

Indonesia's military strategy in the invasion of East Timor

Carl von Clausewitz described war as 'an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will' and strategy as 'the use of engagements for the object of the war.'¹ War is thus a violent but innately political act with distinctly political objectives. Various military theorists have defined and redefined military strategy in different ways, but at the heart of these definitions is the manner in which military power is used to achieve a political purpose.

This chapter examines Indonesia's military strategy in the invasion of East Timor.² It examines Indonesia's war aims, the structure of the Indonesian military, the structure and major operations of the forces that attacked and occupied East Timor, and the course of the war from 1975-1978. Although a detailed military history of Indonesia's war against East Timor has yet to be written, and there are insufficient monographic materials on the specific tactical battles and individual operations, it is possible to trace the broad contours of how Indonesia deployed military forces to achieve its strategic objective.

Indonesia's war aims

Indonesia's war aims were to defeat FRETILIN in battle, eliminate its leaders, suppress political organizations associated with it, and extinguish political activity at the village level. To do all this, it had to annex East Timor.

Indonesia had not shown any interest in annexing East Timor during its own struggle for independence from the Netherlands. Nor did it show any interest during the liberal parliamentary period from 1950 to 1959. Dr Subandrio, then Foreign Affairs Minister, explicitly denied any claim to East Timor in his submissions to the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in 1961. This remained Indonesia's position during the Guided Democracy period from 1959 to 1965 and the first decade of the New Order of President Suharto.

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 146.

² I dedicate this chapter to the late Andrew McNaughtan. Research for this chapter has benefited from a broad spectrum of sources, not least of which are Australian intelligence assessments from 1974-1979 made by officers of the Joint Intelligence Organisation in Canberra. In particular, my predecessor as East Timor Desk Officer, the late John 'Pepe' Florent, wrote an account of the Indonesian annexation of East Timor in 1978. It was an exemplary piece of contemporaneous analysis, and I use material from it at various times in this chapter. Captain Chris Jones would later add to Florent's account. Before John Florent, Ms. Jenny Herridge handled the East Timor desk in the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) from March 1974 until December 1975. Lieutenant-Colonel Geoff Cameron of JIO's Directorate of Joint Service Intelligence (DJSI) left the Army after reaching his compulsory retiring age and joined OCI as a civilian analyst on the Indochina Desk. He began reporting on Timor after the invasion, when Jenny Herridge left JIO and went overseas. Peter Gibson was the Indonesian Army Desk Officer within DJSI from February 1974 to March 1977.

The Suharto regime's political ideology was Organicism, which holds that the state and society form an organic unity. There was no room in this ideology for political competition or a democratic opposition. Organicism had been influential among Indonesian legal scholars who drafted the constitution in 1945. They had been influenced by anti-Enlightenment Dutch orientalism, Japanese proto-fascism and elitist Javanese political thought.³ Under Suharto, Organicism was revived in full measure. Accompanying it was a political concept known as the 'floating mass', whereby 'people in the villages' were not to 'spend their valuable time and energy in the political struggles of parties and groups' but rather to 'be occupied wholly with development efforts.' Accordingly, the people were a 'floating mass' who 'are not permanently tied to membership of any political party.'⁴

When political parties emerged in East Timor after 1974, the Indonesian establishment had not been immediately hostile to the prospect of independence. Indeed, Indonesia's foreign minister, Adam Malik, met Jose Ramos-Horta, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the *Associacao Social Democratica Timorese* (ASDT) or Timorese Social Democratic Association, in Jakarta in June 1974. Malik provided written assurances that Indonesia supported East Timor's right to self-determination. Ramos-Horta was so impressed by his meeting with Malik that he came away from it indicating that East Timor's leadership might even concede its foreign and defence powers to Indonesia.

Things changed after the ASDT renamed itself the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (*Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente* – FRETILIN) in September 1974.⁵ FRETILIN's program focused on decolonization, land reform, administrative reform, popular education and the development of small industries based on primary products like coffee. Australian intelligence reported that FRETILIN's leaders 'persistently stressed the need to develop a political system best suited to the economic and social environment and to an independent East Timor. They seemed to have been deeply committed to the development of cooperatives in commerce and agriculture as a means of improving the living standards and economic power of the indigenous Timorese. Nevertheless, they insisted that free-enterprise arrangements for Chinese entrepreneurs and foreign business interests would continue indefinitely.' Michael Curtin, the head of the Indonesia section at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs, wrote that FRETILIN was 'the sort of party we would have welcomed, even encouraged, anywhere else than in Timor.'⁶

However, FRETILIN's commitment to working in the villages and its pursuit of land reform and public education flew in the face of the New Order's hostility to political activity at the village level in Indonesia. This opposition to village-level mobilization was a foundational principle of the New Order regime. FRETILIN would have been a successful example of a democratic alternative in the middle of the Indonesian

³ D. Bouchier, *Lineages of Organicist Political Thought in Indonesia*, PhD thesis, Monash University, 1996.

⁴ A. Murtopo, *25 Years of Accelerated Modernisation*, in D. Bouchier and V. Hadiz, *Indonesian Politics and Society: a reader*. (London: Routledge, 2003: 45-46).

⁵ For more on this, see C. Fernandes, 'The sort of party we would have welcomed, even encouraged, anywhere else than in Timor'. Paper presented at the 2013 Timor-Leste Studies Association conference.

⁶ NAA: A1838, 3038/10/2, ii.

archipelago. This is not to say that FRETILIN was a model of libertarian political thought; rather, its work in mobilizing the inhabitants of the villages of East Timor was intolerable because the Indonesian public would be able to see a successful alternative to the New Order in their geographic midst. Regional policymakers understood the Indonesian regime's concern. Michael Curtin acknowledged this frankly when he wrote:

If an independent and politically radicalized East Timor were to make a go of it, with political and economic help not to Indonesia's liking, it would certainly become something for discontented Indonesians to look to.⁷

Indonesia used anti-Communist pretexts to justify its opposition to an independent East Timor.⁸ (In different times, anti-terrorism pretexts might well have served a similar purpose.) Once the political decision had been taken to annex East Timor, Indonesia's military planners had to take a series of military-strategic decisions about the kinds of operations best suited to achieving the annexation as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia

The Indonesian Armed Forces played a major role in Indonesian society during the New Order regime of President Suharto, who was in power from 1965 to 1998. They traced their origins to the People's Security Army (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, TKR) in the war of independence against the Dutch in 1945. They were later established as ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* – Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia), consisting of four services under HANKAM (*Departemen Pertahanan dan Keamanan* – Department of Defence and Security): Army, Navy, Air Force and Police.⁹ Under Suharto, the central government appointed the governors of all 26 provinces (and the 27th province, East Timor). These governors, who were usually army generals, reported to the Minister of Internal Affairs, who was also an army general. Although the civil service played a leading role in the administration of the 281 regions into which the 26 provinces were divided, many of the lesser administrative officials had a military background and the regional army commander could exercise executive power when necessary.

Three intelligence organisations – BAKIN, OPSUS and KOPKAMTIB – became vital pillars of Suharto's power. BAKIN, the State Intelligence Coordination Body, was at the pinnacle of the Indonesian intelligence community. Suharto established it by presidential decree on 27 May 1967. It was not part of any government department but reported directly to him. It received funds officially, through the State Secretariat, and unofficially, through off-line funding. Its duties included the coordination of Indonesian intelligence activities in respect of the reopening of China's embassy in Jakarta, the supervision of Service Attaches who collected intelligence overseas, and

⁷ NAA: A1838, 3038/10/1/2, ii.

⁸ Indonesia claimed – falsely – that communists from China were attempting to enter East Timor, that East Timor would give the Soviet Union a naval base to divide Indonesian waters into two zones, that Vietnam might send troops to East Timor, and other equally false Cold War-inspired claims.

⁹ On 1 April 1999, the Police were split from the rest of the Armed Forces, which henceforth were known as TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* – Indonesian National Military).

the conduct of intelligence liaison with foreign states. It also screened government employees who required security clearances and organised physical security arrangements for Indonesian dignitaries travelling abroad.

OPSUS (Operasi Khusus – Special Operations) was an intelligence unit formed by Suharto in late 1965 when he commanded the Army's Strategic Reserve Command during the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party. Its initial task was to liaise secretly with Malaysia with the aim of ending Confrontation.¹⁰ More a function than an organisation, OPSUS operated as a virtual private intelligence agency for Suharto. Specific people and agencies were commissioned for specific intelligence operations, supported by a small permanent central staff.¹¹ Lieutenant General Ali Murtopo, a close confidant of President Suharto and a deputy director of BAKIN, conducted special operations through OPSUS until 1978, when he became Minister for Information.

KOPKAMTIB (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order) was established in 1966 to eliminate the PKI as a political force and to restore law and order. Suharto himself was the official head of KOPKAMTIB, which was 'the Government's main instrument for maintaining internal security and is thus a very powerful organisation.'¹² The Minister for Defence and Security, who was also the commander of the Armed Forces, commanded the organisation on a day-to-day basis, reporting directly to Suharto. KOPKAMTIB's chief of staff supervised its daily routine and attended all important staff meetings at HANKAM. The organisation had almost unlimited power to deal with internal security and a wide range of administrative, political and economic matters. It proved ineffective when tasked with combating corruption, however. Operation Tertib (Order), which was supposed to eliminate bureaucratic corruption, ran for five years from mid-1977 onwards. It had very little effect on corruption in Indonesia.

More than formal titles, personal relationships between a tightly knit ruling group were of great importance in determining strategy and policy. An official's relationship with the President determined his level of power. For example, there were more senior officers in the Indonesian Armed Forces than Major-General Benny Murdani, but he enjoyed immense authority because of his personal relationship with President Suharto. He had far more influence, access and responsibilities than more senior officers. Directed by President Suharto himself, three men controlled the Indonesian intelligence community: General Yoga Sugama, the Head of BAKIN and Chief of Staff of KOPKAMTIB; Major General Benny Murdani, Assistant for Intelligence HANKAM, Head of Strategic Intelligence Centre HANKAM, and Deputy Head of BAKIN; and Admiral Sudomo, Commander of KOPKAMTIB and Deputy Commander of the Armed Forces.

At the time of the invasion of East Timor, Indonesia's Department of Defence and Security directly controlled four regional defence commands or KOWILHAN (Komando Wilayah Pertahanan).¹³ Each KOWILHAN was under the operational

¹⁰ In 1963, Sukarno had rejected the formation of Malaysia, sending troops to Borneo as part of a policy of 'confrontation.'

