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THE PERILOUS ROAD TO SOVEREIGNTY: LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH IN TIMOR-LESTE

By Lieutenant Colonel Douglas D. Jackson, U.S. Air Force

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

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The Contradictions of Timor-Leste

In May of 2002, at the easternmost edge of the Lesser Sunda Islands, the nation of Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor) became the first internationally recognized, sovereign state of the 21st century. The occasion represented a milestone in the troubled history of the nascent nation, but the ceremony did not connote a cessation of the violence and hostilities that indelibly marked centuries of colonialism, occupation, failed pacification, and systematic reprisal. More than a decade after Timor-Leste's formal recognition of statehood, and fifteen years removed from the sovereignty referendum that concomitantly marked a termination, an escalation, and a genesis of episodic challenges confronting the country and its citizenry, Timor-Leste remains a study in contrasts. For idealists, Timor-Leste symbolizes the power of a free people to self-determine despite years of oppression and neglect. Advocates of multilateral engagement, meanwhile, trumpet Timor-Leste as an elegy to the vast potential of global cooperation and regional leadership. Conversely, skeptics of coordinated international intermediation contend that the various tragedies and missteps in Timor-Leste represent a cautionary tale of ineffective intervention and the impotence of the United Nations.

Perhaps the only unimpeachable truth of Timor-Leste is that its narrative is more complicated than a single perspective can convey, and therefore its past, present, and future defy simple categorization. Accordingly, this study will consider Timor-Leste's complex and challenging history, with particular emphasis on the efforts to stabilize and develop the nation in the wake of the violent aftermath of the 1999 referendum. Further, the study will analyze lessons learned during the fifteen years following the popular consultation and the salient conclusions that international leaders and policymakers should draw from the post-sovereignty experience of Timor-Leste.

East Timor in Historical Context

The island of Timor developed as a trading colony of the Portuguese in the 16th century, further colonized by the Dutch in the early 17th century.¹ The Dutch wrested control of the western portion of the island in 1616, while Portugal maintained dominion over the eastern section of the island that comprises modern Timor-Leste; a 19th century treaty between Portugal and the Netherlands formalized the partitioning of the island, to include the geographically separated East Timorese enclave of Occussi on the northern coast of West Timor.² As a result of centuries of Portuguese colonialism and separation from

most of the western half of the island, East Timorese share a unique culture and a political unity, influenced by Christianity, European style governance, and resistance to occupying power.³

The Dutch-Portuguese cohabitation of Timor Island continued through civic unrest, failed attempts at pacification, and colonial indifference, with minimal interruption, until World War II.⁴ In early 1942, in anticipation of a Japanese invasion, the Netherlands and Australia positioned armed forces on Timor Island, with Portugal's permission. The ensuing fall of Singapore and Japan's decisive victory over the Allied fleet in the Java Sea signaled its dominance in the region and prompted Portuguese and Dutch forces to surrender Timor Island without resistance.⁵ Fearful of the geopolitical ramifications of a Japanese occupation of Timor Island, Australian forces were not as conciliatory, instead opting to engage in a prolonged guerilla war with Japan.⁶ The outnumbered Australian commandos were able to delay advances while inflicting significant casualties on Japanese units, due in large measure to assistance from young East Timorese men and boys – known as Criados – who served as guides for the agile Australian military forces.⁷

Though Australian forces eventually withdrew from Timor Island in 1943, the engagement was a pyrrhic victory for Japan that resulted in only forty Australian casualties compared to nearly fifteen hundred Japanese casualties. The most significant losses of the conflict were inflicted against the East Timorese, who endured nearly 70,000 casualties as a result of Japanese reprisals after the Australians departed.⁸ This episode tragically foreshadows the exorbitant costs paid by East Timor when the international community fails to forestall and safeguard against atrocities of war. Furthermore, Australia's alliance with East Timorese Criados against occupying Japanese forces and the ensuing Australian withdrawal from the island that prompted widespread reprisals, influences the prevailing dynamic between the two nations. One could infer that this shared history at least partially explains the complicated and angst-filled relationship Australia shares with its neighbor 400 miles to the northwest.

When Japan relinquished control of its territorial gains in the Dutch East Indies at the conclusion of World War II in 1945, Indonesia immediately declared its independence. After a four-year revolution marked by periodic military conflict with the Netherlands and internal feuding, Indonesia was recognized as an independent amalgamation of the Dutch East Indies, to include the former Dutch colony of West Timor.⁹ Meanwhile, despite a renewed call for independence following World War II and an Australian consideration to request an international mandate to control East Timor for strategic reasons, East Timor remained a Portuguese colony.¹⁰ While the region of West Timor integrated into independent Indonesia, East Timor resumed its “prewar colonial model of forced labor, underdevelopment, and neglect.”¹¹

Colonial incompetence in East Timor fomented calls for rebellion and resistance to Portuguese authority and gave rise to a generation of East Timorese leaders who would eventually lead an autonomous and independent nation; however, it was not until Portugal's predominantly bloodless “Carnation Revolution” of 1974 that decolonization became a reality.¹² Emboldened by a wave of public support, the new government in Lisbon acted swiftly to restore democracy and terminate Portugal's costly and unsuccessful colonial occupations around the globe. Within months, Portugal withdrew entirely from Timor Island, effectively ending 460 years of Portuguese domination of East Timor.¹³

Portugal's abrupt departure from East Timor, coupled with centuries of extraction and underdevelopment, left the impoverished region devoid of a coherent governing strategy, adequate infrastructure, and the institutional capacity to manage the transition to sovereignty. Amidst an internal struggle to determine the appropriate path forward – certain factions favored integration with Indonesia while others advocated a closer alignment with Portugal – the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) unilaterally declared independence in November 1975 and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste was born.¹⁴ The two alternative political groups in East Timor opposed FRETILIN's declaration, as did Portugal's transitional assistance regime, but negotiations among the parties proved to be ineffective.¹⁵ The predictable discord in East Timor provided the ideal pretext for Indonesian forces, which had been engaging in small-scale, sporadic fighting with East Timorese factions, to intervene en masse. Nine days after FRETILIN's declaration of independence, ten thousand Indonesian troops invaded East Timor.¹⁶ Only two months later, 60,000 East Timorese had died at the hands of the annexing Indonesian military.¹⁷

Scholars disagree regarding the level of international complicity in Indonesia's aggressive takeover of East Timor, however, none dispute at least tacit approval of Indonesia's action on the part of major world powers.¹⁸ As a result of Indonesia's staunchly anti-Communist disposition – a significant factor in the context of the Cold War – and widespread fear of potential Communist sympathy within FRETILIN, Western and Western-influenced nation-states opted against intervention when Indonesian forces breached the border of East Timor. Documents declassified in 2001 reveal that U.S. President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, under increasing pressure in the region due to military struggles in Vietnam, “assured [Indonesian President] Suharto that they would not object to what the Indonesian leader termed ‘rapid or drastic action’ in East Timor.”¹⁹ Australian leaders were provided similar notification ahead of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor and elected to remain silent on the matter.²⁰ Weeks later, the United Nations Security Council formally condemned the invasion, confirmed East Timor's right of self-determination, and called for an immediate withdrawal of Indonesian forces, but the resolution was ineffectual.²¹ In July 1976, Indonesia declared East Timor to be its twenty-seventh province and shortly thereafter closed the territory to outside observers.²² Following 460 years of colonization, East Timor would now be victimized by 25 years of occupation, repression, and genocide.

