

9-17-1999

Trends. Timorous in East Timor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (1999) "Trends. Timorous in East Timor," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 11 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol7/iss11/6>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. Timorous in East Timor

Author: Editor

Volume: 7

Issue: 11

Date: 1999-09-17

Keywords: East Timor, Human Rights, Indonesia, Military Intervention, Political Independence

Many analysts have attacked Western powers for not having anticipated that significant atrocities would occur in East Timor if the recent referendum clearly reflected support for East Timor's independence from Indonesia. Analysts also have attacked these powers for not having acted on such anticipation.

The latter attack is easier to answer. How could one act on an anticipation that one did not have? The former attack is more difficult to counter. Indonesian counterinsurgency operations against East Timorese independence movements had been ongoing for over 20 years--with multiple examples of atrocities. Western powers--viz., the United States Government--had established significant information channels with Indonesian civilian and military authorities through various political, military, and economic support programs and could reasonably be expected to be aware of military and paramilitary planning and trends. Atrocities and acts bearing on atrocities had also occurred in the run-up to the East Timorese referendum.

It is more appropriate to conclude that there had been an anticipation of atrocities, but Western strategic interests and bureaucratic phenomena proved to be prepotent in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy concerning East Timor. The strategic interests included Asian economic stability, supporting an Asian ally, respect for Indonesia's national sovereignty (as opposed to its sovereign interests in East Timor), the maintenance and facilitation of Western trade routes, and, conversely, East Timor's lack of strategic import (divorced from moral concerns) for Western powers. The bureaucratic phenomena included inertia, business as usual, turf battles, careerism, and more unsavory components of shoddy analysis, the subversion of analysis by desired policy, and the refusal to accept moral interests as strategic interests.

It seems as if the notion of a new era in which military intervention is initiated to right violations of human rights has not been supported. Unfortunately, this notion--based largely on military intervention in Kosovo--is itself notional. The continuity of a long history of military intervention based on strategic interests largely apart from moral ones remains. So does the timorousness of military interveners to merge the strategic and the moral--especially seeing the moral as itself strategic. Is this based on fearing that the chickens of such conflation might come home to roost? (See Emler, N., & Stace, K. (1999). What does principled versus conventional moral reasoning convey to others about the politics and psychology of the reasoner? *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 455-468; Landler, M. (September 16, 1999). East Timor refugees recall a wave of brutality. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Narvaez, D., et al. (1999). Individual moral judgment and cultural ideologies. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 478-488; Shilling, C., & Mellor, P. A. (1998). Durkheim, morality, and modernity: Collective effervescence, homo duplex, and the sources of moral action. *British Journal of Sociology*, 49, 193-209; Singer, M.S. (1999). The role of concern for others and moral intensity in adolescents' ethicality judgments. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 160, 155-166.) (Keywords: East Timor, Human Rights, Indonesia, Military Intervention, Political Independence.)