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# Japan's Foreign Policy and East Timor, 1975–2002

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Paulo Gorjão

This article distinguishes three different periods in Japan's foreign policy concerning East Timor. During Indonesian President Suharto's authoritarian regime, and in particular between 1975 and 1998, East Timor was totally irrelevant to Japan's foreign policy. Confronted with incompatible interests and compelled to choose who to support, either Indonesia or East Timor, there was no doubt that Tokyo was on Jakarta's side. Indonesia loomed much larger than East Timor. This balance changed marginally in 1998–99, when East Timor, as this article will show, became a cause for concern in Japan during President B. J. Habibie's transition to democracy in Indonesia. Contrary to the period before, Tokyo was not compelled to choose only one side and, therefore, it could support the interests of both parties. Between 1999 and 2002, Indonesia ceased its official political claims upon the territory and this meant that Tokyo could develop an independent approach toward East Timor, while continuing to bear in mind Jakarta's sensitivities. During this period, East Timor became a significant test case, not only of Tokyo's commitment to Asia's regional security, but also of Japan's desire to be a more important player on the international political stage. In fact, it is argued here that there has been a metamorphosis in Japan's foreign policy with regard to East Timor, even though this outcome has been the result of circumstances, rather than through any policy actively

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pursued by Tokyo. Also in contrast with the past, when confronted with a unique opportunity to gain a larger international presence and to demonstrate its commitment to Asia's regional security, Japan seized the opportunity and shaped it according to its own foreign policy interests.

Bearing the above in mind, this article will review the cycle of Japanese foreign policy as it relates to East Timor between 1975 and 2002. It begins with a description of Japanese policy during Suharto's authoritarian regime. It then assesses Japan's diplomatic approach, the Indonesian transition to democracy, the popular consultation in East Timor, and the establishment of a multinational force to intervene in the territory. Last, but not least, this article examines the significant Japanese decision to contribute with Self-Defence Forces (SDF) personnel to the U.N. peacekeeping operation in the territory.

### Japan and East Timor during Suharto's Authoritarian Regime (1975–1998)

Before the formal transfer of executive power to Suharto in Indonesia on March 11, 1966, East Timor had been a source of Tokyo's attention only during World War II. In December 1941, as part of a forward defense strategy, 400 Australian (and Dutch) troops were sent to the island of Timor in order to pre-empt a Japanese takeover, which military leaders thought to be imminent. This decision convinced the Japanese that the territory was soon to become a forward military base and, in February 1942, they sent 20,000 troops to take it. In February 1943, the Australian and Dutch soldiers' left the island after reportedly inflicting between 1,000 and 1,500 losses on the Japanese military forces. Some East Timorese continued resisting, but they were soon defeated. However, their brief resistance led to retaliation by the Japanese forces, which, together with significant bombing raids by the Allies, meant that by the time Tokyo surrendered in August 1945, an estimated 40,000 East Timorese had perished.<sup>1</sup>

After this brief period, the territory ceased to arouse Japanese diplomatic interest for approximately three decades. It resurfaced with the Portuguese transition to democracy in 1974–76 and Lisbon's consequent decision to allow the self-determination of its overseas territories, among them East Ti-

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1. On the death toll in the context of the Japanese occupation, see James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Milton, Queensland: Jacaranda Press, 1983), p. 26. See also Peter Hastings, "Timor—Some Australian Attitudes, 1941–1950," in James Cotton, ed., *East Timor and Australia* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Center, 1999), pp. 41–53. This contribution appeared originally in the *Australian Outlook* in 1975.

mor.<sup>2</sup> Portugal attempted, without success, to deflect Jakarta's intentions by appeal to the self-determination principle. After Indonesia's military invasion of the territory on December 7, 1975, both the U.N. Security Council and the General Assembly met in emergency sessions to discuss the developments. Jakarta struggled to present its case as best as it could, in order to avoid the condemnation of the international community. In this situation, the way in which its political allies voted was decisive.

Japan by then was one of Indonesia's political allies that immediately attempted to diminish the international condemnation directed at Jakarta. Tokyo voted against the General Assembly's Resolution 3485, and the other seven General Assembly resolutions adopted in each subsequent year until 1982. Moreover, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council at the time, Japan voted in favor of Security Council Resolution 384, adopted unanimously on 22 December 1975. In the heat of the political moment in Southeast Asia, this was a situation beyond Tokyo's control. Like General Assembly Resolution 3485, this also called on Indonesia to withdraw its forces without delay. Japan knew that this was not a cause for concern, since there was no way to reverse Jakarta's military *fait accompli*. In fact, Japan knew full well that Indonesia could agree publicly to withdraw its troops, without having the slightest intention of doing so. As soon as Tokyo was able to show more support for Indonesia, it did. On April 22, 1976, Tokyo abstained in the Security Council vote on 389, calling once again upon Indonesia to withdraw without delay all of its forces from East Timor.

