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### The role of East Timor's security institutions in national integration - and disintegration

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# The role of East Timor's security institutions in national integration – and disintegration

*Sven Gunnar Simonsen*

**Abstract** This article examines the interplay between security sector developments and national unity in East Timor since the Indonesian occupation ended in 1999. Particular attention is paid to the regional distinction between *Loromonu* and *Lorosae* – people from the west and east of East Timor, respectively. In 2006, East Timor experienced a crisis that saw the disintegration of the military and police forces, and widespread violence that led to massive internal displacement. It was during this crisis that the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction first emerged as a major societal cleavage. The article argues that the independence cause and the guerrilla force Falintil had been an important focus of East Timorese national unity in 1999. In the years that followed, however, the implementation of flawed security policies led to new military and police forces that were politicized, factionalized and lacking in cohesion. Prior to the 2006 crisis, the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction was primarily an issue within the army. As the crisis escalated, however, the violence was to a large extent framed by the east–west dimension, and popular perceptions of the military as ‘eastern’ and the police as ‘western’ hardened. A year after the crisis, little if any progress had been made towards reducing the increased salience of the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction in society. The main internal security challenges – gang activity, the unresolved issue of the so-called ‘petitioners’, and the destabilizing role played by fugitive former head of military police Alfredo Reinado – all had an east–west dimension. The article also finds that new initiatives aimed at reforming East Timor’s military and police forces appeared to be lacking in both depth and relevance for addressing the country’s new level of internal division, and its immediate, internal security challenges.

**Keywords** East Timor; security sector reform; security sector governance; nation-building; statebuilding; military intervention.

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When the 2006 crisis broke out in East Timor, the small remaining UN office (UNOTIL) in the country was only a few weeks from closing down. In the progression of international missions, from UNTAET to UNMISSET to UNOTIL, East Timor had seemingly developed into a country ready to stand on its own feet. The full range of democratic institutions had been set up – including those of the security sector – and responsibilities had been gradually transferred to local hands.<sup>1</sup>

It was, in many ways, the worst case scenario that played out in 2006. Not only did statebuilding regress; internal divisions intensified and took on new dimensions that will affect the prospects for peace and development in the country for many years to come. The distinction between *Loromonu* and *Lorosae* (or *Kaladi-Firaku*) – people from the west and east of East Timor, respectively – was not new, but it now became, for the first time, the fault line for large-scale violence. By mid-summer, 155,000 people had fled their homes and at least 37 had been killed. One year later, in May–June 2007, voting in the presidential and parliamentary elections showed a new, strong ‘ethnic census’ profile, with outcomes varying significantly between different parts of the country. And, when violence flared up again in August, within hours of the announcement of a new government led by former guerrilla leader and president Xanana Gusmão – entailing Fretilin’s fall from power – the east–west profile of the unrest was very clear.

Though many observers were surprised by the ferocity of the violence, the 2006 crisis did not strike without warning. What triggered the crisis was the government’s dismissal of 591 army servicemen (later known as ‘petitioners’) – close to 40 per cent of the entire force. However, East Timor’s security sector had been experiencing serious problems for several years by then. Individual members of the army and police repeatedly came to blows; the forces were strongly politicized; institutions were marked by internal rifts stemming from historical, regional and personal differences; and, outside the security forces, groups of disgruntled Falintil ex-combatants represented a serious cause for concern. By spring 2006, East Timor’s military and police forces were no longer merely politicized and lacking professionalism: elements of both broke off and became drivers of the violence.

When successful, the building of new security institutions can have a positive impact on cohesion in a post-conflict society. Building the institutions of the state – *statebuilding* – impacts on the sense of national unity – *nationbuilding*. Furthermore, it is assumed here, such nationbuilding can contribute to *peacebuilding* in a post-conflict situation (Simonsen 2004). Conversely – as happened in East Timor in 2006 – flawed security policies can contribute to societal disintegration (Simonsen 2007). When the Indonesian occupation ended in 1999, the independence cause and the guerrilla force Falintil (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste, Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor) formed an important focus of East Timorese national unity. Later, as the country’s

new military and police forces disintegrated, this development also had a powerful impact on identities within East Timorese society at large.

This article seeks to examine the interplay between security sector developments, on the one hand, and national unity and the sense of East Timorese nationhood, on the other. Paying particular attention to the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction, the article will consider developments starting with the cantonment of Falintil in 1999, through the establishment of the Defence Force (Falintil–Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste, F-FDTL) and the National Police (Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste, PNTL) in 2001, the 2006 crisis – when both of those organizations disintegrated – and subsequent events up to August 2007.

The first part of the article provides background material on the question of East Timorese national unity, the demobilization of Falintil, and the establishment of the new military and police forces. It includes a brief summary of the events of the 2006 crisis. The second part of the article surveys the impact of the 2006 crisis with regard to societal divisions, with a focus on the F-FDTL and PNTL. The third and final section seeks to evaluate new policy initiatives in the security sector, in the light of society's need for both internal security and cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

### **National unity, Falintil, and the new security institutions**

When the Indonesian occupation ended in September 1999, East Timor seemed a unified society. 'National unity' had become a key strategic element in the resistance, not least with guerrilla commander Xanana Gusmão's 1987 decision to separate Falintil from Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente, Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) and reconstitute it as a non-partisan force. Independence achieved, Falintil under Gusmão's leadership enjoyed an enormous moral authority, and it was the prime symbol of national unity among East Timorese. The outcome of the country's first elections also signalled a unified population: in elections to the Constitutional Assembly (2001) and the presidency (2002), overwhelming victories were won by Fretilin and Xanana Gusmão, respectively, both with substantial, if not equal, support in all districts.

