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Asia Pacific: Perspectives is a peer-reviewed journal published at least once a year, usually in April/May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

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* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

East Timor and the Power of International Commitments in the American Decision Making Process

By Christopher R. Cook, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article looks at American foreign policy towards East Timor in 1999 using internal documents from the White House, Defense and State Departments, as well as interviews with decision makers alongside the extant literature. It examines policy decisions while shedding theoretical light on different types of humanitarian intervention. I argue that Washington had various policy options for the Timorese situation ranging from military intervention to indifference. So why did the White House ultimately choose the path of logistical aid to the Australian INTERFET mission instead of a more muscular response? The best explanation lies in bringing liberal institutionalism back into a constructivist framework. International institutional membership and identity shape state preferences, not only in decisions to intervene but in determining the size and scope of the mission. In the case of East Timor, the Clinton Administration developed policies based on cues received from global institutions. One can imagine easily that if Australia had not been eager to intervene, or that Indonesia had not given approval for an international force, the U.S. might not have been involved at all.

Introduction

In March of 1999 the Clinton Administration with its NATO allies used military force to stop a possible genocide of the Kosovar Albanians. Clinton's actions were seen as a fulfillment of his Clinton Doctrine where he called on Americans to think about the security consequences of letting humanitarian conflicts fester and spread. He argued that where "our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so."¹ In an ironic coincidence of history Washington was faced with a comparable humanitarian tragedy in South East Asia during the same year. This crisis also carried the potential threat of genocide and generated refugees. Yet, the U.S. did not commit troops. The case of East Timor is an illustration of one of the most perplexing puzzles in international relations—trying to explain why states intervene militarily in some humanitarian crises but choose to do nothing in others. Kosovo received unqualified military support, even though the province was seen as legitimately part of Yugoslavia. Yet in East Timor, President Clinton was content to tell the people of East Timor that they were going to receive limited American support through logistical aid to the Australians.² There would be no American military to stop the terror of pro-Indonesian militias. Where was the Clinton Doctrine?

This article is a theoretical examination of U.S. policy towards East Timor in 1999. I try to answer two interrelated questions: First, why did the U.S. become involved in this particular crisis at all? With several ongoing U.N. missions the Clinton Administration could have easily chosen to ignore East Timor as the U.S. had done in 1976. Secondly, and just

as importantly, what shapes the *level* of American response? How can international relations theory help us understand the decision to logistically support Australia and the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) but not send troops? To answer these questions one must move beyond the rhetoric of the Clinton Doctrine. I will carefully look at internal memos from the National Security Council (NSC), Defense and State Departments combined with elite interviews of key Clinton decision makers. I will then test them against a structured focused comparison of two competing hypotheses of foreign policy. The first hypothesis I have chosen is realism, still considered the dominant paradigm of foreign policy scholarship. Secondly, I develop a hypothesis of institutional agenda setting, based on constructivism and neo-liberal institutionalism.³ These hypotheses will hopefully shed theoretical light on how the Administration framed American policy in Timor and how it understood the possible policy options to end the suffering.

I ultimately argue that when it comes to understanding policy in East Timor the Clinton Doctrine or realism cannot fully explain American actions. Instead an understanding of liberal institutionalism and the commitments (and norms) for our duties and membership in the United Nations play a crucial role not only in how the U.S. understands the crisis but how it will respond to it. I argue that the intensity or the international will to do something at the global institutional level will not only predict whether an intervention will occur but what *kind* of intervention. The weaker the international will, the weaker the international commitments the Executive Branch face for action. This understanding of international agenda setting helps explain why East Timor is a case of American "limited intervention" of logistical aid but no substantive military support.

Competing Theories of Foreign Policy and Testable Hypotheses

Realism is often seen as the dominant paradigm of global relations; but it does not have much to say about humanitarian intervention and even less about peace operations. Foreign policy, to realists, is about the promotion and protection of the national interest as defined by the distribution of power in the world. Intervention in strictly humanitarian crises—is by definition outside national security.⁴ Thus, I argue that one should find that at the core of every peacekeeping operation is an internal, sober analysis of national interest.⁵ Policymakers must perceive that something will be gained from participating in these kinds of international ventures. A successful mission might maintain or change the distribution of power but always to the benefit of the intervening nation.⁶ A realist discussion of East Timor must include the fact that Indonesia is a pivotal state to American security. Robert S. Chase, Emily B. Hill and Paul Kennedy called the nation a fulcrum for the region and one that the U.S. must engage with. Events in Jakarta could "trigger political and economic instability" that could affect the entire South East Asian community.⁷ Another consistent goal of Clinton's foreign policy was his pursuit of neo-liberal economic reforms. Washington looked to protect American corporate penetration into Indonesia's expanding markets.⁸

The U.S. had always maintained cordial ties with President Suharto and the Clinton Administration was no different. The White House allowed Indonesia to bypass Congressional restrictions on aid. More importantly, Jakarta continued to receive weaponry. Between 1993 and 1998 the Administration allowed the Indonesian Special Forces (the ones most responsible for East Timorese atrocities) to receive military training.⁹ David Sanger reports that one senior Administration official stated that Suharto was, “our kind of guy.”¹⁰ One should not forget that Timorese leaders like Jose Ramos-Horta criticized Clinton’s plans to sell F-16 fighter jets to the Suharto regime, arguing that “it’s like selling weapons to Saddam Hussein.”¹¹

What kind of hypothesis could we derive with a realist theory when it comes to understanding East Timor? Simply put, Washington will privilege Indonesian stability over the self determination and human rights of East Timor. If this hypothesis is true we will find the Clinton Administration making choices to intervene or not based on explicit arguments of East Timor’s importance to American national interests and Indonesia—a strategic ally in Asia. These findings will be strengthened if we locate evidence that top Clinton decision makers made consistent and repeated references to the geo-strategic and financial stakes Timor posed to the Indonesian government in their comments to the media, minutes from official meetings, memoirs, government papers, reports, and personal interviews.

