

4. Not So Networked Warfare, 1975–1999

Indonesia's Timor campaign started with a limited form of networked warfare in the latter months of 1975. The main objective of the cross-border military incursions in these months was to sustain an impression of internal conflict by Indonesian soldiers pretending to be Timorese opponents of Fretilin. Their orders were to create 'terror and intimidation'. Small numbers of UDT and Apodeti refugees did accompany them in mainly non-fighting roles; they were networked with the Indonesian forces as 'Partisans'. Actually, Indonesia had been giving military training to Apodeti in West Timor since December 1974 and had been conducting covert operations in East Timor with the support of local intelligence operatives throughout 1974 (CAVR 2006:Part I, p. 5). Except in the latter stages of the cross-border campaign, Fretilin forces acquitted themselves well, inflicting losses on Indonesian forces that found themselves bogged down in the wet season.



Figure 4.1: José Ramos-Horta, second from left, after Indonesian cross-border attacks had begun, but just before the full invasion of Dili, with Xavier do Amaral, second from right, Alarico Fernandes shaking his hand and Xanana Gusmão to his left

Photo: Penny Tweedie/Corbis

The Indonesian military's conception of the real invasion was that it would be a frontal exhibition of overwhelming force to take Dili first. There would be

quick capitulation, they thought, in the face of a massive show of force. Well in excess of 20 000 troops landed in Timor during December 1975, later increased to 40 000 (Kohen and Taylor 1979:39) and possibly increasing to 60 000 for certain high points of the deployment (Smith with Dee 2003:41), in addition to large numbers of (former US) naval vessels offshore and air support. General Ali Murtopo confided to a US source before the invasion that 'the whole business will be settled in three weeks' (Burr and Evans 2001:7). Indonesian generals had the more colourful way of putting the shock-and-awe plan: 'breakfast in Dili, lunch in Baucau and dinner in Lospalos' (CAVR 2006:Ch. 7.9, p. 12).

The resistance from Fretilin forces was stronger than expected. The initial landing by many hundreds of paratroops went badly; many were shot by Fretilin forces in buildings along the seafront as they came down; others drifted out to sea and drowned; others landed behind Fretilin lines. Perhaps shock and anger at these early losses contributed to the wanton slaughter that then occurred on the dock and on the streets of Dili, even of Chinese business leaders who came out to welcome them. Chinese families managed to get letters out through places like Kupang to reveal probably hundreds of Chinese killed in the first two days (Kohen and Taylor 1979:78). One of the letters said: 'At 2 pm, 59 men, both Chinese and Timorese, were brought on to the wharf... These men were shot one by one, with the crowd, believed amounting to 500, being ordered to count' (Taylor 1999:68).

Spies identified Fretilin members to be shot; entire families were executed if they had a Fretilin flag at the front of their house; many women were taken out to the warships to be raped and killed. Rosa Muki Bonaparte, charismatic Secretary of the Popular Organisation of Timorese Women, was shot when she resisted being taken to a warship. Others were shot to enable looting of their possessions. The widespread atrocities made no political sense; they were hardly likely to win hearts and minds. Some argue that it was a result of the propaganda that some commanders fed their young charges of the devilish communists and Christians who were the enemy. Whatever the reason, the barbarism and indiscipline, combined with the Indonesian losses and the fact that most Fretilin forces escaped in well-prepared plans to convene in the mountains where their weapons and food were hidden, strengthened the commitment of the resistance. For the next two years, Fretilin controlled most of the country and most of the population fled to these Fretilin-controlled areas. Fretilin claimed 80 per cent of the population under their control in 1976 and 1977.



Figure 4.2: Rosa Muki Bonaparte, second from left, with, from left to right, Mari Alkatiri, Nicolau Lobato and Mau Laka, 1975

Photo: Jill Jolliffe

Fretilin's military wing, Falintil, avoided head-on confrontations with massed Indonesian forces after that first day of the invasion, but inflicted great damage by ambushing small groups of Indonesian troops as they moved around the country in hit-and-run attacks on bases and by sniper fire. Their tactics would seek to split a smaller group of Indonesian soldiers away from the main group, then hunt and kill that smaller group (Interview with Falintil officer, September 2009). Bahasa-speaking Falintil troops dressed in captured Indonesian uniforms would walk into a camp to check that only a small number were there at the time of a planned attack (Interview with Falintil fighter, November 2006). Indonesia was most unwilling to reveal to the world or to its own people how great were the losses it was suffering in those early years. In 1977 a senior Indonesian officer confided to a Dutch official that 5000 casualties had been inflicted by Fretilin (Dunn 2003:267). The morale of fearful Indonesian soldiers soon fell. This low morale inevitably filtered back home to sap the spirit of a nation that had been led to expect quick victory. Estimates of total Indonesian lives lost in the fighting range from 4000 to 20 000 and of its cost from US\$1 million to \$3 million per day (Salla 1997a:450). This cost burden foreclosed opportunities for development projects and also sapped the morale of the Indonesian elite. The international media began to discuss the conflict as 'Indonesia's Vietnam' (*The Times*, 18 August 1976). In the long run, it was no Vietnam because Falintil had no external patron supplying arms and cash.