In subsequent years, though, divisions increased within East Timor. Calls for 'national unity' have spoken to several emerging cleavages, with the Fretilin government and Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri on one side, and a range of other actors – President Gusmão, the parliamentary opposition, the Catholic Church, the PNTL, and the F-FDTL petitioners – seen as being on the other (though not necessarily allied.) As Josh Trindade and Bryant Castro have pointed out, not only has the assumption that a common national identity would develop by itself on basis of the resistance not been borne out by subsequent events; the resistance itself has become 'a rather divisive topic in daily conversation' (Trindade and Castro 2007: 14). With

the impact of the 2006 crisis, East Timor now shares more traits with deeply divided post-conflict societies elsewhere than it did in 1999.

### ***The Loromonu–Lorosae distinction***

A critical consequence of the 2006 crisis was the increased salience of the distinction between people from the west and the east of country – *Loromonu* and *Lorosae*, respectively – which loosely coincided with some of the above mentioned cleavages. Stereotypes describe *Lorosae* as volatile, vocal, confident, entrepreneurial, and strong characters, whereas *Loromonu* are seen as more stable, passive, quiet, and calm. The distinction between them has been found to have existed at least since the 1940s (Harrington 2007). In recent years, a central element of prejudice between *Loromonu* and *Lorosae* has been the common assertion (by *Lorosae*) that people from the west contributed less to the 1975–99 resistance. Such assertions are echoed in *Loromonu* complaints of discrimination within the *Lorosae*-dominated F-FDTL (see below), up to the January 2006 petition. In recent years, east–west prejudice has been stimulated by demographic factors, such as migration and a youth bulge. In the upheavals of 1999, when Indonesians and Timorese militia members (as well as ordinary citizens) fled Dili, many houses that were left empty were swiftly taken over by others. Since then, in a city whose capacities have been stretched thin by a massive population increase, it has been common among *Loromonu* to hold the view that most of the good houses were taken over by ‘entrepreneurial’ *Lorosae*. Social jealousy and personal score-settling thus played a part when houses were set on fire during the 2006 crisis, leaving parts of Dili ‘cleansed’ of *Lorosae*.

Though the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction was not new, and though it to a large extent framed the violence, it would be a mistake to view it in primordial terms. East Timor is a highly diverse country. To illustrate, in Viqueque district alone, five different languages are spoken, and there are longstanding grievances, in particular, between the Makasae and the Naueti (NDI 2002: 17). Politically, these gravitate towards Fretilin and Xanana Gusmão, respectively. (Moreover, in fact, the Makasae–Naueti cleavage defined much of the most serious violence during and after the 2007 elections.) East Timor as a whole has not traditionally been polarized. It is a significant fact, for example, that in the thousands of interviews that were conducted over a four year period as part of the documentation efforts by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação, CAVR), no mention was made of *Loromonu–Lorosae* as an important fault line. In mid-2007, a senior Australian UNPOL (United Nations Police) officer explained that, when she first served in East Timor in 2001, she had seen no suggestion of an east–west issue in the security sector: ‘I never heard of it ... It was new to me when I came into the mission this time’, she explained.

### ***Fault lines in the security sector***

Studies of security sector reform during the period 1999–2006 agree, nevertheless, that some of the seeds of more recent problems were sown early on. One important factor was the cantonment of Falintil prior to the UN-administered referendum on independence in August 1999. Throughout the militia rampage that followed the pro-independence vote, Gusmão managed to hold his men back from a confrontation that would have caused even greater bloodshed – and possibly put independence at risk. The cantonment continued, however, after the arrival of INTERFET (the UN-sanctioned International Force in East Timor) and the United Nations; for a long time, international actors seemed unable and unwilling to deal with the largely unknown entity that Falintil was. As a consequence, found Edward Rees, ‘during 2000 a marginalized Falintil suffered faltering cohesion and discipline and it soon posed a potential security threat’ (Rees 2004: 46).

In February 2001, a new defence force, the F-FDTL, was established. Recruitment to the first of the current two infantry battalions was left to the discretion of Falintil commanders. As a result, the majority of recruits to the force were ex-combatants, and both its senior commanders and most of its recruits came from the country’s eastern districts (Shoemith 2003: 247). In 2003, a comprehensive review of UNTAET found that the Falintil High Command’s control of both F-FDTL recruitment and eligibility for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) assistance had ‘created resentments that lingered on after independence’ (King’s College London 2003). More attention was paid to representativeness and transparency in the recruitment of the second battalion, with more recruits than previously being drawn from the western districts (Simonsen 2006: 590). In August 2001, the police force PNTL was formally established (recruitment and training had started in 2000). Here, too, recruitment was to prove controversial. Aiming to speed up the process and bring experience into the force, UNTAET opted to recruit some 340 policemen who had earlier served in the Indonesian National Police (Polisi Republik Indonesia, POLRI) – a force whose record was far below the professional standards proclaimed for the PNTL. These ex-POLRI officers were also put on a fast track to higher positions, receiving only one month’s training and subsequently bypassing newly recruited staff who underwent longer periods of training (Simonsen 2006: 589).

Examination of these very different institutional trajectories is essential for explaining later security problems. One such problem concerned former guerrilla fighters. A major objective behind the establishment of the F-FDTL was the demobilization of Falintil, but the new army was unable to absorb all former combatants. More than 1,000 veterans passed through the FRAP (Falintil Reinsertion Assistance Program), but several thousand more did not get that opportunity. As a result, frustration was severe, with chaotic scenes as large crowds gathered at recruitment offices to seek

employment with the F-FDTL and the PNTL. By December 2002, 6,000 Falintil veterans had applied for police positions (Judicial System Monitoring Program 2002). Many veterans, including commanders, would also discover that they did not meet the physical, literacy and other requirements for service in the new military. Among ex-combatants who found few opportunities to start their lives anew, such developments fuelled a level of discontent that several players were ready to exploit. Key among these was Rogério Lobato, brother of the late Fretilin leader Nicolau Lobato. Upon returning from exile in 2000, Rogério Lobato organized around himself discontented ex-combatants, building a platform of power that, in 2002, secured him the position of interior minister. Despite being distrusted and feared, even by other members of the government, and rumoured to be engaged in criminal activities (International Crisis Group 2006: 6; UN police sources), Lobato would remain in that position until spring 2006.

