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Green Light for War Crimes

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It is not easy to write with feigned calm and dispassion about the events that unfolded in East Timor in 1999. Horror and shame are compounded by the fact that the crimes are so familiar and could so easily have been terminated. That has been true ever since Indonesia invaded in December 1975, relying on U.S. diplomatic support and arms — used illegally, but with secret authorisation, even new arms shipments sent under the cover of an official embargo. There has been no need to threaten bombing or even sanctions. It would, very likely, have sufficed for the U.S. and its allies to withdraw their participation, and to inform their close associates in the Indonesian military command that the atrocities must be terminated and the territory granted the right of self-determination that has been upheld by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. We cannot undo the past, but should at least be willing to recognise what we have done, and to face the moral responsibility of saving the remnants and providing ample reparations, a pathetic gesture of compensation for terrible crimes.

The latest chapter in this painful story of betrayal and complicity opened after the referendum of August 30, 1999, when the population voted overwhelmingly for independence. Atrocities

mounted sharply, organised and directed by the Indonesian military (TNI). The UN Assistance Mission (UNAMET) gave its appraisal on September 11:

“The evidence for a direct link between the militia and the military is beyond any dispute and has been overwhelmingly documented by UNAMET over the last four months. But the scale and thoroughness of the destruction of East Timor in the past week has demonstrated a new level of open participation of the military in the implementation of what was previously a more veiled operation.”

The Mission warned that “the worst may be yet to come... It cannot be ruled out that these are the first stages of a genocidal campaign to stamp out the East Timorese problem by force.”¹

Indonesia historian John Roosa, an official observer of the vote, described the situation starkly: “Given that the pogrom was so predictable, it was easily preventable... But in the weeks before the ballot, the Clinton Administration refused to discuss with Australia and other countries the formation of [an international force]. Even after the violence erupted, the Administration dithered for days,”[2] until compelled by international (primarily Australian) and domestic pressure to make some timid gestures. These limited measures sufficed to induce the Indonesian generals to reverse course and to accept an international presence, illustrating the latent power that has always been at hand, overwhelmingly so since Indonesia’s economic collapse in 1997.

These recent events should evoke bitter memories among those who do not prefer what has sometimes been called ‘intentional ig-

¹ Report of the Security Council Mission to Jakarta and Dili, 8 to 12 Sep. 1999.

norance'.² They were a shameful replay of events of 20 years earlier. After carrying out a huge slaughter in 1977–78 with the support of the Carter Administration, the regime of General Suharto felt confident enough to permit a brief visit by members of the Jakarta diplomatic corps, among them U.S. Ambassador Edward Masters. The Ambassadors and the journalists who accompanied them recognised that an enormous humanitarian catastrophe had been created, reminiscent of Biafra and Cambodia. The aftermath was described by the distinguished Indonesia scholar Benedict Anderson. “For nine long months” of starvation and terror, Anderson testified at the United Nations, “Ambassador Masters deliberately refrained, even within the walls of the State Department, from proposing humanitarian aid to East Timor,” waiting “until the generals in Jakarta gave him the green light” — until they felt “secure enough to permit foreign visitors,” as an internal State Department document recorded. Only then did Washington consider taking some steps to deal with the consequences of its actions.³

While Clinton followed suit from February through August of 1999, the Indonesian military implemented a scarcely-veiled campaign of terror and intimidation that may have killed thousands of people. And as he “dithered” in the final weeks, most of the population were expelled from their homes with unknown numbers killed and much of the country destroyed. According to UN figures, the TNI-paramilitary campaign “drove an estimated 750,000 of East Timor’s 880,000 people from their homes,”⁴ probably some 250,000 or more to Indonesian West Timor — elsewhere too, accord-

² Donald Fox and Michael Glennon, ‘Report to the International Human Rights Law Group and the Washington Office on Latin America’, Washington D.C., April 1985.

³ Anderson, Statement before the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, Oct. 20, 1980. For fuller quotes and context, see Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War* (New York; Pantheon, 1982). On the earlier background, see Chomsky and Edward Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston; South End, 1979), vol. I.

⁴ Seth Mydans, NYT, Feb. 16, 2000.

ing to many reports, though no one is investigating. The Air Force that was able to carry out pin-point destruction of civilian targets in Novi Sad, Belgrade and Ponceva a few months before, lacked the capacity to drop food to hundreds of thousands of people facing starvation in the mountains to which they have been driven by the TNI forces armed and trained by the United States, and its no less cynical allies. The Administration also took no meaningful action to rescue the several hundred thousand captives held by paramilitaries in West Timor.

By year's end, 100,000–150,000 or more people remained in West Timor as “virtual prisoners,” Amnesty International reported, “trapped in makeshift camps and living in a state of constant fear under the rule of the militia groups that destroyed East Timor... often intimidated, harassed, extorted and in some cases sexually assaulted and killed.” This is “the only place in the world where UNHCR workers are heavily escorted by police and army troops where they go into camps,” the agency reported, adding that “The moment an East Timorese expresses a desire to leave the camps and go home, their life is in danger.” Perhaps 500 had died “due to inadequate sanitation and medical care,” officials said, mostly children, victims of diarrhoea and dysentery. “Every day, many of the people are dying from malaria, respiratory infections and acute gastro-intestinal diseases,” says Arthur Howshen, a volunteer doctor. “There is also a lack of food, shortages of rice are common, and there are also a lot of children suffering from vitamin A deficiency.” With the onset of the rainy season, conditions are even worse than when they were driven from East Timor. Touring camps on both sides of the border, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Harold Koh reported that the refugees are “starving and terrorised,” and that disappearances “without explanation” are a daily occurrence.⁵

⁵ Seth Mydans, NYT, Feb. 16, 2000.

The story does not begin in 1975. East Timor had not been overlooked by the planners of the postwar world. The territory should be granted independence, Roosevelt's senior adviser Sumner Welles mused, but “it would certainly take a thousand years.”⁵³ With an awe-inspiring display of courage and fortitude, the people of East Timor have struggled to confound that prediction, enduring monstrous disasters. Some 50,000 lost their lives protecting a small contingent of Australian commandoes fighting the Japanese; their heroism may have saved Australia from Japanese invasion. Perhaps a third of the population were victims of the first years of the 1975 Indonesian invasion, many more since.