Indonesian Domination of Timor-Leste

Although consistent figures of East Timorese killed in the aftermath of the Indonesian invasion of Timor-Leste are elusive, conservative estimates suggest over 100,000 individuals were killed in the first two years following the December 1975 incursion.²³ FALANTIL, the militant wing of FRETILIN, resisted the advances and dominion of the Indonesian military (TNI), but the under-resourced and poorly equipped units could not withstand the direct assault of a superior-funded fighting force. FALANTIL forces instead commenced a 25-year guerrilla warfare campaign against occupying Indonesian forces, prompting a harsh pacification effort against all East Timorese. During the Indonesian domination of East Timor, massacres against civilian populations were commonplace, as were indiscriminate napalm bombing campaigns, widespread famine, and TNI-controlled labor camps.²⁴ By the time a military stalemate emerged in the mid-1980s, more than 200,000 East Timorese had lost their lives at the hands of the TNI.²⁵

Three developments in East Timor, beginning in the late 1980s, in conjunction with a determined and increasingly high-profile resistance force, prompted a significant shift in Indonesian policy in the region. The first spark toward a new geopolitical reality in Southeast Asia was an official visit to Dili by Pope John Paul II in October 1989.²⁶ After the Pontiff conducted mass for thousands of Timorese Catholics, representatives of FRETILIN and FALANTIL staged a pro-independence demonstration in view of hordes of international media traveling with Pope John Paul II. The enormous press coverage sparked international outrage and began a steady application of pressure on the Indonesian government.

If the papal visit represented the initial spark toward enduring change in East Timor, the massacre of scores of Timorese by Indonesian military and police forces in Dili's Santa Cruz cemetery in November 1991 was the fuel that empowered a sustainable fire. After minor scuffles between funeral-goers and occupying forces during the procession, approximately 85 Indonesian defense and law enforcement personnel opened fire on the mourners inside the cemetery gates.²⁷ Some of the mourners survived, but most did not, as Indonesian troops launched intermittent gunfire at the unarmed crowd for nearly twenty minutes.²⁸ Unlike previous reports of atrocities in East Timor that the Indonesian government simply denied, the Santa Cruz massacre was incontrovertible because it was videotaped by a British journalist.²⁹ The death toll of the Santa Cruz massacre is disputed, but the impact of the event is clear; the massacre represented an “end of any chance of East Timor's successful integration into Indonesia,” as Timorese anti-Indonesia sentiment fomented and human rights advocates found a galvanizing event to rally the international community.³⁰

A massive regional economic and monetary crisis, partially influenced by internal and international pressure applied on the Indonesian government over the occupation of Timor-Leste, led to political upheaval in Jakarta in May 1998. After 32 years in office, Suharto abruptly resigned and handed control of the government to his Vice-President, B.J. Habibie.³¹ Despite a close 40-year friendship with

Suharto, Habibie immediately initiated a more internationalist, transparent, and conciliatory administration than his predecessor; among the changes Habibie instituted was the policy of decentralization of Indonesian provinces, including East Timor.³² In a June 1998 BBC interview, Habibie announced, “I am ready to consider, as the President, to give East Timor a special status.”³³ After a 25-year occupation that led to the death of more than a quarter of its population, East Timor approached a narrow window of opportunity to self-determine, but the challenges of independence were only beginning to surface.³⁴

Planning and Execution of Popular Consultation

After rounds of negotiations between Indonesia and Portugal, facilitated by the United Nations, Indonesia agreed to a UN-administered referendum to determine whether East Timorese would prefer autonomous status within Indonesia or outright independence.³⁵ In accordance with the May 1999 agreement, if the East Timorese voted in favor of autonomy within Indonesia, East Timor would be removed from the list of Non-Self Governing Territories of concern to the General Assembly; this outcome effectively would have led to the UN officially recognizing East Timor as a legitimate, albeit autonomous province of Indonesia.³⁶ In contrast, if the East Timorese electorate endorsed independence and rejected autonomy, Indonesia would voluntarily withdraw from Timor-Leste and allow Portugal to oversee a transition to independence.³⁷

Pursuant to the agreement signed by the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia as well as the UN Secretary-General, the UN established the United Nations Mission to East Timor (UNAMET) “to organize and conduct a popular consultation...to determine the Territory’s future status.”³⁸ Though UNAMET was charged with nearly all logistical requirements of the consultation, in accordance with the agreement, Indonesian authorities were solely responsible for ensuring a secure environment in East Timor, devoid of violence and other forms of intimidation.³⁹ The collective decision to abdicate security responsibility to the occupying force proved to be a disastrous one.

UNAMET included 241 international staff divided into political, electoral, and informational components, along with 280 civilian police officers and 50 military liaison officers tasked with advising Indonesian police and military forces on the discharge of their duties.⁴⁰ UNAMET did not have authority to engage in peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations, but rather operated under the terms of Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, to aid “in the peaceful settlement of disputes.”⁴¹ Shortly after its formation, UNAMET established an electoral commission and began registering and informing East Timorese voters; in only six weeks, UNAMET successfully registered over 450,000 East Timorese ahead of the negotiated cut-off date. UN operations in East Timor, however, continued to be threatened and impacted by violence in the region perpetrated directly by the TNI or, more commonly, by TNI-backed militia groups.⁴² The violence was the coordinated result of a pro-integration (anti-independence) campaign intended to ensure that Timor-Leste remained part of Indonesia.⁴³ Eventually, security conditions in East Timor deteriorated so profoundly as a result of the terror campaign that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was forced to extend the voter registration deadline more than a month and delay the referendum date from August 8 to August 30.⁴⁴

Predictably, as the consultation date drew nearer, violence in East Timor escalated even further. UNAMET offices were victimized by grenade attacks and vandalism designed to intimidate, while UNAMET officials faced threats of violence as well as occasional car-jackings, ambushes, and physical attacks.⁴⁵ UNAMET officials were not the primary targets of intimidation, however, as TNI-supported militias were more interested in swaying the vote toward integration with Indonesia through terror against pro-independence Timorese.⁴⁶ Additional consultation delay and even postponement was considered, but due to demands of President Habibie to complete the process before the end of August and internal pressure to minimize time and cost requirements, Secretary-General Annan affirmed the amended consultation date of August 30, 1999. Annan pressed forward with the consultation despite the fact that several influential governments within the UN—notably the United States, Great Britain, and Australia—“had shared sufficient intelligence to make their leaders aware that the voting would be accompanied or followed by significant militia attacks.”⁴⁷

In spite of these security concerns and the campaign of intimidation launched by the TNI and TNI-supported militia groups, leaders in the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT) also backed the August 30 consultation date. One can reasonably infer that the steadfast support of the East Timorese resistance to hold the consultation as scheduled despite fears of reprisal stemmed from centuries of occupation and domination. As Julio Da Costa Freitas – a veteran of the resistance movement and the current Charge d’Affaires for the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in Washington, DC – explained in an interview: “We were aware [of the threat of reprisal], but the referendum was our only chance for freedom. We feared if we delayed further, we might not get another chance.”⁴⁸