Japan's voting pattern in the U.N. during the 1970s and 1980s reveals where Tokyo's national interests lay. In fact, it is clear that Japan was determined that as far as possible, it would not publicly condemn Indonesia on the East Timor issue, whether in the U.N. or elsewhere. This was owing to Japan's geographical location, lack of natural resources, and the Asia-Pacific context.<sup>3</sup> Within Japan's foreign policy establishment, Russia, China, the U.S., and the Korean Peninsula have all been at the top of the agenda. So too has Indonesia, owing to both the strategic importance of its sea lanes and to the vital economic relations between the two countries. Economic relations between both countries were extremely significant during Suharto's New Order government (1966–98). In fact, in Andrew MacIntyre's view,

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2. Concerning Portuguese foreign policy on East Timor, see Paulo Gorjão, "The End of a Cycle: Australian and Portuguese Foreign Policies and the Fate of East Timor," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23:1 (April 2001), pp. 101–21.

3. Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan: Normative Constraints Versus Structural Imperatives," in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 199.

Japan looms very large in the Indonesian economy. Japan has been Indonesia's most important trading partner; prior to the [1997–98] . . . economic crash, it was both Indonesia's largest export market (principally, oil, gas, and timber) and the largest supplier of imports (principally, manufactured goods). Similarly, Japan has also long been Indonesia's largest foreign direct investor. . . . Japan has also . . . outstripped all other providers of official development assistance (ODA) to Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

Even though Japan is the more important partner in the relationship and has powerful economic leverage on Indonesia, Tokyo's realist evaluation of its national interests dictates that it avoid the potential for bilateral conflict with Jakarta. Indonesian elites are aware of this and, as a consequence,

[a]lthough Indonesia periodically worries about the possible dangers of excessive economic dependence on Japan, for the most part there has been remarkably little attention focused on the bilateral relationship. One does not encounter among Indonesian policymakers, military officers, businesspeople, intellectuals, or journalists a sense that Tokyo is constraining or influencing the policy choices of the Indonesian government.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, citing the principle of non-interference, Japan considered Indonesia's military invasion of East Timor as none of its business. But in fact, Japan went far beyond passive acquiescence in the matter. Between 1975 and 1999, Tokyo was one of Jakarta's most faithful international allies.<sup>6</sup> Although Japan did not recognize Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, either expressly or by implication, the reality was that it "signed treaties with Indonesia containing clauses defining Indonesia as that territory deemed by laws of Indonesia to be subject to Indonesian sovereignty, for all effective purposes recogniz[ing] the incorporation."<sup>7</sup>

As was the case in the three decades after 1945, during almost the entire 1980s, the question of East Timor disappeared from Japan's diplomatic priorities. It only reappeared in the early 1990s, owing to the Santa Cruz massacre on November 12, 1991, in which dozens of East Timorese were killed by the Indonesian military forces. In fact, as before, Japan played a pivotal role in Jakarta's policy calculations after the massacre. In the following days, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Canada suspended their aid programs to Indone-

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4. Andrew MacIntyre, "Can Japan Ever Take Leadership? The View from Indonesia," *Asian Perspective* 24:4 (2000), p. 302. For a more developed version of this article, see idem., "Japan, Indonesia, and Policy Leadership in the Pacific: Economic Crisis and Foreign Policy Opportunities," in Takashi Inoguchi, ed., *Japan's Asian Policy: Revival and Response* (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

5. MacIntyre, "Can Japan Ever Take Leadership?" p. 303.

6. The term "ally" will be used in this article without necessarily implying a formal alliance.

7. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000: An Australian Policy Challenge* (Canberra: DFAT, 2001) p. 12.

sia. The Netherlands announced specifically the postponement of any new aid by the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI). The IGGI was a 14-member international aid consortium responsible for providing grants and loans to Indonesia. It was chaired by the Dutch and consisted of nations and multinational organizations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In retaliation for the postponement, Suharto accused the Dutch government of intimidation, and decided that Indonesia would no longer accept aid from the Netherlands. Then he decided to put an end to the IGGI, and ordered Indonesian Coordinating Economic Minister Radius Prawiro to set up an alternative institution. Shortly thereafter, Prawiro asked the World Bank to organize a new Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI), based in Paris.