The Institutional Norms and Humanitarian Intervention¹²

While some in the East Timorese grass roots community saw the hand of realism trump a discussion of human rights, the domestic critics of President Clinton claimed his policies were anything but *real politick*. Michael Mandelbaum argued in a famous article that Clinton’s liberal foreign policy was unnecessary social work. He even later suggested that the 1999 Kosovo crisis was a “perfect failure” of Wilsonian liberalism, ripe with unintended consequences. He asked, was the “Clinton Doctrine” a blueprint for a “Mother Theresa” interventionist policy?¹³ The Doctrine suggests that policymakers should value democracy, self determination, and the stopping of gross human rights abuses. While events were unfolding in East Timor, President Clinton declared in Kosovo, “we don’t want our children to grow up in a... world where innocent civilians can be hauled off to the slaughter, where children can die en masse, where young boys of military age can be burned alive, where young girls can be raped en masse just to intimidate their families.”¹⁴ John Ikenberry would argue this is more than just empty rhetoric but a coherent and rational foreign policy, “a pragmatic, evolving, and sophisticated understanding of how to create a stable and relatively peaceful world order... It is a strategy based on the very realistic view that the political character of other states has an enormous impact on the ability of the United States to ensure its security and economic interests.”¹⁵

However, if the Clinton Administration was serious about following a Wilsonian path in East Timor how does it explain the decision to not contemplate aggressively the use of American troops? Richard Armitage stated in August of 1999: “These

problems in Timor have been on the horizon for months... It would be a tragedy to find out [that the White House] had not privately been developing various force packages for contingencies.”¹⁶ If some in the United States argued the White House intervened too much, others claimed not enough was done for the people of Timor-Leste. This was a position exemplified by Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), who thought the administration was too slow to send American troops, and then sent too few on too limited a mission in Timor-Leste. “When we are presented with a humanitarian crisis... we cannot sit back like some immense couch potato.”¹⁷

So how does a Wilsonian liberal (like Clinton) explain the policy path chosen? Part of the answer lies in the Clinton Doctrine which carries an important caveat: direct intervention would occur when our values *and* our interests are at stake. We are forced to ask how strategically important human rights were in East Timor vis-à-vis Indonesian stability. Thus present in the Clinton Doctrine is the interplay between interests and values, as well as questions about when and how to intervene. The answers to these questions are modified by international institutions. A possible explanation of policy lies in a constructivist variant of institutional liberalism. If realism posits that interventions are rooted in self interest, liberal institutionalism and constructivism contend that peace operations lie in the development of identity, rules and norms of state behavior within a society of states. International organizations become the center for understanding interventions because they are the transmission belt between the competing norms of humanitarian intervention and national interest of states.

The Clinton Doctrine was partially based on the growing international acceptance in humanitarian intervention to save people. This norm has pushed the boundaries of national interest but has it fundamentally changed national interest? John Duffield argues that it cannot be imposed on states but “inculcated via such processes as persuasion and socialization.”¹⁸ Part of that inculcation comes from membership in international organizations. However, this transmission is a two way street. The U.N. Security Council is simultaneously a collective actor, and a forum in which member states pursue rational interests. States are pushing back on institutional norms and are capable of picking which to champion and which to rearrange into new patterns of politics.”¹⁹ This should come as no surprise because institutions like the U.N. are in essence political. Statesmen have learned to use the U.N. to further their own goals.²⁰ International organizations are a battleground of competing norms, practices, and rules. Not all norms are equal; they vary in strength and intensity, and nothing yet trumps national security. Humanitarian intervention, while growing in legitimacy, is not an automatic outcome of U.N. policy but transmits the idea to the foreign policy agenda of states.

Finnemore and Sikkink argue that norms of intervention exist but they cannot predict when the U.S. would intervene or how much.²¹ But our second hypothesis provides us a framework to examine East Timorese policy. Even if the crisis does not reach an American national interest, policy rests on an international consensus that an intervention is necessary.

If no such consensus exists the U.N. may adopt no policy at all, evidenced by the tragic case of Rwanda in 1994. However, we may frequently find a muddled consensus that weighs the ideas of state sovereignty and power calculations alongside the norm to end suffering. These missions are often lacking in clear objectives and are frequently undermanned and underfunded. Thus our second hypothesis states that the U.S. will intervene in East Timor based on the agenda of international institutions like the United Nations. Furthermore, the findings will be strengthened if we see evidence that top decision-makers were explicitly concerned about international organizations from their comments to the media, minutes from official meetings, memoirs, government papers, reports, and personal interviews.

The Historical Context of East Timor Policy

The starting point for any discussion of U.S. policy in East Timor should begin in 1976. At the time American policy in East Asia was driven by a simple and powerful goal—the containment of communism. The fear of the “dominoes falling” in the region was accelerated by the communist victories in South Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975. As one of the most populated nations in the world, and strategically placed in the shipping lanes, Indonesia was seen as the crucial linchpin to this policy. Richard Nixon called the country “the greatest prize in the Southeast Asian area.”²² Jakarta was also an expanding market for American goods and rich in natural resources. To American policymakers, corporations, and realist theorists the stability of South East Asia rested on Indonesia.