Days before the popular consultation, violence and terror peaked as pro-autonomy militias rioted, destroyed, burned, tortured, and killed indiscriminately in Dili and throughout the province.⁴⁹ Despite a UN mandate to ensure an environment devoid of intimidation and violence, Indonesian military and police forces did not intervene to prevent the pre-referendum rampage. Meanwhile, UNAMET personnel, neither equipped nor authorized to operate against pro-autonomy, TNI-backed militias, retreated into walled compounds. Perhaps for reasons of necessity or self-preservation, UNAMET officials documented but ultimately ignored the obvious environment of intimidation that existed beyond the gates. Indicative of willful ignorance or irrational optimism that belied the events on the ground, UN Secretary-General Annan released a statement on August 29, 1999 that heralded the next day’s referendum as an opportunity “to settle a long-running dispute by peaceful means.”⁵⁰

By the numbers, the popular consultation was an overwhelming success. 98.6% of eligible East Timorese participated in the referendum that was overseen by an additional 1,300 international observers.⁵¹ The day of the referendum was peaceful and surprisingly quiet; the majority of East Timorese voters cast their ballots by mid-morning through limited reports of voter intimidation, breaches of voting rules, and sporadic violence. By the early afternoon, however, as indications began to signal a massive surge in pro-independence voters, TNI-backed militias activated. UNAMET personnel were forced to close and evacuate numerous polling places by 2:00 p.m. due to safety concerns.⁵² Throughout the island region, as UNAMET officials departed, Indonesian militias torched the voting facilities and initiated a coordinated campaign of reprisal against the East Timorese. The reprisal was necessitated because pre-referendum attempts to intimidate, terrorize, and eliminate pro-independence support failed; East Timorese voted in favor of independence by a whopping margin of 57% (21.5% in favor of autonomy within Indonesia; 78.5% opposed). Julio Da Costa Freitas, a 1999 voter and victim of the subsequent post-referendum violence, proffered a representative perspective on the matter. Asked whether he would still vote for independence knowing the reprisals the outcome would engender, Freitas responded: “Absolutely. I am proud of the courage of the East Timorese and convinced we made the right decision.”⁵³

Indonesian Reprisal and the International Response

After a hand count of votes and the validation of the Electoral Commission, the UN released the result of the popular consultation on September 4, 1999. In the announcement, Secretary-General Annan praised the Indonesian government for its commitment and perseverance in East Timor.⁵⁴ Annan further asserted: “Now is the time for all concerned to seize the opportunity to lay a firm and lasting foundation for cooperation and peace, and to usher in an era of stability and prosperity for all future generations of East Timorese.”⁵⁵ Immediately after Annan’s address, President Habibie urged acceptance of the results and reiterated the Indonesian Government’s acceptance of full responsibility for the peace and security of East Timor.⁵⁶ Regrettably, Indonesian military and police forces operating in Timor-Leste did not honor President Habibie’s directives. Within minutes of the announcement, proxy militias – many wearing TNI uniforms, with TNI-issued weapons – launched a massive campaign of mayhem. More than 1,400 East Timorese were murdered in the first day after the consultation results were released; in two weeks, more than 70% of Timor-Leste’s built environment was razed.⁵⁷ Moreover, by September 14, more than three-quarters of Timor-Leste’s 800,000 people had fled their homes, mostly to Indonesian West Timor and the Timor mountains.⁵⁸ A scathing report from the Australian Consulate in September 1999 decried “a deliberate and selective lapse of law enforcement” in Timor-Leste.⁵⁹ The report concluded: “there would

seem to be no doubt that TNI is allowing militia violence and intimidation to continue almost unchecked.”⁶⁰

Despite pre-referendum assurances to the contrary, the violence in Timor-Leste necessitated the emergency evacuation of nearly all remaining UNAMET personnel.⁶¹ By September 14, only twelve UNAMET staff members remained in Timor-Leste; most were evacuated to Australia, along with hundreds of East Timorese refugees and former UNAMET employees who had sought protection inside UNAMET’s gated facility.⁶² A later UN investigation of the post-referendum rampage concluded that an international criminal tribunal was necessary to bring the perpetrators of the coordinated violence and destruction to justice.⁶³ The measure was blocked by the UN Security Council, however, and no international criminal tribunal to address the post-consultation atrocities in Timor-Leste was or has ever been formed.⁶⁴

The post-referendum chaos and the public outrage the mayhem engendered – particularly in Australia and Portugal – prompted a coordinated and effective application of diverse instruments of power by the international community.⁶⁵ The United States preferred to defer leadership of the Timor-Leste intervention to regional power Australia, but applied financial and diplomatic pressure on Indonesia to compel acceptance of an international peacekeeping force on Timor Island. President Bill Clinton, for example, publicly declared: “My willingness to support future economic assistance from the international community will depend upon how Indonesia handles the situation [in East Timor] from today forward.”⁶⁶ Privately, meanwhile, the U.S. military suspended all ties with the Indonesian military, to include joint exercises and foreign military sales, until the situation in Timor-Leste was resolved.⁶⁷ Further, at the request of the United States, the World Bank threatened to withhold Indonesia’s emergency recovery funds and the International Monetary Fund planned to cancel an upcoming consultation with Indonesia if President Habibie refused to permit an international force to intervene in Timor-Leste.⁶⁸

The synchronized coercion succeeded; Indonesia accepted an international peacekeeping force in Timor-Leste on September 12, 1999.⁶⁹ Three days later, the UN Security Council authorized the formation of a multinational force “to restore peace and security in East Timor.”⁷⁰ Though not formally designated, Australia assumed the role of “lead nation in a multinational coalition” for the first time in its history.⁷¹ In a demonstration of keen forethought, Australia, the United States, and New Zealand had already conducted preliminary, multinational military planning during the summer of 1999, in anticipation that the situation in Timor-Leste might deteriorate as the referendum approached.⁷² Furthermore, Australia and the U.S. had conducted bilateral training and peacekeeping exercises that summer, and regional planners from several supporting nations had already established a shared trust, vision, and respect.⁷³ As a result of these pre-conditions, the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) formed, deployed, and commenced operations more rapidly than similar multinational organizations.⁷⁴

The main body of INTERFET personnel arrived in Dili on September 20, 1999 – seventeen mayhem-filled days after the announcement of the result of the popular consultation. In spite of initial Indonesian demands that the force be lightly armed and drawn only from regional militaries, INTERFET was a fully-armored and integrated fighting force, comprised of personnel from 22 nations, with considerable capabilities in air, sea, land, and space.⁷⁵ By the end of September, more than 4,000 INTERFET personnel were operating in Timor-Leste; at its zenith, INTERFET’s troop level swelled to over 11,000.⁷⁶ INTERFET’s concept of operations was an “oil-spot” strategy based on the principal of “methodically reinforcing success” as personnel levels increased.⁷⁷ INTERFET initially focused security efforts in Dili, then transitioned to Baucau and other regional centers while maintaining a presence in previously pacified sections.⁷⁸ INTERFET’s building-block approach to security succeeded; by October 22, 1999, security was restored throughout the island territory.⁷⁹ One week later, the last vestiges of the Indonesian military withdrew from Timor-Leste, leaving behind scorched earth, an already meager infrastructure in shambles, and a brutalized but not broken populace.