¹¹ NAA: A13685, 12/76.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ NA: FCO 15/2090, File FAG 10/4.

control of the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces. The KOWILHAN were:

- I – Sumatra and West Kalimantan (HQ at Medan)
- II – Java, Madura and Nusatenggara (HQ at Jogjakarta)
- III – East and South Kalimantan and Sulawesi (HQ at Ujung Pandang)
- IV – Maluku and Irian Jaya (HQ at Biak)

In wartime, the KOWILHAN commanded the Army, Navy and Air Force area commands. In peacetime it commanded only the Army Area Commands. Although there was a good deal of diversity in the officer corps, the average Army officer was Javanese (about 3/4th of the total officer strength), Muslim and ‘generally from a lower middle class group with a somewhat better-than-average education.’¹⁴ Unlike in many Asian countries, most members of the officer corps did not come from a socially elite class.

The Indonesian army’s territorial structure was the cornerstone of the New Order’s power. The territorial structure had its origins in the Indonesian war of independence, when various irregular units waged an insurgency against the Dutch. The Suharto regime enlarged and reinforced this structure in order to consolidate its power, formalizing consultations between the armed forces, the police and civil servants in a process known as *Muspida* (*Musyawaharah Pimpinan Daerah*, Regional Leadership Consultation) at provincial and district levels, and *Tripika* (*Tri Pimpinan Kecamatan*, Sub-district Leadership Triumvirate) at the sub-district level. The *Muspida* resembled the State War Executive Committees that were set up in Malaya during the Emergency of the 1950s. It coordinated, guided and supervised all facets of local government and territorial affairs. The territorial structure, a foreign military attaché reported, ‘provides a framework of units and commands throughout the country and a transmission belt conveying the wishes and thoughts of the central government to the furthestmost regions and on the other hand, playing back to the central government the feelings, aspirations and problems of the people in every corner of Indonesia.’¹⁵

The territorial structure at the KODAM and subordinate levels was as follows:

Government Level	Senior Official	Army Level	Army Commander
Province (Propinsi)	Governor (Gubernur)	KODAM (Military Area Command)	Brigadier-General or Major-General
Residency (Keresidenan)	Resident (Residen)		
		KOREM (Military Sub-Area Command)	Colonel
County (Kebupaten)	Bupati	KODIM (Military District Command)	Lieutenant-Colonel
District (Kewedanan)	Wedana		

¹⁴ *Ibid*. The author adds that ‘Christian officers do not appear to be discriminated against, witness the Minister/Commander, General Panggabean.’

¹⁵ NA: FCO 24/1413; FWD 10/4, December 1971.

Subdistrict (Kecamatan)	Camat	KORAMIL (Military Sub-District Comd)	Lieutenant
Village (Desa)	Village Head (Luruh)	BABINSA (Village Management NCO)	NCO

There were a total of 17 KODAMs in the 26 provinces of Indonesia¹⁶. Accordingly, a KODAM could include several lightly populated provinces. By contrast, a heavily populated and politically sensitive area such as Jakarta and its immediate environs had its own KODAM. All KODAMs had their own headquarters and each had a military staff (with the exception of the village NCO). The KODAM Commander was a member of the *Muspida* along with the Governor, the head of the police and the provincial prosecutor. KOREM were established according to need. The KODAMs of lightly populated but geographically large provinces such as East and West Kalimantan each had only one KOREM. The KORAMILs, which were vital to ensuring dominance over political activity in the villages, were regarded as essential command posts whose commanders could request troops for deployment in combat, security and intelligence gathering operations. The KORAMIL staff consisted of three senior NCOs responsible for operations, logistics and socio-political affairs.

Commenting on this structure, a British official remarked that the Armed Forces 'play a large part in ensuring that the writ and message of the Central Government run throughout the country. I suppose this role is comparable in a less sinister way to the role of the Party in a Communist country... In the field of economic development, in particular, much is done through the civilian hierarchy in the provinces, although the division between the civil and military authorities is sometimes difficult to define when many provincial Governors and administrators are themselves Army Officers. ... [Suharto] relies almost exclusively at the centre on civilian technocrats and not on soldiers for the planning and execution of economic development.'¹⁷

Thus, in the lead-up to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, the Indonesian armed forces were not structured for expeditionary war but rather for control against internal threats to the Suharto regime: trade union organisers, human rights campaigners, pro-democracy activists, dissident intellectuals, and that catch-all description, 'suspected communists'. The Indonesian military's operation against West Papua had occurred more than a decade before, when then-President Sukarno established the Mandala Command (commanded by then-Major-General Suharto) in 1962. On that occasion, the Indonesian military's capabilities had not been serious enough to directly threaten Dutch rule in West Papua.

ABRI's doctrine was based on the concept of *Sishankamrata* (*Sistem Pertahanan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta*, or Total People's Defense and Security System). In addition to conventionally trained, full-time military personnel, civilians were

¹⁶ KODAMs 1 to 16 were commanded by a Major-General. KODAM 17 was commanded by a Brigadier-General and was responsible for administrative and operational command of army units and the close off-shore islands.

¹⁷ NA: FCO 15/2090 File number FAG 10/4.

selected to undergo basic military training, after which they were known as *Ratih* (*Rakyat Terlatih* or Trained Civilians). From *Ratih* some were further trained as *Hansip* (*Pertahanan Sipil*, or Civil Defense Force), in case of natural disaster or war. Others were further trained as *Kamra* (*Keamanan Rakyat* or People's Security Force), to assist the police. Others were trained as *Wanra* (*Perlawanan Rakyat* or People's Resistance Force), to assist the armed forces. In most parts of Indonesia these groups were under the control of DEPDAGRI (*Departemen Dalam Negeri* or Department of the Interior). During the occupation of East Timor, however, all these groups would remain under the command of the Indonesian military.

The Indonesian army's Training Command had 'suffered because of the poor quality of commanders and staff officers appointed to it and because of a lack of finance to develop and support an effective training program.'

It was hindered by serious problems such as:

'a theoretical and unrealistic approach to training, a lack of awareness of the vital need for effective methods of instruction and efficient instructors and a reluctance (and probably incapacity) to conduct training in the field... Officer training is restrictive and inflexible. The Armed Forces Academy cadet quickly learns that his success is a measure of his conformity; the army does not reward initiative, flexibility, or inventiveness. The young officer graduates into a highly competitive structure where the army's involvement in civil administration, combined with his limited pay and poor service conditions, inevitably fosters the development of corruption.

... Much formal training is theoretical, and doctrinal adherence is closely supervised. Delegation of authority and responsibility is rarely encouraged in officer training, and as a result the Indonesian army officer delegates little in the field. The servility he has to develop towards his superiors is demanded from his subordinates. Officers who attend foreign training are not encouraged to demonstrate their acquired skills on return – returning staff college students do not experiment with new doctrine, and fresh ideas are thus prevented from being disseminated.'¹⁸

A Western military observer reported that 'an operation involving the coordination and cooperation of all arms against serious opposition could be a complete fiasco.'¹⁹ The validity of these criticisms would become apparent during the invasion.

Operation Komodo

Operation Komodo was the first of three strategic-level operations conducted by the Indonesian Government against East Timor. Named after the giant, slow-moving lizard found in the Indonesian archipelago, it was designed to ensure East Timor's annexation via a covert process of slow but methodical destabilization. It was followed by Operation Flamboyan (armed, covert action) and Operation Seroja (the invasion of East Timor).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ NA: FCO 24/1413; FWD 10/4, December 1971.

Operation Komodo began in October 1974, immediately after secret meetings with the Portuguese government in Lisbon earlier that month. The operation's most visible aspects were its hostile radio broadcasts to East Timor from Kupang in West Timor. These broadcasts originated from a Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) station in Kupang, which provided regional services as well as relays of Jakarta broadcasts. Calling itself Radio Ramelau and broadcasting usually in Tetum, it provided hostile commentary on daily events and drew on Indonesia's intelligence collection network inside East Timor.

Indonesia's destabilisation campaign also relied on the leaders of APODETI, the Timorese Popular Democratic Association, whose goal was to integrate East Timor as an autonomous province of Indonesia. A senior APODETI figure went to Jakarta in October 1974 to meet the chief of the Indonesian armed forces. Indonesia then claimed that hundreds of East Timorese were fleeing to West Timor, that communists had infiltrated and funded FRETILIN, and that communist newspapers and Marxism were spreading in East Timor. Meanwhile, an Indonesian Special Forces team deployed to Atambua in West Timor in order to train APODETI fighters. The Special Forces team was not authorized to enter East Timor, and no other Indonesian military activity was undertaken.

At that time, Atambua had a population of just over 6,000 – the second largest town in West Timor. It was a good location for a command post and training area but not for a base from which to invade East Timor. The only motorable road from West Timor to East Timor ran from Kupang through the central regions to the border. This road was unsuitable for the movement of militarily significant quantities of vehicles. In the dry season, which lasted from May to October, even 4-wheel drive vehicles were unlikely to travel faster than 25 kph, and they would be 'limited to parts of the wide river valleys in the central area and to parts of the plateaux and the coastal plains.' In the wet season, which lasted from November to April, 'numerous sections of any road are likely to be impassable. Unbridged streams become obstacles for long periods, and landslides and washaways are common in mountainous areas.'²⁰ Movement was possible for the infantry and for pack animals, thanks to a network of 'tracks and trails varying between 0.6 and 1.8 metres in width,' however this could occur 'at a reduced pace in the higher mountains and with considerable delays in the wet season because of the numerous streams.'²¹

By the end of January 1975, there were signs that Portugal was contemplating a substantial reduction in its military presence in East Timor. Lisbon radio had broadcast an interview with a Portuguese officer who indicated that Portugal would be withdrawing all its non-essential personnel from East Timor by late March 1975, leaving behind only a few hundred technicians who would train East Timorese replacements. The mood of wanting to return home to Portugal as soon as possible was not confined to its troops in East Timor; regardless of where they were serving in empire, most wanted to go home. They saw their role merely as one of maintaining public order until they could be repatriated. Indonesia noted these developments,

²⁰ NAA: A13685, 4/1975.

²¹ Ibid.

assessed that Portugal would not use force to resist a takeover, and stepped up its covert campaign.

In February 1975 HANKAM conducted military exercises in southern Sumatra to prepare its combat forces for operations should it decide to invade East Timor. Indonesian Special Forces, Airborne units and Marine Corps groups practiced small-scale commando raids. These exercises were reported in the Australian press and discussed with alarm by the Portuguese administration in Dili and local East Timorese leaders. Indonesia denied that it had any intention to attack East Timor. Instead, it intensified Operation Komodo activities. It increased its propaganda broadcasts to East Timor. In addition to the station already broadcasting from Kupang, it set up new stations at Atambua (for broadcast across the border), Kefamenanu (directed at Oecusse), and Su (to relay transmissions into East Timor and to broadcast propaganda for local consumption inside West Timor itself).

