinton administration, the Australian government also continued its support for Indonesia in the period following the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre. In April 1992, Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating met Suharto in Jakarta, where the Santa Cruz massacre was not discussed. Keating confirmed in 1994 that ‘no country is more important to Australia than Indonesia. If we fail to get this relationship right, and nurture and develop it, the whole web of our foreign relations is incomplete’. In 1995, Australian Foreign Affairs head Richard Woolcott claimed that ‘the East Timor lobby should accept that the time for an act of self-determination after 20 years has passed and that demanding independence is a lost cause which raises false hopes, prolongs conflict and costs lives’.

Bilateral ties were strengthened between Australia and Indonesia in 1992, with the establishment of an Australia-Indonesia Ministerial Forum designed to provide a platform for the expansion of economic ties, including agreements on investments and copyright protection. Canberra made it clear that Indonesian human rights abuses would not be allowed to affect bilateral trade and investment. Australian Foreign and Trade Minister Gareth Evans stated that ‘Australia did not think it appropriate to make “routine linkages” between the two as that would be counterproductive’. In addition to enhanced trade and economic linkages, Australia was also focusing on ‘building a much deeper and more consequential military and security relationship’ with Indonesia. During this same period, the newly elected Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating travelled to Washington, at a time when Congress was seeking to restrict defence sales and training between the US and Indonesia, with the express intention of urging Clinton to withdraw human rights considerations from the drafting of defence contracts.

By 1995, Indonesia held more military exercises with Australia than with any other country. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Indonesian Navy conducted maritime warfare exercises four times a year. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Indonesian Air Force conducted joint exercises annually. Kopassus units travelled to
Australia for counter-terrorism and counter-hijacking training, ‘despite objections that the force has been linked to serious human rights abuses’. In 1995, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) became ‘the most important foreign provider of military training to Indonesia, having displaced the United States’. Increased relations between Australia and Indonesia culminated in the signing of a secret ‘watershed treaty’, in December 1995, known as the Australia-Indonesia Agreement on Maintaining Security. This treaty committed the Australian and Indonesian governments to consult at ministerial level about matters affecting their common security, consult each other in the case of adverse challenges to either party, or to their common security interests, and promote cooperative activities in the security field.

A powerful Jakarta lobby, consisting of bureaucrats, academics and journalists, also had a significant impact on Australia’s foreign policy with respect to Indonesia. The Jakarta lobby ‘long regarded Australia’s relationship with Indonesia as an exceptional case requiring careful management by “experts” with a proper sympathy for and understanding of Jakarta’s difficulties’. This was a stance reflected by Richard Woolcott in 1995, when he confirmed that ‘we cannot allow foreign policy to be made in the streets, by the media or by the unions’. The Jakarta lobby ‘insisted that [Suharto’s] human rights “failures” should be balanced against his economic achievements’.

Following the massacre in Dili, the Jakarta lobby made ‘concerted efforts to offset community outrage’. Richard Woolcott and journalist Greg Sheridan took steps to blame Portugal for the killings. An Australian National University Economics Professor stated that the massacre was a tragedy, not due to the loss of life, but because of the anti-Indonesian hate campaigns it had inflamed. The Jakarta lobby also took steps to minimize the number of victims of the massacre, and dismissed evidence of further massacres committed by Indonesian troops against the East Timorese. Clearly, in the post-Cold War period, Australia continued to view Indonesia as a key strategic regional partner. Canberra therefore prioritized good relations with Indonesia over concerns for human rights abuses committed by Indonesian forces in East Timor.

**Indonesia-ASEAN state interest convergence**

Despite the massacre of unarmed demonstrators in Santa Cruz, the ASEAN states continued their support for Indonesia’s East Timor
policy, taking whatever steps were necessary to obstruct further protest movements. The Nobel Peace prize award-giving ceremony in 1996, where East Timorese Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo and Foreign Minister in exile José Ramos-Horta were to be honoured, was held in Oslo, Norway. Thailand, as the only ASEAN state to have an Embassy in Norway besides Indonesia, refused to attend the ceremony, making it clear that the Thai ambassador’s attendance at the function would be ‘inappropriate’. In May 1994, the Philippine President Fidel Ramos, responding to pressure from Jakarta, tried to ban an international conference on East Timor human rights in Manila. Jakarta warned the Philippines that ‘the holding of such a conference in Manila may impair the friendly relations between the two countries’. In an effort to placate Jakarta, President Ramos confirmed that ‘the Philippines considers East Timor part of Indonesia as its 27th province. This is a position which we took a long time ago’. Despite the Philippines constitution providing for freedom of association and free speech, Manila confirmed it would do everything it could, within the constitution’s limits, to avoid damaging relations with Jakarta. Philippines’ Secretary Raul Manglapus stated that Manila ‘will not support any secessionist movement in Indonesia’. Ultimately, the Philippines made the decision to ban foreign participation at the conference. This meant that Mr Jose Ramos-Horta was blacklisted from attending. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas welcomed the Philippines decision. Alatas argued that the conference had been ‘inspired, planned and engineered by East Timorese exiles’, and that the conference was ‘leaning towards interference in Indonesia’s territorial integrity’. The Chairman for the Asia–Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET) argued that the Philippines’ decision was evidence of Manila’s ‘clear surrender to Indonesian pressure. Indonesia has succeeded in invading the Philippines – not in military terms … but in foreign policies and diplomatic work’. However, President Ramos affirmed that ‘the Philippine government has acted, as it will always act, in accordance with the national interest’. Plans for a human rights conference to be hosted by the Southeast Asian Human Rights Network (SEANET) in Thailand were met with similar consternation. The Thai government stepped up its control over the operations of international non-governmental organisations, requiring them to apply for permission for any planned activities 30 days in advance. This meant that SEANET conference organizers were unable to find a venue for the meeting. Thai officials feared that Bangkok might be used as a venue to criticize Indonesia in its handling of East Timor. As such, the Thai government sent
plainclothes police to ‘monitor the movements of a group of foreign human rights organisation members’. 59 Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri urged the human rights group ‘to consider the adverse effects the meeting may have on relations between Thailand and Indonesia … the meeting will not only strain relations between the two countries’. 60

Ali Alatas informed the Thai Foreign Ministry that he may ‘decide against attending the ASEAN meeting if the SEANET meeting is held in Bangkok’. 61 Indonesia also protested against a Thai newspaper, The Nation, after it ‘carried two editorials critical of Indonesian policy on East Timor’. 62 Thailand’s Special Branch Police Bureau Assistant Commissioner Yothin Mattayomnan stated that ‘police had been instructed to intervene and make arrests if the activities of NGO [Non-governmental Organisation] members threaten national security and the country’s international relations’. 63 The Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai denied that his administration was contravening its policy to promote human rights. Leekpai argued that Thailand ‘must place the national interest before anything else while upholding the rights and freedom of all’. 64

Manila banned Ramos-Horta from entering the country for a second time in October 1996, fearing he may disturb an upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting scheduled for November. The House of Representative Speaker Jose de Venecia said that the decision had been taken ‘in the national interest and in the ASEAN interest, out of respect for President Suharto, and in order to maintain serenity within APEC’. 65 Ramos-Horta was also banned from entering Bangkok in 1995 to teach a programme at a local university. In November 1996, the youth wing of the ruling government, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), broke up the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor, convened in Kuala Lumpur. The Malaysian police went on to arrest more than 100 people, including 47 foreigners. 66 These foreigners were subsequently deported. Indonesia expressed its ‘highest appreciation’ to the Malaysian government for shutting down the conference. 67 The Malaysian decision ‘reflected the ASEAN members’ commitment not to interfere in the affairs of other countries, and their highest solidarity’. 68

In December 1996, ASEAN warned the European Union that continued scrutiny of extraneous issues such as East Timor could aggravate relations between the two organisations. This statement was the first time ASEAN as a group ‘formally cautioned another grouping against poaching into the affairs of one of its members’. 69 This statement had the desired effect. During EU-ASEAN dialog in February 1997, EU foreign ministers skirted the issue of East Timor,
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despite initially expressing a determination to press the topic.70 ASEAN officials expressed their satisfaction that ‘East Timor was not included in the agenda’.71 According to Jakarta, ‘ASEAN countries are aware East Timor would have been far worse off without Indonesian intervention. No ASEAN country would have endorsed a “Cuba” on Indonesia’s doorstep’.72 It is apparent from these findings that ASEAN support was a key component in Indonesia’s East Timor policy. Within the region, Indonesia was determined to keep East Timor off the agenda, by any means necessary. The ASEAN states recognized this, and did everything in their power to placate Jakarta. Maintaining positive relations with Indonesia was as a key national interest at this time.