Figure 4.3: Desperation in the face of famine

Photo: Peter Rodgers/Fairfax Media



Figure 4.4: Resilience in the face of famine

Photo: Peter Rodgers/Fairfax Media

Because all six foreign journalists who remained in the country were shot when Indonesian forces arrived in the areas where they were reporting, the invasion was a success (compared with Vietnam) in deterring foreign media organisations from sending journalists to East Timor for many years unless they were specifically invited to cover something of interest to Indonesia. Indonesia also banned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and indeed all international relief, human rights and development agencies from East Timor during the early years of the conflict—a decision with terrible consequences once mass starvation was caused by defoliation from the air of the large swathes of the country that were Fretilin controlled. When the ICRC was allowed in from September 1979, their relief work saved large numbers of lives, but they were allowed to distribute food only in military-controlled areas (Robinson 2008:97) and only Indonesian Red Cross workers were permitted. The policy was an explicit one of starving civilians into surrendering to camps where they knew many more would die. The West was again deeply culpable over this intentionally induced famine. ‘According to one reliable account, the US ambassador to Indonesia, Edward Masters, failed to report the famine in East Timor for a full nine months after he had witnessed it firsthand’ (Robinson 2008:97). Western leaders did not want to look and were not shown what they did not want to see.

When Rockwell OV-10 Bronco aircraft arrived with infrared detectors, rockets and napalm, designed for counterinsurgency against an enemy without anti-aircraft weapons, Indonesian fortunes began to improve. Starvation became a weapon of war as defoliants destroyed the gardens feeding the large numbers of people supporting the fighters in the mountains. For the first two years of fighting, Fretilin was still running a revolution, educating the people to a new democratic, egalitarian, non-feudal society, as well as running a war. This education also prepared the young for participation in the clandestine network (Chapter 5) in the next phase of the conflict after armed resistance had substantially collapsed. But starvation and constant bombing and artillery attacks led to civilian surrenders to Indonesian transit camps. The Indonesian strategy was then to use these large camps to segregate the insurgents from their civilian supporters (‘separate the water from the fish’). The insurgents also began to run out of ammunition. Divisions opened up, particularly over policy on civilian surrender, including violent divisions that resulted in the execution as traitors of some leaders who wanted to allow civilians to surrender. For communist supporters of Fretilin in Australia and elsewhere there was disappointment that the Fretilin leaders progressively moved further away from a communist ideology. Communications out of East Timor on the internal divisions went to the Australian communist activist Denis Freney, who was the designated recipient of radio messages. This gave him an opportunity to move against the social-democrat leader of the diplomatic front, Ramos-Horta, using

his crucial leverage of control of the radio communications to distort the situation and declare Ramos-Horta a traitor. Ramos-Horta and other Fretilin leaders were imprisoned for a period in Maputo, Mozambique, in 1978 at the behest of those seeking a more radical leadership. After Xanana Gusmão took over leadership of the insurgency, he interpreted the divisions, detentions and executions as a result of political hubris, domination and intolerance of a plurality of voices:

This senseless radicalism paid no attention to our concrete conditions and limitations. It made us intolerably overbearing and led us to put many compatriots on the same footing as the criminal aggressor. We have committed crimes against our own brothers and, during this difficult war, we have spent more time in arresting and assassinating compatriots than thinking about capable defence of the Homeland, the results of which were evident in the events of 1978. (Xanana Gusmão, 7 December 1987, in Gusmão 2000:132)

These words show the struggle inherent in being embattled to survive domination, the struggle against oneself dominating to crush diversity. Xanana on the one hand was such an admirable figure in that he opened up the resistance to participation from all political factions, including former UDT members, who wanted independence for East Timor. On the other hand, an important observation of our analysis will be that in government he still fell prey himself to the very tendency he struggled against throughout his life as a leader of his people. In combination, all these forms of new adversity encountered by Fretilin caused its substantial decimation, including the loss of almost all the top leaders, in encirclement campaigns between late 1977 and early 1979.

