


East Timor and the Emperor's "old" clothes

 Adam Henry

 6 March 2016, 7:40am

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Dr Adam Henry discusses newly released documents exposing self-righteous and dispassionate attitudes of Australian diplomats during the war in 1970s East Timor.



(Image via en.wikipedia.org)

Part 1

THE RECENT UNEARTHING of Australian diplomatic documents – by Monash University academic researchers Sara Niner and Kim McGrath – containing written annotations by Australian diplomats in Jakarta (November 1976), has brought back into the light an unresolved dark chapter in Australian history.

A named recipient of the memo, Peter Rogers, now enjoying post diplomatic retirement as a resident expert at the Australian National University, has not confirmed if he is one of the annotators. Another former diplomat Cavan Hogue at least concedes some of the annotations look like his handwriting.

Highlighted **in bold** are sections from an article Hogue wrote in 2006:

*Then there is the realist view that we do not want unstable entities close to our borders because they might be used by terrorists or enemies or **adversely affect our interests in other ways. Interestingly, this was the reason given by Indonesia for their intervention in East Timor in 1976.***

No doubt this intervention prevented the kind of ethnic and political based violence we are seeing now but their main reason was to prevent Timor being ruled by an unstable Communist government (Fretilin).

*As Xanana Gusmao has recently pointed out, the Fretilin leadership is undemocratic and not averse to bloodshed. (The fact that incompetence, cruelty and corruption by TNI **later lost the hearts and minds of the people does not alter the motivation for Indonesian intervention.***

The attitude expressed in the written annotations and the 2006 article (which largely spoke about the possibilities of so called security interventions in our region) do not "surprise" me in regards to the mentality at the highest levels of our diplomatic corps to such issues. Nor do the email excuses of Peter Rogers, which he sent to journalist Tom Allard in order to spin away the sheer callousness of the written annotations.

When I read the Hogue 2006 article – and looked again at the context of the annotations – some thoughts percolated.

First, was Hogue's juxtaposition of East Timor during 1975 with the political upheavals of 2006. Hogue makes no mention whatsoever of the possible role that Australia might have played in exacerbating political conflict in Timor Leste at that time. The inference appears to be that the East Timorese are not really capable of self-government.

Hogue's attitude is rather extraordinary given the information available on the 1975 period and beyond (in light of the archives in Australia alone), and that numerous examinations of the issue reveal a near total indifference to Indonesian human rights abuses and crimes in Timor Leste.

John Pilger discusses Australia's ugly history in East Timor. <https://t.co/om9p8FhxiL>

— IndependentAustralia (@independentaus)
February 27, 2016

Richard Woolcott (Australian Ambassador to Indonesia) even advised Whitlam (in the wake of the Balibo executions) that the Javanese simply did not value human life the same way they "we" do. In light of the official Australian silence to its own murdered citizens and its indifference to the suffering and loss of life of the Timorese from the very beginning, one can at least take some satisfaction that Woolcott's unique logic will be on the public record for all time.

The justification for the Indonesian invasion – advanced by Richard Woolcott and others and trotted out by Hogue – should be greeted with historical contempt. It was never more than a smokescreen, a cover story — even Whitlam (the main architect of Australian diplomatic complicity over East Timor in 1975) is eventually recorded by the diplomatic archives as being dismissive of any outside forces wanting to interfere in East Timor in his correspondence with Suharto *prior* to the illegal invasion.

The other question worth considering is how Hogue can know the innermost "motivations" of the Indonesian military in 1975 – or is it merely the case that because they said it privately to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta (and then used it publicly as a cover story) – then this becomes a "legitimate motivation"?

It should be noted that the Australian Embassy in Jakarta (under Woolcott as Ambassador), and where Hogue worked in 1976, had a close relationship with key Indonesian military and intelligence figures. Perhaps this past connection is why Hogue feels able to speak with such authority about Indonesian military motivations?