Surely we should by now be willing to cast aside mythology and face the causes and consequences of our actions realistically, not only in East Timor. In that tortured corner of the world there is now an opportunity to remedy in some measure at least one of the most appalling crimes and tragedies of the terrible century that has finally come to a horrifying, wrenching close.

[2]NYT op-ed, Sep. 15, 1999.

⁵³ See sources cited earlier, and for brief review, my “L’Indone’sie,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1998.

The sordid history should be viewed against the background of U.S.-Indonesia relations in the postwar era.⁵² The rich resources of the archipelago, and its critical strategic location, guaranteed it a central role in U.S. global planning. These factors lie behind U.S. efforts 40 years ago to dismantle Indonesia, then support for the military in preparation for the anticipated military coup, and unbounded enthusiasm for the regime of killers and torturers who brought about a “favorable orientation” in 1965 and for their leader, who remained “our kind of guy” until his first missteps in 1997, when he was abandoned in the usual pattern of criminals who have lost their usefulness or become disobedient: Trujillo, Somoza, Marcos, Noriega, Saddam Hussein, Mobutu, Ceausescu, and many others. The successful cleansing of Indonesia in 1965 was, furthermore, understood to be a vindication of Washington’s wars in Indochina, which were motivated in large part by concern that the “virus” of independent nationalism might “infect” Indonesia, to borrow standard rhetoric, just as concern over Indonesian independence and excessive democracy had been motivated by fear that a “Communist” (meaning independent nationalist) Indonesia would be an “infection” that “would sweep westward” through all of South Asia, as George Kennan warned in 1948.

In this context, support for the invasion of East Timor and subsequent atrocities was presumably reflexive, though a broader analysis should attend to the fact that the collapse of the Portuguese empire had similar consequences in Africa, where South Africa was the agent of Western-backed terror. Throughout, Cold War pretexts were routinely invoked. These should be analyzed with caution; all too easily, they can serve as a convenient disguise for ugly motives and actions that had little to do with shifting relations among the U.S., Russia, and China, not only in Southeast Asia but in Latin America, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

⁵² Mark Dodd, Sydney Morning Herald, Jul. 26; Dennis Shanahan, Australian, Sep. 24, 1999.

To bring these crimes to an end has easily been within Washington’s power, as before.

At last report, the U.S. had provided no funds for the Australian-led UN force INTERFET (International Force in East Timor); Japan, long a fervent supporter of Indonesia, offered \$100 million and Portugal \$5 million. That is perhaps not surprising, in the light of Washington’s failure “to pay any of the \$37.9 million assessed for the start-up costs of the United Nations civilian operation in Kosovo, which Washington supported in the Security Council.” At the same time, the Clinton Administration asked the UN “to reduce the size” of its small peacekeeping force in East Timor.⁶

In Kosovo, preparation for war crimes trials began in May 1999, in the midst of the NATO bombing campaign, expedited at the initiative of Washington and London, which also provided unprecedented access to intelligence information. In East Timor, investigations were discussed at leisure, with numerous delays and deference to Jakarta’s wishes and sensibilities. “It’s an absolute joke, a complete whitewash,” Lucia Withers, a spokeswoman for Amnesty International, informed the British press: it will “cause East Timorese even more trauma than they have suffered already”; a leading Indonesian role “would be really insulting at this stage.” Few seriously expect that the U.S. or U.K. will release vital intelligence information, and the Indonesian generals are reported to feel confident that their old friends will not let them down — if only because the chain of responsibility might be hard to snap at just the right point. By mid-January, UN officials said that a tribunal was unlikely. U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and others “are pinning their hopes on an internal tribunal held by Indonesia, whose military controlled East Timor from 1975 until August and is blamed by human-rights groups for the atrocities.”

⁶ AI estimated over 100,000 by late December (AI report of Dec. 22, 1999). West Timorese officials reported 150,000. At the end of January, the Australian press reported from West Timor that over 150,000 still remained (AFP, Age [Australia], Jan. 31, 2000). Also, see UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, December 1999.

It was claimed that China and Russia are blocking a tribunal, an obstacle that the West cannot think of any way to overcome, unlike the case of Serbia.⁷

On January 31, 2000, the UN International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor issued a report calling for an international human rights tribunal under UN auspices. Its mandate should be “to try and sentence those accused by the independent investigation body of serious violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law which took place in East Timor since January 1999.” “It is fundamental for the future social and political stability of East Timor,” the Commission concluded, “that the truth be established and those responsible for the crimes committed be brought to justice. Every effort has to be made to provide adequate reparation to the victims for only then can true reconciliation take place.”⁸

On the same day, an Indonesian government Commission of Inquiry issued a “damning report” condemning “the Indonesian military and its militia surrogates” for atrocities “following the territory’s August 30 vote for independence,” including former army chief General Wiranto.⁹ Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, then at the Davos conference in Switzerland, called upon Wiranto to resign his cabinet post, and promised to pardon him if he is convicted. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson expressed her “hope that efforts to hold those responsible for the atrocities in East Timor accountable will go on so that there is no impunity.” But that is “not very likely,” correspondent Dan Murphy observed: “Support within the UN

⁷ Barbara Crossette, NYT, Oct. 5 & Oct. 6; Joe Lauria, Boston Globe, Oct. 8, 1998.

⁸ Mark Riley, NY, Sydney Morning Herald, Oct 16; Richard Lloyd Parry, Dili, Independent, Sep. 27, 1999. Joe Lauria, BG, Jan. 15, 2000.

⁹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor to the Secretary-General. January; full text, Feb. 2, 2000.

