

## 2 Nonviolence against Indonesian repression: barriers to action

In 1965 on the Indonesian island of Java where there had been widespread slaughter of alleged communists, peasant women would occasionally line the roads as soldiers in trucks passed by. The women, in a display of contempt and a refusal to co-operate with the activities of these rampaging soldiers, would turn their backs and lift their sarongs to display their backsides to the troops, a gesture that in numerous cases cost them their lives.<sup>1</sup> Thus our first case study, nonviolent resistance in Indonesia from 1965, starts with a reminder of the courageous resistance that challenged the brutal regime of that country.

Yet defeat of repressive regimes generally takes much more than contempt and courage. It requires high levels of organization, preparation, and commitment. Accordingly, it was more than 30 years before Indonesian President Suharto resigned. The years of his rule coincided with continual but varying levels of resistance in Indonesia, which makes it an appropriate case study to demonstrate the waxing and waning of nonviolent struggle and its effectiveness. Despite massive repression and killings undertaken under the Suharto regime, for most of his rule there was not a high level of worldwide outrage at events in Indonesia.

On the contrary, as far as most Western governments were concerned, the situation in Indonesia seemed fairly satisfactory for most of the period from 1965 to 1998. It was only when dissent at the popular level grew sufficiently for governments to feel that they must respond to public opinion that foreign policies turned around.

However, we will start firstly with resistance in Indonesia itself and specifically that short period in 1998 when there was massive and effective resistance, before comparing

those events with two others: the 1965–1966 massacres and the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor from 1975.

### The toppling of Suharto<sup>2</sup>

Indonesia became a Dutch colony through a long period of expansion beginning in 1619 and ending in the 1920s. After occupation by the Japanese during World War II, nationalist leaders declared independence in 1945 and after a national revolution gained sovereignty in 1949. Over the period 1965–1967, the left-leaning Sukarno government was replaced by a military-dominated regime led by Suharto, accompanied by a major bloodbath, as described later.

The foundation of the Suharto regime's power was the military forces, but with a democratic facade. Within this framework, Suharto maintained power through astute political maneuvering.<sup>3</sup> He sidelined challengers, rewarded friends (especially family members), and repressed dissent. Repression was systematic: all potential opponents, both popular and in the elite, including those in the military, were crushed. All organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, and cultural bodies, that might provide a basis for questioning or challenging the regime were

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2 Useful collections on these events are given in Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith, and Gerry van Klinken (eds.), *The Last Days of President Suharto* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1999); Geoff Forrester and R. J. May (eds.), *The Fall of Soeharto* (Bathurst, NSW: Crawford House, 1998). See also Marcus Mietzner, "From Soeharto to Habibie: The Indonesian armed forces and political Islam during the transition," in Geoff Forrester (ed.), *Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Renewal or Chaos?* (Bathurst, NSW: Crawford House Publishing, 1999), pp. 65–102.

3 Ed Aspinall, "Opposition and elite conflict in the fall of Soeharto," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 130–153, at pp. 131–132.

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This chapter is co-authored by Adrian Vickers.

1 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 283.

banned, restrained, or disempowered by being brought into the state mechanism, a process called “depoliticization.”

As a method to prevent challenges to the regime, co-optation was a potent supplement to repression. The most effective form of co-optation was through economic growth, which proceeded at an impressive 7% annually from 1970. During this time the regime was supported by Western governments and the major international funding agencies and praised for its economic policies.<sup>4</sup>

After the announcement of a period of “openness” in the late 1980s, voices of dissent began to emerge, but no one inside or outside the country believed that Suharto’s grip on power was weakening. There were still hundreds of thousands of former prisoners from the earlier and more extreme repression who had to carry identity cards and who were restricted in various ways, including being limited in where they could live or work. These people, known as “ex-Tapols,” had to report at least once a month to their district military command headquarters, an exercise that served as a reminder of the power of the military in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, into the mid 1990s, popular opposition was muted, partially as a result of continued economic growth and partly as an outcome of the ongoing repressive culture and disempowerment of most opposition. For instance, the Indonesian government undertook “mental ideological screening” to ensure that anyone who was deemed to have “communist ties” — and this included not only ex-Tapols but also their extended families — was excluded from employment in the military, the civil service, the schools, political parties, the press, legal aid societies, the priesthood, and even shadow puppet troupes.<sup>6</sup>

Opposition political parties were banned or severely constrained, serving only as fig leaves for a pretend democracy. Western governments feted the regime and its policies. The Indonesian military retained ultimate power and received weapons and training from various governments such as Australia and the US.

This suddenly changed as a result of economic collapse, triggered by the crash in Thailand beginning in 1997 which spread to several South-East Asian economies. Indonesia was particularly hard hit, with the collapse of the currency leading to widespread impoverishment, more extreme than in other countries.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the collapse, Indonesia’s economic policies had been fully supported by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and most commentators, but afterwards blame was placed either on corruption and cronyism or on global markets.

The dramatic change in economic climate opened the door for a deeper expression of popular opposition that had been building. By 1996 at least one economic commentator was doubting that Suharto would be able to suppress the growing democracy movement.<sup>8</sup> Now outrage over corruption, collusion, and cronyism became a rallying cry, with the government blamed for economic misfortunes. The regime was not well structured to deal with this new situation. Suharto had become increasingly out of touch with everyday realities since he was surrounded with sycophants, operated using a 1960s way of thinking (including a Cold-War fear of communism) and was tied into the crony system he had used to build his power. As a result, his political judgment suffered. In addition, his health was poor, so both physically and mentally he was not ready for

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4 Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 79.

5 Aryen Neier, “Watching rights,” *The Nation*, Vol. 251, No. 2, 9 July 1990, p. 43.

6 Neier, “Watching rights.”

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7 Kevin Evans, “Economic update,” in Forrester, *Post-Soeharto Indonesia*, pp. 105–127.

8 Michael Shari, “Suharto may win this battle, but not the war,” *Business Week*, 26 August 1996, p. 45.

the unprecedented challenges he faced in 1998.<sup>9</sup>

The economic crisis had the most severe impact on the urban working class and the unemployed. Some Indonesians were earning as little as 70 cents a day and were drastically affected by the rising cost of food and soaring unemployment. Accordingly there were protests and food riots, to which Suharto responded by banning mass rallies in Jakarta and insisting that anyone caught hoarding essential commodities would be sentenced to death.<sup>10</sup> However, it was not poor Indonesians, mainly preoccupied with pure survival, who organized the major actions. The overt opposition was drawn primarily from the middle classes, including students, academics, university graduates, journalists, lawyers, artists, and staff of nongovernment organizations (NGOs). This middle-class group, having grown up in a time of prosperity, was particularly affected by the sharp changes in lifestyle brought about by the crisis. Of those involved, students were by far the most vocal.

Before 1997, NGO leaders and former student activists had tried to create a coalition in opposition to the regime, but had not got very far: Suharto's methods of depoliticization were too effective.<sup>11</sup> The collapse of the economy served as a catalyst and a rallying point for a more solidified and organized opposition.

