



I thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil

OPINION

By Chip Henriss

Posted Sun 20 Sep 2015, 9:29pm

Exactly 16 years after I joined the Australian mission in East Timor, I wonder whether our government's motive was pure, or if they were just eyeing off oil and gas fields. It's time for Malcolm Turnbull to right some wrongs, writes Chip Henriss.

Sixteen years ago on September 20, I was with the Australian Army's 3rd Brigade, the Townsville-based ready Deployment Force. We were some of the first soldiers to land in Dili, East Timor as part of the INTERFET mission.

We were sent in to restore peace in the wake of the Indonesian-led violence that engulfed the country following the historic ballot for independence.

Like the beginning of any mission, it was tense. There was a lot of apprehension about how things might unfold. But it was also an optimistic mission and my conviction that it was a just mission was rock solid. The Australian government had finally reversed a decades-long policy of callous disregard to the plight of the Timorese. This was Australia standing up and doing the right thing to help out our friends in the region.

It's not an overstatement to say I was profoundly proud of Australia's role at the time. It seemed to capture the notion of "a fair go" that my country so embraces.

In the years that followed however, I began to ask myself, was our government's motivation as pure as it would have us believe?

Were we in East Timor to selflessly end the bloodshed? Could it be that we were also eyeing off East Timor's vast oil and gas reserves?

East Timor's oil had long been Australia's weakness when it came to its unprincipled policies towards its small neighbour during the 1970s and '80s, but I had hoped the intervention was the beginning of a new chapter.

My doubts started growing in March 2002 - just two month's before East Timor would finally become an independent nation - when Australia withdrew its recognition of the maritime boundary jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Why is Australia walking away from the independent umpire that helps settle disputes arising about maritime boundaries, I thought to myself. Unfortunately the answer became clear.

Through some very lopsided negotiations, in which the Australian government took a hard-nosed - some would call belligerent - approach, Australia managed to short-change East Timor out of billions of dollars of government revenue. It refused to set maritime boundaries with East Timor and instead cornered Timor into a series of dodgy "temporary resource sharing agreements".

I felt betrayed. It was as if we had stepped in to chase off a schoolyard bully, but were now stealing the victim's lunch money.

I didn't like it. I joined with other concerned Australians in a grassroots campaign calling for our government to give East Timor a fair go.

During the "Timor Sea Justice Campaign" in 2006, I had the honour of meeting a number of World War II veterans. They had fought the Japanese in East Timor and explained to me that none of their mates would have lived had it not been for the help they received from the local Timorese.

They too were angry by our government's betrayal and in television ads funded by businessman, Ian Melrose, the Diggers said they'd prefer if prime minister John Howard didn't attend their ANZAC day parade.



PHOTO: Australia needs to draw the line and set permanent maritime boundaries with East Timor. (7pm TV News WA)

thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil - The... <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-21/henriss-address-the-oil...>

Even though permanent maritime boundaries still have not been established, I believe the campaign contributed to the fact that East Timor was eventually offered a larger share of the \$40 billion Greater Sunrise gas field.

But even this has now been tarnished.

Two years back, an Australian whistleblower spy came forward alleging that Australia had bugged East Timor's cabinet room during the negotiations. As such, East Timor took steps to have that particular treaty nullified arguing that it was not signed in good faith. In response, ASIO raided the offices of the lawyers representing East Timor and seized the whistleblower's passport.

Sixteen years ago I thought INTERFET would have a great and lasting legacy in East Timor, but today I'm concerned the greed of successive Australian governments and big oil companies is slowly but surely eroding the goodwill that the Australian Defence Force soldiers I served with helped to create.

If the Australian government wants me to believe Australia went into East Timor to help them transition to independence - it needs to prove it.

It needs to finish the job that John Howard supposedly began. It needs to draw the line and set permanent maritime boundaries with East Timor so our neighbours can benefit from the natural resources that they are entitled to.

In situations such as this one, international law calls for a "median line" solution. This simply means drawing a line half way between the two coastlines. It's fair and simple.

If an oil or gas field is located closer to East Timor then it should belong to East Timor. The Timorese fought for 25 years for their independence. They don't want or need our charity, they simply want what is theirs by law.

I urge our Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, to resubmit Australia to the maritime boundary jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and sit down with his Timorese counterpart and finish the job that we began in 1999 - draw the line.

Chip Henriss served as a commissioned officer in the Australian Regular Army and Army Reserve between 1991 and 2001. He is a member of the Timor Sea Justice Campaign which is on Twitter @TimorSeaJustice.

Topics: oil-and-gas, government-and-politics, foreign-affairs, international-law

Comments (105)

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Terry:

21 Sep 2015 11:38:16am

No, we wanted their oil, and if helping East Timor secured it for us, then lucky them.

Reply Alert moderator

harvey:

21 Sep 2015 2:00:00pm

The whistleblower with a conscience has been bullied by the Abbott government, his passport seized and his freedom curtailed. He is under threat of prison. As is his lawyer.

All for exposing the role that the LNP government, all the way to the top, played in taking most of the oil that under international law belongs to East Timor. To my mind this is corruption.

And to my mind, ordinary Australians do not support corruption or thuggery. Lets hope this all changes now.

Reply Alert moderator

Zing:

21 Sep 2015 6:44:09pm

When you reveal compromising information to your own government, it is called whistleblowing.

thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil - The... <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-21/henriss-address-the-oil...>

When you reveal compromising information to another government, it is called espionage. If not treason.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Dove:

21 Sep 2015 11:42:54am

Australians don't want to screw east Timor over and nor do those working in the government. But money does and when money is in its corporate form it has no conscience. This amoral force lobbies, bribes and donates to political parties who then abuse the instruments of state to get their hands on it. And so the military, police and intelligence arms of the executive are corrupted too

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

dubious the third:

21 Sep 2015 12:38:28pm

Australia is built on stealing the resources of First Nations Peoples, domestically and abroad. The East Timor fiasco is but one recent example, but a glaringly obvious one that needs to be sorted, and soon.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Puffin:

21 Sep 2015 1:16:51pm

Yet under international law it is Australia's. Advocates are trying to rob us.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Dove:

21 Sep 2015 1:49:00pm

"It is legal, justified, and reasonable. The primary purpose of these activities is to improve the working and living conditions of personnel stationed there, to better fulfil our international obligations concerning maritime search and rescue, disaster prevention, and mitigation, and to enable us to provide better services to vessels"

Chinese Ministry of the Interior re: claims in the South China Sea. Can you spot the difference?