Operation Komodo then focused on fomenting conflict between FRETILIN and UDT, which had formed a coalition and agreed that East Timor should become independent under a transitional government. In April 1975 Major General Ali Murtopo invited FRETILIN and UDT representatives to Jakarta. Although they arrived in Jakarta at the same time, Murtopo met the two delegations separately, thus stoking the flames of mutual distrust. The parties' mutual suspicion proved to be too strong and their political inexperience meant that they had no mechanisms to deal with their differences. On 27 May 1975 UDT formally withdrew from its coalition with FRETILIN.

The Indonesian destabilization campaign continued, and tensions between UDT and FRETILIN rose. In early August 1975, UDT's secretary-general Domingos Oliveira and its secretary for foreign relations Joao Carrascalao met General Ali Murtopo in Jakarta. They tried to reassure Murtopo that FRETILIN was not communist but only a nationalist movement with a few extremists, and that UDT was able and willing to have these people expelled to Portugal. Murtopo indicated that FRETILIN was planning a coup on 15 August. Joao Carrascalao later said that Murtopo had assured them that Indonesia would respect East Timor's right of self-determination if UDT moved against the extreme elements in FRETILIN. The UDT members led a preemptive coup against FRETILIN on their return from Jakarta. They closed Baucau International Airport on 9th August. Not everyone in UDT was involved in this so-called 'armed movement,' which began around midnight on 10 August or very early on 11 August. Mario Carrascalao, who was head of the UDT political committee, only heard about the coup by radio on the afternoon of 12 August.²²

The UDT forces captured the police headquarters, the armoury, the port, the airport and the radio and telephone facilities in Dili. They detained hundreds of FRETILIN activists. Indonesia had trained and armed about 200 APODETI fighters in order to deploy them against FRETILIN forces. It referred to these fighters as 'monkeys' – a reference to the Ramayana epic poem in which a monkey army led by Hanuman fought against Lord Rama's enemies. The use of the 'monkeys' was intended to prevent Indonesia's involvement in the UDT action from becoming publicly known. However, the 'monkeys' were poorly armed, poorly trained, and of very limited

²² B. Anderson, A. Djati and D. Kammen, *Interview with Mario Carrascalao*, Indonesia 76, 2003.

military value against FRETILIN. Many ‘monkeys’ were captured or killed while others fled across the border to West Timor.

FRETILIN defeated UDT, APODETI and other forces in short order. Its troops seized the Portuguese military arsenal at Taibessi, gaining control of the following weapons along with enough ammunition to enable intense fighting for up to one year:

Type	Quantity
G-3 automatic rifles	3,700
Mauser bolt-action rifles	15,000
7.62 mm light machine-guns	250
81 mm mortars	20
60-mm mortars	40
Bazookas	20
75 mm anti-tank guns	6

Between 1,500 and 3,000 people died in the internal armed conflict, which, although chaotic and violent, was essentially over by 30 August. FRETILIN was firmly in charge of the territory. Its opponents withdrew across the border to West Timor. The Indonesian navy used its fleet of merchant ships to launch Operation Prihatin, an evacuation operation of Indonesian nationals from Dili.

‘The only dove in Jakarta’

Indonesia had fomented a civil war via Operation Komodo, but the wrong side (from its perspective) won. FRETILIN’s quick victory surprised the architects of the Indonesian destabilization campaign. They had assumed that UDT would win because they had been receiving intelligence about UDT’s popularity from the main towns of Dili, Baucau, Ermera and Maubisse. But FRETILIN had been campaigning very effectively in the villages, where the overwhelming majority of East Timorese lived. (In 1975, only about 15% of the population lived in urban areas, unlike today (2013), when about 30% live in urban areas.) By contrast, UDT had not ventured far beyond the main administrative centres.

Nevertheless, once the internal political conflict had begun in August, the departure of the Portuguese administration presented the Indonesian military with an opportunity to invade swiftly and decisively. In anticipation, they conducted Exercise Wibawa VII and Operation Siaga II. Exercise Wibawa was an annual joint-service exercise conducted by the National Strategic Command (KOSTRANAS). However, Wibawa VII was a cover for the preparation and deployment of Indonesian forces for military operations in East Timor. Siaga II was an Indonesian Air Force operation to prepare for participation in East Timor in coordination with Wibawa VII. The Indonesian military wanted to invade openly with all the forces at their disposal. They were unable to do so because President Suharto was opposed to overt military action. There had been a meeting in August between Suharto, the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Commission and representatives from HANKAM and the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA).²³ At the meeting, which was chaired by the President, all three groups had strongly urged him to approve an immediate invasion of East Timor. Indonesia had a

²³ Dewan Pertimbangan Agung. It was abolished in 2002.

case for direct intervention, they argued. They could make a plausible argument, given the chaotic situation in East Timor, that they had no choice but to intervene to restore order. Suharto had vetoed them. As a result, some foreign diplomats described Suharto as 'the only dove in Jakarta'.

Four factors are likely to have influenced Suharto's thinking: one, the advice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to move by stealth so as not to attract criticism that he retained Sukarno's territorial ambitions. Two, Indonesia's diplomats had misunderstood the politics of Portugal. They had believed that the Portuguese Government would intervene unilaterally to assert its authority in the territory. Three, Suharto's was reluctant to divert resources from economic development. Four, he had received a non-committal reaction on the subject from US President Ford at their Camp David meeting on 5th July 1975.

He had therefore resisted his military commanders' urgings of overt military action, preferring an undeclared overland intervention along the border regions. As a result, the Indonesian military began to regard the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with considerable bitterness, since it was they who had persuaded Suharto to reject an invasion. The military's senior commanders were also disappointed by Suharto's insistence that the intervention along the border be presented to the outside world as an indigenous Timorese victory over FRETILIN. There would be severe implications for the Indonesian campaign.

Operation Flamboyan

Operation Flamboyan was the second of three strategic-level operations conducted by the Indonesian Government against East Timor. Named after the flame tree known as Flamboyant (Royal Poinciana), it involved an undeclared overland intervention from West Timor under the leadership of Major General Ali Murtopo. The aim of Operation Flamboyan was to destabilize East Timor by establishing small enclaves just inside the territory. These enclaves would be used to mount small offensive actions against FRETILIN in order to make its position in East Timor untenable. By seizing territory and demonstrating that FRETILIN was impotent in the face of the Indonesian military, it was hoped that FRETILIN would become demoralized and the population would rally to the pro-Indonesian side. As such, Operation Flamboyan was designed to avert the need for a full-scale invasion. If it went as planned, there would be no need for an assault on Dili or major operations in the eastern part of the territory.

Operation Flamboyan was a strategic-level operation conducted by sea, air and land. The Indonesian Navy sent its destroyer escorts Monginsidi and Nuku to patrol the south and north coasts of Portuguese Timor respectively. The Indonesian Air Force moved ground parties and aviation fuel into the airfields at Bima, Rembica and Maumere in the Lesser Sunda Islands; these airfields were intended to provide emergency landing grounds for any major airlift of troops and equipment into Timor. The Indonesian Army assembled Battalion Combat Teams, which consisted of standard infantry battalions being augmented by heavy weapons and engineer support elements for specific operational use.

Two Indonesian special forces units of about 100 men each entered East Timor on the evening of 3-4 September 1975. They were members of Indonesia's Special Warfare Command (*Komando Pasukan Sandhi Yudha*, Kopassandha). They divided into three teams (Susi, Tuti and Umi) and conducted probing attacks in the first half of September in order to test FRETILIN's response and capabilities. These operations, which were supported by APODETI fighters, caused the largest number of deaths from pre-invasion covert military operations. On 8 September, Team Susi entered Ermera and confronted FRETILIN forces. Each side lost a man in the fighting. Team Susi retreated to Haekesak in Atambua, West Timor, and then re-infiltrated through Asulau and Matarobu-Borro in Ermera.²⁴ At least 70 civilians were killed in the fighting.²⁵

Indonesia's military pressure continued. On 14 September, Indonesian special forces and their local East Timorese allies (known as 'partisans') attacked towns in the western districts of Ermera, Bobonaro and Covalima. A combined group of specially trained 'monkeys' and Indonesian special forces entered Batugade but met fierce resistance by FRETILIN, which expelled them on 24 September. The local population had been hostile to Indonesia, providing vital intelligence and supplies to FRETILIN. Indonesia then landed an amphibious task force of 400 marines and other troops and vehicles at Atapupu on 2 October. The marines moved immediately to reinforce Indonesian positions near the border. Finally, on 7 October, a force of 100 special forces troops and APODETI fighters retook Batugade, triggering an international armed conflict to which the 1949 Geneva Conventions applied.

President Suharto continued to resist pressure from General Panggabean, Major-General Murdani and other military commanders to invade East Timor conventionally. He preferred the strategy advocated by Major-General Ali Murtopo: establish small enclaves just inside East Timor, mount small offensive actions from them, and make FRETILIN's position in East Timor untenable. After his forces had captured Batugade, he agreed to a 'strengthening of Indonesian military elements' and a 'changed Indonesian tactical approach.'²⁶ Brigadier-General Chamid Suweno, the Commander of the Airborne Special Forces Centre, visited Indonesian-held areas in East Timor in order to see the situation for himself.²⁷

The Batugade operation was successful but hardly covert. Yet its success meant that it was likely to be repeated. As Australian intelligence reported, 'We expect the most likely Indonesian tactic to be a repetition of the method of the Batugade incident in

²⁴ The Australian intelligence assessment on which this narrative is based does not explain the precise manner in which Team Susi retreated from Ermera to Atambua. According to Dr Estevao Cabral, a scholar and former combatant, it would have been 'impossible for them to retreat using vehicles because by then, FALINTIL already controlled most of the region. By foot would have taken them a bit longer to get back.' (Personal communication).

²⁵ According to Dr Estevao Cabral, one of the FRETILIN members killed in Ermera, was Helder Monteiro – a cousin of Roque Rodrigues, a senior member of UNETIM. He was not a FALINTIL member. (Personal communication).

²⁶ NAA 13685: 15/75.