Institutional weakness provided for serious problems not only outside the security institutions, but also inside and between them. The F-FDTL struggled with weak discipline and cohesion. With the PNTL, examples were accumulating of police brutality, incompetence, and even plain criminal activities, leading to comparisons with Indonesia's POLRI. Relations *between* the F-FDTL and the PNTL became hostile at an early stage – not only because of their very different backgrounds, but also for such reasons as F-FDTL jealousy of the money, attention and weapons going to the PNTL. As early as 2004, President Gusmão made F-FDTL–PNTL relations the main topic of his New Year's address, following clashes in which a number of policemen had been shot and injured (Office of the President 2004).

### ***A brief chronology of the 2006 crisis***

The 2006 crisis has been subject to several analyses:<sup>3</sup> the sequence of events has been laid out in great detail; the roles of different actors have been examined; and the UN Independent Special Commission of Inquiry has put forward recommendations for investigation and prosecution (*Report of the United Nations* 2006). As a background to the discussion that follows, a brief summary of the events may nevertheless be helpful:<sup>4</sup>

- 9 January 2006: members of the F-FDTL submit a petition to the chief of the Defence Force and President Gusmão, alleging mismanagement and discrimination in the force.
- 3 February: the petitioners leave their barracks.
- 16 March: F-FDTL chief Taur Matan Ruak dismisses 591 soldiers.
- Dismissal is supported by Prime Minister Alkatiri, but criticized by President Gusmão.
- Protests during March and April culminate in demonstrations on 24–28 April. On the last day, violence erupts and five people are killed. Alkatiri calls in the F-FDTL to assist the PNTL.

- 3 May: F-FDTL Military Police chief Major Alfredo Reinado abandons service, joined by a number of military police and PNTL officers.
- 8 May: Following attack on eastern PNTL in Gleno, Interior Minister Rogério Lobato arms two groups of civilians.
- Ongoing violence peaks from 23 May. The PNTL disintegrates, police officers join petitioners and confront remaining F-FDTL in gun battles. Youth gang activities intensify; the bulk of the violence, burning and looting in the following months is perpetrated by such gangs.
- 23 May: Major Alfredo and his followers ambush F-FDTL and PNTL forces. Five people are killed.
- 24 May: PNTL and armed civilians attack F-FDTL headquarters in Taci Tolu outside Dili, and the private residence of Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak. F-FDTL arms civilians. East Timor government appeals for international security assistance.
- 25 May: F-FDTL launches counterattack on PNTL headquarters. UNPOL negotiates safe passage from the headquarters for PNTL members. A column of approximately 85 unarmed PNTL members, escorted by UNPOL, is attacked by small group of F-FDTL members. Eight PNTL officers are killed, and 27 are injured (including two UNPOL officers).
- 26 June: Prime Minister Alkatiri resigns. The first of 3,200 peacekeepers land in Dili. Unrest continues but is gradually quelled. 155,000 people have been internally displaced, and at least 37 killed.
- 10 July: José Ramos-Horta is sworn in as prime minister.
- 25 August: The United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) is established.
- 30 August: Alfredo Reinado (detained on 26 July) escapes from prison, together with more than 50 other prisoners.

### **The east–west divide after the 2006 crisis**

Since the 2006 crisis, the east–west dimension has continued to evolve as a format, framing a variety of conflict issues. A more polarized country revealed itself, for example, in voting behaviour in the 2007 elections. Regional differences in voting behaviour were observed as early as the Constitutional Assembly elections in 2001 (King 2003: 753). By 2007, though, the picture had become much more polarized. In the May run-off for the presidential election, the Fretilin candidate, parliamentary Speaker Francisco ‘Lu Olo’ Guterres, won the eastern districts of Baucau, Lautem, and Viqueque with a good margin, whereas José Ramos-Horta won the remaining 10 (of which he had only won two in the first round) equally convincingly. The image of ‘east vs. west’ was thus mirrored by an image of ‘Fretilin vs. the rest’.

These divisions also continue to mark patterns of confrontation in a still tense security situation – in the violence of youth gangs; inside and between



the F-FDTL and the PNTL; and as witnessed in the unresolved petitioners issue and the rise of Alfredo Reinado as an opposition figure.

Since spring 2006, youth gangs have grown bigger and more organized, particularly in Dili. Several hundred youth groups have been identified in East Timor. Some are very small, and many are unproblematic security-wise – indeed, some are engaged in conflict resolution. However, there are also a number of very large groups of worrisome nature (Scambray et al. 2006), including martial arts groups with a total membership estimated in the tens of thousands.<sup>5</sup> It would be difficult to identify a specific political agenda on the part of the gangs. However, several have specific regional affiliations: James Cotton (2007: 15) found many of the chief actors in the 2006 violence ‘openly affirmed their geographic identity’. Some also have party-political affiliations, and gang violence has often coincided with political developments – lending support to claims that the violence has been tacitly approved and in some cases encouraged by political players.<sup>6</sup> Violence flared up, for example, following a March 2007 attack by the International Stabilization Force (ISF) on Alfredo Reinado and his group in the village of Same that left five of Reinado’s men dead. Rumours abound that gangs have been paid to generate unrest, but these are difficult to verify, even if sometimes plausible.