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 2:08:23pm

I can, Dove. Australia's claim to the resources in question are laid out in black and white in the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Oh Lordy:

21 Sep 2015 2:10:21pm

Spot the difference??

Australia's claim is well supported by geology and therefore, International Law which is founded on the principle that submarine geological resources are owned by the closest nation with an unbroken geological connection to the resource.

China's claims are NOT supportable geologically or geographically..... and their historical claim is tenuous in the extreme.

The Australian claim stands up under International law...China's doesn't.

Tough, eh??!!

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Prime Lemur:

21 Sep 2015 5:41:42pm

Is that why we used our foreign spy agency, tasked with protecting Australia's security, to spy on the negotiations?

And that Mr Alexander Downer was an adviser to Woodside Petroleum, the company who is reaping the rewards of a stilted agreement.

Oh, and let's not forget ... the enormous donations rolling into Liberal Party coffers from said company.

No, our governments should have entered into negotiations in good faith ... if that brings about a good deal for Australia, so be it. But we risk it when you can cheat the process, right?

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

21 Sep 2015 2:16:55pm

Tabanus:

Easy: the Chinese are making it up: they have no claim to those island. Our claim is real.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 2:54:06pm

Puffin:

Agreed. International law and all just about every single country on earth recognizes our claim. Imagine the result If we forfeited all claims against our legal rights.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 4:32:13pm

Oh Lordy:

"Imagine the result If we forfeited all claims against our legal rights."

Indeed....if we overturned many decades of established, International Law and recognised submarine mineral rights on the primary basis of geographical proximity rather than geological continuity....

Iran would love that.....that would give them a claim to much of the oil under the Persian Gulf...in closest geographical proximity to Iran but geologically connected to and currently owned by Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Gulf Monarchies.

Is that a can of worms worth opening for the sake of mineral rights in the Timor Sea???

And then there is the Gulf of Mexico...the Caribbean (much of Venezuela's oil reserves)....Alaskan submarine oil fields in close geographical proximity to Russia....

What could possibly go wrong??

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 6:24:20pm

harvey:

So much rubbish in your small sentence Puffin.

The LNP used ASIO spies to con the East Timorese into a treaty that is unfair, thats what spies are for ffs. Commercial fraud where possible.

Any other story is just spin for the LNP and the multinational company perpetrators.

And then the LNP stole the case documents, illegally had a very good look at them, and gave them back on order of the Court. They've also threatened the whistleblower and the lawyer as well. As regards the rule of law, alls fair in spying and deceit. Hello curly.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 1:53:11pm

Oh Lordy:

Indeed.....the oil is shallow water on the continental shelf of the Australian mainland. It is geologically part of Australia. There is a whopping great oceanic trench several km deep between the edge of the Australian continental shelf and East Timor.

Under International law that means this geological resource is the property of Australia.

No ifs or buts about it.....the law is clear and unambiguous.

Why this emotive push to overturn well established principles of International law???

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 4:12:34pm

rockpicker:

Bloody lawyers. Our actions in illegally invading East Timor in 1942 cost them 40-70 000 odd lives as a result. I reckon we owe them a better deal than they got and so did most of the old diggers who fought there. Shame.

Reply Alert moderator

Oh Lordy:

21 Sep 2015 4:18:30pm

"Bloody lawyers."

We can agree on that bit at least!!

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 4:27:35pm

If Henriss had decided to make an argument that stated that conceding the resources rights to East Timor would be a really nice thing to do and would be moral compensation for perceived past wrongs then the matter of what the law actually says would not have come up, but that is not what Henriss did. He made a claim as to what the law says. If you make a legal case for something then you must expect a legal discussion, rockpicker.

Reply Alert moderator

Econ:

21 Sep 2015 2:29:46pm

That's the problem with money, no one knows how much is enough.

The more money we have the more weapons we can buy and the more likely we are to use them.

We are told we must be more productive, but that just means our assets are used faster.

If holes in the ground were an asset we would be very wealthy indeed.

Reply Alert moderator

rag:

21 Sep 2015 4:22:04pm

'We are told we must be more productive, but that just means our assets are used faster.'

Is exactly what happened to Japan's people. For the company, Jap crap evolved to high quality late 60s into 70s and now look at the place. Toxic as hell, polluting the north pacific with way too many particle disintegrations per second and is an insolvent nation.

More productivity, more growth, more people, more environmental burden, more corruption, more investor state wars, expand, expand, expand, to where, for what?

Go forth and multiply is getting a bit old I think.

Reply Alert moderator

Sea Monster:

21 Sep 2015 11:45:02am

Australia signed the Timor Gap treaty with Indonesia in 1989. Australia had an agreement by most accounts favourable to it. Why weaken that agreement and the basis of the agreement on our entire boundary with Indonesia by intervening?

So the agreement we are pursuing with East Timor might be unfair. Great. Let's talk about it. Let's not distract ourselves with conspiracy theories.

Reply Alert moderator

Ovid:

21 Sep 2015 1:19:53pm

In a world of full of manipulation, half-truths and lies, the conspiracy theory is often a safer bet than the official story. Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.

Reply Alert moderator

mike j:

21 Sep 2015 2:29:33pm

Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them... CONSPIRACY MAN is here to save the day!

Smarter than professional analysts, better informed than the mass media, more ethical than the justice system, CONSPIRACY MAN oversimplifies complex scenarios into bite-sized chunks of paranoia for easy digestion by simpletons who believe that any mystery can be solved in an hour-long episode of CSI.

Reply Alert moderator

Jay Somasundaram:

21 Sep 2015 11:49:46am

Well said.

Let us become a country we can be proud of.

Reply Alert moderator

Oh Lordy:

21 Sep 2015 2:12:49pm

I believe we already are!!