²⁷ Suweno was in fact the commander of Operation Seroja Joint Task Force Command (*Kogasgab Seroja*), which had been established by the chief of the armed forces and minister for defence and security, General Maradean Panggabean, on 31 August 1975 in order to centralize command and control of Indonesian military operations in East Timor. Under the command of Brigadier-General Suweno, *Kogasgab Seroja* would coordinate the invasion of East Timor on 7 December 1975.

the major population centres of the interior. Indonesia appears to be not unduly concerned at the likelihood that its military involvement will be exposed; it seems to believe that the advantages accruing from the successful rallying of anti-FRETILIN elements outweigh the disadvantages. FRETILIN's public exposure of Indonesian activity will no doubt gather intensity though it has been weakened by its exaggerations.²⁸ While FRETILIN had shown that its trained troops were 'a force to be reckoned with by routing the UDT forces ... and by repelling the initial Indonesian covert special forays', it would be 'unlikely to be able to withstand assaults from well-equipped and well-organised opposition forces equipped, as they now are, with automatic weapons and supported by mortars with further heavier fire-support potential.'²⁹

At this time five foreign journalists (two Australian, two British and one New Zealander) were at the town of Balibo, which was not militarily significant in itself but was on the road to the Indonesian objective of Maliana. If the foreign journalists had obtained film footage of Indonesia's military campaign and conveyed it to the outside world, the cover story would have been blown. Indonesian special forces captured and killed them on the morning of 16 October. They then dressed the corpses in military uniforms, placed guns beside them, and took photographs of them in an attempt to portray them as legitimate targets.³⁰ The attack on Balibo was part of a major coordinated attack in which six towns along the border were attacked by regular infantry, special forces, marines and partisans supported by artillery, mortars, a B-26 bomber, a C-47 gunship and some armed helicopters.³¹ There were about 3,500 Indonesian troops directly involved by mid-October. FRETILIN resistance was much more robust than the Indonesians had expected, although it was 'restricted to limited, initial opposition followed by withdrawal and the conduct of sporadic harassment.' There was 'no overall FRETILIN command and control system', and it would be unable to 'sustain conventional opposition in the face of Indonesian military pressure.'³² Nevertheless, 'one Indonesian unit [was] surrounded and taking casualties. The commander of the force ... asked for reinforcements and a helicopter gunship to provide air support and to evacuate wounded.'

FRETILIN inflicted heavy losses on the Indonesian supply line between Balibo and Maliana, where the uphill, winding road and thick vegetation favoured the use of hit-and-run ambushes. Indonesia's attacks had stalled due to its 'failure to secure the border town of Lebos.' FRETILIN's mortar attacks 'severely damaged' the Indonesian forward command post on the weekend of 18-19 October. By contrast, the Indonesian troops received a nasty surprise in battle when they discovered that 70 per cent of their mortar rounds were duds.³³ FRETILIN's troops were also exposing another Indonesian operational weakness: although special forces elements had been operating in East Timor for many months, they had failed in their task of gathering intelligence on local conditions, and on how these conditions would affect operations. It appears that Indonesian special forces were not physically fit enough to conduct high-tempo operations in East Timor's difficult terrain.

²⁸ NAA 13685: 19/75.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ NSW Coroner, *Brian Peters Inquest*, Sydney, 2007.

³¹ B. Toohey and M. Wilkinson, *The Book of Leaks*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987: 161-3).

³² NAA 13685: 24/75.

³³ B. Toohey and M. Wilkinson, *ibid.*

The killing of the five foreign journalists caused alarm in the Indonesian high command. Worried about a negative international reaction and hampered by their own logistical problems and the onset of the wet season, they called a halt to the military operation. They waited for nearly five weeks to see what the reaction would be. But there was no adverse reaction from Australia, Britain or New Zealand. This was the real 'green light'; the lack of international condemnation at the killing of five foreign journalists meant that the Indonesian military could treat the East Timorese as they wished.

FRETILIN's main concern in mid-October 1975 was the economy. The internal political conflict and the departure of the Portuguese administration to Atauro had resulted in the loss of 80 per cent of the territory's civil servants overnight. Its own officials with civil service experience had resigned from the administration several months before to undertake full-time party work. The most urgent problem was that the capture of Maliana had caused a rice shortage. Maliana was one of the most fertile areas of East Timor, and it fell to Indonesian forces just as harvesting was due to begin. In addition, more than 2000 tons of grain and other foodstuffs, imported by the Portuguese administration before the internal conflict, had failed to reach the territory. Indeed, no food supplies had reached Portuguese Timor since July. There was also a distribution problem; with few motor mechanics in the territory, transport vehicles to deliver food to the districts became unserviceable quickly. Nevertheless, although there were no physicians or engineers, FRETILIN had managed to make a go of it. They had restored some essential services to the towns, the capital was running normally, and many Chinese shops had reopened. The medical system was functioning normally again, thanks to the arrival of doctors from the Australian Society for Inter-country Aid – Timor (ASIAT) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). There were ample supplies of medicines and drugs in Dili. FRETILIN had managed to open nursing schools in Aileu and Atsabe. Australian intelligence reported that 'during this period, FRETILIN had the support of the people including many UDT supporters... FRETILIN leaders were welcomed in the main centres by Timorese crowds.' Although FRETILIN was 'not without its critics and opponents', opposition to it 'was confined to expressions of dissatisfaction rather than hostility.'³⁴

Indonesia's propaganda campaign intensified during the five weeks of relative military inactivity. Malaysia contributed its support to the propaganda campaign, with the Malaysian Prime Minister publicly declaring his support for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. He 'told a Radio Australia reporter in Adelaide on 21st October that ... he did not see how Portuguese Timor could survive as an independent country and criticized Portugal for not being sensitive enough to Indonesia's feelings on the Timor issue.'³⁵ Malaysia's Straits Times newspaper ran three articles in one week stressing East Timor's backwardness and unviability, and Portugal's incompetence. The Far Eastern Economic Review virtually invited Suharto to intervene to help East Timor by ending FRETILIN's terrorism and Portugal's irresponsibility.

³⁴ NAA 13685: JIO 1978

³⁵ NAA 13685: 23/75.

The Australian Council for Overseas Aid sent a delegation led by former Australian Consul, Jim Dunn, to Timor to try to get the Portuguese administration to meet FRETILIN and UDT for negotiations. Dunn traveled back and forth between Dili and Atauro but was unable to accomplish his mission. The foreign ministers of Portugal and Indonesia met in Rome on the weekend of 1-2 November but the slide towards an all-out invasion could not be prevented. Portugal did not take the opportunity to internationalise the issue by, for example, referring it urgently to the UN Security Council. For its part, the Indonesian government repeatedly prevented all-party talks among the East Timorese by rejecting any negotiations with FRETILIN.

Indonesian forces had achieved their first phase objective, which was the territory to the west of the line linking Batugade, Balibo and Maliana. They did not venture east of this line because FRETILIN had been re-infiltrating in strength behind Indonesian forward troops and conducting raids against their posts. At the end of October FRETILIN conducted raids into Indonesian Timor, attacking several Indonesian posts near the town of Kotabot and in villages to the west of Suai. During these raids, FRETILIN's raiding party drove quickly to the target, attacked using automatic fire and withdrew a few hours later, after superior Indonesian firepower was deployed.

The last ten days of November saw a marked increase in the operational tempo as Indonesia began moving towards its second phase objective. This involved the capture of Bobonaro and Atabae, and the establishment of headquarters there along the lines of those already set up at Batugade and Balibo in order to increase the pressure on the FRETILIN leadership in Dili. Indonesia attacked Atabae on 20 November with naval and air support. Two days later, FRETILIN launched a large counter-attack against the Indonesian position at Maliana in order to disrupt the Indonesian build-up and relieve the pressure on Atabae.³⁶ However, the Indonesian naval and air support proved decisive, as did the absence of a significant FRETILIN reserve element. Atabae was captured on 27 November.

Indonesia's military incursions and the paucity of support from other states meant that FRETILIN had been contemplating declaring independence in order to focus greater international attention on the situation in Timor. Some consideration had previously been given to declaring independence on 1 December, the anniversary of Portugal's own independence from Spain in 1640.³⁷ But the fall of Atabae meant that independence had to be declared as soon as possible. Accordingly, FRETILIN declared independence on 28 November, one day after the fall of Atabae. Many FRETILIN leaders were not present at the declaration; Juvenal Inacio, the secretary for finance and Vicente Reis, the secretary for labour and welfare, were fighting in the western districts. Alarico Fernandes, the secretary general, and Jose Ramos-Horta, the secretary for foreign affairs, were in Australia.

Indonesian forces were making progress on the battlefield but the FRETILIN leaders had succeeded in winning the ear of the Australian press, the Australian Labor Party and some sectors of Australian public opinion. FRETILIN's declaration of independence carried the prospect of international acceptance as the de facto authority in East Timor. FRETILIN now hoped to achieve recognition by a significant number

³⁶ NAA 13685: 34/75.

³⁷ The Portuguese nobility proclaimed the Duque de Braganca as King John IV of Portugal on 1 December 1640.

of states. In particular, it had established that Brazil, China, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, North Korea, North Vietnam, Sweden and Tanzania would immediately recognise it. By contrast, the Indonesians' attempts to mobilise world opinion looked incompetent. Despite its military superiority, Indonesia was now faced with an unfavourable situation. Its clandestine intervention had resulted in the wrong party taking power in East Timor. All prospect of an orderly process of integration had disappeared. Then they had bungled the politics and logistics of their armed intervention due to the President's insistence on a deniable, covert operation. Meanwhile the cost of sustaining Indonesian forces in combat operations inside East Timor and caring for refugees inside West Timor caused a heavy drain on the budget. By the time FRETILIN declared independence, Indonesia had come close to stopping the Army's training programs for lack of money.

Since Indonesia's enclave-grabbing strategy had failed to break FRETILIN's will, it began urgent preparations for a heavier intervention. This would be known as Operation Seroja ('Lotus') – the full-scale invasion of East Timor on 7th December 1975. Indonesia's war planners intended to mount an amphibious tactical lodgement and seize Baucau and Dili simultaneously, while its cavalry units and battalion combat teams in the western districts would make a concurrent main-force drive eastwards along the main roads. Indonesia laid the political ground for Operation Seroja by having its East Timorese allies – UDT, APODETI, KOTA and Trabalhista – issue a 'Proclamation of Integration' accusing FRETILIN of obstructing a peaceful solution and asking the Indonesian government and people to integrate East Timor into Indonesia³⁸.

Once again, Suharto's insistence that the invasion be presented to the outside world as Indonesian 'volunteers' assisting indigenous East Timorese created severe complications for the campaign. Not only would the military invasion be badly handled, but Indonesia's denial that it had officially authorised military action prevented it from defending itself properly in the UN, where it was criticised by its non-aligned friends among the Group of 77.