Students began to openly challenge the government by holding rallies on campus and then moving off campus in defiance of conditions imposed by the police. As the rallies became larger, more students joined in and leaders became bolder. Meanwhile, opposition activity blossomed in a range of areas, such as the arts scene.

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9 Geoffrey Forrester, "Introduction," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 1–23, at pp. 17–18.

10 "Food riots batter Indonesia," *Maclean's*, Vol. 111, No. 9, 2 March 1998, p. 31.

11 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Trends in Indonesian student movements in 1998," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 167–178.

At a student-led protest on 12 May 1998, four students and two others in the crowd were killed by troops at Trisakti University, an elite private institution in Jakarta. This event triggered massive rioting and looting in Jakarta, causing extensive damage and leaving more than a thousand people dead (principally looters caught in fires). There is strong evidence that the riots were orchestrated, probably to discredit the protesters.<sup>12</sup> In any event, the killing of the four students and subsequent events caused a loss of public faith in the regime and led some military elites to think that Suharto should resign in order to placate the population.<sup>13</sup>

As is common in nonviolent struggles, violence by the regime triggered much greater support for the resistance. Massive rallies were held throughout the country. In Jakarta, students continued to lead protests, which involved ever larger sectors of the population. This unprecedented public display of opposition caused splits within the ruling elite.

Not long before these events, Suharto had promoted his son-in-law Subianto Prabowo to head the Kopassus special force. A ruthless operator, Prabowo had ambitions to gain power over the head of the armed forces, General Wiranto, who was also close to Suharto. Earlier in 1998, various activists "disappeared," some of them emerging weeks or months later after imprisonment and torture in secret locations. Others were presumed to have been murdered; their relatives still do not know their fate. Prabowo probably orchestrated this repressive operation. He sought to stop student protests by force and was responsible for the killing of students on 12 May, which may have been done purposely by military units rather than accidentally in general shooting.<sup>14</sup> Since this repressive approach was triggering ever more massive

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12 Susan Berfield and Dewi Loveard, "Ten days that shook Indonesia," *Asiaweek*, 24 July 1998, pp. 30–41.

13 Forrester, "Introduction," p. 21.

14 Berfield and Loveard, "Ten days that shook Indonesia."

popular opposition, some members of the elite decided Suharto had to go.<sup>15</sup>

A student occupation of parliament was crucial. This occupation reached its climax on 20 May and was a key factor in convincing members of cabinet that Suharto had to resign. As the protest expanded, opposition political leaders joined in. Amien Rais, a leading Islamic political figure, called a rally for 20 May. In order to stop it, Indonesian troops shut down central Jakarta. This in turn alienated the business sector, supplying yet more pressure for change. The end was near when the leader of the parliament — all of whose members had been virtually handpicked by Suharto — called for Suharto to step down. On 23 May Suharto suddenly announced his resignation and his deputy, B. J. Habibie, took over. The surprise resignation reduced the chance of a broader democratization at that time.

### Nonviolent action against Suharto

The protests of the Indonesian students demonstrated several classical, as well as some novel, forms of nonviolent action. These included martyrdom, visual props, solidarity-building, and ensuring good relations with at least some of the media. Importantly, the students appear to have appealed to the community in ways that gained widespread sympathy rather than suspicion or hostility.

Achieving this sympathy was probably largely due to the diversity of the students involved in the protests, whom Human Rights Watch identified as coming from a “wide variety of Muslim, radical leftist, and reform-oriented organizations.”<sup>16</sup> Importantly, the protests were also geographically broad-based, with the involvement of campuses in Sumatra,

Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Bali, Lombok, Irian Jaya, and Timor as well as thirteen cities in Java.

In many respects, the police, in trying to suppress the dissent,<sup>17</sup> played into the demonstrators’ hands. Certainly the Trisakti University students did not want, nor plan for, four of their group to be killed but, following this incident, they were definitely not going to be silenced. On the contrary, many more joined the protests. The four killed students came to be known as “Martyrs of Reformation”. Rallies in their honor were held all over Indonesia, at which the special song “Fallen Flowers,” reserved for those who die in a holy war, was hummed. These martyrs served as a point of focus and an inspiration for other demonstrators.<sup>18</sup>

The Indonesian events fit a standard pattern of nonviolent action, in which open defiance of the regime generates greater support.<sup>19</sup> If the regime does nothing, then opponents become bolder in their actions. If the regime responds with overt violence, this causes public outrage and greater support for the opposition. Open use of violence by the regime, especially the killing of students at an elite university, turned out to be very counter-productive. In comparison, the “disappearances” earlier in the year caused far less outrage. The main difference was that it was harder to assign responsibility for covert torture and killing. Similarly, the regime attempted to distance itself from responsibility by using agents provocateurs, paid demonstrators, gangs, and criminals to undertake looting, arson, and rape, including attacks on the Chinese minority, designed to aggravate

15 While Suharto was the primary target, there was also a faction fight in the military, which split into Wiranto and Prabowo camps, with the Navy and Air Force distancing themselves from the rest of the armed forces and the police becoming autonomous.

16 Quoted in Suzanne Charlé, “Banning is banned,” *The Nation*, Vol. 267, No. 10, 5 October 1998, pp. 15–19, at p. 18.

17 This assumes it was the police behind the shootings of the four students for, as mentioned, there is evidence that suggests the military were responsible.

18 Charlé, “Banning is banned,” p. 15.

19 See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 447–817, on the dynamics of nonviolent action.

ethnic tensions and reduce the chance of unified opposition to the regime.<sup>20</sup>

One of the standard methods used by the regime to maintain control was to infiltrate potential opposition groups and to foster dissension, such as by accentuating religious and ethnic divisions. Eventually, students attempted to overcome this by instituting tight internal discipline, to the extent of preventing nonstudents from joining occupations, in order to prevent infiltration and to maintain focus on a single goal: to get rid of Suharto.

The tactics used by one key student group, Forum Kota (City Forum) illustrate one method of avoiding co-optation. Every week the group changed both its leader and its command post so that no one leader or campus could gain control and be open to co-optation.<sup>21</sup> Although the military did try, as usual, to infiltrate the student groups, this proved unsuccessful. One student said laughingly of those who attempted to infiltrate, "They always have short hair, and they are in good physical condition. You can spot them a mile away."<sup>22</sup>

Even though the protests caused huge traffic jams, the students enjoyed wide popular support even among those directly affected such as taxi and pedicab drivers. Women passed out roses to pedicab drivers with notes attached: "Don't let your consciences die." Two other vivid protests included students putting flowers down the barrels of soldiers' guns and other students walking around with their mouths taped up, as a symbolic protest against the lack of free speech in Indonesia.<sup>23</sup>

Setting up alternative societies and practicing the sort of life one envisages as the outcome of one's struggles play an important part in the struggle itself, reminding activists

of their goals and serving as an example of what can be achieved. Directly after Suharto's resignation, some students went to work with farmers and factory workers, raising political consciousness and helping to build a civil society. Others were busy training new university students in the tactics and philosophy of dissent.<sup>24</sup> The actions of both groups suggest that the students knew that the struggle would be ongoing and had the foresight needed to prepare for the next stages of the struggle. On the other hand, in the years after Suharto's departure, some student leaders have supported the use of violent methods, in addition to nonviolent ones, as part of their strategy.