Reply Alert moderator

Kanooka:

21 Sep 2015 3:26:22pm

Oh Lordy: You are very easily pleased then, for mine there are a myriad of issues that need to be addressed before we can all be proud of Australia..... Off shore detention, Indigenous health and education, unfair and unequitable taxation system, unreasonable rorts in the political system, senate voting system that gives us Senators with very limited support (less than 3%), incursions into other countries without Parliament approval, failure to collect fair and reasonable taxes from foreign corporations, inherent racism, to name just a few.

Time to remove the rose tinted glasses me thinks!

Reply Alert moderator

Oh Lordy:

21 Sep 2015 3:42:25pm

It has to be perfect before you can be proud of it??

And not just perfect....but YOUR definition of perfect and nobody else's??

Wow...Same rules apply to your family and friends??

Reply Alert moderator

Felix:

21 Sep 2015 3:51:40pm

Many more countries have far bigger problems than that.

However if those are reasons enough for you not to have pride in your country, so be it.

But they are YOUR reasons - and Oh Lordy clearly has reasons of his/her own for feeling the opposite way you do.

No need to climb on your high horse and get personal.

Reply Alert moderator

Happy Expat:

21 Sep 2015 2:39:06pm

And how do you propose we do that given the quality (or lack of it) of our politicians of all colours in both houses. Do you think the Green senators give a hoot about the "best interests of Australia" when they cast their votes ?

Pull the other leg mate.

Reply Alert moderator

gazanazdiak:

21 Sep 2015 12:02:24pm

"It was as if we had stepped in to chase off a schoolyard bully, but were now stealing the victim's lunch money."

Exactly right Chip.

It's despicable for a nation with the resources we have to try so hard to rob a small neighbour of the only real chance they have to improve the standard of living for their people.

It certainly seems like the government that sent you there were not risking the lives of you and your brothers and sisters in arms to protect the people of Timor Leste, but simply making a grab for their main resource.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 12:51:20pm

reaver:

Australia is not robbing East Timor of anything, gaznazdiak. Henriss is wrong about the correct application of the "median line" concept. That only applies when two countries share a continental shelf. Under Part VI of the Convention on the Law of the Sea resources under the sea bed belong to the countries on the continental shelf where the resources are located. Australia and East Timor are on two different continental shelves so the two countries only have legitimate claims over resources under their own shelves.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

GJA:

21 Sep 2015 1:27:29pm

The treaty under which Australia is operating is one it had with Indonesia, following their takeover of East Timor, but which the latter has never been a part of. When Indonesia took over, East Timor was a colony of Portugal, and the Portuguese never joined the negotiations that established the median zone. As an independent nation, East Timor is not bound by the treaty between Australia and Indonesia, and its maritime boundaries would, under normal circumstances, i.e., not having Australia demand they honour Indonesia's agreement, extend over the disputed resources areas. We are playing the bully and denying East Timor the revenues they should receive.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 2:00:44pm

No, GJA, as I have explained East Timor's legitimate claim would not extend over the disputed areas. The disputed areas are on Australia's continental shelf, not East Timor's. The former treaties between Australia and Indonesia have nothing to do with the matter.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Tabanus:

21 Sep 2015 1:34:02pm

Dear reaver

I did think of trying to explain the issues, but as I said elsewhere it is quite complicated. There are no black and white areas, but heaps of grey, despite the efforts of the author. Compromises have to be made by both sides.

But most of the posters here don't care about facts, arguments or issues.

It is simple to them: rich "white" country and poor "brown" country. Guilt is obvious - no need to look further.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 2:40:29pm

Grey areas, Tabanus? Which part of "The coastal State exercises over the continental shelf sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources" and "The coastal State shall have the exclusive right to authorize and regulate drilling on the continental shelf for all purposes" sounds ambiguous to you? Under the Convention on the Law of the Sea Australia owns the resources and has to pay 7% of the total value of extracted resources (if they are extracted in an area more than 200 nautical miles from Australia's nearest coastline) to the International Seabed Authority "which shall distribute them to States Parties to this Convention, on the basis of equitable sharing criteria, taking into account the interests and needs of developing States, particularly the least developed and the land-locked among them."

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

gaznazdiak:

21 Sep 2015 1:45:13pm

But seriously, does semantics and legal sophistry justify a country as wealthy as we are being so grubby as to try to stop another nation with so little from having a chance to improve their lot?

This is as much, if not more, a moral as a legal issue.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 1:58:08pm

This is nothing but a legal issue, gaznazdiak. East Timor (and East Timor's supporters) are trying to make a legal claim to the resources in question, a claim that they have no grounds for. Rich vs. poor has nothing to do with it. They have no more legitimate legal claim over the resources under the law as it stands than I would have over someone's Toorak home. Having it would certainly improve my lot, but I still have no legal claim over it.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

21 Sep 2015 2:18:27pm

Tabanus:

Glad to see you have dropped the "legal" argument.

Now it just an argument as to whether we should give more money to a government that has shown itself to be incapable of governing.

Reply Alert moderator

james Murphy:

21 Sep 2015 3:30:58pm

Why do you think the decision-makers in Timor Leste would do anything significant to improve the standard of living for their people? Have you been there, ever?

The country currently makes money (not a vast fortune by international standards, but still, nothing to be sneezed at) from coffee exports, and receives a lot of international aid, yet poverty is still prevalent, medical care, and decent schooling are still very much dreams for a lot of the people. When I was working in Dili, I could also see some efforts made to start a tourism industry, (still some of the best reef-diving I've ever experienced, I might add), but you didn't have to look hard to see the dire situation faced by so many.

Why will oil and gas make any difference to the way the country is managed, without people at the top making a real effort? Even the locals I worked with were asking this - they were happy to be independent, but were starting to wonder what their government was actually doing to make the country a better place for all.

Another point: As we keep being told, Australia, and other developed countries should stop using oil, gas, and coal for environmental reasons, yet, it's apparently all fine and dandy if TL exploits the same resources for their own financial gain - obviously for some imbeciles, CO2 from rich countries is more harmful than CO2 from poor countries...

Reply Alert moderator

Tabanus:

21 Sep 2015 12:11:58pm

A very simplistic article on a very complex subject, and one that simply ignores most of the issues.

Particularly the main point that despite millions of dollars of oil money, East Timor is rapidly becoming a failed state. How pouring more cash in would prevent this catastrophe is not explained.