Operation Seroja

A few days before the invasion, Indonesia's foreign ministry delivered one-on-one briefings to selected members of the diplomatic corps in Jakarta. It told the ambassadors of the US, the USSR, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Papua New Guinea and the ASEAN countries that events had forced it into a position where it might become involved in East Timor very soon. Indonesia, it told them, would be looking to her friends for understanding in the difficult days ahead. It would restore law and order in East Timor, and was then prepared to conduct an 'act of self-determination' of some kind and would consider United Nations involvement. President Suharto would make these points to US President Ford in person on the eve of the invasion. He told Ford, who was making a brief visit to Indonesia accompanied by his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, 'We want your understanding if we deem

³⁸ This proclamation has since been known as the Balibo Declaration. Although said to have been proclaimed at Balibo, witnesses to its signing as well as its signatories later testified that it was drafted in Jakarta and signed in a Bali hotel under coercive circumstances. Portugal rejected both Fretilin's independence declaration and the Balibo Declaration.

it necessary to take rapid or drastic action.’ Ford replied, ‘We will understand and will not press you on the issue. We understand the problem you have and the intentions you have.’ Kissinger informed Suharto that ‘we would be able to influence the reaction in America if whatever happens, happens after we return... If you have made plans, we will do our best to keep everyone quiet until after the President returns home’. He asked Suharto if he anticipated a ‘long guerilla war’, knowing that a long campaign would quickly attract scrutiny by the US Congress. Suharto acknowledged that there ‘will probably be a small guerilla war’ but didn’t predict its duration. After its diplomats had cleared the political decks, Indonesia’s military moved into action.

The structure of the attacking force

With a strength of 423,000 Regulars (Army 230,000, Navy 40,000, Air Force 33,000 and Police 120,000), the Indonesian Armed Forces, the Armed Forces were, on paper at least, one of the largest militaries in the region. The standard of training and efficiency were low in the Navy and the Air Force. A shortage of funds meant that HANKAM was unable to replace its obsolete or unserviceable ships and aircraft. Indonesia had prioritised economic development over military spending.

Since 1974 the Indonesian Army had been reorganising its combat forces in order to create independent brigades groups. Each brigade group would consist of three infantry battalions, one field artillery battalion, an engineer company and a cavalry company. The Army’s strategic component was KOSTRAD, its Strategic Reserve Command, with 15,000 troops. KOSTRAD’s principal strike force was two airborne brigades (the 17th and 18th Airborne Brigades), each with three airborne battalions. It also had one mechanised brigade consisting of a cavalry battalion and a tank battalion, and combat-support and logistic units. The airborne brigades were being progressively re-equipped with modern rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, recoilless rifles, mortars and armoured vehicles under the US Military Aid Program. KOSTRAD’s commander was Major General Leo Lopulisa, a former military attaché in Canberra. The Army also had a Special Forces Command with 4,000 troops organised into four battalion-sized operating groups.³⁹ The first two groups were primarily para-commando; the third was a training group; the fourth consisted of covert operations specialists.

The Navy had one operational submarine, seven frigates and ten landing ships, which were the mainstay of its amphibious force. Its merchant fleet played an important role in supplementing its naval logistic capacity during the invasion of East Timor. About 80% of all the ships involved in the operation were over 20 years old and near the ends of their working lives. However, the Indonesian Navy was prepared to deploy ships that Western navies would consider unacceptable, and which would be likely to be liabilities in a hostile environment. Apart from its troop transportation role, the Navy’s main contribution to the conventional war was through its Marine Corps, which had about 13,000 troops, making it one of the largest marine corps in South East Asia. Although it was organizationally part of the Navy, this unit was a strategic asset under the direct command of the Chief of the Defence Force. Many of its officers and enlisted men had been trained at US Marine Corps schools and bases. The Fleet Marine Force (Pasukan Komando Armada, or PASKOARMA) was able to

³⁹ NAA 13685: Indonesia Military Study dated March 1977.

deploy three battalion-group landing teams for amphibious assault operations. The Marine Corps' weaknesses were a lack of standardised weapons and equipment, which increased their logistical burden. Although they were supposed to be an amphibious strike force, their amphibious vehicles were in need of replacement. This was the result of Indonesia's post-Sukarno defence policy, which placed a low priority on the maintenance of an amphibious strike capability.

The Air Force was poorly equipped because the Sukarno government had acquired most aircraft from Soviet Bloc countries. When the Suharto Government came to power, the USSR suspended its military assistance, causing a sharp decline in the effectiveness of the air force. The most important aircraft were the C-130 (Hercules), which provided most of the air transport, and the OV-10 (Bronco), which provided Indonesia's ground-attack and close air support capabilities. The air force was hampered by relatively low technical proficiency. For example, there was a shortage of navigators because two Dakota flying classrooms had crashed, killing the entire class, all the instructors and all the airborne training equipment.

Foreign military assistance

According to secret assessments by Australian intelligence, Indonesia received 'the greater part of her military aid from the US, and the remainder from Australia.' The former included direct grants, credit sales and transfer from excess stocks. Between 1969 and 1978 US military aid was US\$352 million. Indonesia also bought additional US equipment over and above what it received through the aid program. At first, US military aid was designed to support civic action projects carried out by the Indonesian military. After 1971 it was 'mainly concerned with the re-equipment of combat units and supporting services.' Australia provided military aid – mainly in the form of equipment – in a series of three-year programs: A\$26 million from July 1972 to June 1975 and A\$31 million from July 1975 to June 1978.

The Suharto regime acquired foreign military equipment as follows:

Armaments	Country of origin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • V-150 armoured cars, • C-130 (Hercules) transport aircraft, • F-51 (Mustang) ground-attack aircraft, • OV-10 (Bronco) ground-attack aircraft, • T-33 (Shooting Star) trainer aircraft, • T-34C (Turbomentor) trainer aircraft, • Bell 204 and 205 (Iroquois) helicopters • UH-34-D (Choctaw) helicopters. • On order: F-5E and F-5F fighter aircraft and A-4 (Skyhawk) attack aircraft. 	USA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrol boats, • Sabre aircraft, • Nomad aircraft⁴⁰, and • Sioux helicopters. 	Australia

⁴⁰ Before the invasion began, Australia had agreed to sell Nomad aircraft to Indonesia. Once the invasion occurred, Mr. Hertasning, the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, met Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock on 16 December 1975 and gave him 'an undertaking that the Nomad aircraft purchased from Australia would not be used in East Timor'. However, Australia's Prime Minister,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fokker F-27 (Troopship) transport aircraft. • On order: three corvettes.⁴¹ 	The Netherlands
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BO-105 (Bolkow) helicopters. • On order: two submarines 	West Germany
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CASA-212 light transport aircraft 	Spain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puma helicopters, • refurbishment of AMX-13 light tanks. 	France
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decca air-defence radars. • On order: Hawk aircraft. 	UK

The capture of Dili and Baucau

Indonesia's military commanders wanted to mount simultaneous attacks on Dili, the main target, and Baucau, the second largest town in East Timor and the location of its international airfield. However, a shortage of air and naval assault assets meant that simultaneous attacks were impossible. They launched a combined air and sea assault against Dili on 7 December. A similar operation against Baucau followed on 10 December.

The assault on Dili began under cover of darkness. At 2 a.m. on 7 December 1975, several Indonesian warships were seen off the coast. FRETILIN shut off Dili's power supply at 3 a.m., leaving the city in darkness. Contrary to their orders, some Indonesian warships opened fire immediately, losing the element of surprise. All warships were then ordered to open fire. Meanwhile, 400 Indonesian marines from the 1st Marine Unit landed in the western part of Dili. They secured the area but then came under naval bombardment as Indonesian warships fired on what they thought were FRETILIN units.

Nine Hercules aircraft began dropping parachutists over Dili at 6 a.m. These parachutists were drawn from KOSTRAD and Kopassandha.⁴² In the months before the invasion, some Kopassandha officers had visited Dili several times on false passports to get a first-hand look at potential drop zones. Despite this reconnaissance, some landed in the sea and drowned, some came under enemy fire, and some came under fire from confused Indonesian troops when they landed. Unnerved by these initial failures, Brigadier-General Chamid Suweno, the commander of Operation Seroja Joint Task Force Command, cancelled the planned afternoon parachute drops.

FRETILIN's defence was not based on fixed positions; rather, they conducted a mobile defence at first followed by a fighting withdrawal to the hills overlooking Dili. From there, they used snipers and mortars against Indonesian troops, confining them within the Dili town area for about five days. FRETILIN's tactics had an unsettling

Foreign Minister, senior departmental heads and the Australian Embassy in Jakarta became aware that Australian-supplied Nomads were in fact deployed to East Timor. The Australian Government then supplied further Nomads to the Indonesian military. Most documents dealing with this subject remain classified, despite the thirty-year rule.

⁴¹ On 21 August 1975 the Netherlands Government issued an export licence for three corvettes the first of which was due in July 1979.

⁴² On 23 May 1985, Kopassandha (Komando Pasukan Khusus Sandhi Yudha, or Covert War Special Forces Command) was restructured along the lines of the British Special Air Service and renamed Kopassus (Komando Pasukan Khusus, or Special Forces Command).

effect on Indonesian troops. Their unloading operations in the harbor were disrupted and they were unable to capture Dili despite their material superiority for five and a half days. Finally, by dusk on 12 December, Dili came under Indonesian control. At least 81 FRETILIN troops were killed in the intense fighting for control of the city. Indonesia reinforced its troops as quickly as transport facilities allowed. Within two weeks of the initial assault, some 5500 troops had been deployed to Dili.

The attack on Baucau was not launched until the morning of 10 December, mainly because of the delay in capturing Dili. Parachutists from KOSTRAD's 17 Airborne Infantry Brigade, then commanded by Feisal Tanjung, and two battalions of 'green berets' from the Siliwangi Division (also known as the 'inti' or 'Kujang' troops), participated in the Baucau operation⁴³. Indonesian forces showed that they lacked experience with major coordinated operations. 328 Airborne Battalion, part of the army's elite strike force, was the centerpiece of the assault on Baucau. Australian intelligence analysts evaluated its performance in order to draw lessons about the general state of readiness and overall capability of the Indonesian army. They reported that the initial parachute drop was 'badly planned and poorly executed' and 'if opposition from FRETILIN had been better organized and coordinated, there would have been significant Indonesian casualties'. Instead, FRETILIN offered no organized resistance at Baucau. Its 'elements withdrew in some confusion, probably to carry out a predetermined tactic of guerrilla resistance'.

Logistic support to 328 Airborne Battalion was poor:

Field rations were inadequate, and at times troops had to supplement rations from local resources. This affected relations with the civil population. Troop asked their families in Java to send 'comfort' items such as cigarettes, supplementary food items, and clothing. The troops received special combat allowances and family-separation allowances, but the allowances were not enough to cover additional expenses. Forward resupply early in the battalion's operations was a serious weakness. Because of the inadequate road system in areas in which the battalion operated, troops in forward areas were supplied irregularly and they suffered from shortages of necessary equipment. During the battalion's tour, aerial resupply on a large scale was not used.