“Benign Colonialism”⁸⁰

As INTERFET addressed security concerns related to militia violence in East Timor, the UN developed plans for a managed transition to national sovereignty. On October 25, 1999 the Security Council established the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to be “an integrated, multidimensional peacekeeping operation fully responsible for the administration of East Timor during its transition to independence.”⁸¹ UNTAET’s comprehensive mission distinguished it from previous and future UN operations. UNTAET was not tasked with controlling or assisting an existing administration; “UNTAET was the administration, with full executive and judicial authority.”⁸² To accomplish this expansive mandate, per UN Security Council Resolution 1272, UNTAET was tasked to accomplish the following:

- “(1) provide security and maintain law and order throughout the territory,
- (2) establish an effective administration,
- (3) assist in the development of civil and social services,
- (4) ensure the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development assistance,
- (5) support capacity-building for self-government, and
- (6) assist in the establishment of conditions for sustainable development.”⁸³

To attain its objectives, UNTAET was authorized a force of 13,390 personnel, including 8,950 military members, 200 military observers, 1,640 police officers, and 2,600 governance and administration civilians.⁸⁴ By February 2000, the entire UNTAET force was deployed to East Timor; subsequently, INTERFET relinquished control of military operations in the island territory to the nascent UN administration.

Assessments of UNTAET’s performance and effectiveness in Timor-Leste are as diverse as the countries that supported the multinational force. Advocates point to the tangible accomplishments of UNTAET as evidence of a mission accomplished. For example, as directed by its first mandate, UNTAET created and maintained a sufficiently secure environment for the administration to operate, for free movement of citizens and personnel, and for the return of over 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁸⁵ Moreover, UNTAET’s success creating and sustaining a secure environment enabled the mission to evolve from operational peacekeeping to peacebuilding; consequently, UNTAET also established East Timorese police academies and multiple military recruiting and training facilities.⁸⁶

UNTAET critics, however, contend that successes in the security arena led to gross failures in the more critical and challenging areas of development and nation-building. A common criticism of UNTAET in this sector is that rather than prepare East Timorese to govern, UN administrators assumed “full control of state functions in the name of efficiency.”⁸⁷ Some argue further that the fundamental failing of UNTAET was that “many of its officials were poorly trained, incompetent or just did not care.”⁸⁸ UNTAET’s tendency to over-manage rather than properly train East Timorese for their future of self-governance is reflected in the fact that fewer than 50% of management positions in the government were filled by the time UNTAET ceded control of the administration in 2002.⁸⁹

Some detractors argue that UNTAET’s failure to overcome a lack of human capacity in East Timor stemmed from the approach of its chief administrator, Special Representative for the UN Secretary General Sergio Vieira de Mello. Mr. de Mello, a seasoned UN diplomat, presumed a greater capacity for the East Timorese people than actually existed.⁹⁰ Furthermore, de Mello exerted absolute control in the nascent nation, thus potentially stifling the ability of the East Timorese to develop organic governing capacity.⁹¹ Nevertheless, UNTAET’s direction and guidance – albeit, perhaps, heavy-handed – enabled national elections to be held exactly two years after the popular consultation. In the August 2001 balloting, 91% of eligible East Timorese elected an 88-member Constituent Assembly; the body was charged to draft and adopt a Constitution, establish a framework for future elections, and enable a transition to complete independence.⁹²

On March 22, 2002, the Constituent Assembly ratified Timor-Leste’s Constitution, paving a path for a presidential election to be held three weeks later. The expedited timeline for constitutional creation

and ratification, as well as the ensuing national election, prompted critics of UNTAET to claim that the process was artificially condensed to facilitate a hastened withdrawal of UNTAET forces.⁹³ Nevertheless, with the support of 82.7% of the electorate, Jose Alexandre “Xanana” Gusmao was elected East Timor’s first president; he was inaugurated on May 20, 2002. Additionally, on the day of Gusmao’s inauguration, in a controversial action that foreshadowed fissure within the nascent government, the Constituent Assembly transformed into the Legislative Assembly.⁹⁴ That same momentous day marked the termination of UNTAET and the formal independence of Timor-Leste.

Author Damien Kingsbury described the UNTAET era in East Timor as one of “benign colonialism,” as the “UN assumed most of the functions of a colonial power and voluntarily withdrew, if precipitously, according to its own decolonization timelines.”⁹⁵ Kingsbury’s assessment alludes to one of the most damning criticisms of UNTAET; from its inception, the mission was designed to withdraw in accordance with timelines, rather than milestones. As a result, when it became clear that UNTAET would not fulfill all aspects of its comprehensive mandate, rather than extend the mission, the UN pushed forward with an incomplete outline of a state administration, “but without its substantive content.”⁹⁶ As UNTAET withdrew from East Timor, a president, a legislative body, and a constitution were in place, but the necessary underpinnings to enable the governmental apparatus to adjust, adapt, and evolve did not exist. Charge d’Affaires Julio Da Costa Freitas succinctly concurs: “UNTAET was too short.”⁹⁷

Arguably the most accurate assessment of UNTAET was articulated, without the benefit of hindsight, by author Sue Downie: “If UNTAET’s legacies are truly sustainable they cannot be gauged now. A test of UNTAET will be the first, and perhaps second, election after independence.”⁹⁸ In the years following the withdrawal of UNTAET, the answer to Downie’s prescient measure of mission success became apparent; based on the need for additional UN intervention to secure and facilitate future elections, UNTAET did not fulfill its mandate.

Early Departure and the Makings a Failed State

Days before the formal declaration of East Timor’s independence and the withdrawal of UNTAET, the UN Security Council approved the establishment of the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET).⁹⁹ UNMISSET was given a three-pronged mandate: to provide assistance to East Timor’s administrative structures, to provide interim law enforcement and security while simultaneously developing the East Timor Police Service, and to assist with the maintenance of internal and external security.¹⁰⁰ At its peak strength in August 2002, UNMISSET was staffed by nearly 6,900 personnel (4,776 military, 771 police, and 1,321 international and local civilians);¹⁰¹ however, from the outset of the mission, UNMISSET leaders were mandated to downsize as quickly as possible and “devolve all operational responsibilities to the East Timorese authorities as soon as feasible.”¹⁰² Regrettably for East Timor, the shortcomings of UNTAET revealed themselves throughout the three-year mission of UNMISSET.

The post-independence government of East Timor enjoyed only moderate legitimacy among the populace, partly due to its controversial establishment, but more attributable to its inability to respond to public grievances in an effective manner.¹⁰³ Lacking capacity to govern and the infrastructure to improve lives of its citizens, East Timor’s government became the target of burgeoning civil unrest and widespread rioting beginning in late 2002 and escalating through 2003 and 2004.¹⁰⁴ An inexperienced, poorly-trained, and under-funded police force worsened discord by responding aggressively to protesters and applying the rule of law inconsistently throughout the nation.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, when an unprepared government was confronted with successive years of drought and subsequent reductions in crop yields, more than 10% of East Timor’s population faced food shortages in 2003 and 2004.¹⁰⁶ Ill-equipped to resolve the natural disaster and unable to institute needed agricultural reforms, East Timor’s government instead relied on international food aid to prevent a more debilitating crisis.¹⁰⁷ This arrangement of outside reliance conformed to systemic patterns established during UNTAET’s rushed mission.