The Asian Financial Crisis (1997) – a catalyst for change

Relations between Indonesia, Australia and the US remained strong in the period up to 1997, despite a change in the regional environment following the end of the Cold War. Levels of interest convergence had been maintained in the absence of a common unifying threat, through joint exports and direct investments. The US had strong economic ties with Indonesia, with US exports between 1986 and 1993 tripling from US$795 million to US$2.8 billion.73 Australia-Indonesia two-way trade also grew rapidly, from $AU2.2 billion in 1990–91 to $AU4.3 billion in 1995–96, a growth rate of approximately 14.5 percent a year.74 Australia also had direct investments in Indonesia totalling some AUS$2.5 billion.75 Clearly, the US and Australia had much at stake in Indonesia. It was in external power interests to see a strong and stable Indonesia in Southeast Asia. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 acted as a catalyst for change, with Indonesia’s subsequent economic and domestic collapse seriously impacting external power interests. Following the crisis, a decrease in interest convergence between Indonesia and these external powers would lead to the first significant calls for intervention in East Timor, and would culminate in Indonesia’s failure to resist sovereignty violation from actors external to the region.

Background to the Asian Financial Crisis

The Asian Financial Crisis first manifested in Thailand, in early 1997. At that time, the Thai baht began to crumble as a result of a number of
factors, including ‘imprudent domestic lending practices, an imbalance between short-term and long-term financing, and an unrealistic exchange rate pegged to the US dollar’. When doubts grew regarding Thailand’s ability to maintain the baht to the dollar, investors began to sell their currency. Despite the Bank of Thailand attempting to float the baht on the international money market, it fell quickly by 10 percent. As it continued to weaken, confidence in the value of the currency was further undermined. By August 1997, evidence of similar short-term debt financing became apparent in Indonesia. In the late 1980s, a large number of private banks were created within Indonesia, which were ‘poorly managed and prone to making risky or politically motivated loans’. During the 1990s, Indonesia’s foreign debt increased to approximately US$80 billion, with much of this short-term debt financing speculative investments in real estate. The Suharto government supported cronyism, unsound banking practices and maintained market-distorting monopolies, something the World Bank was reportedly aware of.

The Suharto regime’s record of economic growth also failed to take into account the poor distribution of wealth or the excessive accumulation of wealth to a small number of elites. These practices increased the Suharto family’s estimated worth to over US$30 billion. After devaluation of the Thai baht, investors questioned the strength of the rupiah, which they subsequently sold to buy the US dollar. As in Thailand, the Indonesian Central Bank attempted to float the rupiah on the international money market. This led to a rapid depreciation of the currency, which lost 81 percent. Collapse of the rupiah devastated the Indonesian economy. As a result, borrowers were unable to repay debts, banks were unable to secure foreign loans in an attempt to foster regrowth, and manufacturers were no longer able to afford raw materials to continue production.

**Indonesia’s economic and domestic crisis**

As a result of Indonesia’s economic crisis, inflation reached 80 to 100 percent. The rupiah reached its lowest point, at 17,000 to the US dollar. Banks became insolvent and businesses went bankrupt. Coupled with depreciation of the rupiah, International Monetary Fund (IMF) rates of interest reached as high as 50 to 60 percent, forcing further companies into insolvency. In 1997, unemployment in Indonesia passed 40 percent. Food shortages due to adverse weather the previous year meant that by early 1998, there were predictions
that Indonesia would require 4 to 5 million tons of rice before 1999 to prevent starvation of vulnerable citizens. Ultimately, Indonesia’s failing economy led to mass unemployment, poverty and malnutrition, with nearly two-thirds of Indonesians in danger of falling below the poverty line in 1999. As a result of the crisis, Indonesia was forced to seek help from the IMF, which offered economic aid but demanded greater democratic and microeconomic reforms by return.

As part of the IMF support package, Indonesia was required to ‘restructure certain banks, dismantle a quasi-governmental monopoly on all commodities (except rice), cut fuel subsidies, increase electricity rates, increase the transparency of public policy and budget-making processes, and speed up privatisation and reform of state enterprises’. Suharto openly criticized the stringent IMF package, informing the international community that no reform changes would be made. Indonesian government official Dim Syamsudin stated: ‘I’m afraid there’s a communications breakdown between us and the IMF. Our people will say “go to hell with your aid!”’. As a response to stringent IMF reforms, Suharto threatened to renege on regional free-trade agreements, and shut off Indonesia’s banking system from the rest of the region, creating an Islamic banking system with no interest charges. Such changes could precipitate the total collapse of the Indonesian economy, sparking regional instability and a domino effect whereby other countries such as Thailand would seek to renegotiate their own IMF bailout packages. As a result of Suharto’s actions, ‘international confidence in the regime, already at an all-time low, simply collapsed … as Suharto’s domestic support began to collapse, his international support evaporated’.

Following the Asian Financial Crisis, domestic support for Suharto’s New Order evaporated. Large sections of Indonesian society abandoned Suharto. Despite domestic upheaval, Suharto had himself reappointed president by Indonesia’s Consultative Assembly for a seventh term in March 1998. Suharto then made the decision ‘to appoint a new cabinet which included his eldest daughter, a notorious businesswoman, and other cronies’. Student-led demonstrations against the Indonesian government’s handling of the economic crisis began in May 1998. On 12 May, Indonesian troops fired on students as they returned to their university campus, killing four. The following day, riots broke out in the capital’s Chinese commercial centre, with approximately 1200 people killed. Subsequently, thousands of Chinese families fled the country. As protests grew within Indonesia, plans were made to hold a mass meeting of over one million Indonesian citizens on 20 May 1998. Commander-in-Chief General Wiranto
threatened to create a ‘Tiananmen’ tragedy if the meeting were to take place, and plans were subsequently abandoned.\textsuperscript{96} As a result of mass public protests, General Suharto had little option but to resign from office. He did so on 21 May 1998, appointing his Vice President, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, to succeed him.\textsuperscript{97}

Political turmoil in Indonesia, followed by Suharto’s eventual resignation, led to an increased number of secessionist movements in Indonesia’s provinces, including East Timor, Aceh and West Papua. On 6 June 1998, the first public meeting to discuss the future of Timor was convened in Dili.\textsuperscript{98} Some 3,000 people, including all Timorese political factions, attended the meeting.\textsuperscript{99} The following week, a student demonstration attended by more than 3,000 people was held at the University of East Timor.\textsuperscript{100} East Timorese student-led demonstrations were also held at the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice in Jakarta. During demonstrations in Dili in June and July 1998, calls for a referendum on independence intensified.\textsuperscript{101} Bishop Belo met with President Habibie to discuss East Timor’s future in June 1998. Bishop Belo left the meeting announcing that ‘President Habibie had promised ABRI [Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia] troops would be removed from East Timor little by little’.\textsuperscript{102} However, it would take significant pressure from external powers before agreement on a referendum would be reached. Analysis of external power interests following the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 will highlight two important factors: first, as a specific result of the financial crisis, interest convergence between Indonesia, the US and Australia began to decrease; and second, that this decrease in interest convergence led to external powers pressuring President Habibie into holding a referendum on East Timor’s independence.