That stability was challenged when Portugal’s *Estado Novo* regime collapsed in 1974. At that time East Timor was a Portuguese colony that shared the eastern half of the island Timor (the other half being Indonesian) in the Indonesian-Malay archipelago of the East Indies just to the north of Australia. The new Portuguese government allowed East Timor to follow an electoral path leading to independence. However, that path faltered when the left leaning Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (*Fretilin*) seized power and unilaterally (and some say prematurely) declared East Timorese independence on November 28, 1975. A week later the Indonesians invaded their much smaller neighbor citing the need for decolonization and the fear of communism in the archipelago. By the following July East Timor was annexed. The invasion came at a high price for the Timorese people. The residents of the capital city of Dili fled into the mountains as the civil and social infrastructure of the new nation were demolished. The people that did not die by human hands soon died of famine. Some estimates claim that over the next several years about 100,000 people or a third of population died.²³

The U.N. Security Council condemned the invasion (with the U.S. and Japan abstaining) and called for Indonesia to immediately withdraw from the colony without further delay. Resolution 389 (1976) on April 22, 1976 called upon member states to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor, as well as enforce the inalienable right of its people to self-determination. But part of the U.N.’s ineffectiveness was the refusal of the United States to sanction a strategic ally. Recently declassi-

fied documents reveal that the Washington gave tacit consent for Indonesian actions.²⁴ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the U.S. Representative to the United Nations, famously claimed in his memoirs, “The U.S. Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook [against Indonesia]. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success.”²⁵ The U.S. continued to ship weapons and train Indonesian officers. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) deemed East Timor an internal Indonesian matter. When Portugal and the European Union tried to raise the issue of human rights after the 1991 Santa Cruz massacres the Indonesian foreign minister threatened the entire ASEAN-EU economic relations over such “an extraneous issue.”²⁶ In essence, the people of East Timor were sacrificed for geo-political realities of the Cold War. Indonesia continued its occupation and during the next 24 years the Army was implicated in numerous human rights abuses.

But Indonesian politics dramatically shifted during the late 1990s. The 1997 Asian economic crisis forced President Suharto from office. In June of 1999 Indonesia held its first free multiparty election in 44 years. The ruling pro-Suharto party was defeated. The domestic turmoil had a positive impact on the status of East Timor. In the wake of the financial crisis and the need for foreign capital, Indonesia agreed to U.N. mediated talks concerning the status of East Timor in 1998. Jakarta offered to rescind its territorial claim if an offer of special autonomy within Indonesia was rejected by a vote of the Timorese people. The details of that consultation vote were worked out in a May 5, 1999 agreement between the U.N., Indonesia and the former colonial power Portugal. The U.N. Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was established in Resolution 1246 (1999) to conduct this referendum in June.²⁷ The agreement made Indonesia responsible for maintaining peace and security, free of intimidation and violence. The agreement also called for an orderly transfer of authority in East Timor to the authority of the U.N. if the vote was for independence.

American Policy toward East Timor: Phase I

In the first phase the White House watched the negotiations between Indonesia, Portugal, the U.N. and how it would impact American interests.²⁸ “Under the Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the Portuguese Republic on the Question of East Timor” Indonesia committed to hold a special referendum on the status of East Timor. A popular consultation would decide whether East Timor remained part of Indonesia as an autonomous region or if it would be allowed to follow a path towards independence. The State Department noted that Portugal was willing to put up a sizable sum of money for such a vote but the U.N. would need support from its larger member states. It did not help that Indonesia objected to the presence of foreign troops to implement the referendum. The Clinton Administration wanted to help but as one official noted, U.S. policy was to avoid owning the issue at the Security Council. Washington ended up working informally behind the scenes to help forge a viable resolution.²⁹ The popular consultation was to be

part of a proposed UNAMET mission that in turn needed an appropriate mandate, presented a realistic exit strategy, and came in under budget.³⁰ The goal was a mission that had the minimum requirements of U.N. participation while being able to advance U.S. interests.³¹

But the Administration was also cognizant that the situation inside East Timor was going to deteriorate. There was an increase of intimidation from pro-Indonesian militias. The U.S. tried to convince Indonesia to restore security and calm before the consultation vote. A March 1999 memo noted the opposition the Indonesians had to letting Timor peacefully go. Humanitarian organizations were hindered from providing needed medical assistance due to security concerns.³² But one of the pertinent questions policymakers asked during the policy meetings concerned the protection of both Timorese and U.N. personnel if there was a campaign of murder and intimidation. Should U.N. personnel conducting the referendum be armed? There was difficulty in establishing an exit strategy because no one knew how the vote would turn out. But it was clear in the spring of 1999 that there were going to be limits to American intervention.

The U.S. also decided to create a volunteer “friends of East Timor” group to supplement that U.N. and take a lead in establishing a trust fund, and soliciting voluntary funds for peacekeeping and developmental assistance in creating government and economic institutions. This model of international cooperation had some success in Haiti. But even in April problems were apparent. Should the friends group solicit troops, not police, even though Indonesia would not consent? One official noted that East Timor looked like a “giant mess.” Just as in Haiti, some U.N. members were concerned about sovereignty implications of the U.N. influencing internal matters inside Indonesia. For example, would international action in East Timor create a precedent for establishing popular consultations in Chechnya or Tibet?³³

In preparation for the U.N. vote to establish the referendum mission (UNAMET), the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council prepared an in depth analysis (PDD-25) of East Timor policy.³⁴ According to Washington the two major sticking issues facing the U.N. mission were a need for a clearer mandate. Was this going to be a Chapter VI or Chapter VII enforcement?³⁵ Secondly, there was no substantial exit strategy considering the uncertainty of how the vote would turn out. A Defense Department Memo on May 26 noted that if there was an increase of violence the U.N. resolution was probably the wrong mandate.³⁶ They warned that current U.S. policy was not thinking of long-term strategy.