[independence] is chosen.” A July document drafted by an officer of a Dili-based regional command, Colonel Soedjarwo, outlines a battle plan directed against what it calls the “Enemy Forces”:

“not only the guerrillas of the resistance movement, Falintil, but civilians, including unarmed student groups and political organisations.” In August, the Dili police department produced “a meticulous plan to evacuate hundreds of thousands of Timorese after the referendum,” with extensive detail. The plans were soon implemented, and it would be most surprising if they were not known at least in a general way to Western intelligence.⁵⁰

Citing diplomatic, church and militia sources, the Australian press had reported in July 1999 that “that hundreds of modern assault rifles, grenades and mortars are being stockpiled, ready for use if the autonomy option is rejected at the ballot box.” It warned that the army-run militias might be planning a violent takeover of much of the territory if, despite the terror, the popular will would be expressed. Leaked official cables reveal the “Australian Government’s harsh assessment of the Pentagon’s ‘overly generous’ interpretation of Indonesian army (TNI) involvement with the militias.”⁵¹ The Indonesian Generals had every reason to interpret the evasive and ambiguous reactions of their traditional friends and backers as a “green light” to carry out their work.

⁵⁰ Suratman cited by Brian Toohey, Australian Financial Review, Aug. 14, 1999, referring to a radio interview “earlier this year.” Sievers, Andrew West, Sunday Age, Jan. 9, 2000. Document, Aglionby, op. cit. A similar document, dated May 5, is published in Human Rights Watch, op.cit. The Indonesian Investigative Commission for Human Rights Abuses in East Timor “confirmed the existence and validity of the Garnadi Document which ordered the burning of the troubled region” (Indonesian Observer, Jan. 4, 2000), referring to a document, denied by the military, authorised from the highest levels of the military command.

⁵¹ Parry, Independent, Feb. 7, 2000.

It will be worse than 23 years ago.” On July 24, Suratman met with a police commander and militia leaders at the Dili military headquarters, where they took “the major decisions...in the recognition that the pro-integration side was unlikely to win the vote,” according to an August 6 report by Australian intelligence officer Wayne Sievers; he is facing charges for having informed the Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade of the secret reports he had sent to the UN from his arrival in June, predicting the post-referendum violence and identifying militia leaders as Indonesian intelligence officers, available to the Australian government through its UN Embassy. A TNI document of early May, when the UN-Indonesia-Portugal agreement on the referendum was reached, ordered that “Massacres should be carried out from village to village after the announcement of the ballot if the pro-independence supporters win.” The independence movement “should be eliminated from its leadership down to its roots.”⁴⁹

Documents discovered in Dili in October 1999, “and analysed in Jakarta by Indonesian investigators and Western diplomatic sources, provide evidence...that, for months before the referendum on East Timor’s independence in August, it was being systematically undermined by Indonesia’s top generals,” including plans for “the forcible deportation of hundreds of thousands of East Timorese.” A Western diplomat who reviewed the documents describes them as “the missing link,” showing “a clear chain of command from close to the very top,” also expressing his surprise at the “sheer quantity” of the weapons provided to local militia and pro-Jakarta figures. As the May 5 referendum agreement was signed, a letter from General Subagyo to Colonel Suratman, copied to senior military figures, ordered preparations for “a security plan to prevent civil war that includes preventive action (create conditions), policing measures, repressive/coercive measures and a plan to move to the rear/evacuate if the second option

⁴⁹ Ibid.

for a war-crimes tribunal is low.” Crucially, support in the great powers is not merely “low” but negative. The general attitude is expressed by the editors of the Washington Post: “But before a Bosnia-style tribunal is created, Indonesia should be given a chance to judge its own” — and to pardon them if convicted, as the President announced at once.¹⁰

Australian UN correspondent Mark Riley reported from New York that the UN “is set to ignore the strong advice of its own human rights body for a war crimes tribunal in East Timor, instead deferring debate on the issue until Indonesia’s probe into the killings is completed. The decision is a political victory for Jakarta, which has argued that it should be left alone to investigate allegations of atrocities on what it considers was its sovereign territory.” UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan “does not endorse the [international] tribunal in his accompanying letter to the report,” Riley added: “the absence of a clear recommendation from Mr Annan meant that no decision was likely to be reached on a tribunal,” UN officials said. The “suggestion of dual representation is a significant departure from the UN tribunal models established in Rwanda and Bosnia,” Riley comments, “aimed at avoiding allegations of bias in the prosecutions,” a matter of concern when the perpetrators of crimes are acting with the support and complicity of the U.S. and its allies and inquiry must therefore be controlled. But the question is academic, in the absence of a tribunal.

Sonia Picado, head of the UN Inquiry Commission, was not optimistic, Riley reported further, recognizing “that there is little prospect of the UN Security Council supporting an international war crimes tribunal.” “The East Timorese deserve compensation — moral and material compensation — because their families and their country have been devastated,” Picado said, and “the UN has to give that to them”: “it cannot be provided through

¹⁰ Keith Richburg, Washington Post-BG, Feb. 1, 2000. Also Seth Mydans, NYT, Feb. 1; NYT, Feb. 2, 2000.

an Indonesian tribunal.” Picado “had no faith in the ability of a planned Indonesian tribunal to deliver justice to the East Timorese people.” “It is just not feasible for [the Indonesians] to create a tribunal out of the blue and bring their own generals to justice,” she said. Furthermore, no meaningful tribunal can be held in Jakarta because “East Timorese people remained scared of the Indonesian authorities and most were reluctant to travel to Jakarta to give evidence to a government tribunal. How can they expect the military courts in Indonesia to bring justice to the people of East Timor?” But “East Timor deserves not to be forgotten,” and with an international tribunal unlikely, she recommended a South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission with commissioners from East Timor, Indonesia and UN-appointed members, with powers to indict or pardon, meeting outside Indonesia.¹¹

Australian Asia correspondent Lindsay Murdoch commented that “grave doubts exist that the guilty will be brought to justice. Indonesia’s legal system is riddled with corruption and has a poor record when dealing with human rights abuses.” Indonesian Attorney-General Marzuki Darusman is “a respected human rights advocate,” but “the task he faces in bringing some of the country’s most powerful people to justice appears daunting, if not impossible,” as illustrated by President Wahid’s apparently having “buckled to pressure from General Wiranto” by declaring that he would be pardoned if found guilty: “Any such pardon would be outrageous,” Murdoch wrote.¹²

“You cannot have one-sided justice in human rights cases,” Picado said. It is fairly safe, however, to predict that one-sided justice is the most that can be anticipated, and even that is a dubious prospect. Furthermore, it is hardly likely that the guilty parties, particularly the U.S. and U.K., will consider providing the “moral

¹¹ Dan Murphy, *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 2; Editorial, *WP-International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 2, 2000.