328 Airborne Battalion's supply and maintenance problems were at first aggravated by the difficulties the Indonesian command in Timor had in maintaining a regular flow of supplies from Java through West Timor to the operations area. Goods, particularly attractive and resaleable items, frequently disappeared in transit. The forward delivery of essential field supplies gradually improved, and by the end of the battalion's tour it was able to meet promptly the demands of its forward elements for ammunition and fuel resupply.

The Baucau operation showed up the flaws in Indonesia's joint-service cooperation. Its junior officers' lack of initiative and flexibility was a result of its training system, which discouraged delegation of authority. However, since Indonesian troops

⁴³ The official 17 Airborne Brigade account of the Baucau operation stated that three airdrops were undertaken.

captured Baucau despite logistic chaos and without major atrocities or lootings, the Indonesian commander was promoted in the field.

Consolidation after the initial assaults

Immediately after the capture of Dili, Indonesian forces moved south to secure the high ground. Their objective was Aileu, a FRETILIN headquarters area about 20 kilometres from Dili. On 26 December they captured the village of Remexio, about 10 kilometres south of Dili. Three days later they captured Aileu. On 31 December a FRETILIN force counter-attacked but was forced to withdraw to the south. With the fall of Aileu, FRETILIN's morale fell too. Its leaders realized that in the absence of international assistance they could not prevent an eventual Indonesian capture of all major population centres.

Meanwhile, as FRETILIN forces defending Baucau withdrew towards Viqueque, Indonesia concentrated on gaining control of the remaining major population centres in East Timor. Viqueque came under Indonesian control on the afternoon of 24 January 1976. But Indonesian forces could not advance quickly along the road north from Betano and south from Aileu despite the lack of determined FRETILIN resistance. Suai was captured in the last week of January 1976 because Major-General Benny Murdani had made it a priority to capture all major population centres as quickly as possible. Lautem and Los Palos also fell to Indonesian forces, meaning that FRETILIN controlled only two small airfields in East Timor – Same and Lore. However, by 7 February Same and Lore were in Indonesian hands.

Indonesian forces steadily consolidated their military control and established an administrative structure. Its troops implemented a strategy of 'consolidation and stabilization' in the areas they controlled. At the end of January 1976, there were 22,000 Indonesian troops in East Timor. 19,000 were involved in combat operations and 5,000 in the administrative and territorial infrastructure. There were also 2,000 East Timorese partisans. One month later, Indonesian troop strength had increased to 27,000 supported by an East Timorese force of 3000. By June 1976, there were approximately 32,000 combat troops in 28 battalions, supported by some 3,000 Timorese partisans and civil defence personnel.

By this time the last major population centres were captured. Indonesia's military planners realized that it would take a lot more time and many more troops to extend their control to the countryside. Accepting these realities, they therefore decided to use East Timor as a venue where their combat units could get as much operational experience as possible. They arranged for specific formations and units to complete six-month tours of duty in specific parts of East Timor. This policy would eventually develop into a well-established system of annual rotations to pre-designated sectors: Sumatra-based⁴⁴ and West Java-based⁴⁵ battalions would be rotated through Baucau and Manatuto; Central Java-based⁴⁶ battalions would be rotated through Viqueque; East Java-based⁴⁷ battalions would be rotated through Dili and Liquisa; Kalimantan-

⁴⁴ Kodams 1 and 2.

⁴⁵ Kodam 3

⁴⁶ Kodam 4

⁴⁷ Kodam 5

based⁴⁸ battalions would be rotated through Lautem; Sulawesi-based⁴⁹ and Nusatenggara-based⁵⁰ battalions would be rotated through Aileu, Ermera, Bobonaro and Covalima. The policy of allocating specific units to specific areas was designed to improve corporate knowledge of the area of operations and to build a sense of continuity, tradition and esprit de corps.

Indonesia planned to incorporate East Timor as its 27th province on 17 August 1976 – the anniversary of its own independence day. However, that date coincided with the reassembling of the Parliament of Australia in Canberra. Although Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock were willing to recognise Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor, they were facing considerable opposition from the Australian public. They therefore privately requested Suharto to bring the date forward by one month, stressing that 'the date of 17 August for any announcement involved them in particular embarrassment as it is the day on which Parliament is to reassemble.' Accordingly, Indonesia announced the integration on 17 July 1976, during the Australian Parliamentary recess.

FRETILIN's strategy after the Indonesian consolidation

FRETILIN had made a radio announcement just before the invasion that East Timor would be divided into seven Sectores (Sectors), which would replace all administrative regions created by the Portuguese government:

Fronteira Norte (Northern Border)	Ermera, Liquica and part of Bobonaro
Fronteira Sul (Southern Border)	Covalima and part of Bobonaro
Centro Norte (North Central)	Manatuto, Aileu and Dili
Centro Leste (East Central)	Baucau and Viqueque
Centro Sul (South Central)	Manufahi and Ainaro
Ponta Leste (Eastern end)	Lautem
Ocidental (Western)	Oecusse

With the exception of Oecusse, this was the basis of FRETILIN's resistance structure. At a national conference at Soibada in the eastern interior from 15 May to 2 June 1976, it divided the areas outside direct Indonesian military control into six sectors, each with a political commissar and several assistant commissars with specific areas of responsibility such as agriculture, health and education.

Sector	District	Commissar
Fronteira Norte	Ermera, Liquica, north Bobonaro	Helio Pina
Fronteira Sul	Covalima, south Bobonaro	Cesar Correia
Centro Norte	Manatuto, Aileu, Dili	Joao Bosco Soares
Centro Leste	Baucau, Viqueque	Vicente dos Reis
Centro Sul	Manufahi, Ainaro	Hamis Bassarewan
Ponta Leste	Lautem	Juvenal Inacio

⁴⁸ Kodam 6

⁴⁹ Kodam 7

⁵⁰ Kodam 9

FRETILIN ordered all sectors to increase agricultural production because the developing food shortage in the countryside was having an adverse effect on FRETILIN's military operations. The sectors' military commanders deferred to the authority of the political commissar in accordance with the 'política comanda fuzil' principle (politics commands the gun). All political commissars were members of the FRETILIN Central Committee. In addition, the chief of the armed resistance (FALINTIL – *Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional Timor Leste* or Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor) as well as the minister and two deputy ministers of defence were also members of the FRETILIN Central Committee.

One problem identified at the Soibada conference was that military commanders were focusing on defending their own zones but not paying enough attention to opportunities that arose for coordinating their activities with neighboring zones. FALINTIL was therefore reorganized so as to create sector commands, regional commands and zone commands, each with a commander who understood the importance of coordinating resistance activities with commanders in other zones. A second tier of fighters was also established. Known as the Self-Defence Forces, these fighters were locals who received basic military training but were often armed only with bows and arrows rather than automatic rifles.

In many places the reorganization was, as Australian intelligence reported, 'little more than the theoretical abstractions of a dedicated band at the centre of FRETILIN's resistance'. However there is no doubt that it paid dividends in most areas outside Indonesian control. Many more local villagers joined the armed resistance. FRETILIN was able to take advantage of security lapses to harass Indonesian outposts and ambush supply convoys. By December 1976, the heavy rains that characterize the second half of the northwest monsoon season were helping FRETILIN's fightback. As these rains settled in, heavy landslides forced the closure of roads that the heavy Indonesian logistic traffic had already degraded. Indonesia's military logisticians soon realized that they were unable to cope with the deterioration of East Timor's arterial roads. Combat units were unable to receive timely resupplies, and Indonesian military capabilities suffered. Although there were 15 infantry and marine battalions in East Timor, their activities were confined to small-scale local patrols. Road-building in the name of 'development' would become a priority for the occupation forces.

The war against East Timor forced an increase in Indonesian military spending; the 1976-77 government estimates allowed for a total expenditure of US\$8.5 billion, with a military estimate of 15% (US\$1.26 billion). Despite this, FRETILIN had managed to hold the Indonesian forces to a military stalemate by the end of 1976. It was able to organize a functioning society in the mountains. It could provide enough food crops and basic health care to the many tens of thousands of civilians who had accompanied them there. According to Major-General Julius Henuhili, a West Timorese who was Commandant of Indonesia's Armed Forces Staff College, 'the Timorese will fight to the death if they have enough food and pride. The Dutch formerly recruited Timorese,

Manadonese and Ambonese on this principle. FRETILIN has enough pride, and while they still control the countryside they will have enough to eat.⁵¹

Indonesia's military commanders in East Timor were also prevented from trying to take back the initiative by the demands of the impending May 1977 general elections. About 14,000 combat troops were deployed from East Timor to provide pre-election security in other parts of Indonesia. FRETILIN thus had the opportunity to recruit, retrain and reorganize. It took advantage of the reduced Indonesian military pressure to recruit and train small groups of anti-Indonesian villagers who, alongside FALINTIL forces, harassed Indonesian positions and intensified anti-Indonesian propaganda. FRETILIN resistance at this time was most effective in the area southeast of Liquica and west of Ermera. The centerpiece of FRETILIN's resistance activities was Operation Fazenda, which demonstrated that it had been able to develop a network of agents and informants to provide detailed information on Indonesian movements.

Airpower after the May 1977 general election

Once the May 1977 elections were over, however, Indonesia hit back with a vengeance. According to Australian intelligence:

In the Eastern Sector it soon became evident that things were going badly for FRETILIN. Thousands of villagers surrendered to the Indonesian authorities and many weapons were handed in. There had never been any reason to believe that FRETILIN was well organized in this sector; this assessment was confirmed by the rapid disintegration of FRETILIN resistance in the area. Towards the end of June 1977 the general trends that had been evident in the east began to emerge in the Central Sector. Although the level of surrenders in the Central Sector never reached the proportions of those in the Eastern Sector, it was evident that FRETILIN was suffering setbacks... The Western Sector continued to remain the only area in which FRETILIN groups seemed to be organized and concentrated. Although FRETILIN groups in the Western Sector maintained some degree of cooperation and flexibility, their capabilities remained limited. Indonesian efforts to deal with FRETILIN in the west by intensifying quick-strike operations, overall failed to achieve the desired results.

Starting in August 1977, Indonesia made an all-out effort to eradicate FRETILIN forces, deploying OV-10F Bronco aircraft that it had acquired through the US Department of Defense foreign military sales program. Sixteen Broncos were introduced into the Air Force's No. 3 Squadron in early 1976, but it would be another 12 months before they became fully operational.⁵² The significance of the Bronco was that it could be operated from the most rudimentary airfields, and its slow flying speed meant that it could identify and attack villages more effectively. It had been designed specifically for such operations. Its manufacturer, North American Aircraft Group, had entered it in the US Navy's design competition for a light armed

⁵¹ For more on this topic, see C. Fernandes, *The Independence of East Timor*. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011).