Gradually, the strategy of having most of East Timor's civilian population living with Falintil in some 30 movable bases collapsed after a troop surge with improved air support from 1977. One by one, the bases succumbed to the new campaign of 'encirclement and annihilation'. The Fretilin leadership finally changed policy and allowed civilians to surrender. This was but the beginning of their suffering as they endured starvation, torture and many hardships first in 'transit' camps, then in 'resettlement' areas that ultimately came to house 300 000 civilians (Robinson 2008:87). Tens of thousands died in them.

Indonesian military training manuals for the East Timor campaign outlined a strategy of physically separating insurgents from their 'network' of civilian support (Robinson 2008:96). US military aid spiked in 1978 to fund the hardware to deliver 'encirclement and annihilation'. The starvation and forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians were not 'unfortunate but inevitable by-product[s] of war'; they formed a conscious Indonesian policy facilitated by the United States (Robinson 2008:98). It was also Fretilin policy that civilians should live with them and sustain their independence in the

mountains, but that was a defensive policy of preventing civilians from being captured by invading forces. They were in no sense human shields because Indonesian policy tolerated the killing of civilians.

While Indonesia declared East Timor pacified in March 1979, one surviving Falintil unit staged an audacious attack on Dili in June 1980, demonstrating that the insurgency lived. In the next phase, the Indonesian military organised civilians in 'fence of legs' campaigns during 1981, harnessing tens of thousands—on one estimate, 80 000 (Sebastian 2006:134)—women, men, children and the elderly, to march across the island in front of units of soldiers, flushing out insurgents before them. Xanana Gusmão was the principal target; his mystique increased when he escaped the net. 'Fence of legs' had been used successfully against the Darul Islam insurgency in the 1950s, as had the counterinsurgency strategy of targeting and assassinating leaders (Sebastian 2006:141). Only modest numbers of Falintil fighters were netted in 1981. Stories abounded of civilians in the fence of legs allowing them to slip through. Many civilians were caught, however, many of whom were massacred, creating the impression that the campaign was a success (CAVR 2006:Ch. 3.9, p. 92).

In 1980 Xanana Gusmão took charge and began to rebuild Falintil as a fighting force of several hundred on the ashes of the thousands of fighters who had perished. Apart from himself, only one other member of the Fretilin Central Committee still in Timor after the occupation had survived into 1980. In the reorganisation he put in place, the Conselho Revolucionário da Resistência Nacional (CRRN: Revolutionary Council of National Resistance) took command. CRRN was to be an umbrella that embraced all political factions who favoured independence, not just Fretilin. This was a decisive move away from Marxist-Leninist influence; CRRN became a more pluralist national unity movement. Xanana was elected to all the leadership positions, however: National Political Commissar, Commander-in-Chief of Falintil and President of CRRN. This concentration of power in the hands of one man reflected the admiration most of the survivors had for Xanana and their view of him as their last hope. The separation of Falintil from Fretilin went a step further in 1988 with the resignation of Falintil Commander, Xanana Gusmão, as a member of Fretilin, and the formation of the Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere (CNRM: National Council of Maubere Resistance), replacing CRRN as the supreme body of the resistance, with Xanana its President. Fretilin, in 1987 in the lead-up to this change, finally renounced its claim to be the only legitimate representative of the Timorese people. On the eve of Suharto's fall in April 1998, CNRM was renamed again, as the Conselho Nacional de Resistência Timorense (CNRT: Council of Timorese Resistance), and was joined by Apodeti Party members, again with Xanana Gusmão as President.

Falintil forces were radically dispersed across the country by Gusmão into many pockets, often with only two or three fighters at shifting bases assigned to hit-and-run attacks on bases of perhaps 15–30 Indonesian soldiers (Pinto and Jardine 1997:52). There were, however, mobile forces of the best armed and trained fighters who could arrive to support local pockets who were in trouble or who sought to overwhelm a modest Indonesian force.

Gusmão also held meetings with the leadership of the Catholic Church, which by 1980 had shifted profoundly from being a conservative bulwark of Portuguese colonial rule to being the advocate for downtrodden Timorese and a rock to which most Timorese could cling. In 1975, the Church leadership had been much more supportive of UDT than of Fretilin because of fears of communism. Xanana's masterstroke of forming the CRRN enrolled the Church as a cover for a great deal of the clandestine activity, discussed in Chapter 5.