Student protests and sit-ins were backed up with teach-ins where tactics could be thrashed out, information shared, uncertainties clarified, and group solidarity strengthened. Both organizationally and strategically, students had learned from demonstrations in both Thailand in the 1970s and South Korea much more recently. Among the chants were those borrowed from overseas struggles, including one from the French New Left in the 1960s: "Il est interdit d'interdire" which translates as "Banning is banned."<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that students had weighed up what had been successful in other struggles and thought about what might be applicable in their own. Therefore, news and other information from protests elsewhere, as well as links with the movements themselves, can be very beneficial. Kurt Schock, writing of differences in the social movement mobilizations in the Philippines and Burma in the 1980s, noted that the Burmese movement may have been disadvantaged by a lack of contact with influential international allies.<sup>26</sup>

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20 Sometimes the regime blamed labor leaders for rioting against ethnic groups. See "Labor round-up," *Multinational Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 9, September 1994, p. 4.

21 Charlé, "Banning is banned," p. 17.

22 Charlé, "Banning is banned," p. 18.

23 Charlé, "Banning is banned," p. 18.

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24 Charlé, "Banning is banned," p. 18.

25 Charlé, "Banning is banned," p. 18. We thank Henri Jeanjean for advice on this slogan.

26 Kurt Schock, "People power and political opportunities: social movement mobilization and outcomes in the Philippines and Burma," *Social Problems*, Vol. 46, No. 3, August 1999, pp. 355-375, at p. 365.

Schock also identifies political opportunities, influential allies, and press freedoms or at least information flows as other crucial factors in allowing sufficient mobilization of social groups to challenge a regime or its leaders. In Indonesia, the economic downturn was a catalyst for the already present discontent to escalate, while political opportunities opened up suddenly as the government's and military's actions backfired. The question of information flows needs to be looked at as part of the broader question of communication.

### The role of communication

Communication was crucial in coordinating resistance and alerting people to what was occurring. At the level of the mass media, this was a challenging task since there was a history of Suharto closing down newspapers if they strayed from the official government line. Variations of censorship include "stifling of all viewpoints critical of the regime through closing down alternative publications, restricting access to communication technologies, and centralizing the news media services under the control of the state" as well as "imposition of economic sanctions, the revocation of publishing licenses, and the harassment, imprisonment, torture, or assassination of journalists."<sup>27</sup> Several of these tactics were used by the Indonesian regime to keep the media in check.

For example, in the summer of 1994 the regime closed three weekly magazines, issued official warnings against three other publications, and placed three more "under watch" for such misdemeanors as reporting on human rights demonstrations in East Timor.<sup>28</sup> The government oversaw a licensing system by means of which it could simply withdraw a license and close a newspaper.

As well as censorship, the regime also made a habit of fabricating stories that put its action in a more favorable light. These stories would then be picked up and run by the more compliant sections of the media. Such was the case with the November 1974 stories carried by the Indonesian press of Communist Chinese infiltration into East Timor, which helped to ideologically prepare the way for Indonesian invasion the following year.<sup>29</sup> This was followed by numerous other fabrications about East Timor carried in the Indonesian press over the entire period of the occupation.

As another form of media control, the Suharto regime also sponsored the Union of Indonesian Journalists. However, a number of journalists formed their own independent union, the Alliance of Independent Journalists. When these journalists signed petitions in support of *Tempo*, one of the weeklies closed in 1994 and reputed to have been the country's most popular magazine, the Indonesian government threatened to also close down the publications for which these journalists worked.<sup>30</sup>

Along with *Tempo*, the newsweeklies *Editor* and *De Tik* were closed on the basis of "ignorance of press ethics." Prior to the three closures, there had been two years of what has been termed "relative press freedom" during which time some Indonesian journals had cautiously reported on some events in East Timor. However, throughout 1993 the military and the official Ministry of Information applied increasing pressure on journalists, especially in relation to East Timor. Foreign governments and commercial institutions conspired in the suppression of information. The *Straits Times* of Singapore, for instance, printed an edition sent for sale in Indonesia. Before doing so, it would remove any articles or pictures that may have been offensive to the Indonesian government.<sup>31</sup>

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27 Schock, "People power and political opportunities," p. 370.

28 Murray Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia," *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Spring 1995, p. 44.

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29 James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1983), p. 79.

30 Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia."

31 Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia."

Despite the regime's best efforts to silence them, however, some Indonesian journalists were in the forefront of the dissent. Ahmad Taufik had been a journalist on *Tempo* and was involved in the formation of the Alliance of Independent Journalists. The group founded its own magazine, though at great cost to its members' personal safety and freedom. They were among numerous journalists jailed for the articles they wrote critical of the regime's policies. Even an 18 year-old office worker at the magazine was arrested and sentenced to 20 months imprisonment.<sup>32</sup>

During the student protests of 1998, the Alliance of Independent Journalists played an important role, running crash courses for the students to better advise them on how to publish newsletters and convey their ideas. Other media and journalists were also sympathetic, including the *Jakarta Post*, whose editor noted that, by covering the protests, his paper could address issues which otherwise were not permitted under the strict rules of the Suharto regime.<sup>33</sup>

Electronic mail and the World Wide Web were effective tools for the opposition, since they by-passed censorship of the mass media and were low cost. Although relatively few Indonesians then had access to the Internet, it proved most useful for those who did. This once again confirmed Schock's point that links with the outside world can be useful and international news coverage can be influential in domestic affairs, a point underscored by students at the demonstrations carrying placards stating "Wear your lipstick. You might be on CNN tonight." A number of banners were in English, the students knowing that this was crucial to informing people in other countries of the situation in their own.

Throughout the events, foreign governments played little overt role and certainly did little to help the opposition. Public events were reported to the world but the outcome was

mainly determined by internal dynamics, especially in Jakarta. However, reports of actions on the web and CNN helped the students to maintain their momentum.

We have seen, then, that in 1998 there was mass action that led to Suharto's resignation, but what about 1988 or 1978, indeed any of the previous 30 years during which repression was a way of life? In reality, there was substantial resistance to repression throughout this time: it is wrong to imagine that there was no dissent or action.<sup>34</sup> However, our focus now turns away from those courageous individuals and groups that did resist, resting instead on occasions and situations where there was considerably less action, for example compared to 1998. Of course, to target situations where there is relatively little action opens an enormous range of material for examination. In order to draw clearer insights, it is useful to consider events where repression was especially brutal or extensive and where it was widely known. Hence we turn now to the 1965–1966 massacres in Indonesia and what lessons they can reveal about why at least some things that "could have been done" did not occur.