However, with these flaws in mind the Deputies still decided to officially vote for the establishment of UNAMET. Policymakers understood that the resolution had clear shortfalls but “the consequences of inaction to regional stability were weighed and considered unacceptable.”³⁷ The PDD-25 stressed the unique nature of Timor since this was not an international conflict but an internal one. The State Department notified Congress that the U.S. was going to authorize UNAMET. The letter addressed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and its Chairman Senator Helms clearly laid out the thinking behind the White House vote at the U.N.:

The U.S. has important security, political, financial and economic commercial interests in Indonesia. Indonesia’s size and location, population of more than 200 million, fourth largest country in the world, and natural resources, notably oil and gas, give it broad strategic value. Indonesian political stability is key to maintaining movement towards restoring Asian financial stability. A stable and prosperous Indonesia is critical to Southeast Asia and regional stability. Indonesia is undergoing a wrenching transition from the authoritarianism of the Suharto era to a more democratic society. It is in our interests to see the Indonesian government complete this transition and to undertake the economic structural reforms that will help restore economic growth and further Indonesia’s integration in the global economy. We view the holding of a fair and credible consultation in East Timor and assessed resolution of this longstanding problem as an essential step in the political transformation of Indonesia. Indonesian stability is a vital concern.³⁸

The letter went on to state: “The exit strategy was defined by the results of consultation. If autonomy were accepted the U.N. mission would end. If independence were accepted there would be another [unspecified] peacekeeping component to the process.”³⁹

As the voting day drew closer, the pro-Indonesian militia stepped up their violence. Indonesia was slow in accepting the legitimacy of the U.N. Resolution and showed little willingness or capability to control the militias.⁴⁰ Indonesian officials at both the national and local level accused the U.N. of favoring the pro-independence side. Policymakers worried that Jakarta was in fact aiding and abetting the militia in an attempt to ensure the consultation would produce a vote for autonomy rather than independence. There was growing evidence that Indonesian security forces often stood by, or in some cases, actively participated in attacks on pro-independence and UNAMET offices.⁴¹ Rallies and parades held for both sides of the referendum often ended up in rock throwing, stabbings and shootings. By July 20 the U.N. Secretary General reported that while UNAMET was fully deployed, violence continued to interfere with preparations for the popular consultation. In response the U.N. Secretary General delayed the consultation vote from August 8 until August 30. A Deputies Committee document on August 30 suggested that the U.N. and U.S. should try to influence the Indonesian government and military to halt the militia violence.

But the intimidation campaign was failing. The UNAMET-led registration period that opened July 16 and ended August 6 exceeded expectations. Madeline Albright could boast that: “Already, more than 400,000 East Timorese have registered to vote, showing tremendous courage under difficult, emotionally-charged circumstances.” However, she warned:

“The United States is deeply concerned by the acts of violence and intimidation which have already marred the pre-campaign period. It is critical, both to ensure a fair vote and to preserve the credibility of Indonesia’s own transition, that Jakarta meet its obligation to provide a secure environment and promote the disarmament of all paramilitary forces in East Timor.”

She then hinted at the length of the mission: “Security concerns will not end when the votes are counted. The Government of Indonesia has repeatedly assured the United States and other nations that it will fulfill its responsibility to pro-

vide security immediately after August 30—regardless of the outcome.”⁴² While that was the public face the Intelligence community informed the White House that mass violence would probably break out if Timor voted for independence.⁴³

In this first phase the U.S. worked behind the scenes at the U.N. to help create and shape the UNAMET mission to implement the consultation. But violence remained a distinct possibility. In early August the Administration warned Congress that East Timor was guaranteed to vote for independence and violence was sure to follow.⁴⁴ But there was no serious discussion that the U.S. would use its own troops. Washington saw UNAMET as part of the agenda of the U.N. and not the pressing issue of American foreign policy.

Phase II: The Vote and the Immediate Aftermath

On August 30, 1999 the consultation vote was held and seemed to go off without a hitch. But East Timor remained explosive and the Deputies Committee met the next day to discuss further U.S. diplomatic actions to influence the Indonesian government and military to control the inevitable militia violence when the results were announced. The Deputies also considered a range of other options including trying to get a larger multinational force and expanding U.N. operations in East Timor. However, due to the lack of international interest the U.S. decided to press the U.N. for an expanded civilian police mandate to handle the situation.⁴⁵

The results were released on September 3 and independence was chosen by 78.5% of the population. Madeline Albright stated: “The United States congratulates the people of East Timor. In making known your strong desire for independence in this election, you have faced dangers and hardships over recent weeks.”⁴⁶ But the celebration was short lived as the Indonesian Army backed militias began their organized wave of terror, including reports of death lists being used. As one U.S. diplomat put it: “There was kind of a hope and a prayer approach [to Timor] that the U.N. would monitor and hopefully that would be enough to dissuade the Indonesians from violence, of course it was not enough and then we had to react quickly once that became a front page crisis.”⁴⁷ Two U.N. staff members were killed as violence broke out in Dili. The official view of the Administration is best expressed in a CNN interview with Secretary Albright on September 8:

MS. KOPPEL: ... Is the U.S. prepared to contribute troops?

SECRETARY ALBRIGHT: Well, what we are doing is really looking at the situation very carefully, considering our options. We obviously want to be supportive. We are as concerned about this as much as anybody is. But the main point here is that the Indonesian Government is the primary party that is responsible for restoring order there and allowing that really remarkable vote for independence to be counted and to have its effect. So the main point that I hope comes out of our meetings here and as our message itself is that the Indonesian Government has a window here in order to be able to deal with this before the international community steps in, in some form or another.⁴⁸

The reaction from Washington to the growing East Timor crisis was quick, but tempered by several factors. First, there

was the realization that the only way to control the spreading violence was to send in U.N. backed peacekeepers and not the police and poll watchers that were there. Second, Washington realized that the only way peacekeepers could arrive was with the consent of Indonesia whose role in the violence was questionable. Third, the U.S. was not going to send a peacekeeping force, partly because of the extensive American participation in the Balkans. Troops would have to come from somewhere else. One NSC official stated: “I can remember the Deputies meeting where [James Steinberg, Deputy National Security Advisor] expressed grave concerns about the risks involved. There were alternatives in East Timor but there were not good alternatives.”⁴⁹ One State Department official stated,