**Indonesia – external power interest divergence**

Following the financial crisis of 1997, the US was forced to re-evaluate its relationship with Indonesia.\textsuperscript{103} Despite significant pressure from Congress, which had steadily increased since the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili in 1991, the Clinton administration had continued to supply arms and military training to Indonesia. However, Indonesian domestic and economic instability following the Asian financial crisis had a significant impact on US state interests. A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, written on 6 February 1998, provides several reasons why the effects of the financial crisis in Indonesia were of interest to the US government.\textsuperscript{104} First, due to the interlinking of
financial markets, instability in the Asian financial markets might affect US markets. American banks and companies were also significant lenders and/or investors in the region. It was feared that turmoil would affect US imports and exports as well as capital flows and the value of the US dollar, in addition to exposing weaknesses in many regional Asian financial institutions. The crisis had a region-wide effect, spreading to South Korea, Hong Kong and Malaysia, with economic problems also adversely affecting Japan, and potentially spreading to Latin America and the US. The crisis might also impede the progress of trade and investment liberalisation under the World Trade Organisation and the APEC forum.

Ultimately, the US had a ‘great interest in a prosperous and stable Indonesia that continue[d] to evolve toward democracy’. 105 By helping Indonesia with its economic recovery, the US could ‘foster a broader economic recovery in Asia’. 106 Indonesia was also important to the US in terms of Asian security, largely because the archipelago ‘sits astride vital sea lanes through which 40 percent of the world’s shipping passes, including 80 percent of Japan’s oil supply and 70 percent of South Korea’s’. 107 By offering assistance to Indonesia, the US could ‘help Indonesians emerge from their crisis and perhaps build the world’s third-largest democracy. An economically reformed and democratic Indonesia would make a worthy strategic partner for the US in Asia’. 108

Suharto’s resistance to the IMF’s economic aid and reform package was particularly disconcerting for the US, considering its interests in seeing a stable and prosperous Indonesia in Southeast Asia. As a response, Washington pushed Suharto to accept the IMF reform package. By March 1998, the US stated it would ‘refuse dispersal of IMF loans to Indonesia without appropriate progress on dealing with monopolies, subsidies, monetary policies and [its] approach to the financial system’. 109 It is therefore apparent that, by early 1998, the US had taken a stronger stance against Indonesia. Whereas Indonesia was once a vital component in Washington’s regional defence against Cold War threats, it now constituted a threat by itself, capable of destabilising the region and its economy.

When President Habibie replaced General Suharto in May 1998, Habibie inherited an economy in vital need of recovery. The US threat to refuse dispersal of IMF loans, if actualized, would put Jakarta in an intolerable situation. Like Suharto, Habibie had been in support of East Timor’s integration with Indonesia. However, occupation of East Timor was costing the Indonesian government approximately US$1 million per day in 1998. 110 In the post financial crisis environment, this figure was unsustainable. The US also began
to press Indonesia on its human rights abuses in East Timor, urging UN-sponsored talks between the two parties aimed at settling East Timor’s political status. In June 1998, less than three weeks after the resignation of Suharto and with external power support diminishing, President Habibie announced that a ‘new status for East Timor should be contemplated’. In particular, Habibie announced that ‘he was willing to consider autonomy for East Timor in exchange for international recognition of Indonesian sovereignty’.

Habibie’s announcement was closely followed by US Senate Resolution 237, which was unanimously adopted on 10 July 1998. In this resolution, the Senate stated that President Clinton should, ‘encourage the new political leadership in Indonesia to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all the people of Indonesia and East Timor … [and] support an internationally supervised referendum on self-determination’. Clearly for the US, the Asian financial crisis and Suharto’s subsequent resignation from power were a turning point. Congress had been pushing the President to take action with regard to Indonesia’s human rights abuses in East Timor since 1991. The Senate increased this demand following Suharto’s resignation. This pressure from Congress, coupled with Washington’s desire to safeguard economic and security interests, ultimately led President Clinton to adopt a new policy with regard to Jakarta. The US would refuse dispersal of much-needed aid to Indonesia, unless Habibie allowed a referendum on self-determination in East Timor. This revaluation of the US-Indonesia relationship meant Indonesian occupation of East Timor lacked the international support it once had. Holding a fragile grip on power, and in need of continued foreign economic aid, Habibie came under pressure from the US, which saw an opportunity to push Indonesia towards a change in its East Timor policy.

Australia interest divergence

Developments in Indonesia and changes in the US-Indonesia relationship were being closely followed in Canberra. The Howard government had adopted a different stance towards Asia since gaining power in 1996. According to this view, engagement with Asia would only be pursued if in the national interest, and if it did not involve the abandonment of other values such as the international rule of law. Prior to 1997, high levels of import and export trade with Indonesia, coupled with high foreign direct investment, meant that it remained in
the national interest to foster good relations with Indonesia. However, the regional financial crisis overturned the long-held foreign policy assumption that a prosperous Asia would bring Australia into its economic orbit. As investments were threatened, regional instability increased, and the crisis 'threatened to undermine Canberra’s attempts at fostering regional organisations'.

Like the US, the Australian government pushed Indonesia to implement IMF reforms. Refusal to accept reforms could ‘lead to instability in the region and precipitate a complete economic catastrophe’. Australia was also concerned about the change of leadership in Indonesia. According to Hugh White, Deputy Secretary in the Australian Department of Defence, Canberra believed that Dr Habibie ‘appeared erratic and weak … his relationship with TNI [Indonesia’s National Armed Forces] was especially problematic … even if TNI did not seize power directly, it seemed likely to be a critical player in Indonesia’s political evolution’. It was therefore determined that ‘Australia’s priorities in the post-Suharto era was to support Indonesia’s democratic transformation, and to sustain a good relationship with TNI’.

Suharto’s departure, precipitated by the financial crisis, also offered Australia an opportunity to address its East Timor policy. In May 1998, the Australian Labour opposition party debated the question of East Timor, adopting the policy that the East Timorese had a right to self-determination. This was one of the first times a government party had challenged the prevailing consensus that Indonesia had sovereignty over East Timor. At the same time, links between the Australian Defence Force and Indonesia’s Kopassus force were suspended, after the latter’s involvement in violence against Indonesian pro-democracy protestors and demonstrators at the time of Suharto’s resignation. In October 1998, following an Australian federal election, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer initiated a re-examination of Australia’s East Timor policy. In November 1998, parliamentary sessions held by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade granted the motion adopted by the federal Senate to lead a review of the Timor issue. During this review, ‘the opinions of refugee and political leaders were sought on the future shape of an autonomous or independent East Timor, and on what support would be needed if the territory was ever to become self-sufficient’. The review found that the East Timorese would not accept any connection with Indonesia without a referendum. As such, the decision was taken that Canberra should seek to influence policy in Jakarta more directly.
The Howard letter

Australian Prime Minister John Howard took Canberra’s first step to influence policy in Jakarta in December 1998. By this time, it had become apparent to the Howard government that the status quo Australia and Indonesia had maintained with regard to their East Timor policy was no longer sustainable. As such, Howard wrote to Habibie, suggesting East Timor be granted autonomy and the right to self-determination. On the surface, this appeared to constitute a total policy reversal by Canberra. However, this is not the case. While Howard did recommend autonomy for East Timor, this was to be an extensive period of autonomy of up to ten years, before the holding of a referendum.128 In addition to this, Howard expressed his ‘Government’s preference for autonomy within Indonesia rather than independence’.129 As such, the Howard letter actually demonstrated the continuity of Australia’s foreign policy with relation to Indonesia and East Timor. Primarily, the letter intended to ‘encourage Indonesia to find a long-term and incremental solution to the problem of East Timor’.130

For the Australian government, East Timor autonomy within Indonesia was preferable to independence for two reasons. First, there was a growing concern in Canberra that ‘an independent East Timor would be economically unviable and politically unstable, and thus a liability to regional security for which Australia would have to take prime responsibility’.131 Second, East Timor autonomy within Indonesia would prevent Indonesian Balkanisation. By 1997, Indonesia was still described as ‘a key determinant of Australia’s security in the years ahead’.132 Australian defence analyst Paul Dibb confirmed that ‘a unified Indonesia is vital to Australia’s national interest’ and that Balkanisation is ‘something we must make absolutely sure doesn’t happen’.133 Both Richard Woolcott and Alexander Downer echoed this view, with the former claiming that ‘it is foolish to suggest the fragmentation of Indonesia into a number of independent states need not concern Australia’.134