### The 1965–1966 massacres<sup>35</sup>

President Sukarno, leader of the government that came to power following Indonesian independence in 1949, rose to prominence on an anti-colonial platform. He sponsored the development of an alternative "Third World" through the 1955 Bandung conference and was quick to invoke anti-foreign feeling when

34 Max Lane, "Voices of dissent in Indonesia," *Arena*, No. 61, 1982, pp. 110–128.

35 Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Indoensian Killings 1965–1966* (Melbourne: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990). For concise summaries, see Malcolm Caldwell (ed.), *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1975), pp. 13–17; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume 1: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1979), pp. 205–217.

32 John Pilger, "The secret history of Suharto's bloody rise," *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 8, 22 September 1995, pp. 14–15.

33 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 15.

faced with what he perceived to be continuing colonialist tendencies of large Western states. He showed himself willing to court the Soviet and Chinese governments if it suited him to do business with them rather than the West. The US government<sup>36</sup> felt that the Sukarno government could not be relied upon in a region it considered to be of utmost strategic importance and was desperate for a more staunchly anti-communist regime to rule in the archipelago.<sup>37</sup>

The opportunity for change came in 1965 following an attempted coup.<sup>38</sup> The incident deeply tarnished Sukarno's reputation and heralded a power shift towards the military. Along with his military supporters, General Suharto, the Commander of the Jakarta

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36 We try to avoid constructions in which a country is identified with its government, e.g. "The US had never been pleased." This form of metonymy is especially inappropriate when discussing nonviolent action, which often pits citizens against their government or its agents. Even our own constructions are shorthands for more accurate but complex formulations, such as "US government" really meaning something like "US dominant foreign policy elites."

37 In accordance with its assumed right to interfere in the affairs of other countries and its history of doing so, the US government undertook serious covert intervention in Indonesia in 1956–1958, in order to undermine Sukarno. This particularly took the form of US government agencies' heavy support for rebels but this interference backfired in its immediate aims. For a fuller story, see Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: New Press, 1995).

38 Responsibility for the coup has been much debated. Suharto and his allies consistently attributed it to the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) in order to justify their pogrom. Given that the PKI was totally unprepared for action, many analysts believe the coup was an internal military matter. Yet others think that Suharto knew about the plans and used the coup to get rid of rivals. See for example Humphrey McQueen, "How Suharto won power," *Independent Monthly*, September 1990, pp. 24–29.

garrison that defeated the coup, took the opportunity to massacre those who were known, thought, or rumored to be members of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) or their sympathizers and many more as well. Using a well-orchestrated media campaign, Suharto banned the PKI and escalated his program of slaughtering communists and suspects. The army systematically went about the obliteration of those deemed politically undesirable in Central Java, moving east through to Bali. As well as killing suspected communists themselves, army officers gave lists of names to right-wing Muslim groups and other anti-communist militias who were provided with arms, transport, and training for the purposes of carrying out this pogrom. The CIA was firmly behind Suharto's actions, supplying lists of leading communists to the Indonesian army and recording their deaths.<sup>39</sup> Although most of the deaths occurred in 1965 and 1966, the slaughter continued until 1969 when virtually all apparent opposition had been eliminated.

Against this wave of killings, left-wing opponents were quickly rendered few and disorganized. Power shifted further to Suharto in March 1966 when the army insisted that Sukarno delegate extensive powers to Suharto, at the time Chief of Staff of the Army, and then officially in 1968 when Suharto was appointed to the presidency in his own right. By then he had set up the conditions for comfortable rule with the bulk of his opponents killed or imprisoned. It is commonly estimated that 500,000 to one million died in the anti-communist rampages, making this one

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39 Kathy Kadane, "Ex-agents say CIA compiled death lists for Indonesians," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 May 1990, pp. 1, 22; <http://users.wesnet.net/~cgian/suha-cia.htm>. For a discussion of the significance of the CIA role, see Robert Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," in Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966*, pp. 1–43, at p. 7. On the role of the CIA and US policy makers in Suharto's rise to power, see Peter Dale Scott, "Exporting military-economic development: America and the overthrow of Sukarno, 1965–67," in Caldwell, *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, pp. 209–263.



of the century's major bloodbaths.<sup>40</sup> At least 400,000 were imprisoned, many on the remote island of Buru.

Those Indonesians who openly opposed the massacres did so at enormous cost. Many chose not to act because the risks were too great: even the slightest resistance was dangerous and could mean the death of oneself or one's family. Indeed, it is believed that many PKI members went meekly to their deaths, sometimes even to the extent of lining up in their funeral clothes to be executed.<sup>41</sup> Overt resistance would have required not only extraordinary courage but, to be effective, high and efficient levels of organization would have had to be developed for the new circumstances which prevailed. This would have been a daunting challenge, given the number of activists being killed. However, examples of individual bravery exist. For example, the then head of Denpasar Hospital, Dr Djelantik, at great personal risk refused killing squads access to his patients.<sup>42</sup>

As hundreds or thousands were killed every day, Western governments had good information about what was happening. Documents from the period show that Australian and US governments knew about the massacres as they were occurring, yet did nothing to stop them,

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40 Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, "Victims of the state: genocides, politicides and group repression from 1945 to 1995," in Albert J. Jongman (ed), *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences* (Leiden: Projecten Interdisciplinair Onderzoek naar de Oorzaken van Mensenrechtenschendingen, 1996), pp. 33–58. For a discussion of different estimates of the number killed, see Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," pp. 7–14.

41 Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," p. 20.

42 A. A. M. Djelantik, *The Birthmark: Memoirs of a Balinese Prince* (Singapore: Peripuls, 1997), pp. 299–303. For an account of the systematic torture and imprisonment of suspected communists, and of underground attempts to reorganize, see Carmel Budiardjo, *Surviving Indonesia's Gulag: A Western Woman Tells Her Story* (London: Cassell, 1996).

instead welcoming the elimination of the communist threat.<sup>43</sup> Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt was obviously pleased with the situation in Indonesia when he announced in 1966 that "with 500,000 to 1,000,000 Communist sympathizers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume a reorientation has taken place."<sup>44</sup>

There was no groundswell of international public opinion that might have forced governments to adopt a different approach. Perhaps the strongest barrier to more widespread mobilization was the Cold War paradigm within which many people understood the global order. The beneficiaries of this ideology were arms manufacturers and those who sought to invest in repressive regimes such as Indonesia which, if nothing else, seemed politically stable as well as obviously friendly to foreign investment.

However, many people in these Western countries did not perceive the situation in this economic light, nor did they understand the relevance of these economic arrangements. Many simply perceived the world situation as one of danger with the overwhelming need being to hold communism at bay. There was widespread paranoia about the march of communism, widely supported by government propaganda that took advantage of much of the pain and loss from the previous world war.

Belief in the so-called domino effect promoted fear that the southward march of communism was almost inevitable except by means of the utmost vigilance, enormous expenditure on arms, and inclusion within a nuclear umbrella. With communism having established itself in Eastern Europe and having "spread" from the Soviet Union to China and Korea, it was a common belief that Indonesia and then Australia (probably by invasion) were

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43 Marian Wilkinson, "Hidden holocaust," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1999, pp. 1s, 4s–5s; David Jenkins, "The silent watchers," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July 1999, p. 11.