By the time of the presidential and parliamentary elections, gang violence in Dili had abated. However, although some suggested that the east–west problems were thus history, this overlooked the fact that over 100,000 people were still internally displaced (among them 30,000 inside Dili),<sup>7</sup> and that the temporary resettlement was looking more and more permanent. ‘We will see the east–west issue re-emerge when we try to return the [internally displaced persons] IDPs’, said one UNDP adviser. The leader of one international non-governmental organization (NGO) pointed to the fact that, in Dili alone, 6,000 houses were believed to have been damaged or destroyed in the 2006 violence, ‘that means that prior to IDP return, we need 6,000 positive dialogue sessions, and 6,000 cases of established property ownership.’

Following the parliamentary elections of 30 June, violence escalated once again. Later, when the CNRT-led (Conselho Nacional de Reconstrução do Timor – National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction)<sup>8</sup> government was announced, violence exploded in Dili and the eastern districts. While stating that it did not endorse the violence, Fretilin declared the new government unconstitutional, and its leader Mari Alkatiri encouraged a ‘campaign of disobedience’ across the country, encouraging among Fretilin’s members a sense that victory had been stolen from them. The double communication was missed neither by Fretilin supporters nor by the United Nations, with the Head of UNMIT, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Atul Khare, declaring that the violence occurred ‘due to the lack of knowledge on constitutional interpretation from the political leaders’ (UNMIT Media Monitoring 2007b). Months later, however, Fretilin leaders

continued to denote the CNRT-led coalition as East Timor's 'de facto government'.

### *The east–west divide in the security sector*

Well before the 2006 crisis, it had become common to view the F-FDTL, in terms of composition, as an 'eastern' institution, and the PNTL as a more 'western' one. In terms of loyalty, moreover, the F-FDTL was seen as linked to President Gusmão, and the PNTL to Prime Minister Alkatiri – along with Interior Minister Lobato. As the UN Independent Special Commission report found, however, the events of April–May 2006 'revealed more subtle divisions within and between the forces', with neither being monolithic: 'significant relationships existed among individuals or groups and between entities of both institutions' (*Report of the United Nations* 2006: 53). As for personal loyalties, Xanana Gusmão – himself originating from the 'borderline' district of Manatuto – continued to command great authority in the F-FDTL (and among ex-Falintil members) as president and military commander-in-chief. It was only with his head-on confrontation with Fretilin and Prime Minister Alkatiri in 2006 that Gusmão definitely entered 'bipartisan' politics. Claims that parts of the military leadership had transferred their loyalty from Xanana to Fretilin prior to that are difficult to substantiate. It is clear, however, that Xanana's patience with Major Alfredo Reinado, the F-FDTL Military Police leader who abandoned service in May 2006, was poorly received within the F-FDTL command. Rather than simply considering F-FDTL loyalties as being either with Xanana Gusmão or with Fretilin, however, the 2006 crisis and later developments suggest that one should also factor in an F-FDTL institutional self-interest that influences the direction in which commanders' loyalties gravitate at different times. 'Many senior commanders have a very dismissive attitude to the "political class" as a whole', said one prominent UN specialist.

Given the allegations by the petitioners of discrimination within the F-FDTL, the 2006 crisis had an east–west dimension from the very beginning. After the dismissal of the petitioners, an estimated 72 per cent of remaining F-FDTL personnel came from the three easternmost of East Timor's 13 districts: Lautem, Viqueque, and Baucau (international Crisis Group 2008: 5). At the same time, the *significance* of the army's composition has increased. As is the case in many post-conflict societies, people may not trust the security institutions to provide security equally for all if they do not see their kin represented in the ranks and command of the forces. As one prominent UN specialist in Dili put it: 'It's not enough to say "we are all Timorese" – it's quite clear that it is now at least an issue whether one can actually have easterners deployed in the west.' The current regional imbalance in the army constitutes 'an immense problem', according to one senior international analyst with intimate knowledge of East Timor's security sector. The development was all the more tragic, she added, because, in the last

round of F-FDTL promotions, more servicemen from the west than from the east had been promoted.

As for the 'western' character of the PNTL, this emerges from the simple fact that the three eastern districts account for just over 20 per cent of the country's population. In other words, demographics produced a profile different from that of the clearly skewed F-FDTL, with most senior PNTL officers coming from western districts (Kammen 2004). PNTL officers tend to serve in their home areas. This is part of the explanation why, when police forces in Dili disintegrated during the 2006 crisis, the police continued to function in the rest of the country. In this context, one may also make a note of the most serious episode of violence during the 2007 parliamentary election campaign, in which a CNRT civil security officer was shot dead by an off-duty member of the ('western') police force in Viqueque following a rally attended by Xanana Gusmão: the police officer was a local man, described by the CNRT as 'a known Fretilin supporter' (CNRT 2007). Moreover, following the presidential elections, international election observers raised concerns over police intimidation and pro-Fretilin bias in this eastern district (EU Election Observation Mission 2007: 7).

### ***Alfredo Reinado and the 'petitioners'***

By mid-2007, besides gang activity, the most acute security problems in East Timor were the unresolved issue of the petitioners and the destabilizing role played by Alfredo Reinado, the fugitive former head of military police. Importantly, because of their east-west profile, each of these problems served to uphold the salience of the geographic divide within society at large. Some of the petitioners had accepted a one-off payment to reintegrate into society and, for example, set up small businesses. However, many were still demanding to be let back into the defence force. This was a solution that the F-FDTL command was unlikely to accept, and one that was advised against by the Commission of Notables that had been set up in May 2006 to consider the grievances of the dismissed soldiers. Meanwhile, Alfredo Reinado had consolidated his position, leading an increasingly well-organized group of several hundred petitioners. A personality of many contradictions but minimal self-doubt, Alfredo grew to become a folk hero of sorts in western districts during 2006-07, evoking for some the spirit of resistance, while his ability to avoid getting caught inspired admiration and myth-making reminiscent of that enjoyed by Xanana Gusmão during the resistance. Alfredo's demands, threats and political statements were publicized continually, building his image and causing political leaders to appear powerless.