What the Howard government could not predict was Habibie’s response to the letter, which inadvertently ‘generated outcomes that it had specifically sought to avoid’.135 For Jakarta, the Howard letter ‘although couched in cautious, diplomatic language … constituted an unmistakable shift in policy as it suggested acceptance of the idea of self-determination for the people of East Timor, albeit after a delay of time’.136 According to Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Habibie was ‘visibly agitated with the implications of the letter,’ rejecting the idea that Indonesia could continue to fund East Timor.137 Habibie
preferred rapid action to resolve the issue so as not to play ‘rich uncle’ to East Timor,\(^{138}\) or to ‘leave a time bomb’ for his successor.\(^{139}\) Clearly, financial pressures and constraints were forcing Habibie’s hand. A lengthy period of East Timor autonomy within Indonesia, as preferred by Australia, was not a viable option for Jakarta at that time. A quick act of self-determination for East Timor was ‘the exact opposite of what the Howard letter sought to achieve’.\(^{140}\) Habibie’s proposal ‘was a bid to win the support of the international community, whose backing Indonesia badly needed if it was to rebound from the financial crisis’.\(^{141}\)

Habibie’s decision to move quickly presented Australia with a \textit{fait accompli}, giving the government very little option but to go along with it.\(^{142}\) A senior Australian diplomat in the Jakarta embassy ‘was instructed to leak the [Howard] letter to an Australian newspaper reporter based in Jakarta’.\(^{143}\) Alexander Downer then called a press conference ‘to announce what he called an historic policy shift’ with regard to Australia’s East Timor policy.\(^{144}\) In what was essentially a ‘damage-limitation exercise’ by Canberra, following nearly a quarter of a century of support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy, the Howard government recognized East Timorese right to self-determination on 5 January 1999.\(^{145}\) For the Habibie government, Australia’s announcement was ‘the final straw,’ and contributed to a dramatic announcement from Jakarta that a referendum to determine East Timor independence would be held in August 1999.\(^{146}\)

**ASEAN institutional cohesion**

Notably absent from the foregoing analysis is the role of the ASEAN states, who maintained the same policy regarding East Timor in 1999 as they had after Indonesia’s initial invasion in 1975. The ASEAN states ‘had little to say publicly’ on the matter, refraining from discussing the topic and maintaining silent support for Indonesia.\(^{147}\) In April 1999, Rodolfo Severino Jr, the Secretary General of ASEAN, stated that the problem of East Timor ‘was for the Indonesians and the international community to resolve’.\(^{148}\)

Indonesian stability was vital for ASEAN state security. In a May 1999 meeting, convened at the Philippine presidential palace by members of President Joseph Estrada’s cabinet, fears were expressed at the ‘prospect of a political or social disintegration in Indonesia [which] would threaten not only the security of Southeast Asia but also the unity of ASEAN’.\(^{149}\) A disintegrating Indonesia could herald the end of the Association. There also remained concerns over the
possibility that ‘separatist groups elsewhere in Southeast Asia might draw succour and inspiration from FRETILIN’s success’. Separatist movements could damage domestic stability, and allow external powers a foothold in the region. For the Southeast Asian states, solidarity with Indonesia was vital. Cambodian officials argued that ‘the important thing is we need to have good cooperation with Jakarta. We don’t have any clear position [on East Timor] … because it is the internal affair of Indonesia’. A Philippine diplomat expressed similar sentiments, confirming that ‘the Philippines would not be risking a long-time ally on any one issue’.

At an APEC meeting held on 9 September 1999, the ASEAN states were reported to be ‘furious that APEC forum organizers had allowed East Timor talks to side-track the trade summit’. Senior Thai Foreign Ministry official Kopsak Chutikul confirmed that ‘no ASEAN countries will attend [the East Timor talks] because it is a non-APEC issue’. Similarly, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated that ASEAN ‘had not met to discuss East Timor’, with Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan arguing that ‘ASEAN should contribute [to the East Timor crisis] in a way that we think is effective and appropriate. At this point, we think through the UN process is most effective and most appropriate. Let us keep it at that level’. It is apparent that if there was to be a resolution to the matter of Timorese independence, it was not going to be orchestrated by ASEAN.

**East Timor’s vote for independence**

On 27 January 1999, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Ali Alatas announced that Indonesia would allow a referendum to determine East Timor’s political future. If the majority of East Timorese rejected autonomy in favour of independence in a ‘process of consultation’, Indonesia would grant that independence. However, not all elements within the Indonesian government approved of Habibie’s decision to allow a referendum. This is especially true of Indonesia’s National Armed Forces, the TNI, formerly the ABRI, and their commander-in-chief General Wiranto. Wiranto disagreed with Habibie’s East Timor decision, and like most of the military ‘did not regard the political aspirations of the East Timorese as legitimate’. In order to get the military’s consent for an August referendum, conditions were laid down ‘that there be no revision of the historical judgment that the army’s conduct of the intervention was beyond reproach, and that its casualties were not in vain’.
UN-brokered negotiations: United Nations mission in East Timor

Consultations between Indonesia and East Timor’s former colonial power Portugal began with UN-brokered talks for popular consultations. Although an initial draft plan was produced, ‘differences on provisions for a referendum, a future constitution, and an interim UN presence prevented the principals from signing the document’. UN-assisted negotiations continued between Indonesia and Portugal in New York in March 1999. On 12 March, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced that the parties had agreed upon a method of direct ballot, to ascertain whether the people of East Timor accepted or rejected a proposal for autonomy. It was agreed that a UN presence would assist the ballot. As the UN pushed Indonesia and Portugal towards finalized negotiations, the situation in East Timor was gradually deteriorating. In March and April 1999, ‘militia groups backed by the TNI and police forces began to assault and detain known advocates of independence, and to burn down the houses of those thought to be supporting them’. On 6 April, militia members killed at least 50 East Timorese who had taken refuge in a Catholic church in Liquiçá. Present at the massacre were TNI troops and local police, which not only failed to prevent the attack, but – which many claim – helped to organize it and carry it out.

Amidst reports of violence in East Timor, the UN pushed Indonesia and Portugal to reach a conclusion on negotiations. These efforts culminated in an agreement signed by the two governments on 5 May 1999, entrusting the UN Secretary General with ‘the organisation and conduct of a popular consultation for the purpose of ascertaining whether the East Timorese people ... accept or reject a proposed constitutional framework providing for a special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary Republic of Indonesia’.

Under Article 5 of the Agreement, if the people of East Timor approved the proposal for special autonomy, the Indonesian government would initiate the constitutional measures required for the implementation of the autonomy framework. The question of East Timor would also be removed from the UN Security Council and General Assembly agenda. Under Article 6 of the Agreement, should the people of East Timor reject the proposal for special autonomy, the Indonesian government would take the necessary steps to terminate Indonesia’s links with East Timor. The governments of Indonesia and Portugal would also agree with the Secretary General on arrangements for a peaceful and orderly transfer of authority in East Timor to the UN, which would begin a process of enabling East Timor to transition to independence.
Under Article 7 of the Agreement, the Secretary General noted that ‘it is foreseen that the United Nations will maintain an adequate presence in East Timor during the interim period’. The Agreement stipulated that the ballot would take place on 9 August 1999, and that the Indonesian authorities would have the responsibility for maintaining law and order. Upon signature of the agreement, the UN would deploy personnel to East Timor, adequate for the execution of the various phases of the consultation process. This agreement formed the basis of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). Authorized by the UNSC on 11 June 1999, the role of UNAMET was to organize and conduct a popular consultation.

The UNSC authorized the deployment of up to 280 civilian police officers in East Timor, to act as advisors to the Indonesian police and to escort the ballot papers and boxes from the polling sites. It was a contentious decision to allow the Indonesian authorities responsibility for controlling law and order during the ballot. Indonesia made it clear that it would not allow East Timor security to be an international responsibility. Habibie informed Howard that if a peacekeeping force ‘was imposed on Indonesia then it would abandon East Timor and the ballot and unilaterally withdraw’. It was implicit that ‘had Habibie accepted a pre-ballot PKF [peacekeeping force], this might have precipitated a civil–military showdown and posed the grave risk of a TNI coup’. However, some commentators asserted that an independent peacekeeping force should be put in place for the ballot, because ‘referendums have a poor record as peace-building mechanisms in conflict situations, because they are a “zero-sum game”; that is, there is always a big winner and a big loser, and loss of face is inevitable’. The idea that East Timor may require peacekeepers was steadfastly refuted by the US government, which was worried that pressure for a peacekeeping force might threaten the vote itself. It was also refuted by Canberra, which did not want to endanger Australia’s strategic objectives by precipitating a potential TNI coup.