The Indonesian policy of armed takeover resulted almost at once in multiple contraventions of international law, blatant human rights abuses on a smaller scale (executions), then killing and death on a grand scale right across the territory. The wreckage from this train of consequences being known to the Australians through intelligence assets (signals primarily) and its foreign service, almost in real time or very shortly after each notable event.

In fact, Hogue's logic is worth examining closely given its hidden message. It firstly implies that the Indonesians had a legitimate motivation or good reason to mount their military takeover of Portuguese Timor. So, if you have the means, motivation and the opportunity, then it is apparently acceptable to wage a "war of aggression" against a near defenceless territory and its people.

La'o Hamatuk post at @crikey_news re last week's #HandsOffTimorsOil protest outside Aus embassy in Dili <https://t.co/Us8qRtJ8IN>

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It was this attitude (in conjunction with diplomatic and economic opportunism) that later enabled Australia to enter into maritime boundary negotiations with the occupying power in order to secure oil and gas concessions – the so called Timor Gap – while the occupation and human rights abuses continued on a daily basis. The other attitude advocated by the pro-Jakarta lobby was that the Indonesian military occupation was permanent and there were no alternatives — independence was irresponsible, so we just had to get on with the diplomatic relationship.

If we had ever relentlessly pursued the cause of international law and campaigned against human rights abuses (at home and in the international system), in any manner that was half as determined as the approach to the Timor Gap – in ignoring human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian military or in ingratiating ourselves with Suharto – *all* Australian diplomacy toward Timor Liste would be a source of principled example, not "newspeak".

We might pause here and consider a very different and self-righteous attitude of the current Australian Government (all shrouded in the language of international law, human rights and the principled morality of opposing force) toward China in the current dispute in the South China Seas, or Russia in the Ukraine or Syria, for example.

There is ample evidence that the very worst of the political "instability" in 1974 to 1975 was a natural result of the collapse of Portuguese colonial authority, the vacuum this left and an Indonesian destabilising program (within and outside the territory). This operated for months prior to the invasion, doing all it could to undermine the eventual alliance between the independence parties (Fretilin and UDT), create pro-Indonesian front organisations such as the Anpodeti party — encouraging discord and conflict.

This was to provide the context for Indonesian military conquest of East Timor — an "intervention" to restore order. The fact the Whitlam Government refused to provide assistance, participate in mediation and had rejected even the notion of actual independence for Portuguese Timor, only made matters worse for the people of East Timor.

There is voluminous information on this topic, yet one still

cannot go past *Timor: A People Betrayed*, by former Australian diplomat James Dunn. We also now have the enormous CAVR report which details all of this in painstaking detail. One area of note here is that Fretilin, Catholic Church, NGO "propaganda" about the Indonesian military in East Timor was highly accurate. The classified intelligence estimates and analysis within the then DFA (often, as I understand, gathered through sources such as Defence Signals and filtered throughout the highest echelons of Australian foreign policy establishment) on what the TNI were doing in East Timor surely must have mirrored these non-government assessments in the 70s, 80s and 90s. It would have been an extraordinary failure of Australian intelligence if they did not.

But perhaps, just perhaps, no one was ever going to do anything about this. Yet this pro-independence, or even racist anti-Indonesian "propaganda" (yes, the pro-Suharto lobby played this card too) was attacked publicly and shamelessly throughout many years by many in the pro-Suharto clique — including high ranking members and former members of the foreign service, Woolcott, Whitlam, Evans, Keating *et al* continuing right down the line until 1999 and beyond). There are "information warfare" advantages in mounting such public commentaries attacking East Timorese support groups, the Timorese Catholic Church, and NGOs, when the detailed intelligence assessments about the war crimes and human rights abuses committed by *our friends* remain classified and not publicly available. The pattern regarding West Papua is virtually verbatim.

Without U.S. support at the highest echelons the Indonesian military never *would* have invaded the territory. There was British and particularly Australian encouragement for the idea of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. Yet military operations were unable to crush the Timorese nationalist resistance by late 1976 and there were U.S. fears that the Indonesian military could "fail" in East Timor — the British and Americans resupplied them with weapons and the Australians (after the briefest flirtation with conscience under Fraser), quickly came to their senses and continued all they could do to protect their relationship with Suharto.