By this time, the Indonesian military had coopted large numbers of Timorese to work alongside them in various capacities, including auxiliary forces who mobilised violence. East Timorese Hansip (civil defence) units were established from late 1976. Hansip members were used to organise civilians in the fence-of-legs campaigns. Some of the Hansip groups became the militias formed by the military to intimidate the population before and after the independence referendum of 1999. The rape and pillage of 1999 were the culmination of a progressive process of the military enrolling Timorese to intimidate and regulate Timorese.

In the early days of the Timor campaign the invaders suffered from having failed to educate their soldiers that this had to be a very different fight from the genocidal slaughter that had been waged against communists in the mid-1960s, wiping out half a million of them so they could no longer be a political force in Indonesia. At first, it did look like a genocidal campaign. In addition to the slaughter both of numbers of Timorese civilians that was quite unnecessary to securing major towns and of the Chinese business elite, transmigration programs began to swing into action to bring large numbers of Javanese to East Timor to dominate its civil service and to control its commercial life. Many in the international solidarity movement began to campaign against what was happening in East Timor as genocide, highlighting behaviour such as the widespread secretive use of the injectable contraceptive Depo-Provera against Timorese women. But the objectives of the New Order Indonesian leadership in East Timor were different from the anti-communist campaign. They were certainly to utterly dominate the East Timor resistance and to make the East Timor economy a wholly owned subsidiary of the crony capitalist system linked to the Suharto family. The objective was not to wipe out the Timorese; Timorese who collaborated with the New Order were embraced; the education of locals at universities in Java and Bali was supported. It was a regime of remorseless

brutality against enemies of the New Order but of generosity towards those who supported it. In addition to enrolling Timorese in various forms of auxiliaries who could support the military from time to time in their work, as with the fence-of-legs work, the New Order invested hugely in enlisting Timorese youth in paramilitary youth groups, scouting organisations, martial arts groups and youth organisations under the wing of Golkar (Suharto's political party). Indonesian domination of the province suffered because at first the rank and file of the Indonesian military did not understand—had not been adequately trained to understand—that quite unlike the anti-communist campaign of the 1960s, this was a campaign to win the hearts and minds of most Timorese, killing only the hold-outs among them.

While this was a much more sophisticated and effective strategy of networked counterinsurgency, in the long run of the Timor campaign two further things went wrong. First, as we will document in Chapters 5 and 6, the young people of Timor had been educated well in their two years of survival in the mountains to their revolutionary emancipation from colonial control. We will see that the clandestine network joined in droves the organisations that were approved by the Indonesians and then used them as a cover to organise against the Indonesians. Second, the policy of sustained violence only against those who openly defied the New Order backfired once it became impossible to prevent video evidence of atrocities finding its way onto Western television screens. We will see in Chapter 6 that this undermined the pro-Indonesia network in the West.

In Australia, it was particularly Foreign Minister Gareth Evans who walked into this trap. There was a certain injustice in this because Evans was rather more assertive than most in the pro-Indonesia network in communicating concern over respect for human rights. He was sensitive in 1991 to the fact that signing the Timor Gap Treaty—while an economic coup for Australia—would be regarded as a betrayal of the East Timorese by many Australians, including in his own party. Visiting Indonesia in February 1991 to finalise the treaty, he said:

I have taken the view that Australia does have a duty as an international good citizen to go on raising [human rights] issues...The truth of the matter is that the human rights situation [in East Timor] has, in our judgment, conspicuously improved, particularly under the present military arrangements. (Pilger 1994:312)

Evans was right: for some years the incidence of forced disappearances, torture and other human rights abuses had been greatly reduced (see Figure 4.6). Then in 1991 the Santa Cruz massacre (Chapter 6) was captured on Western television cameras and Evans was pilloried by commentators like John Pilger for statements such as those above. It did not help that Evans was quick to defend Indonesia after the 1991 massacre, describing it as 'an aberration, not an act of

state policy’ (Pilger 1994:312). It was state policy to be ruthlessly brutal with those who openly resisted it, while seeking to respect human rights, and enrol and win the hearts and minds of those who collaborated with it. While this was a great improvement from the indiscriminate violence of the 1970s, human rights abuses became a problem for Indonesia in the 1990s that they had not been in the 1980s. In a context where the Suharto regime was increasingly under challenge even in Jakarta, in a world of more miniaturised media technology, it became impossible to prevent damaging images of atrocities in Indonesia from reaching a Western media that had been persuaded by the international solidarity movement to become more interested in covering it. Strategies like networking indigenous militias to do some of the regime’s dirty work were partially successful in the 1980s, and certainly an advance on the tactics of the 1970s that gave the appearance of genocide. Networking indigenous militias also backfired in the 1990s. In 1999, the undisciplined violence of militias guided by the Indonesian military leadership was to bring utter international disgrace to their nation.