PS As "pre-emptive invasions" have been in the news in the past few years, it is interesting that we never mention that Australia invaded East Timor in WW2, when it was ruled by the neutral Portugal. Japan invaded after we had taken it over.

Have the "international law" brigade started legal action against the Australian leaders of the time for their "war crime"?

Did marchers parade through Sydney yelling "Not in my name"?

Surely those protesting today do not have double standards? Do they only protest when the USA is involved?

Reply Alert moderator

Reinhard:

21 Sep 2015 12:31:13pm

I confess that at the time I believed Howard's motives were noble, protecting the people of Timor Leste, and his real motivation was not clear at the time

I really should have known better.

Reply Alert moderator

Sack:

21 Sep 2015 1:25:03pm

The article certainly ignores the biggest factor, the map of the sea floor and the continental shelf.

As for the bugging issue...

"Hey can we come and refurbish your Prime Minister's private meeting room. We'll do it for free."

"Lovely. Great idea. Go ahead."

Stupid is as stupid does. A bit hard to feel sorry for them.

Reply Alert moderator

gazanazdiak:

21 Sep 2015 1:32:18pm

I think it's your outlook on the issue that's simplistic, to say the least.

You say:

"Particularly the main point that despite millions of dollars of oil money, East Timor is rapidly becoming a failed state. How pouring more cash in would prevent this catastrophe is not explained."

This statement suggests that you believe that simply because this small, impoverished and fractured third world country, trying to recover from years of occupation and civil war, hasn't been able to perform the societal miracle of transforming themselves instantly into a prosperous first world nation that they should be forever prevented from doing so by having their only resource stolen by a rich and far more powerful neighbour.

The ONLY chance Timor Leste has of avoiding becoming a perennial basket case reliant on the cold charity of others is the wealth represented by their oil.

The very thought of a country like Australia stealing that one and only chance from them is as shameful a concept as say, a well paid professional footballer beating up a homeless person and stealing what little they own.

We have no more right to steal Timor Leste's oil than Saddam had to invade Kuwait.

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 2:14:42pm

Our oil, gaznazdiak. I have explained this.

So what if the only chance East Timor has of avoiding perennial basket case status is the wealth represented by our oil? Your homeless man's best chance of avoiding lifelong poverty is represented by the wealth in and of the professional footballer's Darling Point home, but that does not mean that they can have it or that they have any legal claim to it.

Reply Alert moderator

graazt:

21 Sep 2015 1:32:33pm

lol - the puported lack of legality for our involvement in Syria is based on various UN laws. The analysis is over at Fact Check.

The UN wasn't actually around in WW2.

There may be other international laws around then I guess; but seems a lot of the League of Nations covenants had broken down by the time the Japanese occupied Timor-Leste.

Surely you've got better things to be outraged about today @Tabanus?

Reply Alert moderator

Tabanus:

21 Sep 2015 2:23:50pm

Dear graazt

The UN does not make laws: it is not, despite the wishes of some, a "world government".

And I am not outraged: I just suspect that due to the deplorable level of history taught in our schools, that most readers would not be aware that it was because we invaded East Timor that the Japanese moved in. I like to educate those robbed by a system that prefers to pretend that spending 5 years learning about pre-settlement Australia is preferable to knowing the development of Western civilisation.

Whether the Japanese would have occupied the east end of the Island is debateable: they probably would not have done so.

As for Fact Check: it is good for a laugh, but please don't use it as a reference.

Reply Alert moderator

graazt:

21 Sep 2015 3:53:55pm

You were referring to Iraq, not Syria? Unless Abbott is being accused of war crimes? I know Howard was some time ago.

You seem to be drawing a legal equivalence between our occupying Timor being the same as our occupying Iraq?

I think the international law brigade had a bit to say on various things that transpired in ww2. But the exigencies arising from that conflict, and the lesser scope of relevant law at the time makes calls around "double-standards"

seem a bit hyperbolic.

The double-standards are more frequently expressed as occurring the other way around. In that the victors are usually indemnified from their crimes.

Doesn't seem to be any different now as it was then.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Stalga:

21 Sep 2015 4:09:21pm

I don't think the term "invaded" is at all accurate. The Timorese knew what was happening and had chosen sides already. We were welcomed. They fought hard along side us to slow the Jap advance after they landed. We literally got out of there by the skin of our teeth thanks to the locals, whom our troops praised highly. We also told them we would return. The Japanese made them pay a very high price for this. As Gusmua(?) said in his inauguration speech, we repaid an old debt by helping liberate them.

I'm not impressed that we have been playing serious hardball over mining rights. Fair is fair. Talk of geography, failed states and legal interpretations is inappropriate. This is no way to treat a close neighbour, friend or ally.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

a_boy:

21 Sep 2015 12:14:03pm

Without a doubt past Australian governments have screwed Timor L'este to the wall. Turnbull should act immediately to redress this horrible situation. Anyone who saw the travelling exhibition which we saw at the West Australian Museum last year will appreciate the risks the Timorese ran to protect Australian troops caught behind the lines in WWII.

We cheated East Timor out of the bulk of their oilfield entitlements and we must give them back.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Shilling:

21 Sep 2015 12:27:18pm

We didn't go into East Timor to save them, so I doubt we'll give them back their oil and gas rights now we are out.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Pieter:

21 Sep 2015 12:28:16pm

Are you sure of that ? As far as I know Timor l'Este get 90 % of the royalties coming out of ZOCA. With Sunrise the issue is where the gas will be landed and turned into LNG. There the debate has been principally about what is technically feasible and economically the most profitable.

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Alan:

21 Sep 2015 2:23:02pm

"As far as I know Timor l'Este get 90 % of the royalties coming out of ZOCA."

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

international tribunal:

21 Sep 2015 2:27:27pm

A consortium of oil companies led by ConocoPhillips demanded an agreement on the Bayu-Undan field, which lies entirely within Zoca, so that they could pursue investments to exploit it. States providing aid to East Timor added to the pressure, anticipating that its income from the field, after Australia had taken its 50% share, would allow them to reduce aid after 2005.