44 *New York Times*, 6 July 1966, quoted in Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, p. 217

next in line. Crude though this was, it held much sway in a fiercely paranoid and anti-communist climate, used by Western governments to control domestic situations as well as to guide foreign policy. During the 1960s and 1970s, the most visible manifestation of the anti-communist impulse was the war in Vietnam.

The mass media's commitment to anti-communism meant that the government line went largely unchallenged. For their part, opposition political parties usually spent more time supporting the ideology and trying to distance themselves as much as possible from any socialist taint than trying to challenge Cold War assumptions. These barriers proved too large, in the case of the 1965–1966 massacres, to have sufficient pressures mounted on governments to take strong stands against the Indonesian government's brutality and repression.

Thus, the massacres proceeded without much resulting backlash. Within Indonesia, this can be explained in part by the lack of preparation for resistance and lack of an organized movement to build on outrage caused by the killings.<sup>45</sup> Outside Indonesia, the massacres received relatively little attention, with anti-communism providing a framework for justifying what was happening. This has been called a case of "constructive terror," namely mass killing that fostered a favorable investment climate.<sup>46</sup>

## East Timor

East Timor<sup>47</sup> became a Portuguese colony in the 1500s. Prior to that it had been a series of

small kingdoms. East Timor remained Portuguese until 1975, shortly after the Caetano regime in Lisbon was overthrown by a coup, bringing about a policy change towards decolonization. In response several political parties formed in East Timor with views about what sort of future the territory should have. Fretilin was the party that went on to gather most popular support and that was paramount in the struggle for independence.

Following the Lisbon coup, the Portuguese stayed in East Timor until one of the East Timorese parties, the Timorese Democratic Union, staged a small and unsuccessful coup that was fairly easily put down. At that stage the Portuguese retreated to the island of Atauro, thus leaving a temporary vacuum, of which the Indonesian government was keen to take advantage despite Fretilin declaring independence for the Democratic Republic of East Timor in November 1975. Both the Indonesian and Australian governments promoted the view that Fretilin was Marxist.

Indonesian forces invaded in December. As well as military operations, they engaged in massive killing of civilians, rape, torture, and destruction. Fretilin was the target of much of the slaughter, although the group held its own initially, having its major strongholds in the mountains and being in possession of a substantial number of arms that the Portuguese had left behind. However, the Indonesian

45 Various factors are discussed by Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia."

46 Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, p. 205.

47 Sources include Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *The War Against East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Peter Carey and G. Carter Bentley (eds.), *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation* (London: Cassell, 1995);

Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*; Jill Jolliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and Colonialism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978); Arnold Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead: The Epic Struggles of Bishop Belo of East Timor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Arnold Kohen and John Taylor, *An Act of Genocide: Indonesia's Invasion of East Timor* (London: TAPOL, 1979); John Pilger, *Distant Voices* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 231–323; Constâncio Pinto and Matthew Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1997); John G. Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Rodney Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits: Government, Media and East Timor* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

military slaughter of East Timorese people was so great that it decimated Fretilin forces as part of its overall culling. Fretilin later made a resurgence in small and then greater numbers.<sup>48</sup>

The Indonesian military assault against East Timor left the small territory devastated. Some estimates claim that up to one-third of the population died. Agricultural output fell by almost 70 percent in just three years, causing serious famine. Infant mortality was elevated to among the highest in the world, nearly all East Timorese teachers were executed, and 400 schools destroyed.<sup>49</sup>

The Indonesian invasion was largely undertaken with the condonation of Western governments, if not their blessing.<sup>50</sup> The Australian and US governments provided quiet succor, hinting only that they did not wish to be seen as openly supporting or condoning any such invasion. Suharto obliged by forestalling a full-scale invasion until President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had completed a visit they were making to Jakarta.<sup>51</sup>

In Australia, both Liberal and Labor governments adopted the same policies toward Indonesia. Liberal Prime Minister John Gorton visited Indonesia during his term (1968–1971)

and Liberal Prime Minister William McMahon (1971–1972) received Suharto as his guest in Australia in 1972. In 1968, immediately after becoming leader of the Australian Labor Party (then in opposition), Gough Whitlam advocated a friendly and supportive approach to the Suharto regime which he suggested was preferable to a communist government which he felt had nearly been in command there.<sup>52</sup> Richard Walsh and George Munster claim that Whitlam had an image of Indonesia that had little to do with reality but more to do with his desire for good relations. Whitlam wanted to be sophisticated and cultured, and he was contemptuous of the White Australia Policy which had tarnished Australia's reputation in Asia. Hence he was keen for a new and close relationship with the neighbor to the north but this meant believing the regime to be more innocuous than it was.<sup>53</sup>

As Australian Prime Minister (1972–1975), Whitlam visited Indonesia in 1974 and reportedly told Suharto that an independent Timor would be an unviable state and a potential threat to the area. This was tantamount to giving Suharto a green light for invasion and simultaneously a virtual guarantee that the Australian government would acquiesce in the event of such an invasion.<sup>54</sup>

Such appeasement seems puzzling in some respects but can partially be explained — though certainly not justified — by a somewhat problematic history in the relationship between Australia and Asia generally. The relationship had been dogged by a White Australia Policy which was founded largely on xenophobia and a fear that the Australian (assumed essentially British) way of life was

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48 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*; Paulino Gama, "The war in the hills, 1975–85: a Fretilin commander remembers," in Carey and Bentley, *East Timor at the Crossroads*, pp. 97–105; Kohen and Taylor, *An Act of Genocide*; Pinto and Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle*. There is a theory that the Indonesian military "allowed" Fretilin to survive in the hills in order to blood new soldiers in counter-insurgency. Some 10,000 to 20,000 Indonesian troops died in East Timor between 1975 and 1998.

49 Ed Ayres, "The costs and benefits of war," *World Watch*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-February 1995, p. 9.

50 Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, pp. 129–204; Kohen and Taylor, *An Act of Genocide*; Pilger, *Distant Voices*.

51 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 9.

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52 Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1985), pp. 102–119.

53 Richard Walsh and George Munster, *Secrets of State* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982), pp. 54–55.