¹² Riley, *Age*, Jan. 31 & Feb. 2, 2000.

a State Department authorization bill asking the Clinton administration to “intensify their efforts to prevail upon the Indonesian government and military” to crack down on the militias, reiterated on June 30 by a vote of 98–0. In a July 8 press briefing, in response to a query about the Senate vote, State Department spokesperson James Foley repeated the official stand that “the Indonesian military has a responsibility to bring those militias under control” — namely, the militias it was organizing, arming, and directing.⁴⁶ Database searches found no report of any of this in the U.S.

Braving violence and threats, almost the entire population voted on August 30, many emerging from hiding to do so. Close to 80% chose independence. Then followed the latest phase of TNI atrocities in an effort to reverse the outcome by slaughter and expulsion, while reducing much of the country to ashes. Within two weeks more than 10,000 might have been killed, according to Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, the Nobel Peace laureate who was driven from his country under a hail of bullets, his house burned down and the refugees sheltering there dispatched to an uncertain fate.⁴⁷

TNI forces responsible for the terror and destruction from February have been described as “rogue elements” in the West, a questionable judgment. There is good reason to accept Bishop Belo’s assignment of direct responsibility to commanding General Wiranto in Jakarta,⁴⁸ not only in the post-referendum period to which inquiry is to be restricted. Well before the referendum, the commander of the Indonesian military in Dili, Colonel Tono Suratman, had warned of what was to come: “I would like to convey the following,” he said: “if the pro-independents do win ... all will be destroyed...

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* See Edward Herman and David Peterson, *Z magazine*, July/August 1999; and ‘East Timor: From “Humanitarian” Bombing to Inhumane Appeasement’, *CovertAction Quarterly*, Fall-Winter 1999.

⁴⁷ Farhan Haq, *Inter Press Service*, Jun 22, 1999; Antara (Indonesian National News Agency), Jul. 2, 1999. See also David Shanks, *Irish Times*, Jul. 10, 1999; M2 PRESSWIRE, Jul. 8, 1999, US Dept of State daily press briefing.

⁴⁸ Philip Shenon, *NYT*, Sep. 13, 1999.

by separating the resource-rich outer islands, undertaken because of Washington's concern that the government of Indonesia was too independent and too democratic, even going so far as to permit a popular party of the left to function. The praise for Indonesia's first democratic election in 40 years managed to overlook the background.⁴³

Habibie moved at once to distance himself from Suharto, surprising many observers. In June 1998, he called for a "special status" for East Timor. In August Foreign Minister Ali Alatas suggested a "wide-ranging autonomy." And on January 27, 1999, Habibie made the unexpected offer of a referendum on autonomy within Indonesia, implying that were the offer rejected, Indonesia would relinquish control of the territory it had invaded and annexed.

The military, however, was following a different track, already described, moving even before Habibie's January announcement to prevent a free choice by violence and intimidation. From February through July, 3–5000 East Timorese were killed according to highly credible Church sources — twice the number of deaths prior to the NATO bombing in Kosovo, more than four times the number relative to population.⁴⁴ The terror was widespread and sadistic, presumably intended as a warning of the fate awaiting those foolhardy enough to disregard army orders elsewhere.

The events were reported extensively in Australia, to some extent in England. In Australia there was extensive protest along with calls for action to end the atrocities. Though information was much more sparse,⁴⁵ there was mounting protest in the U.S. as well. On June 22, the Senate unanimously supported an amendment to

⁴³ Binny Buchori and Sugeng Bahagijo, *Inside Indonesia*, Jan.-March 2000. On the role of the IMF, see Robin Hahnel, *Panic Rules* (Cambridge; South End, 1999).

⁴⁴ Audrey and George Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy* (New York; New Press, 1995); Powers and Prospects.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *op. cit.*, citing church report of Aug. 6. Arnold Kohen, WP, Sep. 5, 1999.

and material compensation" they owe to the victims, and there is no call for such action.

In the U.S., the Indonesian government report, with its call for an Indonesian inquiry restricted to the post-referendum period, was extensively reported, and supported. The UN report, calling for an international tribunal on crimes committed from January 1999, received only passing mention, and the crucial issues, scant attention.¹³

The restriction to the post-referendum period is important for the international collaborators in the "veiled operations" that preceded, not to speak of the earlier record. Under the post-referendum restriction, one might argue without utter absurdity that there was little time to respond. The Jakarta option has other advantages: East Timorese are unlikely to testify, pardons have already been announced, the pressures to evade the facts will be strong, and the great powers are immune from inspection. But even in an international tribunal the possibility that Western leaders would be held accountable for their responsibility is so slight as hardly to merit comment. Only by attaining a remarkable level of "intentional ignorance" can one fail to perceive that the international judicial process, like other aspects of international affairs, is subject to the rule of force, which overrules considerations of justice, human rights, or accountability.

In East Timor, the peacekeeping forces and the UN mission "have neither the means nor the authority to track down those responsible" for crimes, and little evidence is being unearthed:

"In contrast to Kosovo, where human-rights investigators began work as NATO forces took control on the ground, the UN in East Timor has no such capability."¹⁴ "Meanwhile, in East Timor, the evidence of crimes against humanity — and so the chance of

¹³ Murdoch, *Age*, Feb. 2, 2000.