East Timor’s homeland security continued to be an issue of concern for the post-independence government and UNMISSET personnel, as well. With a troop strength of 1,500, East Timor’s new military – the Falintil-Timor-Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL) – was too diminutive to be effective; nevertheless,

due to international support and funding, the F-FDTL expended nearly 8% of the federal budget.¹⁰⁸ For reasons of incapacity, corruption, or disinterest, F-FDTL did not secure the border between East Timor and Indonesia, leading to unchecked smuggling, economic subversion, and a perceived lack of territorial integrity.¹⁰⁹ Rather than address its systemic law enforcement and security problems, however, the government of East Timor became increasingly insular and authoritarian.¹¹⁰

Despite aforementioned deficiencies, on May 19, 2004, UNMISSET relinquished all police and both internal and external security responsibilities to the fledgling government of Timor-Leste.¹¹¹ Whether during the mandates of UNAMET or UNMISSET, complete or early abdication of security responsibility is a consistent theme throughout international engagement in Timor-Leste. Moreover, in accordance with its original mandate rather than the realities evident in country, as 2004 progressed UNMISSET continued to demobilize its forces, shed its responsibilities, and precipitously decrease funding for the mission in Timor-Leste.¹¹² In spite of persistent indications of inadequate governance, porous borders, civil dissatisfaction, and insufficient internal and external security, UNMISSET employed barely more than 1,000 staff members at the time of its withdrawal on April 30, 2005.

UNMISSET gave way to the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) – an exclusively political mission – in May of 2005. UNOTIL was modestly mandated to support development of critical institutions and provide training on observance of democratic governance and human rights.¹¹³ Of note, UNOTIL did not have any direct security or law enforcement responsibility; the limited military and law enforcement personnel authorized were tasked to train, not operate. Concurrent to UNOTIL's establishment, East Timor's imminent political crisis worsened, as national poverty and income inequality increased while acrimony sparked by institutional weakness and communication barriers swelled.¹¹⁴ Revenue from Timor-Leste's plentiful oil and gas reserves in the Timor Gap became a symbol of government ineffectiveness, as it enabled profligate spending by political elites, without supporting sustainable economic development and non-oil GDP growth.¹¹⁵ President Gusmao and the prevailing FRETILIN government, comprised primarily of East Timorese who lived in exile during the Indonesian occupation, was increasingly seen as illegitimate and repressive by underrepresented minority groups.¹¹⁶ As UNOTIL's scheduled 2006 withdrawal approached, conditions in Timor-Leste deteriorated to dangerous levels.

Schisms within the East Timor National Police (PNTL) and the F-FDTL prompted widespread riots in April 2006. As national disaffection mushroomed, anti-government groups combined with aggrieved military and police forces to demand change. The fledgling government responded with aggression and the riots quickly devolved into open hostilities between pro-government forces and the protesters.¹¹⁷ Cleavages, previously papered over by pro-independence nationalism, reopened as violence erupted in Dili and throughout Timor-Leste. In an effort to pacify the protesters, President Gusmao accepted the resignation of the first national prime minister and appointed Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos-Horta as interim prime minister in advance of 2007's national elections.¹¹⁸ Ramos-Horta was seen as a suitable replacement, as he was no longer a member of FRETILIN, yet enjoyed widespread national popularity.¹¹⁹ Despite the leadership change, violence continued, causing a massive proliferation in internally displaced persons (IDPs) reminiscent of the post-popular consultation reprisal. By June 2006, approximately 160,000 East Timorese resided in IDPs in or around Dili.¹²⁰

As East Timor's 2006 humanitarian and security crisis expanded, the international community was forced to act. At the request of the Timor-Leste government, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Portugal provided emergency security forces beginning in May 2006.¹²¹ Simultaneously, the UN conducted a rapid assessment to determine the appropriate form of future intervention.¹²² The assessment's findings included acknowledgement that the achievements of previous UN missions in Timor-Leste were at risk of compromise if the international community failed to respond in a decisive manner.¹²³ In a major departure from previous wording vis-à-vis time horizons in Timor-Leste, a follow-on Secretary-General report released in August 2006 concluded: "A renewed commitment by the international community to assist the country in this [nation-building] process must correspondingly be a long-term one."¹²⁴ The report's stark language suggests that after nearly seven years of international half-

measures, the one positive development to emerge from the 2006 humanitarian and security crisis in East Timor is that the events finally inspired substantive change.

UNMIT and the Reinvigoration of International Effort in Timor-Leste

On August 25, 2006, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). UNMIT was given a multi-faceted mandate to provide for government and institution development, support the 2007 electoral process, enhance national security and law enforcement agencies through direct support and training, and coordinate UN post-conflict peacebuilding and capacity-building efforts.¹²⁵ Unlike the preceding UN missions in Timor-Leste, UNMIT's mandate made no reference to departure, withdrawal, abdication of responsibility, or cost controls; the emphasis of the mandate was security to enable effective governance. UNMIT was authorized slightly more than 1,600 personnel – most of which represented international police and military forces – but the troop strength was not designed to decline over time, but rather maintain a steady footprint for the duration of the mission. Similarly, UNMIT's budget remained relatively constant throughout the nearly seven-year operation, ranging between \$177 million and \$218 million annually.¹²⁶

As UNMIT personnel deployed to Timor-Leste in the summer of 2006, they arrived in a fledgling nation described by Damien Kingsbury as “not quite anarchy,” but “very close to it.”¹²⁷ A massive and violent rift had developed between pro-FRETILIN “easterners” (also known as “loyalists”) and anti-FRETILIN “westerners” (referred to as “petitioners”).¹²⁸ The PNTL and the F-FDTL reflected the national divide, as armed members of these police and military forces abandoned organizational roles and identities in favor of factional allegiances. In short, civil war in Timor-Leste was a real possibility. Undoubtedly, the timely establishment of UNMIT in Timor-Leste, even with limited manpower, quelled the violence throughout the island nation and averted a full-scale civil war.¹²⁹

To be clear, UNMIT was not a panacea in Timor-Leste and the arrival of the multinational force did not signify a cessation of hostilities; however, UNMIT's deployment dramatically improved the security situation in the nation, enabled nearly all IDPs to return to their homes, and facilitated East Timor's national elections in 2007.¹³⁰

After a tense but secure political campaign period, Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta emerged from two rounds of balloting as the overwhelming selection for President of Timor-Leste; he was inaugurated on May 20, 2007. In accordance with the Timor-Leste Constitution, the president is a symbolic head of state, though he does have authority to veto legislation and call for dissolution of Parliament, when appropriate.¹³¹ The Prime Minister is the head of government position and is selected by the 65-member Parliament. Accordingly, Timor-Leste's parliamentary elections, that take place after the presidential elections, are most significant for the citizenry and the nation. Though violence did increase marginally in advance of the 2007 parliamentary elections, UNMIT personnel teamed with East Timorese law enforcement and military forces to ensure a safe environment that enabled more than 80% voter participation. Ironically, former President Kay Rala “Xanana” Gusmao (he shed his Portuguese names in favor of local ones) emerged at the conclusion of the parliamentary elections, cobbled together a coalition of minority parties that did not include FRETILIN, and ascended to the position of Prime Minister in August 2007.