⁵² NAA 13685: 20/75.

reconnaissance aircraft specific to counter-insurgency missions. It was the only operational aircraft dedicated to Indonesia's ground-attack role.

The Indonesian Air Force's Broncos were modified with two 12.7 mm machine-gun pods mounted on the inner sponson attachments to increase their firepower. The maximum weapon load of the Bronco was 1600 kilograms, including up to four 250-kilogram bombs. The main items of air ordnance were Mk-81 (100-kg) bombs; Mk-82 (500-kg) bombs, both HI drag and LO drag; 2.75-inch FFAR rockets, with either HE fragmentation or HE anti-tank warheads; and napalm. The close-support missions against East Timor were controlled by a front-line 'Visual Control Centre' rather than by either Forward Air Control aircraft or other airborne liaising aircraft. The Bronco would communicate direct with the Visual Control Centre using a PRC-77 (man-portable VHF FM transceiver) carried in the cockpit.

According to Australian intelligence, the Indonesian aircraft deployed in East Timor had a very low use-rate, mainly because of poor logistic support. However, shortages of aviation-fuel and ammunition resupply did not seem to result in the cancellation of any operations. Transport aircraft were often supplemented by a number of medium helicopters and smaller aircraft on loan from Pelita Air Services. The Indonesian military's offensives destroyed the liberated zones, where the population lived alongside FRETILIN, and the support bases, which surrounded the liberated zones. The offensives targeted agricultural areas and other food sources such as livestock. The Indonesian Air Force used napalm in flagrant disregard of the laws of war. According to survivors who testified before East Timor's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR):

The army burned the tall grass. The fire would spread quickly, and the whole area would be ablaze as if it had been doused in gasoline. Those of us who were surrounded didn't have time to escape because the flames were so big. Their strategy trapped many people... After we got out, I could still see the old people who had been left behind by their families. They were in a sitting position. The men put on new clothes, hung *belak* [crescent-shaped metal chest-ornament worn around the neck] on their necks and wore *caibauk* [crescent-shape crown]. The women had put on gold earrings and gold necklaces, prepared their *konde* [traditional way of styling hair] and wore black veils as if they were going to mass. We just looked at them but couldn't do anything. The enemy was still after us.⁵³

Tens of thousands of civilians died as a result of these dry-season offensives, whose timing was influenced by the weather conditions in East Timor. Indonesia's calculations were that the rains would seriously affect operations by the end of January 1978, as they had done previously at the end of January 1977. Therefore it had to eliminate FRETILIN between August 1977 and the end of January 1978, otherwise FRETILIN would once again be allowed the opportunity to regroup, recruit and retrain.

⁵³ Maria da Costa, Testimony to CAVR National Public Hearing on Forced Displacement and Famine Dili, 28-29 July 2003.

A military-induced famine

On 16 August 1977 President Suharto announced a general amnesty for any FRETILIN members who voluntarily surrendered to the Indonesian Armed Forces by 31 December 1977 at the latest. The offer also applied to FRETILIN elements under detention and to those who had fled to other countries. Fratricidal conflict arose within FRETILIN's ranks as a result of disagreements about the presence of civilians. Many Falintil troops who had served in the Portuguese army believed that civilians should surrender rather than stay with the armed resistance in the mountains. Some FRETILIN leaders who operated according to a political concept known as 'protracted people's war' took the opposite view, believing that the war was a social and political revolution that could erase classes; it had to involve the people, who might otherwise be forced back into feudal subjugation. These disagreements were never resolved. Rather, they were simply overtaken by Indonesia's military offensives.

As early as April 1977, there were credible reports that the food situation in East Timor was growing perilous. As Indonesia's military operations increased in intensity from August 1977 onwards, agricultural areas and other food sources such as livestock were destroyed. Illness and food shortages were forcing civilians to leave the hills and make their way to Indonesian forces in order to surrender. The Indonesian military's first priority was to destroy the resistance, not to care for the population. The surrendering population was first detained in transit camps and later dispatched to resettlement camps. Transit camps were located in close proximity to the local military bases. East Timorese collaborators from APODETI helped the Indonesian military to identify members of the resistance in the transit camps. Sometimes these collaborators identified people who were not connected to the resistance but against whom they had held grudges prior to the invasion. Torture and rape were common during the interrogation process. People identified as members of the resistance were either executed immediately or interrogated at greater length and then executed. Female relatives of resistance leaders were often made the sexual slaves of Indonesian military officers.

The critical period for East Timor began in 1978. The famine was gathering force, the armed resistance was on the verge of defeat, many overseas supporters were demoralized, and the prospects of success appeared to have faded. In Australia, where most of the international reaction had taken place, the government extended *de facto* recognition of Indonesia's sovereignty in January 1978. Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock announced that Indonesia's effective control over all major administrative centres of East Timor was 'a reality with which we must come to terms... Accordingly, the Government has decided that although it remains critical of the means by which integration was brought about it would be unrealistic to continue to refuse to recognise *de facto* that East Timor is part of Indonesia.'⁵⁴ Some public support had existed in Australia as a result of the deaths of foreign journalists at Balibo and the sympathy of Australia's World War Two veterans. The Australian government's recognition of the takeover dashed the hopes of many that Indonesia might be pressured to eventually withdraw. In Portugal, East Timor was seen as an

⁵⁴ H. Krieger (ed.), *East Timor and the International Community: Basic Documents*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 333).

unfortunate casualty of the fall of the Portuguese Empire. Many East Timorese in Portugal had sided with UDT, and the difficulties in the diaspora allowed the Portuguese government to avoid having to take meaningful action. East Timor's political destiny was looking more and more like that of West Papua or the South Moluccas. Meanwhile, the famine grew inside the territory.

The transit camps were not equipped to care for the welfare of the surrendering population. Often they were little more than huts made from palm thatch with no toilets. In many cases, the only shelter in the camps was under trees. No medical care was available. Since the detainees' food sources had been destroyed and they had walked for days in order to surrender, they were already in a weakened state when they arrived at the transit camps. Diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea and tuberculosis ensured that most people who were sick died. Detainees were forbidden to grow or search for food themselves but were given a small amount of food on arrival. This food was often distributed after extorting family heirlooms, jewelry, traditional beads or sexual favours. In some cases, the detainees went into protein shock after eating the food, resulting in chills, fever, bronchial spasms, acute emphysema, vomiting and diarrhoea. After a period of three months (the exact duration in each camp depended on the prevailing policy there), the detainees were dispatched to resettlement camps. Sometimes they were not sent anywhere; the same transit camps were re-designated as resettlement camps.

In mid-1978, just as the famine was hitting with full force, Indonesian officials told Australian Ambassador Tom Critchley and First Secretary David Irvine that some East Timorese who surrendered 'could not even stand for lack of food.' And in August 1978, two Australian diplomats were shown photographs of the condition of the refugees in Bobonaro. The photographs depicted many sick, starving and malnourished women and children, typical of famine scenes throughout the world. They were told that the condition of the refugees, many of whom had in any case arrived in a desperate condition, was extremely poor. The Indonesian authorities were 'doing almost nothing' to alleviate the situation. They were told that at least 1.5% of the refugees were dying monthly and that in some groups the death rate was around 8% per month'. The Australian ambassador visited East Timor along with ten other foreign ambassadors from 6 to 8 September 1978. The ambassadors were briefed that approximately 125,000 people had come down from the mountains, and that as many as a quarter of them were suffering from cholera, malaria, tuberculosis and advanced malnutrition. The Ambassador reported in confidence that the visit had been carefully controlled by the Indonesian authorities, who were clearly anxious that the tragic plight of many of the refugees seen should not be blamed on their administration. Many ambassadors came away shocked by the condition of the refugees, and one ambassador said that the children in one camp reminded him of victims of an African famine.

By late 1979, there would be approximately 300,000 to 370,000 people in the camps. About 200,000 East Timorese died during this period.

Operation Pamungkas

As the dry season approached around April 1978, Indonesia began to plan a new major offensive – Operation Pamungkas. This operation saw Indonesian forces in East Timor climb to a total strength of 33,000 – the greatest number since July 1976. The aim of Operation Pamungkas, which involved 33 Infantry and Marine Corps battalions, was to eliminate FRETILIN before the UN General Assembly vote in November 1978. Indonesia believed that it could regain the support of non-aligned countries by arguing that East Timor had been successfully integrated into Indonesia, and that there was no effective FRETILIN resistance any more.

During Operation Pamungkas the Indonesian military allocated target numbers 4, 5, 6 and 7 to specific parts of East Timor. Each target was to be destroyed by a specified date. (Target numbers 1 to 3 were probably in the north-west and south-west of East Timor and had been cleared during the 1977 dry-season offensive). Indonesia aimed to capture FRETILIN's major stronghold in the eastern sector by 30th November. The target areas were as follows:

Target Number	Area	Location
4	Urahu	South-west of Dili
5	Remexio	South of Dili
5	Lequidoe	South of Remexio
5	Fatuberliu	South of Lequidoe
6	Lacluta	South-west of Baucau
6	Mundo-Perdido	East of the central sector
7	Luro	East of Baucau
7	Matebian	South of Baucau

According to Australian intelligence:

Target 4 was to have been achieved by the end of May, and targets 5 to 7 were to have been destroyed between June and November with forces sweeping from the north-west eastwards through the centre of the province. Target 6 was to be the finale with FRETILIN remnants being herded into Lacluta in the eastern sector, and then eliminated. The plan was to attack FRETILIN in each of its traditional havens as it had done after previous limited Indonesian operations. Indonesia planned to make greater use of air resources, both in the strike and mobility roles, in order to achieve the maximum effect in the offensive. This was an innovation in a campaign marked so far by the poor mobility of Indonesian ground forces.

Up to and including April 1978, Indonesia focused its search-and-destroy operations on the far north-western corner of the western sector. There was little FRETILIN activity in this area subsequently. In May 1978 Indonesian forces targeted Falintil combatants and their support networks in the Western Sector, seeking them out and engaging them in battle with the aim of either destroying them or sweeping them into the Central Sector, where they could be isolated. In June the operation spread to the Central Sector not because they had completed the job in the Western Sector but because their timetable had called for them to move after one month. Inflexible timetables prevented Indonesian field commanders from clearing their areas of responsibility before moving to other areas. According to Australian intelligence,

‘perhaps the greatest weakness was the failure to consolidate operational gains. Efforts to adhere to rigid timetables often resulted in the movement of troops prematurely from a particular area of operations. Pressure was therefore taken off FRETILIN forces, and they were able to regroup and to continue harassing Indonesian lines of communication.’