### **Speaking to internal divisions: new security sector initiatives**

When a new, concerted effort towards security sector reform was announced in August 2007, the country was facing a number of serious

internal security challenges. There had been little, if any, progress towards reducing the salience of the east–west divide. Its main expressions – the issues of the tens of thousands living in IDP camps, and the group of petitioners – were still unresolved, and had not even been substantially addressed during the electoral campaigns (International Crisis Group 2007: 2). Youth gangs were as strong as ever, although their violence was mostly contained.

This section of the article will consider aspects of security sector policy since the 2006 crisis, with a particular focus on societal cohesion and the east–west divide.<sup>9</sup> It will argue that steps taken towards reform of East Timor's security institutions have only partly reflected the fact that these very institutions constitute major sources of insecurity in themselves.

### ***East Timor's security challenges***

Illustrating the institutional problems of the F-FDTL, numbers from before the 2006 crisis showed that almost 70 per cent of disciplinary cases within the army concerned confrontations with PNTL personnel (IISS 2006: 1). As to the state of the PNTL, Human Rights Watch stated in April 2006, just as the crisis was erupting, that its researchers had been 'shocked to find so many credible accounts of torture and severe ill-treatment by [PNTL] officers' (Human Rights Watch 2006, press release). Following the 2006 crisis, the office of the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice stated that a 'considerable effort' was needed to rebuild both the police and the army, in order to ensure their professionalism and accountability; it also found it 'vital that both institutions are subject to vetting of their members' (Provedor for Human Rights and Justice 2006: 32). These institutional problems notwithstanding, political leaders were in 2007 preparing for a major expansion of the F-FDTL and its budget. As regards the PTNL, its current overhaul may be insufficient for addressing its institutional weaknesses.

As for current security challenges, relations with Indonesia have become quite amiable, not least because of the remarkable willingness East Timor has shown not to pursue crimes committed by Indonesian forces and their Timorese militias. Indeed, indignation and protests have been voiced by both local and international human rights activists, as well as by the United Nations, over East Timor's readiness to open up for amnesty for such crimes – most recently by the bilateral Commission on Truth and Friendship. Such concessions, nevertheless, have enabled a situation where East Timor need not worry about conventional military threats from other states. The threat of external attack, usually the focus of a military force, has been addressed by diplomatic means; conversely, in the unlikely event of such an attack, the small Timorese army would realistically be able to offer little resistance – other than perhaps by reverting to guerrilla tactics. By extension, the most acute security challenges currently confronting East

Timor are of a nature that most democratic states consider to be police tasks.

Nevertheless, in the discourse of security sector reform in East Timor, the most fundamental question – whether East Timor needs an army at all – is not raised. It was raised, however, during the years of resistance: then, José Ramos-Horta, Xanana Gusmão, and Taur Matan Ruak all argued that an independent East Timor should follow the example of Costa Rica. President Ramos-Horta no longer subscribes to that view: ‘When we had the violence of 1999, I dropped the idea. And the strategic reality, the challenges that this country faces internally and externally advise us to have a credible, significant, highly trained defence force’, he explained. For his part, Matan Ruak used the ceremony marking the end of Xanana Gusmão’s presidency to state his current position: ‘Some states may be able to survive without Armed Forces. But that is not the case of Timor-Leste – nor will it ever be’, he stated in his address (*Speech by Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak* 2007). Incidentally, former guerrilla leader Gusmão seemed the most open on the issue. He acknowledged that the F-FDTL is at present in a mission limbo, and blamed the Fretilin government for its lack of action on recommendations for reforms that he had put forward as president: ‘We said, “What is [the meaning of] defence to us?” So far, we don’t have any idea of what we are defending, of what the army is for.’

To the extent that East Timor’s security institutions themselves constitute sources of insecurity, this is partly a question of politicization and partly one of professional competence. Central to the question of politicization is the sharply skewed composition of the F-FDTL following the dismissal of the petitioners. In the light of the 2006 crisis, the representativeness of the F-FDTL was obviously important for the perception among the population that the force is truly ‘national’, and not, at worst, party to regional conflict. The question remained, however, to what extent and by what means the force should be made to resemble a microcosm of Timorese society. Army chief Taur Matan Ruak did not consider the skewed composition of the F-FDTL to be a major problem; nor did he think that one should seek to closely mirror the composition of the population in the military: ‘The army is national; it’s composed of East Timorese. If you try to select people by representation – we have more than 30 ethnic groups; that would be very hard.’ Moreover, he added, even if one were to focus only on the east–west distinction, and even if 600–700 soldiers had left the force, ‘we still have more than 200 [from the west] left, some in commanding positions.’ Xanana Gusmão, president and commander-in-chief of the F-FDTL at the time of the crisis, stated a year later that ‘there was a problem of discrimination’, but nevertheless saw the real problem as the Fretilin government’s mismanagement of the issues of the veterans and the petitioners: ‘Six hundred people from the west came out. Six hundred! There is an imbalance in the army now, but before there was not. . . . We are not talking about. . . asking for representation from every ethnic group – this is not a problem of ethnicity.’