54 David Lee and Christopher Waters (eds.), *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 228.

threatened by the “yellow masses” to the north. Whitlam, on taking office, was keen to overcome the longstanding image of Australia as a nation that eyed its Asian neighbors suspiciously and he felt particularly strongly about the cool relations that had existed between the Indonesian president and his more recent prime ministerial predecessors. In 1967, five years before taking office, he claimed “In Indonesia we lost our first opportunity to preserve and build the legacy of goodwill left by the policies of the Chifley Government and the actions of Dr Evatt.”<sup>55</sup> But Indonesia, post-1965, was a very different country from that encountered by Chifley and Evatt in its early days of independence. Although Whitlam had ample intelligence resources signaling the Indonesia regime’s intentions regarding East Timor, Whitlam had long wanted to rekindle good relations with the Indonesian government, even at the cost of other Asian neighbours.<sup>56</sup>

The slaughter of guerrillas and civilians alike in East Timor was largely undertaken with arms from Western countries. The US government supplied A4-Skyhawks, used to terrorize people in the mountains, as well as OV10 Bronco planes; Lockheed C-130 transport aircraft; Cadillac Cage V-150 Commando armored cars equipped with machine guns, mortar, cannons, and smoke and tear-gas launchers; M-17 rifles; pistols; mortars; machine guns; recoilless rifles; and

extensive communication equipment, as well as providing counter-insurgency training. The Bronco planes in particular are credited with having stepped up the war to new offensive levels.<sup>57</sup> The US government concealed its armaments role from Congress and the US public, with equipment misleadingly justified as being for “training purposes only.”<sup>58</sup>

Journalist John Pilger repeatedly tried to expose the hypocrisy and complicity of Western governments, especially the British and Australian governments.<sup>59</sup> Pilger reported the \$1 billion sale of British Hawk aircraft to Indonesia.<sup>60</sup> According to the Center for Defense Information in Washington, the Hawks were “ideal counter-insurgency aircraft, designed to be used against guerrillas who come from among civilian populations and have no adequate means of response against air attack.”<sup>61</sup> British arms exports provided the Indonesian navy with a warship, the Green Rover, shortly after global media coverage of a 1991 massacre in Dili, East Timor’s capital, discussed below. Western governments could no longer credibly deny Indonesian repression but they sent arms anyway.

The US and British governments were not alone in supplying the technology of repression to the Indonesian military. The Netherlands government supplied three Corvette warships despite the demands of Dutch action groups that the deal be cancelled. Meanwhile, the Australian government donated Nomad Searchmaster planes, fitted with ground and

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55 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, p. 102. Ben Chifley was prime minister immediately after World War II and H. V. Evatt was a prominent diplomat and leader of the Australian Labor Party.

56 Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, gives an excellent account of the way the key figures in the Australian government, with full knowledge of what was happening in Indonesia and East Timor (including through spy operations), gave some public lip service to human rights while in practice seeking to placate Indonesian elites. For original documents, see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Wendy Way, ed.), *Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor, 1974–1976* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

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57 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 27.

58 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

59 Pilger, *Distant Voices*, pp. 301–311.

60 John Pilger, “Land of the dead: journey to East Timor,” *The Nation*, Vol. 258, No. 16, 25 April 1994, pp. 550–552.

61 John Pilger, “Inside the ministry of propaganda,” *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 7, 29 April 1994, pp. 16–18.

sea surveillance radar.<sup>62</sup> The Australian military, like the British and US, also provided training.

East Timor solidarity campaigns were started around the world. Activists struggled long and hard to stop the bloodshed and pursued various campaigns such as against Western arms sales to Indonesia. Activists used symbolic actions in an attempt to alert other citizens to the situation in East Timor and to take a stand against Western governments' military involvement.<sup>63</sup> In an attempt to "disturb consciences," one British activist conducted a peaceful raid on British Aerospace where he hung a banner, painted slogans, and hammered the machines of destruction. Conducting his own defense at his resulting trial, he focused on Britain's supply of this weaponry to Indonesia and its role in the repression of East Timorese.<sup>64</sup> Some time later four women undertook a similar raid on a British Aerospace plant, attacking with household hammers a Hawk fighter aircraft destined for Indonesia the following day and leaving in the pilot's seat a videotaped explanation for their actions.<sup>65</sup>

Other activists attempted to use the Internet to expose the lies of the Indonesian regime and the real situation in East Timor. In September 1998, Portuguese hackers modified numerous Indonesian websites, adding links to sites elsewhere containing information on human rights abuses in East Timor. They also added

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62 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 30.

63 For a personal testimony of religiously based resistance, see Ciaron O'Reilly, *Remembering Forgetting: A Journey of Nonviolent Resistance to the War on East Timor* (Brisbane: Swords into Ploughshares, 2000).

64 Vanessa Baird, "Bringing the blood back to British Aerospace," *New Internationalist*, March 1994, p. 21.

65 John Pilger, "In a Liverpool court next week, four women who disarmed a warplane headed for Indonesia will raise the issue of our right to stop genocide," *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 9, 19 July 1996, p. 23.

"Free East Timor," in large black letters, to the sites.<sup>66</sup>

In Australia the Campaign for an Independent East Timor (CIET) was established in November 1974.<sup>67</sup> Campaign activists in CIET issued press releases warning of the threat of invasion, contacted members of parliament, met with Fretilin activists, sought trade union actions, organized demonstrations, gathered information, put out fortnightly bulletins, fed information to the media, arranged interviews between Australian media and Fretilin spokespeople, and encouraged formation of East Timor solidarity groups in other countries. Perhaps one of the group's biggest contributions was helping set up secret radio contact in Darwin with Fretilin in nearby East Timor and providing operators and technical support. Several times Australian security police tracked down and seized the transmitter.<sup>68</sup> Australian authorities ordered an end to distribution of messages from East Timor that had been routed through an Australian telecommunication center.<sup>69</sup>

According to Denis Freney of CIET, "... despite the best efforts of many people around the country [Australia] to get the government to stop supporting Suharto we had little success, although we were able to keep the question alive even while most people thought it a 'lost cause'."<sup>70</sup>

Certainly more pressure, more actions, and more demands brought to bear much earlier might have undermined some of the support offered by Western governments to the Suharto regime. The Indonesian government hired a public relations firm, Burson Marsteller, to put forward a more acceptable

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66 Amy Harmon, "'Hactivists' of all persuasions take their struggle to the web," *New York Times*, 31 October 1998.

67 Denis Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1991), p. 348.

68 Freney, *A Map of Days*, pp. 357–373.

69 Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War*, p. 77.

70 Freney, *A Map of Days*, p. 363.

image of Indonesia's presence in East Timor,<sup>71</sup> suggesting that the regime feared that, as more people in the West learned of events in East Timor, they would pressure their governments to take action. This \$5 million contract is a testament that there was a war of image to be won, as well as a war against the people of East Timor.

In the 1980s, the East Timorese resistance reorganized to gain more support, with the aim of building unity in East Timor and gaining support in Indonesia and internationally. The new emphasis was on nonviolent action, urban participation, and orientation of guerrillas to defending against attacks and not initiating violence. This resulted in a much more potent resistance movement.<sup>72</sup>

A crucial obstacle to generating international support was lack of information about massacres for outside audiences. The Indonesian occupiers did everything possible to shut down communication outside the country. The importance of communication to outside audiences can be illustrated by a couple of examples. In 1989, the Indonesian government "opened" East Timor to outside contact: journalists, among others, were allowed to visit. On 12 November 1991, a slaughter of more than 200 peaceful protesters at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, the capital of East Timor,<sup>73</sup> was witnessed by several Western journalists and recorded on videotape by Max Stahl from Yorkshire TV, who was able to smuggle the tape out of the country. When the journalists' eyewitness accounts and especially the video footage reached an international audience, they caused outrage and triggered a great increase in Western popular support for the East Timorese struggle.<sup>74</sup>

71 Pilger, "Inside the ministry of propaganda."

72 Chisako M. Fukuda, "Peace through nonviolent action: the East Timorese resistance movement's strategy for engagement," *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2000, pp. 16–31.