Figure 4.5: Individual and group victims of human rights violations across time in East Timor

Source: Database of Narrative Statements Given to the CAVR. CAVR (2006)

So our conclusion is that, while the Indonesian military adapted its strategies to new realities of new decades with success in the medium term, it did so more slowly than the East Timor clandestine and international solidarity movements. As a consequence, the Indonesian military was ultimately outmanoeuvred by its enemies.

As early as the late 1970s, the leaders of the insurgency were clear that they could not hold out militarily for many years on as small an island as Timor with no international border to escape across and no-one supplying them with military hardware. Nor did they wish to surrender. They wished to keep reinvigorating the insurgency as a card in their negotiating armoury. It was a useful card with Indonesian elite and public opinion because they had killed so many Indonesian soldiers and imposed such costs on the national budget to fight them.

Xanana Gusmão wanted to stem the needless waste of the lives of young Timorese and Indonesian fighters (especially as more of the latter became Timorese themselves). Yet he was reported to be brimming with confidence when he negotiated a ceasefire with the Governor of East Timor in 1983. One report had him saying 'oil prices were down and Indonesia could not afford to keep troops in East Timor' (Conboy 2003:299). In a June 2011 interview with Adérito Soares, Gusmão said that he used the ceasefire to regroup for the next Indonesian assault that he knew was coming. The ceasefire broke down, but nevertheless both sides came to realise that they were better off refraining from all-out assault on the other. There were assorted agreements between local Falintil and local Indonesian military commanders that they would seek to avoid killing of one side by the other. While the Indonesian military had secured effective control of almost all the country, and while they knew there were only a few hundred insurgents left, they knew the cost of going after them would be high because there were thousands of young men and women in the clandestine network who would lay down their lives to join Xanana in the fight. It was not a hurting stalemate, but rather in some ways a non-hurting stalemate. This freed Xanana to focus on his real campaign, which was in mobilising a clandestine network that would undermine Indonesian legitimacy in East Timor, link up with a democracy movement in the rest of Indonesia to help overthrow the New Order, and link up with an international solidarity movement that would support Ramos-Horta's leadership on the diplomatic front. An ongoing function of the armed resistance from remote camps was to provide somewhere for members of the clandestine network to escape to when their identities became known and their lives imperilled. Because the military card had become no more than a background option for Falintil and a niggling nuisance for the Indonesian military (that still tied down a number of watchful battalions), it was no real setback for the resistance when Xanana was captured in his Dili

hideout in November 1992 and exiled to prison in Jakarta. From his Jakarta prison cell, it became much easier for him to lead the more important struggles of the clandestine network within the heartland of Indonesia and to develop an understanding of the pressure points on the increasingly fragile Suharto regime. Even Nelson Mandela was able to visit Xanana when he was assertive enough to ask President Suharto for a meeting. Xanana had no problem sending messages back to East Timor in the hands of Timorese students and others who visited him in prison and through encrypted emails. For Xanana, like Mandela, some of his prison guards came to admire him. Others took bribes to look the other way as he went about his subversive networking.

The 1983 ceasefire was seen by the Catholic Church and by many moderates in Jakarta as a welcome pause in suffering and an opportunity for lasting peace and reconciliation. Many military leaders, in contrast, saw the ceasefire at worst as a display of weakness, at best as an opportunity to photograph and identify the numbers and location of Falintil fighters as they enjoyed the freedom to visit their families and villages. The much more total control the military enjoyed over East Timor and its economy than any other province allowed its officers to benefit financially from the conflict. Coffee growers, for example, were forced to sell the province's largest export through an army-controlled monopoly at much less than half the market price (Kingsbury and McCulloch 2006:217). Profits earned by lower ranks had to be shared up the chain of command. Many junior officers ran small local businesses through local men or engaged in extortion from other businesses. Senior officers also controlled many larger monopolies and used violence to force out competitors (Kingsbury and McCulloch 2006:218). In this financial sense as well, until 1998 the military did not see itself as in a hurting stalemate, but in a highly lucrative stalemate. They could not imagine what their enemy could do to break up their country or their profits. Here, as we will see in the next chapter, the CNRM leadership had a more politically creative imagination.

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