### ***Police reform after the 2006 crisis***

For the PNTL, reform was already well in progress a year after the crisis, but there was still cause for concern about both its depth and its relevance. The PNTL was formally taken out of service in Dili district when international forces arrived in May 2006. Since the crisis, a thorough, internationally led reform of the PNTL has been initiated. A major feature of this programme, which commenced in September 2006, involved the screening of PNTL officers. Each of the approximately 3,000 officers was to be screened in relation to crimes and misconduct committed in the past. Screening was followed by renewed training and a six-month UNMIT Police mentoring programme (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste 2007: 15–6). In this phase, PNTL officers were only allowed to operate when accompanied by UNPOL mentors. Officers that successfully completed the process were eligible for ‘final certification’. By August 2007, screening in Dili had been completed: more than 800 had resumed police work, while 56 required further investigation, and 76 were awaiting a decision on suitability (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste 2007: 16; *La'o Hamutuk Bulletin* 2007).<sup>10</sup>

It is not given, however, that PNTL problems are solved at the same rate that the screening proceeds. One issue is the *quality* of the screening itself. Prior to the 2006 crisis, investigations alleged human rights violations, including sexual intimidation and involvement in trafficking by police officers. ‘These issues need to be properly looked at, if the police is going to secure and protect society. But I don’t think sufficient attention is paid to these issues in the screening,’ said Milena Pires, country director of UNIFEM. It would also seem that current procedures cannot ensure that police officers who are also gang members will be filtered out. One study has found that the infiltration of martial arts groups into the security forces ‘has further inflamed the situation, in addition to creating a potential for conflicting loyalty’ (Scambary *et al.* 2006: 2).

Another issue is the *relevance* of the screening process to the problems at hand. As has been pointed out by the NGO La'o Hamutuk, this process alone does not address the PNTL’s *institutional* problems. The report of the Independent Special Commission of Inquiry pointed to institutional problems in the areas of recruitment and training, weapons and ammunition control, factionalism, politicization, and integrity of the command structure. To address these diverse problems, to be sure, the joint efforts by UNMIT and East Timor’s government in the ‘reform, restructuring and rebuilding’ of the PNTL and the ministry of the interior do extend well beyond the central element of screening (*Arrangement on the Restoration ...* 2006). UN reports from mid-2007 nevertheless left the impression that progress was slow to take place. The PNTL institution was ‘still fragile and susceptible to politicization’, suggested the UN Secretary-General’s half-year report on UNMIT, published in

August 2007 (United Nations 2007). That same month, a UNMIT human rights report pointed to ‘serious cases of political bias compromising the impartiality of the police force’, warning that initiatives for the adoption of amnesty legislation risked fostering impunity (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste 2007: 2–3). Uncertainties about the PNTL were reinforced on several occasions during 2007. Among the most alarming developments was the arrest of five PNTL officers in mid-September, in connection with arson attacks in Viqueque district (UNPOL 2007).

### ***Defining a role for the F-FDTL***

It is common in security studies to distinguish between a country’s *internal* security – challenged, generally, by criminal activities within the boundaries of the state – and its *external* security – where challenges are mostly the aggressive behaviour of other states (Lutterbeck 2005). In post-conflict situations, there is often no such clear dividing line, and security sector reform programmes typically aim at establishing a clear delineation of relevant roles. Police trainers, for example, emphasize that the police is a ‘service’, meeting citizens in their daily life and providing them with security using only a minimum of force. The military, on the other hand, is a ‘force’ – an instrument that is both heavy and blunt, meant to physically eliminate major threats to the state. In East Timor, the goal of delineating army and police roles has been made difficult by the antagonistic relationship between the F-FDTL and the PNTL. Since UNTAET made border control a police task, the F-FDTL was not even left with a significant role in external security. All in all, in Charles Scheiner’s words, ‘the police are perceived by some past and current soldiers as usurpers or worse’ (Scheiner 2006: 8). At the same time, as we have seen, the F-FDTL has also on an ad hoc basis ventured into law enforcement territory.

Because of the current serious problems with the PNTL, and despite the F-FDTL’s own mixed record, to many Timorese the latter now looks like the best bet for the provision of internal security, though equally as many are opposed to it playing such a role. The F-FDTL may be a heavy and imprecise tool for maintaining law and order, but the force is nevertheless available. Little concern is expressed about the different modes of operation employed by an army and a police force, nor about the fact that a muddled division of labour between the military and the police is potentially problematic for the consolidation of a democratic system. Making a thoroughly professional police service out of the PNTL will take years still; patience may not last, and success is not guaranteed. As early as in the beginning of 2003, Amnesty International expressed its concern that a lack of confidence in the PNTL had resulted in F-FDTL being called upon ‘to play a role in law enforcement activities for which it has neither the authority nor the training’ (Amnesty International 2003: 2). Nevertheless, since 2006,

F-FDTL troops have been deployed, in agreement with UNMIT, to provide 'static security' to sensitive locations in Dili. Following the pre-election shooting episode involving police in Viqueque, politicians including President José Ramos-Horta called for the involvement of the F-FDTL. When unrest broke out in August 2007, a limited number of F-FDTL personnel were indeed deployed to the districts of Viqueque, Baucau, and Lautem (UNMIT Media Monitoring 2007a, 2007c).

At present, the F-FDTL finds itself with no clear security tasks or mandate, which is a cause for restlessness within the force, as well as an issue of concern for the rest of society. The fact that the petitioners now constitute a security problem outside the F-FDTL does not signify that all is well *within* the force. One year after the 2006 crisis, no significant organizational reform had yet taken place within the F-FDTL. In mid-2007, NGO and military sources provided this author with a number of recent examples of cases where F-FDTL servicemen in Dili had displayed a lack of discipline, acting at their own discretion and getting away with it. Off-duty military had clashed with youth gangs, with fighting ending only when UNPOL arrived; military police would patrol streets on an ad hoc basis; soldiers set up a post in a Dili market without permission; one soldier threatened to throw a grenade if he were not allowed into a hospital to visit a relative. In spite of all this, questioning the state of affairs in the F-FDTL in some sense still appeared to be 'unpatriotic'. 'The PNTL is an easier target, because it doesn't have the guerrilla history', commented one international military observer.