73 Pinto and Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle*, pp. 188–199.

74 Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead*, pp. 160–187; Andrew McMillan, *Death in Dili* (Sydney:

Eventually public sentiment abroad turned against the Indonesian regime, largely as a result of getting more information about events in East Timor than governments were willing to disseminate through formal channels. Following the UN-supervised vote in East Timor in September 1999, in which nearly 80% of voters supported independence, the Indonesian military in East Timor connived with anti-independence militias<sup>75</sup> in a ruthless orgy of destruction, killing, and forced relocation.<sup>76</sup> Because there had been considerable attention on the referendum in a country which had been struggling for its independence for a long time, substantial media resources had been stationed in East Timor and there was considerable focus on events there. Such attention was itself an outcome of

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Hodder and Stoughton, 1992); Pilger, *Distant Voices*, p. 236; Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, pp. 43–53. McMillan also describes the voyage of the peace ship that sailed from Darwin for Dili in early 1992. Later, copies of Stahl's videotape were smuggled into Indonesia and had quite an impact in antigovernment circles.

75 Hamish McDonald, "Masters of terror," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28–29 April 2001, pp. 23–25; Lindsay Murdoch, "UN lays blame for Timor wave of terror," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 2001, pp. 1, 14; Lindsay Murdoch, "Old friend of Timor says what others will not," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 2001, p. 14. One reason that states may tolerate, encourage, or set up death squads is so that the government's direct involvement can be publicly denied. This is definitely of significance in mobilizing resistance to repression. See Bruce B. Campbell, "Death squads: definition, problems, and historical context," in Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 1–26, at pp. 12–13. See also, in the same volume, Robert Cribb, "From *petrus* to *ninja*: death squads in Indonesia," pp. 181–202.

76 For a summary of political events in East Timor in 1999, see Bob Lowry, "East Timor: an overview of political developments," in Chris Manning and Peter van Diermen (eds.), *Indonesia in Transition: Social Aspects of Reformasi and Crisis* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), pp. 91–108.

the nonviolent struggle to draw the world's eyes to the situation in East Timor. The upshot was that the post-election massacre occurred in the full spotlight of the world media (at least for those countries where East Timor is considered significant, such as Australia). Large numbers of people outside Indonesia were horrified and outraged, leading to many forms of nonviolent action including trade union bans and discouragement of tourism.

Note that in both the 1991 Dili massacre and the 1999 post-vote violence, the East Timorese resistance had by that stage adopted a largely nonviolent approach. Indonesian repression was exercised against nonviolent civilians and information was available to an international audience. Thus, conditions were more conducive to generating international support than in the decade from 1975. Of course, other factors played a role, including the saliency of anti-communism, the strength of international human rights and solidarity groups, and the interest of the mass media. That increased interest on the mass media's part was itself a tribute to the work done by solidarity groups which had made the East Timor issue of interest to international audiences, to which media responded with increased coverage. Overall the reasons that there was more interest and fewer barriers in the 1990s are a complicated blend of outcomes of tactics, a growing awareness of some international issues — which always vie against others for coverage — and a differently configured notion in the “public mind” of international rights and responsibilities.

What is far less studied, and far less easy to understand, is the relative lack of concern and action when information about repression is readily available, though not necessarily presented as the sort of headlines that are influential in determining what many people consider important. While nonviolence research has concentrated on nonviolent action and how it does or doesn't generate support, there has been a neglect of situations, such as East Timor after 1975, that warrant nonviolent action but where relatively little or none occurs. Such cases provide a rich ground for

understanding barriers to action and how they might be overcome.

### **What else could have been done?**

It is relatively easy, after the fact, to speculate about what opponents of Indonesian repression could have done differently in the period 1965–1998 that is the focus of our attention. Since participants in any struggle are constrained by the circumstances in which they operate — including resources, ideas, dangers, and contingencies — it is unfair to blame them for acting as they do and unrealistic to demand a different course of action. Similarly, it would be unfair to expect action from those whose lives, freedom, or families may be at risk, even though some people do act under those circumstances. Nevertheless, it can be productive to talk about “what ifs” in order to learn lessons about nonviolent action that can be applied in future situations. Another way of framing the question is to ask: what barriers to action existed and what eventually breached these barriers?

Within Indonesia, opponents of government repression did in fact use a wide variety of nonviolent techniques, including leaflets, speeches, strikes, rallies, marches, occupations, and vigils. Similarly the people of East Timor used many methods of nonviolent action, though in this case there was guerrilla warfare as well. While vitally important, analyzing domestic nonviolent opposition, both what was done and what could have been done, is a type of study well traversed in the literature on nonviolent action. Therefore we look instead at what has been less commonly examined, namely support for the struggle from outside the country, in this case from outside Indonesia.

As noted previously, there was little help for the Indonesian democratic opposition movement from outside the country. In contrast, the call for independence for East Timor generated international popular support from the start, growing eventually to proportions that governments could not ignore. Invasion of the small territory was poorly received throughout most of South-East Asia, even at a

government level, and there was even less support from African and Latin American governments.<sup>77</sup> It was mainly the US, Australian, and Japanese governments that tried to play down the invasion or to at least put it in the best light possible. In fact, their support proved crucial and, as a result, the Indonesian regime received significant support from foreign governments.

This occurred in three main ways. First, governments around the world legally recognized and maintained the usual diplomatic relations with the Indonesian government. James Dunn, a former Australian consul in East Timor, claims that the Indonesian government calculated — correctly, as it turned out — that, if the Australian and US governments could accommodate East Timor's annexation, then the international community at large would not challenge it.<sup>78</sup> Formal recognition in the international arena is an important source of legitimacy for any government; withdrawing recognition is seen as a sign of serious hostility. Some governments went further and formed closer ties with the Indonesian government. The Australian government later made military agreements with the Indonesian government, including joint training exercises and providing military aid. Furthermore, the Australian government, unlike most others, recognized Indonesian annexation of East Timor, thereby giving greater legitimacy to repressive actions there.

Secondly, the reverse side of this support for the regime has been that foreign governments failed to support democratic opposition movements within Indonesia, whether rhetorically or more substantively. During the cold war, Western governments often gave at least rhetorical support to dissidents and opposition groups in communist countries, but this sort of open advocacy for "freedom and democracy" was mostly lacking in the case of Indonesia under Suharto.

A third form of foreign support for the Indonesian government came through business investment and financial links. Although business activities in a country do not necessarily imply any formal endorsement of the government, they implicitly condone its policies. Withdrawal or avoidance of investment can be a tactic to signal opposition to domestic policies, as in the case of disinvestment in the South African economy under apartheid.

Also worth noting is the role of foreign intellectuals, such as US academics who built links with and supported antisocialist Indonesian figures during Sukarno's presidency, a process funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and carried out through leading universities such as Cornell, MIT, and Berkeley. Western economists helped teach "modernization theory" to Indonesian economic planners.<sup>79</sup>

The three main forms of support for the Indonesian regime were combined in the Timor Gap Treaty, which divided up resources in the oceans near Timor between Australia and Indonesia. The treaty provided additional acknowledgment of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, laid the foundation for increased economic investment, and denied any role for the Indonesian people (not to mention the people of East Timor).