All of this U.S., UK and Australian support could only have been useful to Suharto before, during and after the invasion, the famine it exacerbated (if not caused) by criminal military strategies carried out under his authority and the ongoing occupation. Systematic human rights abusers in such an Orwellian scenario could only be emboldened with a total sense of impunity. Australia has done next to nothing to

support any notion of legal retribution under international law for what occurred in East Timor.

Coming soon: Part 2

Dr Adam Hughes Henry is a visiting fellow at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University. You can read more from Dr Hughes on his website.

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East Timor and the Emperor's "old" clothes (Part 2)

 Adam Henry

 6 March 2016, 10:50am

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Dr Adam Henry continues his insights into newly released documents exposing self-righteous and dispassionate attitudes by Australian diplomats during the invasion of 1970s East Timor.



Protesters at the Australian embassy in Dili calling for permanent maritime boundaries. (Image via @TimorSeaJustice.)

[Read Part 1]

FORMER DIPLOMAT
CAVAN HOGUE

suggests that the 1975 invasion of East Timor – in the first weeks alone a pure massacre of thousands of innocent people particularly the first attack and occupation of the capital Dili – was designed to prevent instability and prevent the Timorese from killing each other?

Highlighted **in bold** are sections from an article Hogue wrote in 2006:

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No doubt this intervention prevented the kind of ethnic and political based violence we are seeing now but their main reason was to prevent Timor being ruled by an unstable Communist government (Fretilin).

*As Xanana Gusmao has recently pointed out, the Fretilin leadership is undemocratic and not averse to bloodshed. (The fact that incompetence, cruelty and corruption by TNI **later lost the hearts and minds of the people does not alter the motivation for Indonesian intervention.***

Well, excuse my sarcasm, weren't the Timorese lucky that Suharto and the TNI was able to take care of all that potential "killing" in East Timor, with their own killing and destruction of Timorese on a truly grand scale. All the while, Australia – its various governments and senior diplomats – all quite sensibly understood Indonesian motivations and aimed to secure the Timor Gap — which they did.

The Indonesian military never lost the "hearts and minds of the people" in 1975, as implied by Hogue — they never had them. Any notion of a genuine act of self-determination for the East Timorese was rejected outright by Suharto and any process that led to a genuine act of self-determination making actual independence an option, was rejected by Whitlam and the pro-Suharto clique lead by Richard Woolcott (ambassador of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and Hogue's superior).

Any "genuine" vote on whether East Timor wanted to become "Indonesian" was doomed to fail, particularly if the other choice was "independence". If there had been obvious widespread popular support in East Timor for Indonesian takeover, surely Whitlam and Suharto would have pushed for such a vote in order to legitimate their desired outcome — Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. They did not.



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As Hogue could only know too well, there was no popular support for Indonesian sovereignty.

Breathtaking is it not?

The mental and intellectual effort to defend the Indonesian military and Australian policy of complicity by selective assertions and omissions, and carefully choosing the most coded language.

It must be godlike to turn day into night, but intellectually exhausting.

Even a cursory examination of the official DFAT publication '*Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor 1974-1976*', in relevant sections shows this. This publication is in itself a shocking collection of material and this *the good stuff*. That is, the material eventually collected, edited and then considered appropriate by DFAT for public release. The mind boggles as to what remains within the system as yet known or seen by public eyes.

The Indonesian invasion was never legal under international law. It makes no difference whether one thinks the Timorese "Communists" in 1975 or not, this was an *illegal invasion* — with systematic massacres, extra judicial killings, starvation, enslavement, rape and torture throughout an ongoing brutal occupation. Yet certain Australian political, diplomatic and economic interests decided to acquiesce and gain from this occupation. The legalities under international law were all known to Whitlam and the then DFA at the time, and by the pro-Jakarta clique as they continue to excuse, obfuscate and slither.