¹⁴ References cited, and others.

successful prosecutions — is literally rotting away because of inadequate resources.” UN civilian police are finding many bodies and mass graves, but have no resources to investigate them. “The need for forensic experts is very, very urgent,” said David Wimhurst, spokesman for UNAMET. “Neither Interfet nor Unamet is able to do this properly at the moment. It is crucial that investigative teams come into Dili as soon as possible.” “When Nato went into Kosovo, teams of police, forensic scientists and lawyers from the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague were at work within days, sealing off and cataloguing mass grave sites. In East Timor, a few harassed policemen have the task of exhuming the bodies and collecting what evidence they can.”¹⁵

The delays ensure that little will be found, even if forensic experts are ultimately sent. Much of the evidence was destroyed by TNI, bodies have been buried by local people, and more will be washed away or eaten by animals, Australian doctor Andrew McNaughtan informed the press, giving details; he has worked in East Timor for 7 years. Isabel Ferreira, who coordinates the East Timor Human Rights Commission in Dili, added that “when the rainy season begins, all the bodies will be washed away into the rivers and there will be no evidence left to investigate.” Kosovo was swarming with police and medical forensic teams from the U.S. and other countries in the hope of discovering large-scale atrocities. In contrast, INTERFET had 10 investigators, no morgue, and no forensic capabilities. Australian forensic pathologists confirmed that with further delay, tropical heat and the onset of the rainy season would eliminate most evidence. UN Administrator Sergio Vieira de Mello pleaded again for forensic experts and facilities at the end

¹⁵ Cameron Barr, CSM, Sep. 30, 1999.

Cambodia than the resistance is of the East Timorese, so therefore it is proper to support both Pol Pot and Suharto. The contradiction vanishes, as did the grounds for its resolution, which remain unreported.⁴¹

For the next 20 years the grim story continued: atrocities, complicity, and refusal to submit. By 1998, some rays of hope began to break through. By then Suharto had committed some real misdeeds, and was therefore no longer “our kind of guy”: he had lost control of the country after the financial crisis, and was dragging his feet on implementing harsh IMF programs. Debt relief had been granted to “our kind of guy” after he took power, but not to the 200 million Indonesians who are now compelled to pay the huge debts accumulated by Suharto and his cronies, amounting now to over 140% of GDP, thanks to the corruption of the regime and the eagerness of the World Bank, the IMF, and Western governments and financial institutions to provide lavish funds for the ruler and his clique.⁴²

On May 20, 1998, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called upon Suharto to resign and provide for “a democratic transition.” A few hours later, Suharto transferred formal authority to his hand-picked vice-president B. J. Habibie. The events were not, of course, simple cause and effect, but they symbolize the relations that have evolved. With Suharto gone, the way was paved for the first democratic election in 40 years — that is, the first election since the parliamentary system had been undermined in the course of the U.S. clandestine operations of 1958 that aimed to dismantle Indonesia

⁴¹ Karnow, Valeriani, *Washington Journalism Review*, March 1980. For these and many other examples, see *Towards a New Cold War*, and on the earlier record, Chomsky and Herman, *op.cit.*, the book Langguth was reviewing in *The Nation*, Feb. 16, 1980.

⁴² John Holdridge (State Department.), Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, 2nd sess., Sep. 14, 1982, 71. On how the quandary was faced, see *Towards a New Cold War*; on the context, Edward Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York; Pantheon, 1988).

The first reports caused considerable annoyance. Commenting in a journalism review, Asia specialist and foreign correspondent Stanley Karnow said he could not bring himself to read a story on East Timor that had just appeared: “it didn’t have anything to do with me,” he said. His colleague Richard Valeriani agreed, because “I don’t care about Timor.” Reviewing a book that gave the first extensive account of what had happened, and the unwillingness to report it, former New York Times Indochina correspondent A.J. Langguth dismissed the topic on the grounds that “If the world press were to converge suddenly on Timor, it would not improve the lot of a single Cambodian.”⁴⁰

Langguth’s observation is surely accurate. More important, it captures lucidly the guiding criteria for approved humanitarian concerns: atrocities for which we bear responsibility, and which we could easily mitigate or terminate, do not “have anything to do with” us and should be of no particular concern; worse still, they are a diversion from the morally significant task of lamenting atrocities committed by official enemies that we can do little if anything about — though when the Vietnamese did end them in this case, Washington was presumed to have the obligation to punish them for the crime, by severe sanctions, backing of a Chinese invasion, and support for the ousted Khmer Rouge (“Democratic Kampuchea,” DK).

Some nevertheless felt uneasy that while bitterly denouncing atrocities in Cambodia, we were “looking away” from comparable ones in Timor — the standard rendition of the unacceptable truth that Washington was “looking right there,” and acting decisively to escalate the atrocities. That quandary was put to rest in 1982 by the State Department, which explained that the Khmer Rouge-based DK is “unquestionably” more representative of the people of

⁴⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, with Suzanne Weaver, *A Dangerous Place* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978). Moynihan writes that 60,000 were reported killed “since the outbreak of civil war.” There had been a brief civil war, with 2,000–3,000 killed, months before the full-scale Indonesian invasion in December.

of November, in vain. A month later it was announced that “international forensic experts will arrive in January to help in investigations of mass graves” and to compile information on crimes, four months after the arrival of INTERFET, long after tropical rains and other factors have significantly reduced the likelihood of revealing the truth.¹⁶

The distinction between the two most prominent atrocities of 1999 is clear. In Kosovo, there was a desperate need for Tribunal indictment (for crimes committed after the bombing began, as the indictment reveals); and “proving the scale of the crimes is also important to NATO politically, to show why 78 days of airstrikes against Serbian forces and infrastructure were necessary,” by the intriguing logic, conventional in Western doctrine, that crimes provide retrospective justification for the NATO bombing of which they were the anticipated consequence.¹⁷ Putting logic aside, at least the immediate agent of the crimes is an official enemy, while in East Timor, the agents of the crimes were armed, trained, funded and supported by the U.S. and its allies from the beginning through the terrible denouement, so it is best to know as little as possible about them.