**TNI militia violence before and after the vote**

As UNAMET staff arrived in East Timor and began to witness the level of violence being perpetrated by the TNI and militia, many argued strongly against proceeding with an August ballot. Instead, they suggested a postponement pending a significant improvement in the security situation. However, external powers were concerned that, given more time, Habibie may change his mind about the ballot.
The domestic situation in Indonesia also remained unstable. In June 1999, elections were held in Indonesia for the People’s Representative Council. Habibie’s party came second to Megawati Sukarnoputri, who had openly criticized Habibie’s actions in relation to East Timor.\(^{174}\) Indonesia’s People’s Consultative Assembly was due to meet on 29 August to select a new president, with Sukarnoputri likely to be chosen. This put further pressure on the timing of the vote.

Despite the presence of UNAMET in the region, pro-Indonesia militias continued to terrorize the inhabitants of East Timor in the lead-up to the ballot, hoping to affect its final outcome. UNAMET observers witnessed TNI officers training and conducting joint operations with militia groups.\(^{175}\) Militias were also seen carrying firearms and wearing new TNI uniforms. The Indonesian police routinely failed to investigate militia violence, and informed UN officers that they were constrained from doing so by the TNI.\(^{176}\) This was a fact already known to the Australian government, whose intelligence community ‘concluded that ABRI had armed various pro-integrationist militia groups and was planning to use them against East Timorese who supported moves towards independence’.\(^{177}\) Australia remained convinced however that ‘Canberra’s special relationship with Jakarta … would ensure that the Indonesian authorities remained both frank and responsive in their dealings with Canberra over East Timor’.\(^{178}\) Australia maintained this stance despite the continued evidence of Indonesian complicity in militia violence.

Within East Timor, voter registration began on 16 July. This coincided with a lull in militia violence, which supported what some within UNAMET and the UN believed was a ‘genuine change in government and TNI policy’ brought about by ‘concerted international political pressure at the beginning of July’.\(^{179}\) The high East Timorese turnout for registration supported this view, and UNAMET moved ahead with the second stage of voter registration on 26 July. However, this second stage was more volatile, involving politically motivated violence directed against civilians, and serious militia attacks on UNAMET staff. On the morning prior to the ballot, a public ceremony at UNAMET headquarters was held between FALINTIL and the militias. It was announced that an agreement had been reached between the two parties, which promised ‘to refrain from recourse to violence, and abide by the outcome of the vote’.\(^{180}\) Despite this agreement, TNI commander Colonel Tono Suratman warned that ‘if the pro-independents do win … all will be destroyed … it will be worse than 23 years ago’.\(^{181}\)

On the day of the Timorese independence ballot, 98.6 percent of the enrolled voters cast their votes.\(^{182}\) Of that 98.6 percent,
78.5 percent chose in favour of independence, effectively ending Indonesia’s claim to the territory. Before the results were announced, militia violence began to escalate, with violence aimed at UNAMET staff and East Timorese civilians. As the security situation in certain Timorese districts worsened, UNAMET staff had to evacuate to Dili on the morning of 3 September. The result of the ballot was officially announced on 4 September 1999. Following the results, a three-week campaign named Operation Clean Sweep began, in which Indonesian armed forces and locally organized militia undertook a scorched earth policy, executing hundreds, possibly thousands of East Timorese. Over three-quarters of East Timor’s population were forcibly displaced, and over 70 percent of the infrastructure was destroyed. Between 5 September and 14 September, the UNAMET compound in Dili came under siege, preventing UN staff from stopping the violence, and risking the lives of several hundred staff. Indonesian authorities claimed that the militias ‘had formed spontaneously in response to provocation by pro-independence activists’. However, all the evidence demonstrates that ‘the militias were mobilized, trained, supplied and backed by Indonesian authorities’.

**Calls for external intervention in East Timor**

As violence continued to spread through East Timor, UNAMET was forced to withdraw its personnel from the region. By midday on 10 September, 444 international and local UN staff had been airlifted to safety in Darwin, leaving 81 international staff inside the Dili compound. With violence raging in East Timor, President Habibie came under intense pressure from the UN to allow a peacekeeping coalition to intervene in the area. Habibie acknowledged that international assistance might be required to restore peace, and on 6 September, the Secretary General asked Prime Minister Howard to lead a multinational intervention force in East Timor. The UN Secretary General was adamant that Indonesian ‘claims of national sovereignty must not be allowed to stand in the way of effective international action in defence of human rights’.

**US response to the humanitarian crisis**

It took several days of pressure by the UN Secretary General before certain states changed their posture towards intervention in East
Timor. External powers, specifically the US, continued to argue that Indonesian armed forces should be in charge of the restoration of power in East Timor, and called upon Indonesian leaders to control the violence. The US resisted an international peacekeeping force for days after violence erupted, indicating that it wanted Australia to take the leading role in any East Timor intervention. A number of reasons for US delays in supporting a peacekeeping force are plausible. First, there was a reluctance to fund the endeavour. Second, the US had placed strict conditions on its support for peacekeeping missions following the deaths of US soldiers in Somalia in 1993.

By 8 September, the US opinion regarding an East Timor peacekeeping force had started to shift. At this time, commander-in-chief of the US forces in the Pacific, Admiral Dennis Blair, met with General Wiranto in Jakarta and told him ‘that military ties between the US and Indonesia were to be suspended’. Additionally, in advance of an upcoming APEC meeting, President Clinton stated that ‘if Indonesia does not end the violence, it must invite – it must invite – the international community to assist in restoring security … it would be a pity if the Indonesian recovery was crashed by this’. Nor was this an empty threat. The US told Indonesian officials that the World Bank would withhold future crisis funding if security was not returned to East Timor. The IMF also suspended a visit to Jakarta to discuss financial crisis aid. On 12 September, at a scheduled APEC meeting between Asian leaders and the US, President Clinton stated that ‘the Indonesian military has aided and abetted militia violence in East Timor … we are ready to support an effort led by Australia to mobilize a multinational force to help bring security to East Timor under UN auspices’.

Australian response to the humanitarian crisis

By mid-September the Australian government had also come to the conclusion that the benefits of intervention now outweighed the costs. Initially, Australia had been reluctant to endorse a peacekeeping force in East Timor, since to do so ‘would have been to effectively renounce support for Indonesian sovereignty of East Timor’. Despite evidence of violence in East Timor, Australia continued to believe that ‘pressure from interested members of the international community, including Australia, would lead to an improvement in the security situation’. The government had been under mounting pressure to take action in East Timor from domestic movements and NGOs, which had been particularly vocal on the topic of Timorese autonomy. These groups
had been active since Indonesia’s initial invasion of the territory, and had stepped up domestic pressure in the period following the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991.