“Once violence starts it has the characteristic of going in its own direction. We contemplated a variety of scenarios... In East Timor, you were never sure just what was going to happen. I think had that vote not been 79% for independence, if it was 53%-54%, there would not have been any multi-national force. One of the scenarios discussed had the Indonesian military staying and fighting and then you are talking about a multi-national force that is no less than 20-30,000. That is why the political legitimacy of the referendum was crucial to the intervention.”⁵⁰

In a joint Congressional hearing on the subject the Administration told Congress that the U.S. had suspended military to military relations with Indonesia and was actively working on gaining the consent from Jakarta to send peacekeeping troops to the island.⁵¹ Secretary of Defense William Cohen noted: “The Indonesian military must do the right thing and aid in ending violence.” He threatened that if not the U.S. had already begun a review of economic and bilateral assistance that could be cut. Cohen added, “I made it clear that the U.S. will not consider restoring normal military to military contacts until the TNI [the Army of Indonesia] reforms its way. The military must show restraint and respects for human rights throughout Indonesia.”⁵²

Within the U.N. the Clinton Administration also made a subtle and important change in American policy towards Indonesia. One NSC official stated, “We supported an open debate in the Security Council which was attended by over 50 representatives from nations across the globe (except pariah states like Cuba, Iran, and the Sudan)—all of whom criticized the Indonesians.”⁵³ Another Defense Department official noted: “If Indonesia screwed up with East Timor not only would they have been subjected to ‘sanctions’ but also a sense of illegitimacy.”

A U.N. aide reported: “If Indonesia accepts the help of foreign forces the matter will probably be handled very quickly” by the Security Council. “That’s what we’re all waiting for—the green light.”⁵⁴ On September 11 the Security Council met in formal session to consider the issue. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Richard Holbrooke stated, “There are continuous meetings going on in New York, Washington, Canberra and all over the world on how to proceed... The United States is not waiting... [and] has been actively engaged around the clock.” But Holbrooke made clear that the Security Council would not authorize the intervention of foreign forces in

East Timor without the express consent of the Indonesian government. Holbrooke added, "Indonesia would have to make clear that it accepts foreign military help because so far Indonesia is of the opinion, and has made it very plain... that Indonesia alone is responsible for peace and security in East Timor." On the floor of the U.N.:

The government of Indonesia must understand that unless it reverses course immediately, it faces the point of no return. No one wants to see Indonesia become isolated in the world community - but its future is now in its own hands. There are clear indications that General Wiranto's troops have backed, encouraged, directed and in some cases participated in the atrocities on the ground. How can the people of East Timor, the U.N. and the international community now be expected to entrust their security to these very same soldiers, under the same military leadership? It is imperative that the international community speaks with one voice, and our message must be clear: Indonesia's government must allow an international security presence.⁵⁵

One U.N. official conceded that an ongoing high-level Security Council mission in Jakarta was "trying to convince Indonesia to go along with 'accepting foreign troops.'" The official added that he does, "not know of any country that has considering intervening in East Timor without the consent of Indonesia. Many governments have mentioned the possibility of sending troops but that was based on the Security Council giving the green light. I can assure you the Security Council will *not* give the green light if there is no permission on the part of the Indonesian Government."⁵⁶ Indonesia weakened from the political turmoil of the Suharto transition and mired in a sluggish economy was sensitive to what the impact of global isolation would have on their drive towards economic recovery and democratization.⁵⁷

How Indonesia dealt with East Timor was critical in terms of their relationship with other international organizations notably the World Bank and the IMF. On September 12 President Habibie signaled that Indonesia would accept peacekeepers in Timor. U.S. pressure proved critical in securing approval of the mission. "American support, diplomatic support, was very important," Australian Prime Minister John Howard stated. The Americans put a lot of diplomatic pressure on Jakarta to agree to an international force.⁵⁸ Through the U.N. debate Habibie realized he was isolated and agreed to the consultation vote and eventually a MNF. The U.S. found a way to support Timor, while showing Habibie it was the best course of action through the U.N."

In Phase II Washington's response to the violence was to double down its diplomatic efforts to convince the Indonesians to work with the United Nations and allow a multinational force into East Timor. The Administration did not ignore the crisis as some would contend. But conversely, even with a widespread belief that something should be done, Washington had no desire to play the role of a Mother Theresa. Instead the policy chosen is a reflection that Washington could achieve its twin goals of Indonesian stability and East Timorese self determination through diplomatic channels and international institutions.

Phase III: Australia, ASEAN and INTERFET

Debate within the U.N. over what to do in East Timor reflected the lessons of peacekeeping learned throughout the nineties. As one Defense Department official stated: "One cannot leave [peacekeeping] to the U.N... the U.N. does not have the capacity to take care of themselves and they must leave fighting to nation states and other organizations."⁵⁹ In early September, with Indonesian approval Australian Prime Minister John Howard and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreed that Australia should lead a multinational force into East Timor to provide security. As former N.S.C. officer Eric Schwartz points out: "Australia's willingness to intervene was the result of a range of factors. The extensive media coverage and the magnitude of human rights abuses played an important role in encouraging government action. Canberra also believed intervention was legally justified due to the unique nature of the crisis. For one, the international community never recognized the Indonesian annexation. (Ironically, the Australians did.) Second it was the Indonesians themselves that volunteered having a consultation vote in the first place. Even if they were unwilling to live up to their end of the bargain in providing security they had no recourse to renege on their deal. But Schwartz also notes that the Australian public "were appalled by reports of widespread abuses in East Timor, and made clear that they would support robust Australian government action." Schwartz added that as "unimaginable as it may seem to Americans, the Australian public even supported a proposal for a tax increase that the government officials thought necessary to finance the intervention."⁶⁰ In Phase III of American policy the question becomes what is the best way to help the Australians. A key component of N.S.C. meetings on the crisis was the need to stand by Australia, a friend.⁶¹

