

Prologue

Regulation No.2001/10 “On the Establishment of a Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor,” is very specific as to Truth Seeking with respect to the role of institutions, organizations and states, as well as external factors alongside internal factors. Section 13 (1) (iii) empowers the Commission to investigate which persons, authorities, institutions and organizations were involved in human rights violations; (iv) “whether human rights violations were the result of deliberate planning, policy or authorization on the part of a state or any of its organs, or any political organization, militia group, liberation movement or other group or individual; and (v) “the role of both internal and external factors in the conflict.”

Down through the years international actors have been the bane as well as the savior of East Timor. This submission will identify the major actors complicit with the making of the East Timor tragedy and amplify upon their roles at certain key junctures. This submission will also explore the sometimes contradictory roles of the same actors in joining a new international solidarism that eventually sanctioned a virtual humanitarian rescue of East Timor after the violence and destruction of 1999.

Even so, we must distinguish between state actors, including the major world body, the United Nations, and the role of non-state actors including the church, NGOs, and the East Timor solidarity movement. This is especially important in the East Timor case as the national interests of states, especially during the Cold War years, but even outdating the bipolar global system, widely diverged with the human rights and self-determination agenda of a spectrum of non-state actors.

Even so, as amplified below, sections of the international media performed an ambivalent role in variously defending realpolitik and in seeking truth.

While obviously, certain international actors, whether through political, military, or economic clout, exercised more leverage over the Suharto dictatorship than others, the major test imposed upon a spectrum of international actors is whether or not they supported self-determination for East Timor. Again the distinction must be made between those actors that extended lip service to this ideal and those who acted to achieve this goal. Also, we observe, a raft of liberal democracies who spoke the language of human rights did not hesitate to supply weapons and military training to the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) in full knowledge that this army was deeply complicit in serious violations of human rights.

Looking ahead to the events of 1999, Joe Nevins (2002, 624-25) references two major schools of public and/or official opinion widely held by concerned international actors. These are the “rogue element” school” which sees no or little link between militia actions and a higher chain of command reaching to Jakarta. Rather, the violence is seen as spontaneous in a situation where the TNI lost control. The elite in Jakarta and their loyal supporters amongst the “international community” largely supports this version of events. The second school views the militia as a smokescreen of the military and cite documentary evidence implicating the military in planning and directing the wave of terror and violence. The “responsibility of military hierarchy” school, while certainly more plausible is his view, is favored by those with a fundamental critique of the Indonesian military and state. However,

“Both spatially delimit their explanations to actions within the boundaries of Indonesia (which, at least in terms of September 1999, included – de facto – East Timor). And both explanations focus on a limited time frame – one that encompasses at least (in the case of the second explanation) the year 1999 and, at worst, just a few weeks (in the case of some versions of the rogue element theory). In doing so, the explanations delimit the geography of the making of the violence as well as its historical roots. In doing so, they exculpate a variety of players that enabled the Indonesian military's crimes in September 1999. More explicitly, they exonerate what was effectively the Indonesian military's partners in crime: a number of national governments that provided large amounts of military, economic, and diplomatic support to Jakarta to the Indonesian military's crimes in East Timor over an almost 24-year period.”

Nevins (2002, 625) goes on to argue that a number of governments allied with Indonesia were in a position to prevent the carnage and destruction. These same governments which supported the UN process in East Timor, did not sanction Indonesia, did not cut-off economic and military ties, “Because they did not make and thus did not act upon such threats, the TNI assumed it could act with impunity, as it had done in the past.” Nevins continues, “these governments had a moral and political responsibility to prevent violence by the TNI.” We are similarly guided in the following pages in our analysis of the role of international actors.