However, evidence suggests that domestic pressures did not play a key role in Canberra’s decision-making regarding Indonesia and East Timor. This was evident in 1995, when the Australian government signed the secret security agreement with the Indonesian government, without allowing the public to participate in the decision-making process. The Jakarta lobby argued that this was ‘a fantastic slap in the face for the anti-Indonesian protest groups … it declares definitively that the protest groups cannot set the agenda in the Australia–Indonesia relationship’. 202 The timing of Australia’s decision to intervene in East Timor suggests that the Howard government took a similar stance to domestic movements. Despite a long period of domestic pressure, Australia did not decide to intervene in East Timor until 7 September, one day after the UN Secretary General requested that Australia lead a multinational intervention force. 203 This suggests that popular pressure was not the deciding factor in Australia’s decision, and that instead ‘the government’s attention shifted to securing Australia’s interests in East Timor directly’. 204 Hugh White confirmed that ‘if East Timor proves to be a viable country and a reasonable neighbour, with stable internal politics and responsible international relationships, then Australia’s original concerns about the threats to regional stability posed by a non-viable East Timor will have proved unfounded’. 205

**Habibie rejects a peacekeeping coalition**

Faced with mounting UN and external power pressure to accept a peacekeeping coalition in East Timor, President Habibie remained adamantly opposed to intervention. The Indonesian government stated that the presence of international forces ‘would represent an unacceptable violation of Indonesian sovereignty, and if foreign troops tried to land without prior Indonesian agreement, they would have to fight their way ashore’. 206 Despite the ‘dubious legal basis’ for Indonesia’s sovereignty claim, both Australia and the US respected Indonesian wishes at that time. 207 A number of important factors conspired to change Indonesia’s position: the loss of external power support; the loss of institutional financial assistance; the suspension of British military supplies on 13 September; and a general arms boycott lodged by the European Union. The culmination of these pressures left Habibie in an untenable situation.
The President of the World Bank wrote to Habibie in early September, stating the belief that Indonesia [must] ‘act swiftly to restore order’.208 Following a threat of economic aid suspension, the World Bank announced its decision to freeze $300 million of Indonesian economic aid recovery. Similarly, the IMF informed Indonesia of its decision to halt the disbursement of some $460 million.209 Heavily reliant upon foreign economic and military aid, Habibie met with his military officials on 12 September to discuss the crisis in East Timor. This meeting came the same day as President Clinton’s speech at APEC, where it was announced that the US would support an effort to mobilize a multinational force in East Timor. It also came the day after an open debate was held on East Timor in the UNSC, where some 50 states spoke in favour of urgent international intervention in East Timor. With the support of General Wiranto, President Habibie reluctantly ‘proposed that Indonesia should now permit an international force to assist in restoring order in East Timor’.210 The Indonesian view was relayed to the UN Secretary General, effectively ending the crisis by sanctioning a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force to enter East Timor.

**Indonesian failure to resist sovereignty violation**

On 15 September 1999, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1264. Invoking Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Resolution expressed concern at the ‘widespread and flagrant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law’.211 As such, the Resolution authorized ‘the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command structure’.212 The remit of the force was ‘to restore peace and security in East Timor, to protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks and, within force capabilities, to facilitate humanitarian assistance operations’.213 The International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), established under an Australian command structure, was given the authority to use all necessary means to restore security in East Timor. The multinational peacekeeping taskforce first entered East Timor on 21 September 1999, less than one week after the Security Council Resolution. INTERFET’s task was to address the humanitarian crisis in East Timor, until a more permanent UN peacekeeping force could be assembled. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made concerted efforts to encourage troops from different countries to join this ‘coalition of the willing’. Despite this, Australian personnel comprised the core of the peacekeeping taskforce.214 Hugh White summarized Canberra’s decision to lead the
INTERFET force, stating that ‘there was a sense that if Australia didn’t lead, no one else would’.

For the Australian government, returning East Timorese stability was vital ‘to avoid having yet another weak and fragile state in what is already a difficult neighbourhood’. Australian Prime Minister John Howard cemented his beliefs in the ‘Howard Doctrine’, which he announced the same week that INTERFET entered East Timor. Howard’s conviction was that, post-Timor, Australia would seek to upgrade its defence forces and embrace a new role as the US’ peacekeeping ‘deputy’ in Asia, with involvement in East Timor helping to ‘cement Australia’s place in the region’. Having reinforced Canberra’s role as lead command of the peacekeeping force, INTERFET began to round up militias in East Timor, in some cases killing them. Whilst this approach elicited protests from some within Indonesia, INTERFET met with very little resistance, either from the militias or the TNI. A measure of security was restored to East Timor relatively quickly, with INTERFET taking till 16 November to secure the region. Despite this success, INTERFET was not ‘intended or equipped to resolve the many problems of administration or reconstruction’. As such, UNAMET re-established a presence in the region from 29 September, until a more comprehensive effort could be authorized and mobilized.

Despite Canberra explicitly seeking a Southeast Asian contingent for INTERFET, the states of ASEAN were noticeably reluctant to take part in an East Timor peacekeeping force. As Lee Kuan Yew confirmed, intervention in East Timor was ‘a task no country in the region would have undertaken’. While Lee acknowledged that ‘it did not make sense’ for the TNI to devastate East Timor, he stated that ‘many things that did not make sense had happened, which is why Singapore, like the others in ASEAN, had stayed out of the East Timor issue’. The ASEAN states were particularly reluctant to intervene in East Timor without prior permission from Indonesia, and were also uncomfortable with the unprecedented power afforded to INTERFET. As Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong argued, East Timor ‘was not a problem created by ASEAN, it was and is an international problem that remains an issue with the United Nations. It never started off as an ASEAN problem’.

These were sentiments felt by the majority of ASEAN states. The member states were, ‘suspicious of Western attempts to internationalize the dispute [and concerned] … that East Timor could set a precedent for Western interference in the internal affairs of other member states using the norm of humanitarian intervention as justification’. Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia was particularly outspoken on the topic of Western
interference in the internal affairs of states. Of specific concern was the implication that in times of humanitarian crisis, the use of military force against a sovereign state could be determined and sanctioned by a concert of Western states. This concern was echoed throughout Southeast Asia and the Third World, where states worried that humanitarian intervention could allow the West ‘to call into question the legitimacy of governments and regimes not of their liking’.

Blaming the US and UN for the East Timor crisis, Mahathir argued that President Habibie had been, ‘pressured to allow an act of self-determination even though many East Timorese had reconciled themselves to integration with Indonesia’. According to Mahathir, there had been ‘no killings’ before the ballot, and pro-Indonesia Timorese had felt ‘cheated’ by the quick vote and ‘responded in the only way they knew how’. Mahathir also expressed the view that ‘the West would like to see Indonesia broken up into smaller countries’ with Australia ‘the main beneficiary’. Coupled with these concerns were a number of more pragmatic considerations related to sending troops to take part in INTERFET. Some ASEAN countries worried about the potential consequences for ASEAN troops if they were to exchange fire with Indonesian troops or Indonesian-backed militias. Others were concerned about the expense of participating in an intervention, with some making participation in INTERFET conditional on financial support from Australia and Japan.

Indonesia was suspicious of Australia’s intentions in the region after Canberra’s policy shift on East Timor’s right to self-determination. These suspicions intensified after Australia agreed to lead the INTERFET force into East Timor. The Indonesians tore up the 1995 security pact signed with Australia on 16 September 1999, the day after the UN Security Council approved INTERFET. The ‘Howard Doctrine’ in particular drew angry reactions from many within Southeast Asia. This can best be summarized by Malaysian Democratic Action Party Secretary General Lim King Siang, who argued that, ‘Asia does not want, nor has it recognized, the US as the policeman of the world, what’s more, one needing a deputy’. For Jakarta, Howard’s remarks acted as a potential agent of interference in Indonesia’s internal affairs.

*Indonesia requests an ASEAN contingent in INTERFET*

Canberra’s role in INTERFET led to ‘assaults on Australian personnel and property within Indonesia, as Jakarta’s former ally was considered
to have its own designs on East Timor’s resources’. Ultimately, Indonesia’s perception of its ‘nation’s humiliation at the white hands of Canberra’, meant that it sought to minimize Australia’s influence in East Timor. It did so by expressly requesting an ASEAN presence within INTERFET. Habibie approached Thailand initially, requesting an ASEAN contribution to the force. This left ASEAN with little option but to engage with the INTERFET force. Not to do so would sour relations with Indonesia and invite international condemnation. In addition to a Thai contingent to INTERFET, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines also agreed to contribute troops to the multinational force.

As ASEAN troops prepared for deployment, Mahathir met with the UN Secretary General to discuss a scaling back of Australian troops within INTERFET, stating that ‘there are other ways of solving problems besides pointing guns at people’. Similarly, Thailand advocated restraint from the Australian troops, suggesting that Asian troops would be more ‘gentle’. Canberra confirmed that it wanted to scale back Australian troops and include more troops from ASEAN. However, this could not be implemented because ASEAN countries were weeks away from deployment and were unwilling to foot the bill for a lengthy involvement. ASEAN’s eventual contribution to INTERFET numbered approximately 2500 of the 9900 force. Thai troops formed the second largest contingent to the force of about 1500 troops, including the force’s deputy-commander. In an effort to maintain good relations with Indonesia, the Philippine government declared its official designation as a ‘Humanitarian task force’, sending only non-combatant forces of engineering and medical units.