Behind apparently generous public declarations, Australia sought to persuade the Timorese that they would lose everything if they asked for too much. As the Northern Territories minister for resource development, Daryl Manzie, told the Asia Pacific Petroleum Conference in September 2000: "We don't know if negotiations will bring up 60-40 or 50-50, but Australia is not reluctant to discuss that." He added that the field's gas reserves were of no importance to Australia, since it owned 10 times more elsewhere and could exploit other fields if the Timorese refused to accept its conditions. Australia's foreign minister, Alexander Downer, remarked ominously that any revision of the share-out of royalties "plays into the overall size of the Australian aid programme in East Timor".

When the UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor) official responsible for the negotiations, Peter Galbraith, supported the Timorese by threatening to take Australia back to the ICJ, the Australian government conceded 90% of the royalties from Bayu-Undan. Besides the remaining 10%, Australia also profits from the infrastructure for

processing and exporting gas, which is in Darwin, and the jobs associated with it. East Timor accepted the deal. Its budget at the time - \$75m, 40% of it from international aid -represented barely \$94 per head of population when there was almost no infrastructure, communications, education or health. Timor's 90% of the royalties from Bayu-Undan came to \$100m a year over 20 years, a significant sum.

But this 90% share applies only in the Bayu-Undan field in Zoca, now designated the Joint Petroleum development area (JPDA). The situation remains unchanged in the Laminaria/Corallina fields to the west, which Australia exploits unilaterally at 150,000 barrels per day, and in Greater Sunlight to the east. These fields would treble East Timor's reserves (6) if the frontiers were redrawn in accordance with the Timorese claim, which most experts support as legally correct. Australia continues to contest the claim on the basis of the continental shelf.

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international tribunal:

21 Sep 2015 2:28:33pm

The actions of Australian politicians belie their insistence that the law is on their side. In 2000 the first assistant secretary at the international law office of the Attorney-General's department, William Campbell, declared that he was in favour of a negotiated settlement and opposed to a judicial solution under which "states lose control" (7). In March 2002, two months before East Timor's independence, Australia withdrew from the ICJ's jurisdiction and rejected arbitration by the International Tribunal for the law of the sea in Hamburg. With recourse to the courts ruled out, there remains only the law of the strongest.

Having delayed its response to the Timorese request for border negotiations until 18 months after independence, the Australian government then postponed the first meeting until April 2004. When the Timorese demanded monthly meetings, Australia claimed that lack of time and personnel made a six-month interval necessary, meanwhile collecting \$1m a day from Laminaria/Corallina.

The oil companies demanded an agreement by the end of 2004 if they were to invest in Greater Sunrise. This field lies astride the eastern boundary of the JPDA, 95 nautical miles from the island of Timor and 250 from Australia, on the Timorese side of the median line. Its exploitation must be mutual.

Until the boundaries are renegotiated, Australia remains the sole beneficiary of the 80% of the field lying outside the JPDA, while East Timor is entitled to only 90% of the remaining 20%; 18% altogether.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Losimpson:

21 Sep 2015 12:23:16pm

Yet another blot on our landscape. Time to fix it Malcolm.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

ken:

21 Sep 2015 12:28:25pm

Thanks Chip. Not only do the boundaries need a rejig but also our whole philosophy around Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWF). The Timor-Leste SWF is about \$23B for a population of about 1.2 million. Yet the population lives in Third world conditions. They are somehow ripping off their own. The closest thing Australia has to a SWF is the Future Fund (FF). However, unlike Timor or PNG, the FF doesn't draw on revenue from mining directly. Its \$117B in savings have come from ordinary surpluses and funds from the sale of Telstra. East Timor and Papua New Guinea make our SWF look backwards when it comes to converting oil and gas into long term savings.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

graazt:

21 Sep 2015 1:40:22pm

Yes it's a shame we can't get a proper resource-based SWF in place.

Much better apparently to keep various mining companies and magnates happy, so they can donate to our political parties.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Zing:

21 Sep 2015 12:32:33pm

"I thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil"

Can we not do both?

At any rate, East Timor's problems go a lot further than not having enough money.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

spacey 101:

Well of course we can zing.

But surely it's not too much to be honest about before, during and after the act.

Let's not pretend we were there for 'humanitarian' interests and bask in the accolades for it, when we were in fact there for our own self interest.

How hard is it to be honest about it??

Reply Alert moderator

Tabanus:

Ok - I'll be honest.

We were there because Mr Howard went over the top on a press release, and the Indonesian PM went along with it, not having thought it through.

It was far too early for an independent East Timor, even if one was viable. And no work had been done to acclimatise the considerable proportion of the population which either did not want to separate from Indonesia or did not want a socialist government in the Portuguese style, which was all that was being offered.

It is only a generation since the Civil War, begun when a military coup in Portugal imposed a socialist government there. It promptly announced that East Timor would be independent, getting rid of a costly drain of resources.

UDT, a slightly more moderate party, fought a civil war with Fretilin, a radical left faction. Portuguese trained and armed troops fought for Fretilin, and UDT was driven into exile in West Timor. As was Apodeti, a smaller party that wanted integration with Indonesia.

Indonesia, fearing a Cuba on its doorstep, invaded. We, and the rest of the world, knowing Indonesia's fear of Communist insurrection and also concerned about Fretilin's policies, did nothing. Remember, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia had fallen to Communism, Malaysia and Thailand had fought bitter battles with insurrectionists and it was just 10 years after an attempted coup in Indonesia had led to perhaps 1 million deaths.

It was always something that needed to be fixed, but nobody did anything - it was always too hard. And then Mr Howard went overboard and it hit the fan.

A perfect example of talking before thinking. As the Romans said "Festina lente".

That is honesty: we did the right thing, the easy thing, but we did not follow through. A bit like more recent events.

Reply Alert moderator

mike j:

By 'honest' you mean 'admit what I think it is you're doing'.

There's no point debating with conspiracy theorists who've already made up their minds.

Reply Alert moderator

spacey 101:

Umm, no, by honest I mean 'we are going to help you, but we have a vested interest in those oil fields over there, and helping you makes it easier for us to help ourselves'.

That's it. I haven't included moral issues or judgements, nor legal ones. Just the honest truth.

Reply Alert moderator

Reinhard:

We should all be grateful for the service Chip Henriss and his fellow ADF personnel gave to help the people of Timor Leste gain independence.