Though Jakarta had indeed considered East Timor to be “its sovereign territory,” nevertheless no actual issue of sovereignty arose in this case, as distinct from Kosovo, which the U.S. and its allies insist must be under the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (specifically Serbia), probably out of fear of a “greater Albania.” Even Australia, the one Western country to have granted de jure recognition to the Indonesian annexation (in large measure because of its interest in joint exploitation of Timorese oil), had renounced that stand in January 1999. Indonesia’s “sovereign rights” were comparable to those of Nazi Germany in

¹⁶ Parry, see note 8.

¹⁷ Kyodo News International, Dili, Nov. 8; Sonny Inbaraj, Inter Press Service, Nov. 10, Japan Economic Newswire, Nov. 28; AP Worldstream, AP Online, Dec. 24, 1999.

occupied Europe; they rested solely on great power ratification of aggression and massacre in this Portuguese-administered territory, a UN responsibility. Nonetheless, the non-existent claim to sovereignty was accorded the most scrupulous respect under the principles of the new humanism that had been proclaimed a few months earlier,¹⁸ while those assigned responsibility for security proceeded to kill and terrorize.

In the light of the absence of any legitimate claim to sovereignty, and the refusal to send peacekeeping forces until after the Indonesian generals agreed to withdraw, having at last been informed by Washington that the game was over, the term “intervention” is out of place. A fortiori, the issue of “humanitarian intervention” does not arise, though this is one of the rare cases when it is possible to speak seriously of humanitarian intent, at least on the part of Australia, or more accurately, its population, who were bitterly critical of the government’s failure to react.

As TNI forces and their paramilitaries were burning down the capital city of Dili in September 1999, murdering and rampaging with renewed intensity, the Pentagon announced that “A U.S.-Indonesian training exercise focused on humanitarian and disaster relief activities concluded Aug. 25,” five days before the referendum.¹⁹ The lessons were quickly applied in a familiar way, as all but the voluntarily blind must recognize after many years of the same tales, the same outcomes.

One gruesome illustration was the coup that brought General Suharto to power in 1965. Army-led massacres slaughtered hundreds of thousands in a few months, mostly landless peasants, destroying the mass-based political party of the left, the PKI, in

¹⁸ Scott Peterson, CSM, Aug. 27, 1999. Also, see my *The New Military Humanism: Lessons of Kosovo* (Monroe, ME; Common Courage, 1999), and ‘In Retrospect’, excerpted in *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2000; *Z magazine*, April 2000.

¹⁹ For a sample of the rhetorical flourishes and awed self-congratulation, see *New Military Humanism*.

Success was indeed considerable. Moynihan cites reports that within two months some 60,000 people had been killed, “10 percent of the population, almost the proportion of casualties experienced by the Soviet Union during the Second World War.”³⁹ A sign of the success, he adds, is that within a year “the subject disappeared from the press.” So it did, as the invaders intensified their assault. Atrocities peaked as Moynihan was writing in 1977–78. Relying on a new flow of U.S. military equipment, the Indonesian military carried out a devastating attack against the hundreds of thousands who had fled to the mountains, driving the survivors to Indonesian control. It was then that Church sources in East Timor sought to make public the estimates of 200,000 deaths that came to be accepted years later, after constant denial and ridicule of the “propagandists for the guerrillas.” Washington’s reaction to the carnage has already been described.

Media coverage of East Timor had been fairly high prior to the Indonesian invasion, in the context of concerns over the collapse of Portuguese fascism and its imperial system. As Moynihan observed, coverage declined as the U.S.-supported aggression and slaughter took its toll; in the national press it reached zero as the atrocities peaked in 1978. Journals were similar. Such coverage as there was during the worst atrocities kept largely to State Department fabrications and assurances from Indonesian Generals that the population was fleeing to their protection. By 1980, however, the story was beginning to break through, though only rarely the U.S. role, which remains well hidden to the present. By then, it was also becoming clear that the atrocities were comparable to Cambodia in the same years, though in this case they were major war crimes in addition, in the course of outright aggression supported by the great powers.

³⁹ Southerland, CSM, Mar. 6, 1980. See *Towards a New Cold War* for fuller quote and context.

proportionally, defined largely in terms of its own interests and threat assessment...” The remarks were not offered in criticism of Washington. Rather, of his fellow Australians, who do not comprehend the facts of life: others are to shoulder the burdens and face the costs, unless some power interest is served.³⁷

Serious commentators had recognized these realities long before. Twenty years earlier, Daniel Southerland reported that “in deferring to Indonesia on [the East Timor] issue, the Carter administration, like the Ford administration before it, appears to have placed big-power concerns ahead of human rights.” Southerland referred particularly to the role of current UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who had direct responsibility for implementing Carter’s policy, and was so little concerned by the consequences — by then, some 200,000 killed — that he could find no time to testify before Congress about East Timor, Southerland reports, though “he did have the time, however, to play host at a black-tie dinner later the same day.”³⁸

The guiding principles were well understood by those responsible for guaranteeing the success of Indonesia’s 1975 invasion. They were articulated lucidly by UN Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in words that should be committed to memory by anyone with a serious interest in international affairs, human rights, and the rule of law. The Security Council condemned the invasion and ordered Indonesia to withdraw, but to no avail. In his 1978 memoirs, Moynihan explains why:

“The United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success.”

³⁷ Peter Hartcher, *Australian Financial Review*, Sep. 13, 1999.

³⁸ Butler, *The Eye (Australia)*, 7–20, 1999.

“one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century,” the CIA concluded, ranking with “the Soviet purges of the 1930s, the Nazi mass murders during the Second World War, and the Maoist bloodbath of the early 1950s.”²⁰ This Rwanda-style slaughter elicited unrestrained euphoria in the West and fulsome praise for the Indonesian “moderates,” Suharto and his military accomplices, who had cleansed the society. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara informed Congress that U.S. military aid and training had “paid dividends” — including half a million or more corpses; “enormous dividends,” a congressional report concluded. McNamara informed President Johnson that U.S. military assistance “encouraged [the army] to move against the PKI when the opportunity was presented.” Contacts with Indonesian military officers, including university programs, were “very significant factors in determining the favorable orientation of the new Indonesian political elite” (the army). The U.S. had “trained 4000 Indonesian army officers — half the total officer corps, including one-third of the general staff,” two Australian analysts observe.²¹

The U.S. is a global power, and policies tend to be consistent worldwide. Not surprisingly, at the same time the same planners were helping to institute murderous military terror states elsewhere, on the principle, explained by McNamara to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, that it is the task of the military to remove civilian leaders from office “whenever, in the judgment of the military, the conduct of these leaders is injurious to the welfare of the nation,” a necessity in “the Latin American cultural environment,” and likely to be carried out properly now that the judgment of the military is based upon “the understanding of, and orientation toward, U.S. objectives” as a

²⁰ David Briscoe, AP Online, September 8, 1999.