Having learned from the failures of post-election international intervention in 2002, UNMIT did not scale back operations or cede responsibilities following the 2007 elections. On the contrary, UNMIT's troop strength and financial commitment remained steady, as did its emphasis on security and effective governance. This consistency of effort paid major dividends in February 2008 when a rival political faction launched a coordinated yet unsuccessful assassination attempt against both President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Gusmao. Rather than erupt into chaotic violence, as one might have anticipated in a less secure environment, Timor-Leste demonstrated new found national resiliency in the aftermath of the assassination attempts.¹³² Attributable at least in part to the presence and progress of UNMIT, the assassination attempts actually broke a political deadlock, rather than exacerbate one.¹³³ The perpetrators of the plots were killed or detained by authorities, while surviving supporters and

sympathizers negotiated with the government to surrender their weapons in exchange for the opportunity to start their lives anew.¹³⁴ The state of emergency that had been declared immediately after the assassination attempts was lifted less than ten weeks later, with virtually no additional violence.¹³⁵

The clearest indication of improved governing and security capacity in the wake of the 2008 assassination attempts emerged from the United Nations' summary of events which noted the following: "The Prime Minister demonstrated firm and reasoned leadership; the Parliament functioned effectively as a forum for debate in response to the events; and leaders of all political parties urged their supporters to remain calm, while the general population demonstrated faith in the ability of the State to deal with the situation." Less than two years since its inception, UNMIT had helped transform a post-conflict state from one susceptible to violent protests and mass internal displacement to one capable of resolving national crisis in a systematic, transparent, and effective manner. Timor-Leste remained fragile, but intact.

As Timor-Leste moved past the assassination attempt, the international commitment to the country remained steadfast. Accordingly, the UN Security Council extended the UNMIT mandate with a long-term focus on the next round of national elections in 2012.¹³⁶ Moreover, fifteen months ahead of a proposed withdrawal, UNMIT and Timor-Leste officials identified 129 critical metrics of progress to monitor and validate mission termination.¹³⁷ Rather than abide by rigid timelines for withdrawal, as had been done during previous UN missions, UNMIT and Timor-Leste's negotiated departure plan allowed for an event-based, phased exit.

When 2012's presidential elections were completed devoid of major security breaches and with more than 72% voter turnout, UNMIT's withdrawal at the conclusion of 2012 became increasingly acceptable.¹³⁸ When Taur Matan Rauk – a former commander of F-FDTL – peacefully transitioned to President of Timor-Leste in May 2012 after defeating incumbent Ramos-Horta and a host of other candidates, the path for UNMIT withdrawal opened further. These electoral developments, combined with the peaceful establishment of Timor-Leste's third Parliament and reappointment of Prime Minister Gusmao, served both as evidence of UNMIT's success and the suitability of its withdrawal. Nearly six and a half years after its emergency establishment, UNMIT completed its mandate on 31 December 2012. As withdrawal approached, UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon lauded the progress in Timor-Leste as "a global example of how to successfully emerge from conflict to lasting peace."¹³⁹

Despite the successes and extended commitment of UNMIT, not all assessments of its performance are glowing. A comprehensive analysis of recent multinational assistance in Timor-Leste to enact security sector reform (SSR), for example, suggests the results are mixed.¹⁴⁰ Some observers contend that Timor-Leste's SSR, the chic modern phrase used to describe combined efforts in the security and development sectors, yielded tactical victories but failed to implement a coherent strategic vision to link political and military operations with social outreach.¹⁴¹ In short, the criticism claims that multinational SSR in Timor-Leste focused too much on institutions, at the expense of societal engagement.¹⁴² Nevertheless, there is broad consensus among international relations scholars that UNMIT's extensive commitment in the region facilitated a more secure, more stable, and more adaptive Timor-Leste.

Ten Lessons of Timor-Leste

The international community acquired reams of experience and datasets from fifteen years of multinational intervention in Timor-Leste. The ten lessons outlined below are assessed as the most critical and salient for future state-building consideration and multinational intervention operational planning.

Lesson 1. Patience is more than a virtue – it's a necessity. When announcing the planned withdrawal of the final members of UNMIT from Timor-Leste in 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted: "State-building, nation-building, is very difficult, it takes time."¹⁴³ A State Department official in Washington DC with knowledge of Timor-Leste further acknowledged that "the average, post-conflict country takes 15-30 years to recover – basically, a generation."¹⁴⁴ Notably, these statements of certainty

regarding lengthy timelines for nation-building were made after multinational experiences in Timor-Leste, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 21st century. The recognition of the challenge and required time commitment for state-building reflects arguably the most striking lesson of Timor-Leste: in matters of international intervention, patience is more than a virtue—it's a necessity.

Throughout the establishment and implementation of UNTAET, policymakers emphasized an expedited transition to independence; according to one critic, UNTAET was “preparing to depart from its inception.”¹⁴⁵ Based on this approach, one should not be surprised that the nation UNTAET helped establish devolved into chaos less than four years after its withdrawal. Ultimately, the international community must accept that effective intervention – be it for purposes of peacekeeping, peacemaking, or nation-building – requires a robust commitment that far exceeds the levels espoused by optimistic estimates. If the international community concludes intervention is appropriate, it must do so with the clear understanding that a mandate will not be completed in accordance with a pre-determined timeline. If world leaders are unwilling to commit to potentially indefinite support of an operation—be it a result of donor fatigue, lack of political will, or another constraint—less onerous alternatives to direct intervention must be pursued.

Lesson 2. Expect the horrific. The tragic history of Timor-Leste reinforces a lesson that the international community episodically learned and relearned throughout the 1990s in locations ranging from the Balkans to Somalia and Rwanda. The critical yet simple directive is expect the horrific. A consistent theme of international attitudes and actions in Timor-Leste from 1975 through 2006 is the tendency to minimize the risk of extreme violence and genocide. The record suggests that American and international policy in the region has often been shaped by hopeful expectations of rational behavior rather than realistic assessments of likely outcomes.

This tendency is evident in now declassified exchanges between the Ford administration and Indonesian President Suharto. Of Indonesia's planned, covert invasion of East Timor, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger advised Suharto to “succeed quickly.”¹⁴⁶ Kissinger's missive ignores the historical resistance and guerilla tactics of the East Timorese and instead presumes an ability to end the conflict swiftly, with minimal bloodshed. A 25-year campaign of suppression and brutality indicates that Kissinger's assumptions on Timor Island were woefully inaccurate. Rather than jeopardize its relationship with the anti-Communist regime in Jakarta, the Ford Administration dismissed the possibility of a protracted conflict in favor of a simpler resolution.