They must all feel terrible betrayed by the recent revelations of the Howard Govt's true motivations, and the actions of the current AG and govt to cover up their malfeasance.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 1:50:20pm

James:

Actually No. I deployed to East Timor in at the same time as the Author and was there until the end of INTERFET. I don't feel betrayed at all by anything to do with that mission.

I do feel betrayed by people who want to use my service as a bludgeon to trumpet their own political agenda. Please don't make claims on my behalf or on behalf of other veterans.

As for Claims it was all about the oil. Australia could have got a much better deal for much less blood and treasure by just supporting the status quo and leaving Indonesia in charge in East Timor we didn't need to put troops on the ground to do it just stay out of the way. We went to Timor for the right reasons and did good work.

I would have more sympathy for the East Timorese if their own government wasn't deliberately making their lives worse including in the past fomenting a crisis just to bring ADF troops back into the country after most had left, just for the money it would make them.

Reply Alert moderator

Reinhard:

21 Sep 2015 2:26:56pm

Pardon me for speaking on your behalf but you cannot seriously condone the actions of the Howard govt? You cannot seriously believe it was acceptable for them to force ASIO agents to plant listening devices in the cabinet rooms of the Timor Leste govt? You cannot seriously agree with the actions of current AG Brandis , raiding the legal practice of the counsel for the Timor Leste govt or the confiscation of the whistle-blower's passport two days before they were due to testify at the ICC?

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 3:32:03pm

Testify at the International Criminal Court, Reinhard? I find that extremely hard to believe given that the International Criminal Court has no jurisdiction over any of the matters of contention between Australia and East Timor. Are you sure that you do not mean the ICJ, the International Court of Justice?

Reply Alert moderator

spacey 101:

21 Sep 2015 4:22:59pm

If we believe the ICC has no jurisdiction or bearing on the case then why not just let the guy go? What harm can be done by a guy testifying in a court that cannot pronounce judgment and of which we can just ignore?

Seems like overkill to me.

Reply Alert moderator

Reinhard:

21 Sep 2015 4:48:17pm

Reaver indeed, the case is before the International Court of Justice, do excuse the error perhaps due to a tinge of wishful thinking.

Reply Alert moderator

MA:

21 Sep 2015 4:32:08pm

Good to hear from someone with experience and personal insight, unfortunately some in their ivory towers will still not listen.

I too believed sending troops was for the right reasons regardless of any other motive. Time seems to blur the memories of atrocities for some reason (including Afghanistan)

Reply Alert moderator

micka:

21 Sep 2015 12:41:21pm

Australia has been East Timor's best friend in the region. John Howard, in particular, was the champion of East Timor's freedom, in contrast to former governments and smug DFAT mandarins who toadied to Indonesia over 30 years. Australia and Australians don't need to loathe ourselves over this issue. We can be proud of our relationship with East Timor and refuse to adopt the assumptions in this article.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 12:44:01pm

John Guru:

I agree 100% with this article. How our Australian Governments of both political parties have all handled this boundary demarcation, does nothing to place Australia on any "fair go" pedestal. Over the years, our Governments have done their best to dud East Timor out of as much of East Timor's oil and gas reserves as they can get away with - an absolutely despicable way to treat a small, poor country on our doorstep, who needs all the help they can get after the years of occupation by Indonesia.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 12:45:41pm

Cyn:

When it comes to foreign policy no one should expect any country to do purely charitable work, and charity is never done with a military. Even helping disaster hit areas in foreign countries should be seen through the perspective of self interest in either the good will it will provoke or the economic damage a slower rebuilding effort will cost. It sounds cynical but world leaders aren't in the habit of running charities and their only responsibility is to their own population.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 12:46:32pm

reaver:

Why is Australia walking away from the independent umpire that helps settle disputes arising about maritime boundaries? Because that umpire has a proven history of ignoring the rules when the rules do not suit it. The International Court of Justice has a history of dividing resources using a halfway-between-countries mark (the "median line" solution Henriss wrote about), regardless of where continental shelves begin or end, which is very much not the way that international maritime law was meant to be applied and certainly not what the signatory countries, including Australia, signed up to. Under international law the resources under a continental shelf belong to the countries on that shelf. If two countries are on that shelf and are close enough that their claims clash (i.e. are less than 400 nautical miles apart) then the rights to the resources in the contested area are split between those countries, with the dividing line between the two countries' claims being half the distance between the two countries in question. This ONLY applies when the two countries share the same continental shelf. If the two countries do not share a continental shelf then the distance between the countries is utterly irrelevant under international law as it is meant to be applied. Australia and East Timor do not share a continental shelf* so if international law was to be applied correctly (i.e. as laid out in Part VI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) then any resources under the sea bed North of the Timor Trough (the oceanic trough that separates the Indo-Australian Plate's continental shelf to the South and the Timor Plate's to the North) belong to East Timor and any resources under the sea bed South of the Timor Trough belong to Australia. East Timor is not entitled to the resources under the international agreements they are using to claim them and it does not matter whether an oil or gas field is located closer to East Timor. Henriss is simply completely wrong about his "median line" solution. The way that the International Court of Justice rules on these things may benefit East Timor, but if it is not going to apply the international agreements in the way that they are written then why should Australia accept it making the decision given that Australia does not have to accept it making the decision (which it does not. The International Court of Justice is only one of the several options countries have for deciding these kinds of things)?

*Please note that a continental shelf is not the same as a tectonic plate. Australia and East Timor share a tectonic plate, but not a continental shelf.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 1:11:44pm

Simon:

Excellent post Reaver. It's very refreshing to see someone post the facts of the issue rather than simply dole out one-sided emotive rhetoric such as the original article.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 1:55:43pm

Tabanus:

Dear Simon

While you may like facts and reasoned discussion, a glance at the other posts here shows you are a minority.

How dare you impose your white masculine heterosexual rationality on others!

This is a post modern forum, all arguments have equal validity, regardless of merit. Unless of course they are made the group mentioned above. Obviously one must draw the line somewhere.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 2:37:53pm

Rocdocta:

As a geologist, i would like you to please explain what you meant by the idea that they share the same plate but not the same shelf? i was going to write up some stuff but just did a straight copy and paste from somewhere else.