It was an illegal act of aggression — the same type of criminal conspiracy which saw people tried and executed at Nuremberg and Tokyo after WW2. If Suharto had turned into a designated enemy of the West (and did even a quarter of the crimes for which his regime *was* actually guilty), his name would be spoken of in the same breath as Saddam Hussein. All Suharto's transgressions would be trumpeted by Canberra, London, Washington as textbook examples of tyranny, and the experts would have been highlighting East Timor and West Papua as the perfect case studies to support the shoddy edifice that has become R2P, but they are not. International law, ethics, war criminality *et al* is something we selectively apply to our official enemies, but never to ourselves or our friends.

We have seemingly learnt nothing from 1999 and have continued our opportunistic mentality in our post 1999 dealings with Timor Leste (including interference in their domestic affairs, hostility from Canberra toward Timorese wanting equitable re-negotiation of the Timor Gap, and even the use of intelligence bugging operations to gain advantages in economic negotiations with Timor Leste).

The brave whistleblower, an Australian ASIS operative, has been treated like a criminal by the Australian government, ostracised and has even had his passport taken away lest he leave the country to testify abroad about these simply scandalous actions. The reaction within the world of Australian spooks to the treatment of this ASIS whistleblower, particularly the removal of his passport, has been great resentment.



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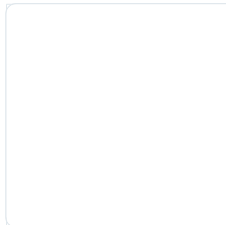


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In another newspaper article (SMH) Hogue is quoted as saying:

'There were atrocities on both sides.'

Yes, there are examples of Fretilin atrocities, but to suggest equivalence between the crimes of Suharto and the West is extraordinary. There were atrocities committed by the anti-Nazi resistance too, in many parts of Europe, but does this in any way diminish the awful crimes of Nazi aggression, systematic human rights abuses, war crimes, industrial genocide or the overwhelmingly admirable courage of those who were forced to resist in order to survive? Not in the slightest. In terms of atrocities by the aggressor and the defenders *under attack* in East Timor, not even close in terms of proportionality or scale. This was, and is of course, well known to the gatekeepers of Australian foreign policy towards Indonesia — the Whitlams, the Woolcotts, the Peacocks, the Hawkes. Keatings, Evans', Hogues and so on.

Australian politicians and diplomats did nothing to censure the guilty in the wake of the blatant executions of the five Balibo journalists, or the execution of Roger East in Dili — nothing. These men were either Australians, naturalised or dual citizens, or had lived and worked in Australia for years coming from the UK or New Zealand.

The Indonesian interference in East Timor was known, of course, to Australian diplomatic and intelligence sources before the invasion. The potential for human rights abuses were accepted from the beginning and, once underway, accommodated almost until the last in 1999. Nothing was done about them. But we did a great deal to get our hands on Timorese oil and gas, and develop closer strategic ties with Suharto.

Looking again at these written annotations and Hogue's quoted views, one wonders what has been learnt from the past by those who viewed themselves then – and now in

comfortable retirements – as the best and brightest. When we turn to the ongoing horrors of West Papua, it appears we have learnt very little. When one looks over those handwritten comments on those recently unearthed diplomatic documents, one cannot help but be stunned by the omissions and weasel words in Roger's email responses to Tom Allard or Hogue's 2006 analysis. But they are symptomatic of a wider community of experts who have guided our foreign policy toward Indonesia since the 1960s. They turn night into day and present their actions as being totally reasonable.


To learn, one would first need to develop at least some intellectual and ethical shame about the past in order to initiate some sea change in the present and future. That is, apologise directly to the East Timorese, open all the archives, and renegotiate the Timor Gap (oil and gas revenues) in complete accordance with international law with a semblance of contrition.

Is there no depth to which we will plunge in order to keep "our" oil and gas, and obscure our silent complicity in the deaths of as many as 200,000 East Timorese?

Given what has been done in order to get hold of the resources and ignore such terrible crimes in the first place, apparently not.

Dr Adam Hughes Henry is a visiting fellow at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University. You can read more from Dr Hughes on his website.

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