²¹ Cited by Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966* (Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, no. 21, 1991).

result of the military aid and training provided by the Kennedy Administration.²²

So matters continued in Indonesia for three decades of military aid, training, and friendly interaction with the great mass murderer and torturer who was “at heart benign,” the London Economist explained, unfairly condemned by “propagandists for the guerrillas” in East Timor and West Papua (Irian Jaya) who “talk of the army’s savagery and use of torture.” The unnamed propagandists were the major human rights groups, the Church, and others who failed to see the merits of “our kind of guy,” as the Clinton Administration admiringly described Suharto when he was welcomed to Washington in October 1995. His son-in-law General Prabowo, “the leader of Indonesia’s paramilitary death squads, who has authorised mass killings and rapes” and was finally sent to Jordan as an embarrassment after the fall of Suharto, was “an ‘enlightened’ military leader who deserved to have his demands treated promptly and with courtesy by British politicians,” according to British Defence Minister George Robertson, “liberator of oppressed muslims of Kosovo.”²³

Direct U.S. support for Indonesian occupation forces in East Timor was hampered after they massacred several hundred people in Dili in 1991. In reaction, Congress banned small arms sales and cut off funds for military training, compelling the Clinton Administration to resort to some intricate maneuvers to evade the legislative restrictions. The State Department commemorated the anniversary of the Indonesian invasion by determining that “Congress’s action did not ban Indonesia’s purchase of training with its own funds,” so the training can proceed despite the ban, with Washington perhaps paying from some other pocket. The announcement received scant notice and no comment in the press,

²² Brian Toohey and William Pinwill, *Oyster* (Port Melbourne: Heinemann, 1989), 93, censored by the Australian government. For review and sources, see Chomsky, *Year 501* (Boston: South End, 1993), chap. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, chap. 7. For more extensive quotes and discussion, see my *On Power and Ideology* (Boston: South End, 1988).

after the referendum, while the most dire predictions were being fulfilled.³⁴

The reasoning of the senior diplomat was spelled out more fully by two Asia specialists of the New York Times: the Clinton Administration “has made the calculation that the United States must put its relationship with Indonesia, a mineral-rich nation of more than 200 million people, ahead of its concern over the political fate of East Timor, a tiny impoverished territory of 800,000 people that is seeking independence.” The second national journal quoted Douglas Paal, president of the Asia Pacific Policy Center: “Timor is a speed bump on the road to dealing with Jakarta, and we’ve got to get over it safely. Indonesia is such a big place and so central to the stability of the region.”³⁵

The term “stability” has long served as a code word, referring to a “favorable orientation of the political elite” — favorable not to their populations, but to foreign investors and global managers.

In the rhetoric of official Washington, “We don’t have a dog running in the East Timor race.” Accordingly, what happens there is not our concern. But after intensive Australian pressure, the calculations shifted: “we have a very big dog running down there called Australia and we have to support it,” a senior government official concluded.³⁶ The survivors of U.S.-backed crimes in a “tiny impoverished territory” are not even a small dog.

Commenting on Washington’s stance, the veteran Australian diplomat Richard Butler observed that “it has been made very clear to me by senior American analysts that the facts of the [U.S.-Australia] alliance essentially are that: the US will respond

³⁴ Sander Thoenes, *Financial Times*, Sep. 8, 1999; *CSM*, Sep. 14, 1999. Shortly after, Thoenes was murdered in East Timor, apparently by TNI.

³⁵ Gay Alcorn, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Aug. 25, 1999, citing State Department spokesman James Foley. Defense Secretary William Cohen, press briefing, Sep. 8, 1999.

³⁶ Elizabeth Becker and Philip Shenon, *NYT*, Sep. 9, 1999. Steven Mufson, *WP*, Sep. 9, 1999.

Again, U.S. and British intelligence must have known all of this, doubtless far more, and it is hard to imagine that the civilian authorities were unaware of what they were supporting.

In April 1999, shortly after the massacre of 50 or more refugees who had taken shelter in a church in Liquica, Admiral Dennis Blair, U.S. Pacific Commander, met with TNI commander General Wiranto, assuring him of U.S. support and assistance and proposing a new U.S. training mission, one of several such contacts.³¹

In the face of this record, only briefly sampled, and duplicated repeatedly elsewhere, Washington lauds “the value of the years of training given to Indonesia’s future military leaders in the United States and the millions of dollars in military aid for Indonesia,” urging more of the same for Indonesia and throughout the world.³²

The reasons for the disgraceful record have sometimes been honestly recognized. During the latest phase of atrocities, a senior diplomat in Jakarta formulated “the dilemma” faced by the great powers succinctly: “Indonesia matters and East Timor doesn’t.”³³ It is therefore understandable that Washington should keep to ineffectual gestures of disapproval while insisting that internal security in East Timor “is the responsibility of the Government of Indonesia, and we don’t want to take that responsibility away from them” — the official stance throughout, repeated a few days before the August referendum in full knowledge of how that responsibility had been carried out. The same stance was officially reiterated well

³¹ Jenkins, *Asia Editor*, Sydney Morning Herald, Jul. 8, 1999; Anderson, ‘The Promise of Nationalism’, *New Left Review* 235, May/June 1999.

³² Alan Nairn, *Nation*, Sep. 27, 1999; Nairn’s testimony at hearings on the Humanitarian Crisis in East Timor, held before the International Operations And Human Rights Subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on International Relations on Sep. 30, 1999, in Washington, DC.