"A continental shelf is the edge of a continent that lies under the ocean. Continents are the seven main divisions of land on

thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil - The... <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-21/henriss-address-the-oil...>

Earth. A continental shelf extends from the coastline of a continent to a drop-off point called the shelf break. From the break, the shelf descends toward the deep ocean floor in what is called the continental slope.

Even though they are underwater, continental shelves are part of the continent. The actual boundary of a continent is not its coastline, but the edge of the continental shelf. The widths of the continental shelves vary. Along parts of the U.S. state of California, for example, the continental shelf extends less than a kilometer (.62 miles). But along the northern coast of Siberia, the shelf extends about 1,290 kilometers (800 miles). The average width of a continental shelf is 65 kilometers (40 miles). "

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 3:02:39pm

The matter of what a continental shelf is legally defined as is dealt with under Part VI of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, Rocard. Read it.

Of course not all continental plates are the same or even similar. The legal definition relies on what is physically present rather than on every country being "issued" the same shelf space. This is what the current dispute over the resources is concerned with. Australia has a very large continental shelf (as defined by the Convention) and East Timor has a very small continental shelf. Those supporting East Timor claim that this is "unfair". Fair has nothing to do with it, the physical attributes of the sea floor do.

A continental shelf is a feature of a tectonic plate. One is on the other, they are not synonymous.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

G.N. Newsam:

21 Sep 2015 12:57:07pm

Certainly it's hard to argue that Australia, and in particular Liberal Australian governments, have not abused their relative power and position in this matter. If so, the next step might be to press the prime minister or foreign minister to make a clear, comprehensive statement of Australia's position. This would serve to flush the government and bureaucracy out as I doubt that Foreign Affairs would be able to provide a justification that is not obviously self-serving or consistent with stated Australian policy on other maritime disputes, e.g. resolving boundary disputes in the South China Sea. Indeed given the Indonesian government's own strong interest in developing mutual understanding with Australia on maritime issues, as an interested third party it might be encouraged to formally request a position statement on maritime boundaries from Australia (8->).

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 2:05:22pm

Australia has no problem with having the matter adjudicated, G.N., as it wants done in other international maritime boundary disputes, just not by the International Court of Justice. Have you wondered why, out of the several international bodies that could be selected to adjudicate this, East Timor and East Timor's supporters are insisting that the International Court of Justice and only the International Court of Justice be the one selected? The answer is that none of the others have any chance of ruling in East Timor's favour.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

CF Zero:

21 Sep 2015 1:01:27pm

Dont let it get to you. You can read a string of stories of US soldiers who came to the realization that all they did was topple governments so American business interests could take over the countries assets.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

mike j:

21 Sep 2015 2:14:42pm

So, subject myself to sociopolitical analyses from grunts who took a wage to shoot at other human beings for the government they now criticise?

No thanks.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Puffin:

21 Sep 2015 1:15:48pm

It's not their oil. It's on our continental shelf. By international law it is ours. It just happens to be closer to east Timor main land. The entire base of this article is wrong.

Any money Timor gains is a gift as it wasn't theirs to begin with. It just happens to be easier to employ them.

[Reply](#) [Alert moderator](#)

Bertrand:

21 Sep 2015 2:06:00pm

so you are happy with the Chinese claims for the South China Sea etc under similar logic?

Reply Alert moderator

Tabanus:

21 Sep 2015 3:30:17pm

The Chinese approach is more along the lines of

"It is ours because we say it is. We don't care what you or anyone else thinks, and we have the power and will to enforce what we want".

I have not seen any claims by China that refer to continental shelves.

Reply Alert moderator

GrumpiSkeptic:

21 Sep 2015 1:25:59pm

I have often wonder about the sincerity of Australian intervention in E.Timor. Sure, we all do that, using all kinds of excuses to gain advantage. However, to actually engage in a war with another country is quite another.

Come to think of it, most nations do it. Big one screwed medium size and minnows. Medium size screwed smaller nations and minnows. Minnows have no one to wallop but among themselves.

USA and the "Coalition of the Jolly Willing" messed around in the Middle East, pretending to rid those nations of dictators. Oil resources were never once crossed their minds ? Of course, never allow truth to stuff up a good story, or an invasion?

The conflict between Indonesia and Australia over E.Timor was based on the promise that Indonesian brutality must end, and that the Timor folks should get some peace and quiet by getting rid of Indonesia. Deep down, and I mean deep down beneath the ocean, is the vast resource Australia already knew about.

OK, may be the reason for the military actions were actually pure. unfortunately, the ways Australia bullied its way to get to the oil, have sullied and cheapened the work of many.

Why do we do that? Because..."Yes, we CAN !"

Reply Alert moderator

standup99:

21 Sep 2015 2:17:19pm

Chip, you need to read the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and in particular the section dealing with the limits of the continental shelf. I don't have a problem with Australia gifting resource royalties to East Timor as foreign aid but it could be a problem to unilaterally alter the Convention since we have other neighbours to consider where the concession may be troublesome in the future. Indonesia and PNG for starters

Reply Alert moderator

Happy Expat:

21 Sep 2015 2:35:12pm

If we had not taken the action we did to guarantee East Timor's independence these oil & gas fields would have belonged to Indonesia and the East Timorise would certainly have got none of the proceeds. Like Bali, all the profits would go to wealthy Javanese.

Having said that though Australia's stance is reprehensible and the actions of the bumbling AFP only underscore an admission of guilt. I agree with the contributor that the boundary determined by the International umpire should be honoured completely. One wonders where Julie Bishop is in not defending the East Timorese in her role as foreign minister. After all this is a more worthy cause than the lives of the convicted drug couriers in Bali.

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 4:31:19pm

The role of the Australian Foreign Minister is to represent Australia's interests, Expat, not other country's interests at the expense of Australia's.

Reply Alert moderator

LB:

21 Sep 2015 2:47:19pm

There was a classic interview some years ago (7.30 Report I think) with Alexander Downer when Foreign Minister. Clarke & Dawe couldn't have scripted it better, I honestly still don't know how Downer or interviewer kept a straight face. And nothing much has changed since.

thought Australia wanted to help East Timor, not take its oil - The... <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-21/henriss-address-the-oil...>

It is a valuable oil field, no doubt. But in the big scheme of things the rights \$\$\$ would make a massive difference in relieving poverty in Timor L'este. In Aus govt hands they would never amount to much more than small change. So why can't we just accord TL their fair share, even a bit more?