But before we turn to United States aid to the Australian led INTERFET, it is important to briefly discuss the role of the ASEAN community in the East Timorese crisis. According to the Administration's internal documents it was hoped that other regional nations and organizations could step forward to assist. But in Jakarta there was a fear that western nations (including Australia) would in the words of the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, "... [use] humanitarian pretexts to justify unilateral armed intervention into the internal affairs of a developing country."⁶² This view was also shared by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir who claimed Australia wanted Indonesia to look bad.⁶³ An Indonesian military and civilian spokesman said Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and the U.S. should not participate in the force as they were "not neutral."⁶⁴ But what would be considered neutral nations? A member of Human Rights Watch stated: "It would be wonderful if ASEAN played a bigger role... particularly as there is a very strong anti-Western backlash in Jakarta."⁶⁵

But ASEAN struggled with responding to East Timor crisis, and they were called "paralyzed, missing in action, inefficient, and clueless."⁶⁶ For years ASEAN maintained that East Timor was an internal Indonesian matter not open for discussion. They also worried about the ramifications of East Timor independence on other Indonesian secessionist movements, Aceh and West Papua to the stability of the

region. However, the narrative of ASEAN inaction might be an unfair assessment. Alex Mango points out that ASEAN has no culture of moral intervention. The organization was built on a policy of strict non-interference.⁶⁷ Furthermore, former ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino claims: "Members differed greatly in their capacities for and attitudes towards peacekeeping operations in general. ASEAN was not, and is not organized for joint military or police action."⁶⁸ Severino also points out the unique role Indonesia has to the organization, "[they] brought... weight, strength and direction, something indeed that made ASEAN possible... Indonesia's international influence, prestige and activism, magnified by its new international posture, [was] placed in ASEAN's service."⁶⁹ While some ASEAN nations felt sympathy towards the Timorese people, alienating Indonesia could have threatened the very heart of the organization itself. One can see the deference accorded to Jakarta by examining the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting held in Singapore in July 23-24, 1999. Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore wanted to mention the Timorese issue and were prepared to accept East Timorese independence. But in the final Ministerial Statement there was no mention of the upcoming referendum and its possible ramifications for the region.⁷⁰

However, a real diplomatic breakthrough occurred at the September 12-13 Auckland APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum) leaders' meeting, an ASEAN summit was convened to discuss the deteriorating situation. The Indonesian representative called for greater and more visible ASEAN participation in the international force.⁷¹ Jakarta had initially rejected an Australian led force and would have preferred an all ASEAN mission. Fellow ASEAN members, considering their limited capacities discreetly and respectfully pressured Indonesia that a U.N. backed peacekeeping force was needed.⁷² Thailand, now argued, that inaction on East Timor would threaten regional stability.⁷³ Once Jakarta gave approval for foreign troops this allowed individual members of ASEAN to freely participate in INTERFET. Alan Dupont suggests that the ASEAN response "proved more robust and substantial than many outside the region expected."⁷⁴

But it is important to note that ASEAN did not officially participate as an organization although its individual members did. This allowed the fiction that ASEAN was not going to interfere with its members internal affairs but allowed Asian participation. As the Thailand Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan stated, "There are some issues that individual ASEAN members will have to decide [about INTERFET participation] individually because it's outside ASEAN's mandate." However, it does not mean that we cannot coordinate among ourselves to solve the problem.⁷⁵

The United States played a minimal role in having ASEAN pressure Indonesia. The ASEAN community handed the situation in their own way. Ambassador Severino notes, "I do not recall any U. S. pressure" in the process.⁷⁶ This conforms to the internal documents that I have reviewed. In light of the sensitivities Jakarta had to the issues of sovereignty and western intervention, nonintervention was probably the prudent course of action. But Washington was eager to get broader regional support from ASEAN members. The United

States lobbied the ASEAN nations to contribute troops. Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated, "My hope is that more of a contribution can be made on the part of ASEAN countries to show that there is a significant ASEAN presence." In a trip to Bangkok, Secretary Cohen pledged financial and logistical help. The United States eventually offered to bear the cost and transport of Thai peacekeepers to Dili. Cohen reasoned that the sooner peacekeepers arrived in Timor to end the violence, "the better off all concerned will be."⁷⁷

Given the response time to other humanitarian tragedies troop deployment in East Timor was relatively swift. Within two weeks of the consultation U.N. Security Council Resolution 1264 authorized a non-U.N. multilateral force to restore peace and security in East Timor under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter. A mission designed to protect and support UNAMET and facilitate humanitarian assistance operations and institute an investigation of apparent abuses of international law. Resolution 1264 stated that this force would remain deployed in East Timor until replaced by a follow up U.N. operation.⁷⁸ With Australian guidance and leadership the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) became that multilateral force. In a show of respect and regional understanding the Australians chose Thailand Major General Songkitti Chakrabhat as the deputy to the INTERFET mission. In a show of ASEAN unity when Thailand signed on to INTERFET the Thai foreign minister met with Jakarta. The Thailand Armed forces Commander in Chief met with his Indonesian counterparts.⁷⁹ This allowed Indonesia to become more comfortable with the mission.