### ***Transforming the F-FDTL: conscription and Force 2020***

That is not to say that reforms are not being discussed. On the contrary, a major overhaul of the F-FDTL has been proposed in the study *Force 2020* (2007), a 'strategic blueprint' for the development of the F-FDTL during 2005–20, released in May 2007. It appears that, at least within the F-FDTL itself, *Force 2020* is seen as the way forward: Taur Matan Ruak has described it as 'a modernization program' for the forces that 'spells out the objectives to be achieved by Timor-Leste's Armed Forces in 2020' (*Speech by Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak* 2007). Upon its release, the study became an immediate focus of diplomatic bickering, though, when Australia deemed provisions such as the purchase of missile boats excessively costly for East Timor.<sup>11</sup>

Work on *Force 2020* began in 2004, and in some ways the final version still reads like a pre-2006 draft. References to the crisis are strikingly absent, reinforcing the impression that security sector reform in East Timor is being conducted on an ad hoc basis, not taking fully into account the country's internal security needs. The study does contain, however, several interesting references to the role the Defence Force can play in identity formation. Given the role that Falintil has played in East Timorese



identity, it is not surprising that *Force 2020* also highlights the challenge of ‘building a national identity with the values of resistance, liberty, human rights, and democracy’. It recommends that the country creates ‘new elements of national identity’. Among a broad range of suggestions to this effect (including ‘the development of industrial brands’) is the participation of the F-FDTL in international peacekeeping missions (*Force 2020* 2007: 13–4).

In a situation where the need for reform of the military was still being discussed, and the way forward for the F-FDTL seemed quite open, parliament in January 2007 approved a law on *military conscription*, requiring Timorese between the ages of 18 and 30 (at a minimum 100,000 men and women (International Crisis Group 2008: 8)) to do 18 months of military service. *Force 2020* does not explicitly endorse the idea of conscription (and it only envisages a military force of 3,000 by 2020, meaning that in practice only a small proportion of the age cohort would serve), but rather recommends that the process of approving the law on conscription include the assessment of whether conscription is of interest to the country, ‘for specific reasons in Falintil’s past related to the need to guarantee an effective national identity through a greater and more improved link to the general public’ (*Force 2020* 2007: 52).

In theory, conscription could correct the current imbalance in the composition of the F-FDTL, as long as there is no imbalance in real access or willingness to serve, or in upward mobility within the force. If such a conscript force functioned well, that could also improve its legitimacy throughout the population – and the force could serve as a unifying national symbol. In practice, however, the plans to introduce conscription seemed to promise new problems. The law on conscription was passed at a stage when much was still unclear about the content of the military service. President Ramos-Horta, who had called for the introduction of conscription while serving as prime minister, made it clear that, owing to the army’s small size, in practice not every person in the relevant age group would be called upon to serve: ‘so those who don’t like the army are lucky, because the chance of [being called] is very small’. While plans for the tasks assigned to a conscript army were still vague, proposals included establishing a section with a civil defence, ‘community army’ character, engaged in tasks such as repairing roads and schools in hard-to-access locations.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, several of the reform measures that have been proposed for the military reflect a continuation of the status quo in terms of perspective: whereas the real need for a defence force remains unclarified, the continued existence of a force is treated as a given, and a reform of the force even points to an increase in its size. Shifting ‘civil defence’ and other internal security tasks over to the military also appears to be a response to current low levels of trust in the police. The introduction of conscription would speak to the high level of youth unemployment, but it could also have a serious downside. ‘Before hiring as part of conscription, one needs to have a

functioning army. Now, one would be giving more people arms – that could be quite scary,’ commented one international development worker. The introduction of conscription for an army with an officer corps that is heavily dominated by officers from the east also implies a danger of broad rejection by *Loromonu* youth, some observers have proposed (Dodd 2007a). The watchdog NGO *La’o Hamutuk* has described the law on conscription as ‘very dangerous’, considering that East Timor ‘endured a repressive, *dwi-fungsi* military regime for 24 years and that incipient low-level, relatively unarmed violence is a major part of the ongoing crisis’ (*La’o Hamutuk* 2007).<sup>13</sup>

### ***Security challenges and the democratic process***

A democratic political system may be viewed as ‘a system of conflict management in which the outcomes are unknown but the fundamental rules of the game provide a safe arena in which to compete’ (Sisk 2003). For the new East Timorese democracy, ensuring that different players agree to operate in such an arena remains a challenge. Significantly, the serious problems posed by increasingly powerful youth gangs demonstrate that some political battles have recently been lifted out of the democratic arena: ‘They are making a political statement by fighting out there. They find that they are not heard, but if they fight and destroy, then they are heard,’ commented Father Cyrus V. Banque, who runs conflict resolution programmes with gang youths and directs Dili diocese’s Peace and Justice Commission. On the other hand, elements of progress can also be registered for the cause of channelling political contest and protest into the democratic institutions. One important example is that of Cornelio Gama, better known as L-7, a former Falintil leader who became one of the most vocal leaders of disgruntled ex-combatants. In 2004–05, as head of the quasi-religious group *Sagrada Familia*, L-7 seemed to represent one of the greatest security threats in the country, at times descending on Dili with trucks of supporters armed with machetes, and also clashing with the police (Simonsen 2006: 594). By spring 2007, however, he had decided to take his agenda into party politics. He affiliated himself with the party UNDERTIM, becoming its top candidate. The leadership of the president and government had not brought progress and development to East Timor, he argued. ‘Instead, it brought conflict, destruction, and fighting between police and the F-FDTL’, he said, explaining his choice to change modes of operation.

### **Conclusions**

The 2006 crisis and subsequent violence have rendered East Timor a less unified country. The *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction has increased dramatically in salience, and looks set to frame a range of conflictual relationships for years to come. The main sources of insecurity in the country – including

youth gangs, continuing internal displacement, the petitioners issue, and polarized party politics – reflect this specific divide, and may still be reinforcing it.