Instead, as Downer made abundantly clear back then, Canberra wants TL to know they are a small nation and rather than having their own resource revenue they should just stand quietly in line for a share of Australia's (dwindling) foreign aid, AND BE GRATEFUL FOR IT!!!!

Reply Alert moderator

Nathan:

21 Sep 2015 2:54:28pm

Funny that we are haggling over 'whale blubber' again such a backward country we have become.

Reply Alert moderator

Fair's fair:

21 Sep 2015 2:59:08pm

Great article!!!!

Australia has a history of grabbing resources off poorer/original owners.

The real question is why aren't we concerned? What if a more powerful nation started taking our things?????

Reply Alert moderator

Felix:

21 Sep 2015 3:55:47pm

I'd expect we'd fight back - or die trying.

Not run away.

Reply Alert moderator

HPH:

21 Sep 2015 4:46:42pm

I'd expect some of us collaborate with the invaders (for a fee) and help them take our things.

Reply Alert moderator

Dean:

21 Sep 2015 3:19:27pm

How do we know it wasn't Downer acting on his own?

Making threats to take aid from the Timorese if they demanded too much, bugged their office, had a predecessor raid the whistleblower. A man who founded his own firm to become an advisor to Woodside Petroleum, what a coincidence that soon after bugging negotiations over an oil-field, the ex-minister is appointed as an advisor to an oil company.

Government Ministers should be automatically excluded from any such roles which relate to their work for the Government, unless they agree to give up their Govt pension, benefits and perks.

Reply Alert moderator

saline:

21 Sep 2015 4:06:28pm

Is it Australia's oil, or is it the property of an oil company?

There is a continental shelf law of the sea.

But I thought a big oil company owned it.

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 4:33:55pm

Legally the oil resources are Australia's, saline, and Australia sells the oil to the oil companies as they extract it.

Reply Alert moderator

saline:

21 Sep 2015 4:54:09pm

Thanks reaver, solves my dilemma.

We went to all that trouble to hand this oil asset to privateers. Not happy.

Then why don't we get cheaper petrol and oil products?

Reply Alert moderator

Gordon:

21 Sep 2015 6:03:31pm

Technically the title to the oil passes on payment of the royalty. The Govt could choose to use the royalty money to subsidise oil for consumers, or it could put up some of the capital for a larger share in the output, and then sell its share cheaply to us. It does neither of these things because it likes the money and it doesn't like financial risk.

Basically our resource regime is a zero-risk model. We expect the company to fund 100% of the project. ("Govt sink \$billion in dud oil project" is not a headline voters like to read). For zero \$ risked, we get a modest royalty (still billions, but in % terms modest). We also of course get to tax the company profits and the workers wages.

Some countries eg Norway take some of the risk by refunding some of the losses, and take more of the profit in exchange. This works well in low risk exploration areas like the North Sea (i.e a very prolific area), and an electorate that understands the business. "Govt refunds billions on dud oil project" would also not be popular here, but they understand that their govt is a full partner in the enterprise.

For us, our exploration success rate is maybe one in 10, with many millions spent just getting to the point of drilling. I leave you to speculate how long a govt would last here, making those kind of investments.

Reply Alert moderator

saline:

21 Sep 2015 4:31:59pm

Way back when Gough was regarding East Timor as part of Indonesia, I believed that if Australia was about to free someone, it should be the people of (then West Irian) West Papua which was snatched by Indonesia around 1969.

Australia focused on East Timor, while the West New Guinea peoples were persecuted by the Indonesian government and have been ever since. Dreadful things have been done to them.

These people have never been properly assisted and if ever there was a case for international intervention its this one.

It is around 46 years of persecution and all the aid people and red cross, everyone, have done nothing.

Reply Alert moderator

reaver:

21 Sep 2015 4:55:02pm

So you think Australia (along with some other countries, obviously) should invade Indonesia in order to free the West New Guinea peoples, saline? How do you think that turned out when we did something similar in Iraq?

Reply Alert moderator

sline:

21 Sep 2015 6:56:49pm

reaver, firstly I didn't mention "invasion".

I had in mind activity in the area of aid and friendship. There are many would-be refugees if they knew someone in the outside world cared. Many get murdered just because they try to organise their neighbours in a village for the improvement of their lives.

Another form of assistance would be education and medical assistance.

They are considered not to be Indonesian in origin by most geographers.

Do you always assume that a takeover or violent assault is the only means of offering assistance to a near neighbour?

Reply Alert moderator

stephen jones:

21 Sep 2015 5:39:05pm

Why did we bug the Timorese delegation ?

I remember reading in the paper when they found this out and I'll bet that is the reason the resultant deal - whether or not is it a fair one - is now in dispute. It probably is because they thought we cheated and manipulated the outcome. That's wrong, but now trust is in dispute, and for that we should revalue the whole deal.

Negotiations of this sort are territorial anyway and what was right for them should have been right for us.

21 Sep 2015 6:24:16pm

Charles:

Nice to see another partisan article about who owns this oil. Perhaps some basic law of the sea, an understanding about continental shelves and a bit of history about the International Court of Justice and old Chip might not be looking so naive. As it is he's taken the whole bait and then tied it up with the ANZACs. Come on Chip, surely you can deal with some of the legal complexity and a little less of the emotional ...

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 7:46:48pm

dlb:

The Australian government of the time did not want to help Timor. However when the Australian people clamoured for us to repay the Timorese, eventually the politicians realised it was a vote winner.

Then the Australian government decided to rip wealth from the Timorese, just as Indonesia had and is doing.

The small and weaker will always be abused by politicians trained in US political realism. In a nut shell; national governments only role is to be self serving. The rest of humanity is only there for our gain.

US Realism; beware - it is taught as a science in politics.

Reply Alert moderator

21 Sep 2015 8:43:40pm

neil:

Under a 1989 treaty with Indonesia 80% of Timor sea oil and gas belonged to Australia, since achieving independence Timor has wanted to negotiate their own treaty and take a lot of what is internationally accepted as belonging to Australia. We didn't help them to get their resources, but since we gave them independence they want to get ours.

Reply Alert moderator