Defenders of government policy would argue that diplomatic recognition and business investment are means to provide a dialogue with the Indonesian government and that good

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77 Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War*, p. 76.

78 James Dunn, "The darkest page," *New Internationalist*, March 1994, pp. 24–25.

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79 David Ransom, "The Berkeley mafia and the Indonesian massacre," *Ramparts*, No. 9, October 1970, pp. 27–29, 40–49. It would be a worthwhile exercise to investigate more deeply the links between western intellectuals and Indonesian repression. A relevant study in another context is Jonathan Feldman, *Universities in the Business of Repression: The Academic-Military-Industrial Complex and Central America* (Boston: South End Press, 1989). On experts as servants of power, see David Elliott and Ruth Elliott, *The Control of Technology* (London: Wykeham, 1976) and Edward T. Silva and Sheila A. Slaughter, *Serving Power: The Making of the Academic Social Science Expert* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984).



relations offer greater opportunities for positive influence. Against this, it can be argued that this approach had little obvious success over more than thirty years of Indonesian repression. Indeed, far from trying to influence the Indonesian government to promote human rights and democratic values, Australian governments after 1965 mostly fell over themselves to appease and ingratiate themselves with the Suharto regime.

However, our focus here is not on official rhetoric and short-sighted diplomatic “pragmatism”<sup>80</sup> but on a strategy against repression based on nonviolent action. Diplomatic recognition, military training, and business investment, whatever their effectiveness as means of reducing repression, are not the subject of nonviolence theory,<sup>81</sup> except as barriers to mobilization of nonviolent action. Although governments supported the Indonesian regime under Suharto, it was quite possible for citizens to oppose it and to support the democratic opposition. “Citizens” here is a shorthand for individuals and groups including churches, trade unions, political parties, solidarity groups, human rights organizations, and many others — what can be called “organized civil society.”

We have already described many of the actions of campaigners for independence for East Timor, from hitting out at weaponry bound for Indonesia to hacking Indonesian government websites. Among other actions was a refusal by Melbourne dockworkers to handle Indonesian shipping following the 1991

Dili massacre.<sup>82</sup> This was in vivid contrast to the Australian government, which welcomed, in a visit to Canberra, the Indonesian general who directed the massacre.<sup>83</sup> There was a “boycott Bali” campaign after the Dili massacre, although it didn’t receive much attention. There were also actions such as writing, publishing, and distributing letters, petitions, and articles, providing symbolic support for the Indonesian democratic opposition, and sponsoring of trips abroad by Indonesian and East Timorese activists. Ahmad Taufic, a journalist from the banned Indonesian weekly *Tempo*, who had himself been imprisoned for several years, was one activist who visited the UK to highlight the situation in Indonesia.<sup>84</sup>

Any one of these actions which were taken, along with others that may not have been, could be developed in detail. For example, setting up effective communication systems could involve obtaining simple and cheap short-wave radios and miniature video recorders and getting them to opponents of the regime. Given that Indonesian government officials have systematically lied about their actions, providing first-hand information about events can be quite a powerful challenge, as in the case of the Dili massacre.

## Conclusion

The protests in Indonesia in 1998 that led to the resignation of President Suharto fit the standard pattern of nonviolent action, in which conspicuous protests encourage more people to participate and open repression against protesters causes a backlash against the regime. Studying these events — plus the 1999 protests in Australia and elsewhere over massacres in East Timor following the vote for

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80 Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, makes a powerful case that the Australian government’s self-styled pragmatism over East Timor was not pragmatic in practice, in part because the government ignored the role of the news media in exposing Indonesian repression and Australian government hypocrisy.

81 Business investment in principle could be a form of nonviolent action, if implemented in support of a nonviolent struggle, but this has certainly not been the way it has been used in Indonesia.

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82 “A diplomatic massacre,” *The Economist* (US), Vol. 321, 30 November 1991, pp. 36–37.

83 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

84 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

independence<sup>85</sup> — using nonviolence theory can be a fruitful exercise. An additional aim here is to draw attention to the limited action at other times, namely the previous decades of the repressive Suharto regime, especially during the 1965–1966 massacres and the 1975 invasion and subsequent occupation of East Timor. Although there was substantial opposition to Indonesian repression in these earlier years, there were also many who supported, condoned, or ignored it.

Our argument is that nonviolence theory can be enriched by studying occasions characterized by a relative lack of action, or insufficient action, in order to learn about barriers to action. Studying action must remain the centerpiece of the study of nonviolent action, but this needs to be supplemented by much more attention to periods and occasions where there are relatively low levels of action. The 1998 protests in Indonesia show what sort of people's action was possible, and throw into relief the relative lack of this scale of opposition at other times. Likewise, the 1999 protests in Australia against killings in East Timor show what sort of people's action was possible outside of Indonesia, and throw into relief the relative lack of this scale of opposition at other times, notably during the 1965–1966 massacres and during and after the 1975 invasion of East Timor.

We have mentioned some barriers to action in the course of our accounts of events.

- Social context, such as anticommunism, trade links, nationalism, domestic preoccupations, and prevailing attitudes about whether one should intervene, make judgments — or even be concerned — about affairs in other countries. (Feelings of insularity can wax and wane).

- Communication blockages, such as censorship and removal of radio transmitters.

- The mind set in Western governments, especially foreign affairs departments, which favors friendly relations with other governments as a form of “real-politik” in which moral issues should not intrude into foreign affairs, and rejects direct support for pro-democracy movements.

- News values in Western media that give priority to government perspectives.

For example, the 1998 protests leading to Suharto's resignation were aided by the social context of economic collapse and by email communication; at earlier times the barriers associated with social context and communication created much greater obstacles to action. In 1999, Australian mass media provided massive and to some extent crusading coverage of destruction and killing in East Timor, supporting and fostering popular protest that was sufficient to override the traditional mind set in Australian governments that favored good relations with the Indonesian regime above other considerations. In earlier times, the social context was less favorable, less information was available and media interest was far less, thus helping to explain the lower level of action against the 1965–1966 massacres and against the invasion and occupation of East Timor.

Finally, we point out that there has been brave and continual resistance to repression in Indonesia itself, East Timor, and in other countries where activists have struggled to draw attention to events in the archipelago. Their courageous protests have in their own way been the foundations for the greater actions that followed. However, we would hope that, by developing lessons and insights from such periods, in future similar struggles need not be as drawn out and action can more quickly move into a more effective phase.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, we re-examine some of the barriers to effective communication against repression, aggression, and oppression, using perspectives from nonviolence theories and communication theories. Through an interplay between theory and case studies, it may be possible to develop insights that activists can use in ongoing struggles.

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85 Although these protests used many methods of nonviolent action, a primary demand by protesters was for military intervention against the killings, causing some complications in undertaking an analysis of these protests using nonviolence theory.