FRETILIN forces in the western and central sectors avoided contact in order to survive until the wet season brought about respite from Indonesian operations. (Arsenio Horta, who had been detained by FRETILIN on three occasions near his family’s farm in Barique, had not seen any Indonesian forces in his area until his eventual capture by ABRI in August 1978. But FRETILIN did not have any difficulty in picking him up on the three occasions they decided to do so.) By contrast, FRETILIN inflicted relatively heavy casualties on experienced Indonesian troops in the eastern sector, particularly in the final three weeks of November 1978, as Indonesian forces focused on their timetable of capturing Luro and Matebian. However, although FRETILIN’s efficient intelligence network continued to give timely warning of impending Indonesian operations, it suffered heavy casualties and lost large quantities of weapons and equipment. Its command-and-control structure was severely damaged. Indonesian forces captured large numbers of FRETILIN members in an exhausted and debilitated state. It became apparent that ‘FRETILIN was in a desperate situation, and that its members were suffering from food shortages and exposure’. However, Operation Pamungkas did not eliminate FRETILIN resistance. It ‘failed in its aim of driving FRETILIN remnants into a final killing ground. Those that were missed in the initial sweep were able to go to ground and live to fight another day’. They would continue to adopt survival tactics and to harass Indonesian lines of communication.

Signals intelligence operations against FRETILIN forces

Indonesia’s signals intelligence operations against East Timor had begun in December 1974. It continued to intercept and exploit FRETILIN’s radio communications till December 1978. During Operation Komodo it sent a small monitoring and observation team from 2 Detachment of the HANKAM Communications Service to the HANKAM Forward Command Post at Kupang. This detachment was unable to pick up all broadcasts emanating from East Timor, however, and so another detachment was sent to Atambua in April 1975. Both teams were under the direct control of the Head of HANKAM Communications Service. The Atambua station continued to function until July 1976. The focus of Indonesia’s signals intelligence operations during Operation Flamboyan was to find FRETILIN’s fighting elements in the border areas and identify their command and control structure based on their radio communications. This process, known as SIGINT development, would remain a focus of Indonesia’s signals intelligence operations during Operation Seroja. During the 1978 dry-season offensive Indonesia also attempted ‘communications fingerprinting’ i.e. trying to work out which military commander or radio operator habitually operated a particular radio set.

At first, the Indonesian army’s radio direction-finding (RDF) capability was often unsuccessful due to faulty equipment, poor training and inexperience. The Marine Corps deployed their own RDF team in February 1977. It too was unsuccessful because of faulty equipment, and it was replaced by further Marine Corps teams. A

key aim of Indonesia's RDF teams was to locate Radio Maubere – a mobile station operated by the FRETILIN leadership. The station functioned as a command station, but it also broadcast FRETILIN propaganda. According to Australian intelligence, 'although propaganda broadcasts were made almost daily between 1100 and 1200 GMT on a fixed frequency of 3805 kHz, the Indonesian RDF teams were unable to locate the station by RDF'. The Radio Maubere transmitter changed its location constantly, obstructing Indonesian efforts to locate and capture it. However it could not have moved too far due to the difficult terrain, and since it broadcast propaganda for an hour almost daily, Australian intelligence believed that 'it should not have been too difficult to take bearings on the station and to keep a log of its movements. The lack of success of the RDF teams may have been due to the fact that they were using inappropriate or poorly-serviced equipment rather than to insufficient knowledge of how to carry out their task'.

Operation Skylight

An episode known as Operation Skylight occurred towards the end of 1978. The facts of this episode are still unclear. Different people have their own understandings of what transpired. They also have their own reasons for presenting versions of the episode for public consumption. East Timor's Truth Commission described Operation Skylight as a specific operation to try to convince senior FRETILIN/Falintil leaders to surrender. Xanana Gusmao described Operation Skylight as 'Alarico's movement' (referring to Alarico Fernandes, FRETILIN's Information Minister). The FRETILIN external delegation claimed at the time that Alarico Fernandes had committed treason as a result of his lack of belief in FRETILIN's strength, and that he had abandoned and betrayed the FRETILIN Central Committee. However, the FRETILIN external delegation was headquartered in Mozambique at the time and based their views on messages conveyed to them by Australian activists who were monitoring the radio transmissions from northern Australia. They were also operating within an analytical framework that was subject to where China, the USSR, and the USA (among others) stood on any given issue. This framework does not lend itself to analytical clarity. For their part, Indonesian Army commanders have sought to portray this episode as evidence of their good tactical abilities. Australian activists listening to Mr Fernandes on the radio at the time have given slightly different accounts of what they heard and their impressions as to precisely when and how he entered Indonesian custody. For health reasons, Mr. Fernandes is not in a position to be credibly interviewed.

During these desperate times, there appeared to be two factions within the resistance in the mountains. They referred to each other as the 'communists' and 'non-communists'. Mr. Fernandes was the leader of the non-communists. He claimed that the other faction, led by Nicolau Lobato himself, had launched a campaign of terror and assassination against the non-communists. Under these circumstances, Operation Skylight was intended to achieve a peace treaty with Indonesia. Mr Fernandes would then be able to purge FRETILIN's Central Committee of the communist elements. It is unclear what these terms – communists and non-communists – meant to those who used them in that context.

Australian activists monitoring FRETILIN's radio broadcasts would usually hear from Mr Fernandes a few times each week. But in this period there was a sudden absence of about ten days, followed by transmissions from Mr Fernandes in code –

something he was at liberty to do but had rarely done in the past. He wanted certain messages passed to Jose Ramos-Horta in New York directly, without being sent to the rest of the FRETILIN external delegation in Mozambique. Australian activists associated with the Communist Party of Australia took a dim view of this request.

It is narrowly accurate – although potentially misleading, given the lack of contextual information – to say that Alarico Fernandes communicated by letter to the Indonesian Government a proposal for a peace initiative – Operation Skylight – and that, according to Australian intelligence, Jose Ramos-Horta lodged a copy of the letter with the UN at the same time. The letter called on Indonesia to withdraw its forces from the area near Remexio so that non-communist elements of FRETILIN could move there to conduct negotiations with the Indonesian authorities. Indonesia insisted on unconditional surrender, however. Much more research is required into this episode, which also led to an internal crisis for the FRETILIN external delegation in Mozambique.

Endgame

Although Operation Pamungkas did not destroy the East Timorese resistance, it achieved a major victory by killing Nicolau Lobato on 31 December 1978. Soon afterwards FRETILIN's vice-presidents, Hamis Bassarewan and Antonio Carvarinho, were also killed. Despite these morale-sapping defeats, however, FRETILIN guerrilla activity continued, and in the western sector it actually increased. The Indonesian military portrayed the death of Nicolau Lobato as a major victory and a testament to their military prowess. In fact, his death in an ambush was 'the result of information gained by chance rather than by skilled intelligence work', according to Australian intelligence. Indonesia's intelligence activities left a lot to be desired during the conventional war. Not only were their activities frustrated by a lack of qualified translators and interpreters, but their intelligence personnel were of poor quality, with a weak ability for critical analysis. According to Australian intelligence, they often distorted their tactical assessments in order to make them compatible with operational schedules. They wasted much effort as a result of wrong information and being deliberately misled by false guides.

The conventional war came to an end with the death of Mr Lobato. A number of important FRETILIN leaders surrendered. Most were systematically executed, many after being given amnesties. The consistent and widespread pattern of disappearance and execution (instead of imprisonment) was designed to prevent the re-emergence of any resistance in East Timor.

Indonesia's war aims in the invasion of East Timor were to defeat FRETILIN in battle, eliminate its leaders, suppress political organizations associated with it, and extinguish political activity at the village level. By 1979, it had defeated FRETILIN in battle and eliminated most of its senior leaders. The remnants of the resistance were reduced to a few bands of ill-equipped guerrillas who were confined to the mountains, far way from the majority of the population in the towns and villages. Indonesia was also able to extinguish political activity at the village level.

The Indonesian authorities made dramatic changes to the traditional East Timorese pattern of habitation. They forcibly closed down smaller villages that were dispersed throughout the countryside and in the mountains. To monitor the population more easily, people were required to move closer to major roads, and into towns with a higher population density than their earlier villages. Indonesia also made major changes to the pattern of food cultivation and food consumption. In late 1978, President Suharto approved an immediate start to the construction of an irrigation system in Bobonaro. The area around Bobonaro was to be turned into a rice-producing area through the construction of an irrigation system. It had been known to produce rice, peanuts, green beans, mung beans, kidney beans, soya beans, cassava, corn, pulses, tuber, coffee trees, coconut trees and other crops. However, the plan was to develop an irrigation system that would create self-sufficiency by increasing rice production. Indonesia's Department of Public Works issued a blueprint which projected an irrigated area of 2,000 hectares by 1982 and a total irrigated area of 17,000 hectares by 1985. The irrigation scheme would involve the building of four dams: the Balubo, Malibaha, Nomura I and Nomura II.

Indonesia believed that the vast majority of Timorese would accept integration but it was unable to completely suppress clandestine political organisations and supporting networks. Nor was it able to prevent the growth and endurance of international solidarity groups, without whom East Timor would have joined West Papua and the Republic of the South Moluccas as uncontested parts of Indonesia.

On 26 March 1979, the Indonesian government declared that East Timor had been pacified. Accordingly, it established Sub-regional Military Command 164 (Korem 164), which was subordinated to the Regional Military Command (Kodam), headquartered in Bali.⁵⁵ The establishment of Korem 164 was intended to show that East Timor had the same military administrative structure as Indonesia's other 26 provinces.⁵⁶ Korem 164 would serve to support Indonesia's claim that East Timor was now a normal province of Indonesia. In fact, of course, East Timor was still closed to foreigners and to non-military Indonesians. Korem 164 oversaw 13 Military District Commands (Kodim), which in turn oversaw 62 Military Sub-District Commands (Koramil). These Koramils oversaw security in East Timor's 464 villages, where the military posted a 'babinsa' (village guidance non-commissioned officer). Some villages had a village guidance team (Tim Pembina Desa, TPD). To this highly militarized structure were added two 'territorial' infantry battalions (Battalion 744 based in Dili and Battalion 745 based in Los Palos). East Timor would remain closed to the outside world until December 1988.

⁵⁵ In the early years, this was Kodam XVI. It later became known as Kodam IX following a reorganization.

⁵⁶ There were a total of forty Korem in the other 26 provinces.