National integration – and disintegration – in East Timor have been inextricably linked to developments in the security sector. Falintil became the main focal point of national unity during the resistance, when East Timor seemed a ‘nation without a state’. With independence gained and an external enemy gone, the relationship was reversed – it was a sense of nationhood that was missing (Borgerhoff 2006). Though the need to build a new sense of nationhood has been widely recognized in East Timor, efforts to achieve this goal have not succeeded.

The crisis of 2006 did not need to escalate as catastrophically as it did. All the same, many underlying factors had pointed towards a crisis for some time. Structural factors included the great demographic shifts and high levels of unemployment in the country. Political factors included weak institutions, confrontational relationships between key players, and an increasing sense of alienation among the population. Within East Timor’s security institutions, alarm bells had been sounding for several years.

A key aspect of current policy initiatives in East Timor’s security sector is that they seem not to be motivated by a dispassionate assessment of the country’s security needs. Rather, they point back to the resistance era and to the prominent integrative role that Falintil then played. This is expressed in desires to engage the F-FDTL more in internal security (in the place of a widely distrusted police force) and to introduce general conscription, expanding the role and presence of the F-FDTL within society both as a means of addressing the problem of unemployment and as a vehicle for building national unity. However, reluctance to address the ‘guerrilla mentality’ will inhibit the normalization of relations between state, society, and security institutions that is required for a consolidation of peace and democratic governance. At the same time, the *potential* for building national unity through the F-FDTL is now clearly reduced: because of its role in the 2006 crisis, and the current sharp regional misbalance in the composition of the force, parts of the population now question the ‘national’ character of the force.

Obviously, the PNTL has never enjoyed the same standing among the population as Falintil. Moreover, since security challenges in the country have fallen mostly into the law enforcement category, the professionalism of the PNTL has been continuously tested in a very different way from that of the F-FDTL. Its record has not been good, and the 2006 crisis caused the complete disintegration of the PNTL in Dili. With the powerful Rogério Lobato no longer in charge, the police force is open to reforms. However, reports suggest that unfit police officers have passed through screening and mentoring filters and are back in service. There is also reason to pay attention to warnings that, as with the F-FDTL, broader problems of organizational culture remain unresolved within the PNTL.

At present, security problems in East Timor are contained with the help of UNPOL and the ISF. The support of these organizations in law enforcement and training will be required for many years still. Continued reforms focusing on professionalism and accountability are required to rebuild trust between the society and the security institutions of East Timor. The problem of the increased salience of the *Loromonu–Lorosae* distinction as a result of the 2006 crisis can be mended, and policies should allow for that to happen – meaning, specifically, that the current high salience should not be seen as fixed. The current east–west imbalance within the F-FDTL is not sustainable, but in the long term the solution will lie first and foremost in transcending the distinction itself, both inside the security institutions and within society at large.

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### Notes

- 1 This article was finalised in January 2008, and covers developments up to August 2007. The cut-off date has been defined by the announcement that month of a new government (led by Xanana Gusmão). Since then, what has determined the direction of East Timor and its security institutions more than anything else, is the events of 11 February 2008, when President Ramos-Horta was shot and seriously wounded, Prime Minister Gusmão was attacked but escaped unharmed, and rebel leader Alfredo Reinado was shot dead. In the turmoil that ensued, a state of siege and curfew was introduced. One other important initiative, aimed to prevent unrest from erupting inside the military and police, was the introduction of a Joint Command for elements of the two forces (its mandate expired May 2008). In the months that followed, the ‘petitioners’ issue gradually found a solution, and some progress was made on the issue of internally displaced people. Although East Timor appears to have reached a new equilibrium since February 2008, the problems that have driven earlier conflict mostly remain (International Crisis Group 2009). In particular, politics is still confrontational, and security sector reform has not gone deep enough to adequately address the fundamental problems discussed in this article.
- 2 Unless otherwise cited, quotations in this article come from the interviews conducted by the author in East Timor in April–May 2007. Those interviewed include José Ramos-Horta, Xanana Gusmão, Taur Matan Ruak, ‘L-7’, and several unnamed informants.
- 3 See, for example, International Crisis Group (2006) and USAID (2006).
- 4 This outline is based primarily on *Report of the United Nations Independent Special Commission* (2006), which features the most rigorous chronology of the events; and Harrington (2007).

- 5 Asia Foundation suggests the total number is nearly 40,000 (Asia Foundation 2007). James Scambary, the main author of the survey cited above, has stated that 70 per cent of East Timorese men are members of martial arts groups (ABC 2006). Such extremely high estimates are commonly criticized by Dili-based observers as conflating gangs, youth groups, and martial arts groups.
- 6 For an analysis of the violence and the youth gang dimension, see Shoesmith (2007).
- 7 July 2007 estimates by OCHA. (United Nations Office 2007: 7). In December 2007, these numbers were unchanged, according to OCHA. Dili alone had as many as 53 camps for internally displaced persons.
- 8 The same abbreviation denoted, from 1998, the National Council of Timorese Resistance, headed by Xanana Gusmão.
- 9 Given this focus, the article does not provide a complete assessment of security challenges facing the country. Thus, for example, the external threat analysis contained in *Force 2020* (2007) is not discussed.
- 10 The screening process for the country as a whole was completed by 1 December 2007. However, the number of fully certified police officers was still very low.
- 11 Among the authors of *Force 2020* were advisers from Portugal and Malaysia, but not from Australia. One Australian newspaper described the exclusion as 'a deliberate diplomatic snub' (Dodd 2007b).
- 12 This scenario was outlined by the late Chris Santos, an adviser to President Ramos-Horta, in an interview with the author.
- 13 *Dwi-fungsi* refers to the *dual functions* ascribed to Indonesia's armed forces: to defend the state and to serve as a social-political force for development.

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