Similarly, in advance of the 1999 sovereignty referendum, the UN allowed Indonesia to dictate the nature and terms of the international intervention and therefore enabled a completely preventable reprisal campaign. Despite later revisionist claims by world leaders, including President Clinton and Secretary-General Annan, that the mayhem in East Timor was unpredictable, historical analysis suggests the violence could and should have been anticipated. Horrifying experiences in East Timor and throughout the world prompted international relations scholar Alan Kuperman to implore intervening world powers to structure reaction forces with the guarded expectation that “violence against civilians can be perpetrated very quickly.”¹⁴⁷

Lesson 3. Stability must be the first priority, but not an end unto itself. Experience in Timor-Leste – be it related to popular consultation, state-building, or economic development – reminds policy makers of the criticality of internal and external security. Indeed, arguably the most effective interventions in Timor-Leste (INTERFET and UNMIT) enjoyed success because they directed sufficient attention to security operations. These experiences, however, should not obscure the importance of integrated operations, as opposed to exclusively military and law enforcement engagements. The relevant two-part lesson, therefore, is security must be the first priority, but not an end unto itself. This mantra reflects the current perspective of interviewed State Department officials in Washington DC and Dili who consistently list security as their chief objective, but also note myriad additional priorities that are integral to developmental plans.¹⁴⁸

For effective state-building, security must be considered a necessary but not sufficient condition. Furthermore, an inability to balance competing and diverse requirements beyond security poses a significant risk for mission failure. UNTAET, for example, according to Damien Kingsbury, began its mission excessively focused on security; this singular focus prevented understanding of the long-term and complicated elements of nation-building.¹⁴⁹ The need to balance mission focus must also be addressed in personnel authorizations for future operations. Outlining this dilemma, former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld famously remarked: “Peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers can do it.”¹⁵⁰ Clearly, military and law enforcement personnel will remain essential elements of 21st century multinational interventions, but fifteen years of involvement in Timor-Leste highlights the critical and complementary roles played by administrators, legal experts, teachers, technocrats, and various other specialists from representing the whole of civil society.

Lesson 4. “Smart power” can succeed where less integrated efforts fail.¹⁵¹ While certainly not perfect, Timor-Leste’s complicated history provides vivid examples of successful international intervention at moments of humanitarian crisis. Invariably, coordinated efforts succeeded in Timor-Leste when the international community employed what Joseph Nye dubbed, “smart power,” rather than mere brute force or impotent negotiation. “Smart power” – defined by Nye as “the ability to combine hard and soft power resources into effective strategies” – will be the key tool of effective geopolitical engagement in the 21st century, but the concept was deftly applied in Timor-Leste at the conclusion of the 20th century, as well.¹⁵²

When TNI-backed militias initiated a post-referendum campaign of mayhem in East Timor in 1999, UNAMET personnel were powerless to arrest the violence and forced to retreat into walled compounds. Discourse from the UN on the matter and resolutions condemning the violence contributed to international public awareness, but ultimately coordinated and integrated action by multiple world leaders compelled Indonesian action. As resolutions proved ineffective, the United States gained traction with Jakarta by threatening to sever military ties and funding. These military actions short of conflict grabbed Indonesia’s attention, but the tangible threat to cut-off emergency economic resources by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund inspired action. If one accepts power as the ability “to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences,” the application of “smart power” to compel Indonesian action in September 1999 must represent one of the seminal moments in the evolution of its use.¹⁵³

Lesson 5. Effective intervention demands regional leadership. Fifteen years of multinational intervention in Timor-Leste additionally highlighted the importance of regional leadership to implement global initiatives. The model of regional leadership in the case of Timor-Leste was validated by the effectiveness and dexterity of the UN, supported largely by Australia and other Asian powers, in executing coordinated policy in the island nation. Regional direction takes on added importance in a multipolar world; without a hegemon, it is essential to develop coalitions of responsibility and collective objectives.¹⁵⁴ This scenario was evident in September 1999, as the U.S. and the international community deferred to Australia to assume command authority for INTERFET, the integrated peacekeeping force in East Timor. A similar model was employed in 2006 with equally encouraging results when South Asian nations of Australia and Malaysia, in partnership with New Zealand, were mandated to provide contingency forces to stabilize Timor-Leste after weeks of rioting, violence, and proliferation of IDPs.

Ongoing international commitments in Timor-Leste suggest that policy makers have embraced the notion and capacity of regional leadership. For example, the multilateral “New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States” – endorsed by 41 nations, including the United States – identifies Australia as the chief partner for engagement in Timor-Leste and defers leadership responsibility to that regional power.¹⁵⁵ Correspondingly, an official at the U.S. Embassy in Dili acknowledged that due to history, geography, and proximity, the United States plays a complementary, though still important, role to Australia in Timor-Leste.¹⁵⁶ A U.S. State Department expert in Washington DC concurred that many U.S. activities in Timor-Leste “dovetail with the Australian effort.”¹⁵⁷ Empowered by successes in locations like Timor-

Leste, while simultaneously constrained by persistent diffusion of power and global fiscal challenges, world leaders must continue to leverage regional leadership to execute diverse worldwide interventions.

Lesson 6. Context matters. In a zeal to draw conclusions and catalog lessons learned from fifteen years of intervention in Timor-Leste, one must recall an immutable truth that moderates claims of certainty with regard to international relations: context matters. Not all realities of Timor Island will translate beyond the Indonesian archipelago. For example, consider the enormous cultural differences and distinct colonial histories of East Timorese and West Timorese Indonesians. Illustratively, many Indonesians fought alongside the Japanese during WWII, in the interest of ridding themselves of Dutch colonization.¹⁵⁸ These massive divisions between East and West on Timor Island clearly influenced the relationship between Indonesia and East Timor. If one disregards these contextual differences, however, one is more likely to misread probable outcomes with potentially disastrous results.

To exemplify this point, consider the U.N.'s tragic decision to abdicate responsibility for security to Indonesia in advance of East Timor's popular consultation. The judgment was likely made in an attempt to strike a middle ground and appease President Habibie, but the security decision failed catastrophically because policymakers failed to consider the context. Though such an option might have been prudent in another region of the world or even with Indonesia and a different nation in Southeast Asia, the context of Timor should have served to forewarn the international community of likely turmoil. Interestingly, historical context likely contributed to a positive development in Timor-Leste, as well. Many historians have surmised that Australia's willingness to invest heavily in blood and treasure to secure Timor-Leste is a consequence of latent national guilt for having abandoned Timor Island during WWII and having tacitly permitted Indonesia to invade in 1975.¹⁵⁹ Both instances suggest the likelihood of effective intervention is enhanced through an informed understanding of historical context.

Lesson 7. Multinational effectiveness requires advance multilateral engagement and planning. The success of INTERFET did not begin in the streets of Dili or the hills of Baucau. On the contrary, the genesis of the success of INTERFET was the cooperative relationships Australia established with partner-nations months and, in some cases, years in advance of the deployment. Australian and U.S. military forces, for example, conducted several training missions and exercises in the region throughout the 1990s.¹⁶⁰ These exercises helped ensure rapid compatibility, familiarity, and shared trust when decisive and timely action was required, particularly with mobilization of strategic air and sealift.