On September 20-21, the Australians and New Zealanders became the first of 22 nations to begin deployment around Dili through the airfield and ports. ASEAN members the Philippines and Thailand responded with sizeable contingents and they were ultimately joined by Malaysia and Singapore. INTERFET planned to build out carefully from Dili and move towards the east into a number of provincial towns and cities.⁸⁰ The Australians operated with robust rules of engagement and were willing to use deadly force if needed. Major General Songkitti Chakrabhat was asked whether Thai troops would be able to engage the Indonesian militia. In a telling statement he responded: "Our men will not hesitate. Besides, it is the Indonesian government which has invited us to take part in the peacekeeping force."⁸¹ INTERFET would eventually reach 10,000 personnel, half of which were Australians.

What did INTERFET find when it arrived in East Timor? The East Timorese population had been uprooted and displaced with extensive infrastructure damage. About 230,000 were living in refugee camps in Indonesian West Timor and thousands were hiding in the mountains. The Timorese in the camps faced acts of violence by militia and regular Indonesian troops. According to Assistant Secretary of State Julia V. Taft during a Congressional hearing, "The mission was shocked at the level of widespread physical destruction of homes, commercial facilities, and public buildings in Dili... However, subsequent U.N. assessment missions have found widespread damage throughout East Timor." Taft pointed out the city of Manatuto, "which was previously home to 16,000 people, is completely destroyed and depopulated; estimates

are that 60%-70% of the houses in the western region of East Timor are destroyed; the port of Suay was reported to be 95% destroyed. Much of the damage was by fire, consistent with a "slash and burn" approach to the area."⁸² Taft went on to explain that U.N. agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and INTERFET were working together under very difficult circumstances in Dili to provide for immediate needs.

But the Australians needed help. According to U.S. internal memos they considered American contributions to UNTAET and INTERFET essential because: 1) of the high quality of U.S. personnel; and 2) participation would appropriately reflect the regional role of America.⁸³ According to Schwartz and unclassified documents, the United States reached its maximum presence in East Timor on November 11, 1999 when 235 troops were on the ground in Timor. The U.S. reached its maximum presence in Australia on November 27 with 353 men. American ships, which included a marine expeditionary unit with just over 3,000 men, sat off the Timor coast in October and served as an important demonstration of U.S. "interest and resolve," as well as alliance solidarity. The United States provided INTERFET with strategic and tactical fixed wing airlift, tactical helicopter airlift, intelligence, communications support, a civil-military operations center, a logistics planning cell, and other support."⁸⁴

The State Department, in concert with other donors, international organizations, and NGOs provided substantial resources to address the humanitarian needs in the future for self government; and establish conditions for sustainable economic growth.⁸⁵ Prime Minister Howard admits that the American "package of assistance proved quite valuable in the end."⁸⁶ However, some other Australians seem to have a different memory. INTERFET commander Major General Peter Cosgrove stated, "The U.S. is a great friend, but [they] did not provide strategic lift of any weight to us. We did it."⁸⁷

By late October the U.N. established Security Resolution 1272 (1999), the U.N. Mission Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to administer the territory now that it would no longer part of Indonesia but before it was ready for independence.⁸⁸ UNTAET would focus on nation building. Australia would continue to play a security role in case of renewed violence. Eric Schwartz points out, "U.S. officials resisted the Australian desire to put into the Resolution a target date for East Timorese independence—and the U.S. position was, in fact, probably the right one. But, in defense of the Australians, they were committed to ensuring the success of the follow-on U.N. force, and thus were probably unconcerned that a target date signaled any lack of resolve."⁸⁹ On the first of November the last Indonesian Army units left East Timor. Most of the militia fled to West Timor with them. A month later Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta returned to Dili after 24 years in exile. In early December the UNTAET installed a 15 member national consultative council to allow the East Timorese to participate in the transitional authority decision-making process.

But one thing is clear from interviews and the internal documents; the Clinton Administration was not going to use American troops in the conflict. Howard expressed his disappointment given Australia's long history of supporting

U.S. policies. He argued that many people in Australia would feel let down."⁹⁰ As one Defense Department official stated: "A U.S. intervention would have humiliated the Indonesian Army." While the U.S. provided essential help the nation did not reach the definition of the Clinton Doctrine. There was a strong reluctance to committing resources. According to the Australians, "Clinton had to be talked into a logistical effort in East Timor when he was in [New Zealand] for [an] APEC." In fact, the U.S. refusal to provide a troop commitment was a blow for Prime Minister Howard.⁹¹

Theoretical Conclusions for American Policy in East Timor

In this article we have explored primary documents and interviews with key Clinton Administration officials to determine why the United States chose the policy path that it did in East Timor. How does realism explain policy in East Timor? As we have noted realism privileges Indonesian stability as the fulcrum to East Asian security. The stability of the largest Muslim nation, with the fourth largest population of the world sitting on top of a host of natural resources, is an American strategic interest. The United States was in no position to alienate the Indonesians especially as they were transitioning to a democracy. President Clinton stated as much, "...Indonesia's future is important to us, not only because of its resources and its sea lanes, but for its potential as a leader in the region and the world... the U.S. has an interest in a stable, democratic, prosperous Indonesia."⁹² Clinton's rhetoric is backed up by the internal documents of the Administration as they struggled to find a solution. Eric Schwartz argues that on one hand, "Indonesian intransigence on the issue could lead to international isolation and in conjunction with the collapse of the Indonesian economy, threaten its transition to democracy." But does this explanation alone satisfy our realist hypothesis?

Realism can also generate alternative hypotheses. For example, critics of the Administration argued that the United States could afford to let East Timor remain part of Indonesia. Pointing to the same instability in Jakarta that the White House saw, they argued that East Timorese independence would add legitimacy to other secessionist movements in the archipelago that would lead to instability. Leon T. Hadar argued that in such a situation East Timor would be a "slippery slope" and that Washington would have to become the "stabilizer of last resort" on the Indonesian archipelago.⁹³ Hadar would eventually applaud the regionalizing approach (INTERFET) that was chosen to deal with the crisis.