Despite the eventual contribution to INTERFET, ASEAN’s slow response to the crisis raised serious questions regarding the Association’s ability to respond to regional conflicts. Without Western intervention, it is highly unlikely the East Timor crisis would have been resolved. This enhanced the view held by many in the West that ASEAN was ‘chronically incapable of taking meaningful action even when its own interests are directly engaged’. Evidence suggests that the ASEAN states learnt very little from the crisis in East Timor. In a July 2000 ASEAN Joint Communiqué, ASEAN foreign ministers ‘commended Indonesia for all its efforts in resolving the East Timor issue’. This led at least one commentator to argue that ‘there was no suggestion of lessons learned or mistakes to be avoided’.
East Timor’s formal independence

On 25 October 1999, the UNSC established a United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which was given overall responsibility for administration of the country.\(^246\) East Timor became formally independent on 20 May 2002, at which time the state was renamed Timor-Leste. Upon independence, UNTAET ended, to be replaced by the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET), established to provide assistance to core administrative structures and to provide interim law enforcement. Although initially established for a period of 12 months, the mandate was extended until 20 May 2005. At this time, all UN personnel left the region. However, Timor-Leste remained weak and vulnerable, with many important nation-building tasks still uncompleted. Timor-Leste descended into internal and factional conflict in 2006, necessitating an International Stabilisation Force (ISF), which was unable to leave the country until 22 November 2012. Timor-Leste remains a vulnerable state, still attempting to grapple with independence.

INTERFET as a violation of Indonesian sovereignty

Did intervention in East Timor by way of a UN-mandated peacekeeping force constitute a violation of Indonesian sovereignty? There are two potential arguments against intervention in East Timor constituting a breach of Indonesian sovereignty. First, because Indonesia’s claim to sovereignty in East Timor was not recognized by the UN, intervention by a peacekeeping force could not constitute a breach of Indonesian sovereignty. Second, Indonesia’s sovereignty could not have been violated, because Indonesia agreed to the peacekeeping force entering East Timor.

UN recognition of Indonesia’s claim to sovereignty

With respect to the first argument, there are a number of important factors to consider. First, Indonesia clearly believed that it exercised sovereignty over East Timor, making it clear that discussion of East Timor would represent an unacceptable violation of Indonesian sovereignty. Second, and related to the first, Indonesia’s claim of sovereignty over East Timor was recognized by members of the
international community. All ASEAN states supported Indonesia’s East Timor policy, believing the matter to be an internal affair of Indonesia. This provided strong regional support for Indonesia’s claim of sovereignty over East Timor. External powers also recognized Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. Australia acknowledged Indonesia’s sovereignty over the territory when it signed the Timor Gap ‘Zone of Cooperation Agreement’. Evidence suggests that the US also supported Indonesia’s claims over East Timor. The US Ambassador to Jakarta, Mr Robert Barry, stated that the US government had from the start accepted East Timor’s incorporation into Indonesia. The US also sought to frustrate UN attempts to resolve the East Timor issue post-1975, and helped to keep the Timor issue off the international agenda.

Third, members of the international community made it clear that they would not move ahead with an intervention force in East Timor without Indonesian approval; the implication being that to intervene without Indonesian approval would constitute a breach of Indonesia’s rights. Despite a lack of UN recognition, Indonesia, ASEAN and the international community recognized Indonesian sovereignty in East Timor. For Indonesia, this validated its occupation of the territory.

**Indonesia’s agreement to a peacekeeping force**

A basic principle of UN peacekeeping is that ‘operations are deployed with the consent of the main parties to the conflict’. This is a legal necessity, so as not to violate Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, which states that the UN has no authority ‘to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state’. Thus, it might be surmised that Indonesia’s consent to a UN peacekeeping force in East Timor legitimized intervention. However, the conditions under which this consent was given should be brought into question. According to Krasner, violations of sovereignty can occur through coercion or imposition. In situations of coercion, there is the threat, ‘to impose sanctions on another if the target ruler does not alter his or her policies. The target can reject these demands, in which case it suffers sanctions, or accept them. In either case the target is worse off’. Violation through imposition ‘involves a situation in which the target has no choice but to accept the demands of the initiator … the target is so weak that it cannot effectively resist’. Coercion and imposition violate state sovereignty because a state would never voluntarily accept an arrangement that leaves them worse off. Imposition can only occur when interests are different and power asymmetries high.
Krasner’s definition can be used to support the claim that during the East Timor humanitarian crisis, Indonesia’s sovereignty was violated. Through coercion, Indonesia had little option but to consent to a UN peacekeeping force. After the financial crisis caused external power interest divergence, the status quo had irreparably changed. Indonesia was weakened by economic and domestic instability. External powers such as Australia and the US used this opportunity to push Jakarta into allowing a vote for independence in East Timor and, subsequently, to accept a UN-mandated peacekeeping force. They did so, despite Habibie clearly stating that this would represent an unacceptable violation of Indonesian sovereignty. As violence escalated in the region, these external powers imposed sanctions on Indonesia, to coerce the state into altering its East Timor policy. By threatening to withhold much needed military and economic aid, Indonesia had little choice but to compromise its sovereignty and accept external power demands. It could even be argued that Indonesia was so weak that it had no option but to consent to peacekeepers entering the region. Despite Indonesian consent, we can argue that coercive measures by external powers caused Indonesia’s failure to resist sovereignty violation from actors external to the region.

**Theoretical assessment of the East Timor crisis (1999)**

The foregoing analysis has shown that, during the East Timor humanitarian crisis of 1999, decreased interest convergence between Indonesia and the US and Australia caused Indonesia’s failure to resist sovereignty violation by actors external to the region. Prior to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, external power interests were convergent with Indonesian interests, causing these states to acquiesce to Indonesia’s activities in East Timor. Nor did domestic pressures, such as Congressional restraints or the activities of NGOs and other domestic protest movements, significantly impact on these interests. During this period, Indonesia remained the ASEAN vanguard state. Indonesia, believing East Timor to be its 27th province, clearly had the most compelling interests at stake with regard to the territory. The ASEAN states, often under the watchful eye of Jakarta, continued to maintain support for Indonesia’s East Timor policy.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis acted as a catalyst for external power interest change. It was in the interests of Australia and the US to have a strong and stable Indonesia in the region. Indonesia’s economic and
domestic instability now posed a significant threat to the regional environment. The subsequent downfall of Suharto also represented an opportunity for the US and Australia to play a direct role in helping to implement transitional democratic reform in Indonesia. This was a secondary interest of these states that the more benign post-Cold War environment allowed them to pursue. In doing so, East Timorese right to self-determination came to dominate the agenda. It became apparent to the US and Australia that the benefits of action in relation to Indonesia and its East Timor policy far outweighed the costs of inaction. These states ultimately sought to secure their own interests, and to prevent a regional power vacuum.

To elicit a change in Indonesia’s East Timor policy, these external powers were able to use two key strategies to their advantage. First, they openly stated that Indonesia should allow the East Timorese a right to self-determination. In doing so, Indonesia automatically lost Western power support, which had lent a large degree of credibility to Indonesia’s claim over East Timor. Second, the US and Australia used Indonesia’s economic situation to their advantage. Specifically, coercive measures to withhold economic aid were used in order to implement changes in line with external power interests. These strategies had the required effect. Indonesia capitulated to external power pressure, stating it would allow the East Timorese a referendum to determine East Timor independence. This set in motion a chain of events that would ultimately lead to a devastating humanitarian crisis and external intervention by way of a UN-mandated peacekeeping force. Despite external power interest change, Indonesia remained the vanguard state, and maintained support within ASEAN, many of whom feared the ramifications of potential Indonesian Balkanisation at a time of severe economic instability. Indonesia and the ASEAN states also feared Western intervention in the region under the auspices of humanitarianism. This was regarded as a way for external powers to secure their own interests in the region. As an Association, ASEAN continued its support for Indonesia in the face of international condemnation.