Employing the same model, Australia's resilient relationship with New Zealand enabled the expedited addition of a "Kiwi" battalion during the initial deployment phase.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Australia's robust military, economic, and diplomatic engagement with ASEAN member states facilitated natural participation and contribution from other regional powers, to include Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia.¹⁶² These relationships enabled INTERFET leaders to operate with a pre-established system for intelligence sharing, logistical support, and joint operability. In light of INTERFET's widespread recognition as a "highly successful" deployment, in large measure because of its ability to initiate action quickly, one must assess Australia's pre-operation engagement as effective.¹⁶³ A striking lesson of Timor-Leste, therefore, is that nations interested in efficacious 21st century global interventions must pursue an activist strategy of bilateral and multilateral engagement across the spectrum of power.

Lesson 8. In a globalized world, coalitions are pathways to progress and prosperity. A corollary takeaway from experience in Timor-Leste is that just as bilateral and multilateral engagement is critical for intervening nations, the same is true for the developing nation-state. Forging partnerships, in fact, represents one of the most valuable actions a burgeoning nation can undertake on its path toward prosperity and global integration. Creating new or joining existing coalitions does not guarantee success, but in a globalized world, partnerships enable expedited progress in a preferred direction.

The current government of Timor-Leste understands this 21st century reality and is operating in a manner consistent with the premise. This recognition explains why Timor-Leste describes full membership in ASEAN as a top national priority and why the United States enthusiastically supports the

initiative.¹⁶⁴ With a collective population of over 600 million and a combined economy of more than \$2 trillion, ASEAN represents a powerful and robust collection of regional states that would provide myriad developmental opportunities for Timor-Leste.¹⁶⁵ To attain its ASEAN objective, Timor-Leste is currently investing in embassies in each of the ten member nations.¹⁶⁶ National emphasis on bilateral cooperation further justifies Timor-Leste's decision to move quickly past its troubled history with Indonesia to forge a cooperative diplomatic and economic relationship with the neighboring nation.¹⁶⁷ The issue of coalitions for a nascent nation like Timor-Leste has become a simple matter of mathematics; the value of bilateral free trade agreements with potent economic powers like Indonesia far outweighs the benefits of grudge-holding or the pursuit of conflict reparations.

Lesson 9. Early investments in human capacity prevent late deficits. U.S. State Department officials describe a lack of human capacity as one of the major, persistent challenges confronting Timor-Leste in 2014.¹⁶⁸ One State Department official further noted that while USAID is doing excellent work to develop human capacity in Timor-Leste now, the agency is “really starting from the bottom up,” and the classes being taught for many Timorese are at a very basic level.¹⁶⁹ The lesson that can be drawn from this experience is that investments in education and human capacity – or lack of similar investments – early in the nation-building process have dramatic effects as the initial wave of national leaders mature and give way to the successor generation. Timor-Leste may additionally feel the impacts of insufficient early investments in human capacity in late 2014 if, as expected, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao retires. Interestingly, in recognition of the lack of a prepared successor to preserve the continuity of government, Mr. Gusmao has already delayed his planned departure by several months.¹⁷⁰

To benefit from this experience-based lesson of Timor-Leste, initial nation-building efforts should include appropriate resources to ensure that a cadre of promising and diverse young leaders are educated, trained, and groomed to assume leadership roles in future administrations. As Timor-Leste has demonstrated, state-building is a long and difficult process. Multinational engagement should be conducted accordingly, with an eye not only on the current generation of leaders, but also those that will replace the first wave of founders and pioneers.

Lesson 10. In developing nations, resources represent a blessing that can become a trap. Timor-Leste is the beneficiary of enormous oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea. Revenue from these reserves account for more than 80% of Timor-Leste's annual GDP and enable a strategic Petroleum Fund worth over \$13 billion.¹⁷¹ The existence of oil and gas afforded the Timor-Leste government significant developmental opportunities and enabled remarkable national growth for the last six years; however, some observers worry that these natural resources and the associated economic growth have facilitated an inefficient and myopic government, exacerbated income inequality, and produced rampant public corruption.¹⁷² The perverse and deleterious effects of natural resources on developing nations prompted author Paul Collier to refer to such apparent advantages as “natural resource traps.”¹⁷³ According to Collier, natural resources are traps because even as they provide for opulent national wealth, they may ultimately lead to boom and bust economies, reduced growth, and systemic poverty.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, natural resources tend to trap nations because the initial riches they provide enable leaders to ignore critical development of alternative markets and assets.¹⁷⁵

Timor-Leste will be particularly challenged by the natural resource trap over the next six to seven years, when the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea are expected to be exhausted.¹⁷⁶ The government of Timor-Leste established the Petroleum Fund in an attempt to extend the fiscal benefits of the oil and gas reserves, but has controversially tapped into the account when fiscal conditions worsen.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps the most important issue to be addressed over the next decade in Timor-Leste is how the burgeoning nation will emerge from the natural resource trap in a post-oil economy. Until that pressing issue is resolved, the status of Timor-Leste's oil and gas reserves as a blessing or a curse remains unknown.

A Hopeful Future Despite a Tortured Past

Today, Timor-Leste – the first nation of the 21st century – endures as a complex study in contrast and contradiction. Hopeful observers point to double-digit economic growth rates, peaceful national elections and transitions of power, and democratic and security sector consolidation as evidence of a young but thriving nation. Dissenters note rampant income inequality, limited human capacity, and a fragile security situation as indicators of a fledgling state with a vexing future. Similarly, through an alternative prism, champions of international intervention in Timor-Leste suggest rapid cessation of violence, dramatic decrease in IDPs, and steady economic development are signs of nation-building success. Contrarily, critics of multinational engagement in Timor-Leste contend that the various mandates in the island nation have been inadequately resourced and overly concerned with time-based, rather than milestone-based, withdrawal plans.

Throughout more than four and a half centuries of colonial domination, twenty-five years of brutal occupation, and fifteen years of international intervention and sporadic internal conflict, Timor-Leste has borne the extremes of the human condition. The years have provided ample evidence of the fortes and foibles of humanity, the best and worst of realpolitik, the triumphs and failures of the international community, and the hopes and limits of self-determination. For all its tortured past, however, Timor-Leste has survived, the spirit of the Timorese people is unbroken, and its future, though replete with challenges, holds the promise of economic independence and liberty. As the Strategic Development Plan for Timor-Leste underscores: “It is easy to simply identify problems and criticize plans for change. The braver path is to recognize our strengths, build on our successes, and work together for a better Timor-Leste.”¹⁷⁸ The world community can honor those words as well as the sacrifices of thousands of East Timorese that perished resisting occupation or exercising the right to vote by analyzing the salient lessons of Timor-Leste and applying them to future multinational operations.

About the author:

Lieutenant Colonel Doug Jackson is an Operations Officer, Joint Operations Directorate, Joint Staff, Pentagon, Washington DC. He is a command pilot with 4,200 hours in the C-5A/B/C/M, T-37B, and T-1A. Colonel Jackson graduated *Magna Cum Laude* with a Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, from the University of Pennsylvania. He holds a Master of Arts degree in International Relations, Norwich University, a Master of Arts degree in Communication, *Summa Cum Laude*, George Mason University, and he was the Distinguished Graduate in his class at The Eisenhower School.



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