However, it is important to point out that realism is not necessarily defined as the pragmatism of elite policy makers. The questions the theory drives us to ask are, does this particular conflict become the fulcrum for Indonesia if Indonesia is the fulcrum for the region? Does an independent East Timor change the power calculus for East Asia? In hindsight the perceptions of the Administration were correct in its assessment of Indonesian stability. However, in the spring and summer of 1999 the future of Indonesia, sans U.S. participation in UNAMET and INTERFET, was indeterminate. Secondly, and just as importantly, realism struggles to predict what kind of intervention should take place. To avoid Indonesian

instability what policy course would realism dictate? If East Timor was important to American security then why did the U.S. choose (in essence) to follow a diplomatic wait and see response to the violence until the Indonesian approval for an Australian led multinational force? The Indonesians could have said “no” to the presence of a multinational force. If the U.S. could have turned away from the crisis as they did in 1976, why bother working with the U.N. and the Australians on INTERFET? Realism is not ruled out as an explanation but a better answer to explaining American policy lies in the power of the international community and the institutional commitments of being in the U.N.

When it comes to liberalism the Wilsonian variant also struggles in explaining East Timor policy. A cursory examination of global events in 1999 would show Slobodan Milosevic receiving the American “stick” of bombs while President Habibie and Indonesia promised an endless array of carrots. When one measures the forceful response to free the Kosovar Albanians with the rhetoric of human rights the East Timorese policy of inaction becomes jarring. A better explanation for policy, that can both address why the U.S. became involved; and secondly predict the level of intervention lies in the power of norms and the international commitments to global institutions. These International institutions are forums where values, interests and issues of state sovereignty are mediated. When it comes to a strict analysis of the “Clinton Doctrine” East Timor fails to meet the American bar for national interest. There would be no troops. However, there was still a discussion of norms: human rights and self determination. In that discussion lies the path towards limited intervention.

East Timor ended up on the American agenda because interactions between the U.S. and the U.N. They both influence each other. However, without the U.N. and the Australians, it is doubtful that the U.S. would have intervened militarily because East Timor was not a strategic interest. But when East Timor was placed on the U.N. agenda, it became a topic of the National Security Council because of our institutional commitments. But even then there was no strong international will in the United Nations to militarily force the Indonesians to do anything. Based on this information we can then begin to predict the shape of American participation chosen. The U.S. would choose a “limited role” in the conflict. This is exactly what we find: the global community, with help from the U.S., crafted a consultation referendum with weak security and vague plans about what to do if violence broke out. When the Indonesians did consent to an international force the U.S. gladly helped play a logistical role. But the evidence is clear there was never going to be American boots directly on the ground.

Secondly, this hypothesis can also hint at the importance of international norms in ending with the crisis. The United States was able to use effectively the institution of the U.N. to expand the debate with Indonesia about human rights and interdependence and how in this situation these norms trumped the norm of sovereignty. In the previous section Schwartz noted that the new Indonesian government faced sanctions from the international community and possible global isolation if it did not restore order.⁹⁴ Through the aus-

pices of the U.N., Indonesian President Habibie realized he was isolated and agreed to the consultation vote and eventually a multinational force.⁹⁵ Membership in the community of nations structured Indonesia’s choices.

Conclusions

Ten years after the East Timorese consultation vote and the chain of events that led to its independence, questions remain about American involvement. For Senator Joseph Lieberman Washington might not have done enough. However, to other critics of the Administration, Clinton tried to do too much. Support for INTERFET risked a slippery slope of involvement that threatened our special relationship with a crucial ally. Analysis of East Timor is further complicated by the rhetoric of the Clinton Doctrine that focused on the promotion of human rights and self determination, a doctrine that was applied to Kosovo but seemingly not to East Timor.

Using East Timor as a case study, this discussion is an attempt to understand two aspects of American policy. First, through the use of primary documents, key interviews, and the extant literature we have been able to map out how Washington handled the crisis and how they approached negotiation with the U.N. Secondly, this article also examines the wider theoretical motivations to not only participate in peacekeeping missions but grapple with understanding of what types of missions are undertaken. So let us return to the original questions: why did the U.S. become involved? Why did the U.S. choose to pursue a path of limited intervention? Not every American humanitarian mission is the same: Rwanda and Darfur are marked by inaction; Bosnia and Kosovo are marked by the use of force.

The U.S. had various policy options for the Timorese situation ranging from military intervention to indifference. However, the best explanation for the policy path chosen lies in bringing liberal institutionalism back into a constructivist framework. Institutional identity shapes state preferences, not only in decisions to intervene but in shaping the size and scope of the mission. In the case of East Timor the Clinton Administration were making policy based on cues they received from the global community not a strict definition of national security. (Admittedly the U.N. was also receiving cues from the U.S.) One could easily imagine that if Australia was not eager to intervene, or that Indonesia never gave the approval for an international force, the U.N. mission would have been considerably weaker. The norms argument I have outlined here is a robust look at American peacekeeping.

Of course East Timor is but one case study. In order to explore the power of international norms and institutional membership one needs to look at other kinds of interventions across time periods and locations. Furthermore, if our units of analysis fall in the time period of the Clinton White House we may in fact be revealing the peculiar policies of this Administration and not a wider theoretical understanding of American policy. However, I contend that the norms argument has relevancy across administrations. The Clinton White House is really not the first to argue that where “our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so.” In fact, a cursory

analysis of American policy in the current crisis in Darfur reveals no strategic interests at stake in the western section of the Sudan. Washington's inaction must also be weighed with the realization that there is a lack of will in the global diplomatic community as well. For effective international response to humanitarian crises, we find that membership in a willing and motivated international organization can overcome the problems of indecisive collective action.

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