Significantly, support within ASEAN for Indonesia’s East Timor policy was not enough to prevent Indonesia’s eventual sovereignty violation. This raises questions about ASEAN and its ability to maintain regional autonomy under challenge from sufficiently powerful external actors. It also suggests that external powers play a vital role in the dynamics of ASEAN state resistance to sovereignty violation. Analysis of the regional environment in 1999 supports the hypothesis that a decrease in interest convergence between a vanguard state and
designated external actors caused a failure of ASEAN vanguard state resistance to sovereignty violation, from powers external to the region.

**Contrasting theoretical arguments**

The humanitarian crisis that devastated East Timor is noticeably underemphasized in the existing constructivist literature, which emphasizes ASEAN autonomy and ‘regional solutions for regional problems, with minimal intervention by outside powers’. However, in the case presented here, there appears little evidence that ASEAN adhered to this norm. Acharya states that the ‘regional solutions to regional problems’ norm must not be conflated with self-reliance, ‘but rather with the right not to be ignored or sidelined by outside powers … in the management of Southeast Asian affairs’. ASEAN’s challenge is therefore ‘not to achieve self-reliance, but to coordinate the seeking and channelling of outside support’. The East Timor case is a clear example of ASEAN’s failure to achieve this goal. External power intervention occurred without ASEAN support, and despite vocal opposition from the ASEAN member states.

All constructivist authors frame the East Timor crisis with respect to the norm of non–interference. Acharya takes the stance that ASEAN’s ‘reluctance to dilute its non–interference doctrine’ prevented the ASEAN states from providing an effective response to the humanitarian crisis. In this view, ASEAN state reluctance to contribute to INTERFET, despite Indonesia’s request ‘further attested to the continued salience of non–intervention’. For Acharya, the East Timor crisis is an example of ASEAN’s inability to respond to the crisis due to its respect for the Association’s norms. That ASEAN state adherence to non-interference actually exacerbated regional instability is underemphasized. Indeed, this is a point made by Alice Ba, who refers briefly to East Timor, stating that the emerging crisis ‘destabilized’ ASEAN’s established norm and practice of not interfering in their neighbour’s affairs and added another layer to already difficult intra-ASEAN debates. Missing from Acharya’s and Ba’s discussion of East Timor is an admission that, by adhering to the non-intervention norm, these states effectively invited external intervention into the region. In doing so, they contravened the ASEAN norm of regional autonomy. This suggests a flaw in the conceptualization of ASEAN’s norms.

Only Haacke appears to highlight the tension between these two norms. Haacke acknowledges the significance of ASEAN state participation in intervention forces such as INTERFET, admitting that
some of the shared understanding ‘intrinsic to ASEAN’s long-standing diplomatic and security culture have been relaxed, particularly the principle of non-interference’. Haacke also notes that the Australia-led international force, ‘demonstrated ASEAN’s incapacity to address regional problems on its own terms’. However, he argues that ‘it seems premature to consider the [INTERFET] participation … as evidence of the demise of ASEAN’s diplomatic and security culture’. For Haacke, the norms associated with the ‘ASEAN Way’ are ‘still perceived to serve the important and necessary function of … limiting interference by non-ASEAN states’. The evidence presented here does not validate Haacke’s conclusion.

As a case study, the East Timor humanitarian crisis of 1999 conforms well to realist expectations. According to Michael Leifer, ‘regional order in the grand sense has been beyond the capacity of ASEAN’. One reason for this is that ‘the Association was established as the institutional fruit of conflict resolution’. Since this time, there has been ‘an absence of any distinctive … peace process in respect of any intra-mural dispute’. In the period following 1997, ‘ASEAN’s round of troubles had only just begun as a period of regional economic turmoil ensued … which has been well beyond the competence of the Association to address on any exclusive basis’. This was compounded by the resignation of Suharto in 1998, which ‘left an enlarged and less cohesive ASEAN in a diminished condition’. The ASEAN of the 1990s was therefore ‘a much more diverse and cumbersome entity; while the changes in its scale means that an earlier intimacy in political communication and consultation is no longer possible’.

Taking a similar view, David Jones and Michael Smith argue that in the period after the financial crisis, the Association’s purpose ‘seemed to consist of concealing fundamental differences of view among its members under the guise of consensus and non-interference’. This supports their assessment that ‘since 1997, the security situation in East Asia reveals … that the ASEAN states possess no clear strategy to respond to the challenges the organisation currently faces’. For Jones and Smith, ‘ASEAN has floundered in its attempts to manage both the regional economic crisis and its legacy of intercommunal violence and separatist struggles’. The ASEAN norm of non-interference ‘has only intensified the failure’. This is because ‘non-interference negates the expression of a region. It merely denotes recognition of a collocation of independent sovereign states’.

Jones and Smith contend that ‘only since 1997 has Canberra begun to ask how to stabilize a disintegrating Southeast Asia rather than integrate itself with a rapidly integrating region’.
after the East Timor crisis in 1999 that ‘Canberra and Washington realized how important a proactive Australia and a supportive US are to the maintenance of a regional balance’. Ultimately, ‘the members of a hollow ASEAN need an American and Australian presence far more than the US and Australia need them, as the stabilisation of East Timor – where ASEAN proved utterly ineffectual – demonstrated’. The realist assessment of ASEAN’s role in the post-1997 period is persuasive. As evidence provided in this chapter shows, ASEAN was unable to provide a response to the East Timor crisis of 1999, and external powers played a key role in maintaining regional stability. Ultimately, ASEAN unity was unable to prevent Indonesian sovereignty violation from actors external to the region.

For critical theorist Lee Jones, the application of non-interference to East Timor was ‘coercively enforced by the Suharto regime and its allies in neighbouring countries’ oligarchic classes, as a means of limiting scope of conflict over East Timor’. This application of non-interference ‘emerged out of a coercive struggle involving states, business groups and civil society organizations’. Jones similarly argues that ASEAN’s response to the 1999 crisis was ‘principally due to their fear of contagion from the social and economic unrest spreading from Indonesia’. At this time, ‘core ASEAN states, which had been most badly affected by the Asian crisis and the growing unrest in Indonesia … felt compelled to intervene’. They therefore ‘actively encouraged and participated in a humanitarian intervention in East Timor’, becoming ‘increasingly involved in Indonesia’s “internal” affairs’. This culminated in the ASEAN states rapidly ‘preparing for a peace-enforcement intervention, committing their forces before [italics in text] Western states did’.

There are two limitations to Jones’ argument. First, there is evidence to suggest that Jones has overemphasized the role of ASEAN in the crisis. Evidence presented in this chapter actually contradicts Jones’ argument, and shows how the ASEAN states vocally opposed Western intervention in East Timor on the grounds of humanitarianism. Although Australia attempted to gain an early ASEAN contingent to INTERFET, it failed to do so because of ASEAN unwillingness to become involved in the conflict. Arguably, ASEAN had very little role in resolving the humanitarian crisis, hence the need for external power intervention. Jones also fails to address the fact that Indonesia requested an ASEAN contingent to INTERFET. It was only after Indonesia requested an ASEAN presence that the ASEAN states supplied troops to the peacekeeping force. It can therefore be argued that non-interference was not contravened in this case.
Second, Jones argues that the ASEAN states intervened in the humanitarian crisis because the core ASEAN states ‘felt that the fate of their societies and economies was bound up with events in East Timor’. This argument is less compelling. While it is true that the financial crisis and Indonesian instability had an impact on the ASEAN states, this was by no means uniform. Whereas certain regional states, such as Thailand, were badly affected by the crisis, other core ASEAN states were much less affected. Despite its open economy, the effects of the financial crisis in Singapore were less severe than other states. Similarly, contraction in the Philippines ‘was considerably less severe than those experienced by its neighbours’. While Jones stresses the fear of separatism as a driving force behind the Philippines’ intervention in Indonesia, this explanation does not sit well with Singapore, which did not have similar domestic considerations. In reality, the Asian Financial Crisis impacted on state interests, acting as a catalyst for change. A subsequent decrease in interest convergence caused a decrease in Indonesian resistance to sovereignty violation from actors external to the region. Although domestic factors can and do play a role, the deciding factor in this case was the role played by external powers. ASEAN support for Indonesia was ultimately of little consequence.

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138 Lee, *From Third World to First*, 390.

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