³³ Elizabeth Becker, *NYT*, Sep. 14, 1999.

but it did lead Congress to express its “outrage,” reiterating that “it was and is the intent of Congress to prohibit U.S. military training for Indonesia” (House Appropriations Committee): “we don’t want employees of the US Government training Indonesians,” a staff member reiterated forcefully, but without effect.²⁴

Government-approved weapons sales come to over \$1 billion since the 1975 invasion, including \$150 million during the Clinton years; government-licensed sales of armaments increased from \$3.3 million to \$16.3 million from fiscal 1997 to 1998.²⁵ As atrocities peaked in 1977–78, the U.K., France, and others joined the U.S. in providing arms for the killers as well as diplomatic protection. Britain’s Hawk jets proved to be particularly effective for killing and terrorizing civilians. The current Labour government continued to deliver Hawk jets secretly to Indonesia, using public funds, as late as September 23, 1999, two weeks after the European Union had imposed an embargo, several days after INTERFET had landed, well after it had been revealed that these aircraft had been deployed over East Timor once again, this time as part of the referendum intimidation operation, two weeks days after the Indonesian Air Force had deployed Hawk jets at the Kupang Airbase in West Timor “to anticipate any intrusion of foreign aircraft into the eastern part of Indonesian territory, especially East Timor,” also installing a early warning radar system in Kupang. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, the author of the new “ethical foreign policy,” explained that “the government is committed to the maintenance of a strong defence industry, which is a strategic part of our industrial base,” as in the U.S. and elsewhere. For the same reasons, Prime Minister Tony Blair later gave “the go-ahead for the sale of

²⁴ *Economist*, Aug. 15, 1987; David Sanger, *NYT*, Oct. 31, 1995. Nick Cohen, *Observer*, 5 Sep., 1999. For more see *Year 501; my Powers and Prospects* (Boston: South End, 1996); and sources cited.

²⁵ Reuters, *NYT*, Dec. 8, 1993, a few lines on an inside page; Irene Wu, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Jun. 30, 1994. See *Powers and Prospects*.

spare parts to Zimbabwe for British Hawk fighter jets being used in an African civil war that has cost tens of thousands of lives.”²⁶

These are altogether unsurprising illustrations of the new humanism, a grand new era in world affairs led by the United States, now “at the height of its glory,”²⁷ and its British partner.

In 1997 the Pentagon was still training Indonesian military forces. The programs continued into 1998 under the code name “Iron Balance,” “hidden from legislators and the public” because they were in violation of the clear intent of congressional restrictions. “Principal among the units that continued to be trained was the Kopassus – an elite force with a bloody history – which was more rigorously trained by the US than any other Indonesian unit,” according to Pentagon documents. Training focused on “military expertise that could only be used internally against civilians, such as urban guerrilla warfare, surveillance, counter-intelligence, sniper marksmanship and ‘psychological operations’.” Among commanders trained were those implicated in the renewed outburst of violence in 1999, as well as earlier massacres, including Krasas 1983 and Dili 1991. “Loyal” Timorese also received U.S. training. Britain was carrying out similar programs.²⁸

In November 1998, Kopassus forces arrived in a port town in East Timor, entering in disguise along with the first of 5000 new TNI forces recruited from West Timor and elsewhere in Indonesia. These became the core elements of the paramilitaries (“militias”) that initiated massive violence in operation “Clean Sweep” from February 1999, with “the aim, quite simply,...to destroy a nation.” As senior military adviser, the military command sent Gen-

²⁶ William Hartung, weapons specialist of the World Policy Institute, KRT News Service, Sep. 16; John Donnelly, BG, Sep. 11, 1999.

²⁷ John Gittings, et al., Observer, Sept. 26; Robert Peston and Andrew Parker, Financial Times, Sep. 15; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts September 13, source ‘Suara Pembaruan’, Jakarta, in Indonesian, 10 Sep 99; Richard Norton-Taylor, Guardian, Sept. 2, 1999. Ewen MacAskill, Guardian, Jan. 19, 2000.

²⁸ David Fromkin, Kosovo Crossing (New York; Free Press, 1999).

eral Makarim, a U.S.-trained intelligence specialist with experience in East Timor and “a reputation for callous violence”; he was also assigned the role of liaison with the UN observer mission. The plans and their implementation were, surely, known to Western intelligence, as has been the case since the planning of the 1975 invasion.²⁹

There is substantial evidence from many sources that from the beginning of 1999, the atrocities attributed to militias were organized, directed, and sometimes carried out by elite units of Kopassus, the “crack special forces unit” that had “been training regularly with US and Australian forces until their behaviour became too much of an embarrassment for their foreign friends,” veteran Asia correspondent David Jenkins reports; though not their friends in Washington, it appears. These forces are “legendary for their cruelty,” Benedict Anderson observes: in East Timor they “became the pioneer and exemplar for every kind of atrocity,” including systematic rapes, tortures and executions, and organization of hooded gangsters. They adopted the tactics of the U.S. Phoenix program in South Vietnam that killed tens of thousands of peasants and much of the indigenous South Vietnamese leadership, Jenkins writes, as well as “the tactics employed by the Contras” in Nicaragua, following lessons taught by their CIA mentors. The state terrorists were “not simply going after the most radical pro-independence people but going after the moderates, the people who have influence in their community.” “It’s Phoenix,” a well-placed source in Jakarta reported: the aim is “to terrorise everyone” – the NGOs, the Red Cross, the UN, the journalists.³⁰

²⁹ Hartung, op.cit. Ed Vulliamy and Antony Barnett, Observer (London, and foreign service), Sep. 19; Guardian Weekly, Sep. 23, 1999. A database search on Sep. 29 found no mention in the US media.

³⁰ John Aglionby, et al., Observer, 12 Sep. (and foreign service); Globe and Mail (Toronto), Observer Service, Sep. 13, 1999. For review and background, see Taylor, op.cit. and Richard Tanter, ‘East Timor and the Crisis of the Indonesian Intelligence State’, in Stephen Shalom, ed., to appear.