Although the Dutch decision provoked a nationalistic reaction in Indonesia that was used by Suharto's political party, Golkar, to enhance its own standing during the June 1992 general election, the dissolution of the IGGI had little impact on future aid commitments. At the time of the last IGGI aid commitment in June 1991, the Dutch contribution amounted to only 1.9% of the total. The World Bank, the ADB, and Japan were the major contributors, providing more than 80% of grants and soft loans. Suharto knew that he could continue relying on Tokyo's economic support. As Indonesian officials expected, the Santa Cruz massacre did not affect Japan's non-interference principle concerning Jakarta. More importantly, Tokyo actively supported the political efforts by Suharto's authoritarian regime to set up the new CGI. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* correspondent in Indonesia, the decision taken by Suharto's government was the "strongest statement to date against attempts by Western donors to link human rights concerns and other conditions to aid."<sup>8</sup>

Japan's implicit support concerning the Indonesian security approach in the territory motivated East Timorese activists to try to influence Japan's diplomatic image by revealing Tokyo's complicity to the world. On November 14, 1994, coinciding with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Jakarta, 21 East Timorese asylum-seekers entered the Japanese Embassy. Although this event went relatively unnoticed in the Japanese media,<sup>9</sup> it constituted a significant international embarrassment to Japan and the Suharto regime. Still, the truth was that Tokyo could easily contain the international reaction and maintain its diplomatic stance on Indonesia and East Timor. Furthermore, even if Japan had had the political will to support the East Timorese right to self-determination (which it never showed), Tokyo knew that a different approach would be unlikely to cause any change in the

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8. See Adam Schwarz, "Tilting at Windmills: Cancellation of Dutch Aid Unlikely to Affect Economy," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 9, 1992, pp. 10-11.

9. See Geoffrey C. Gunn, *East Timor and the United Nations: The Case for Intervention* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997), pp. 73-76.

Indonesian diplomatic position concerning the incorporation of the territory.<sup>10</sup>

### Japan and East Timor during Habibie's Transition to Democracy (1998–1999)

Tokyo's concern with East Timor would increase significantly during the years 1998–99. From the Japanese point of view, the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis threw Southeast Asia into an unwelcome period of social, political, and economic turmoil. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* editor pointed out that “Japan yearned for stability in Indonesian political life, above all. So long as Suharto remained an asset rather than a liability in this context, Japan would back him to the hilt.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, between 1966 and 1998, Japan consistently maintained support for Suharto's regime. However, his clumsy management of the domestic impact of the Asian financial crisis soon became a liability. He transformed himself into an obstacle to Tokyo's strategic interest in Indonesia, as Indonesia's role was transformed from that of a stabilizer in Southeast Asia to that of a destabilizing force.

As the economic situation worsened and Japanese dissatisfaction with the measures taken by Suharto grew, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto phoned the Indonesian leader in January 1998 to express his concern and to urge Indonesia to follow the International Monetary Fund (IMF) directives, which were preconditions for financial aid and credit. Until then Indonesia had neither decreased the government spending nor closed banks deeply in debt. The idea of a currency board system, which would peg the Indonesian rupiah to the U.S. dollar at a fixed exchange rate, was unwelcome in Tokyo because it was premature, and the prime minister's special envoy, Yoshiro Hayashi, relayed this position to Suharto in February 1998. In early March, Japan followed the IMF line and declared that it was postponing any future grants to Jakarta. In this way Tokyo maintained its original diplomatic approach. Hashimoto's visit to Jakarta in mid-March was perceived as a sign of political support. Moreover, according to Kees van Dijk, “Hashimoto promised Indonesia special financial assistance outside the framework of IMF.”<sup>12</sup> However, Suharto's refusal to bow to the demands of the IMF reform program continued to affect Indonesia's economic performance. As a consequence of his stubbornness, the rate of the rupiah plunged to around Rp

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10. Concerning the relationship between regime change and foreign policy, see Paulo Gorjão, “Regime Change and Foreign Policy: Portugal, Indonesia and the Self-determination of East Timor,” *Democratization* (Frank Cass, U.K.), 9:4 (Winter 2002), pp. 142–58.

11. Michael R. J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: Order, Development and Pressure for Change* (London: Routledge, 1994 [1998]), p. 168.

12. Kees van Dijk, *A Country in Despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001), p. 156.

10,000 to the dollar. By then, the "Bank Indonesia reported foreign reserves of \$16.3 billion, down 25 percent from the close of 1997."<sup>13</sup> By mid-May, the Tokyo government had reached the point where it had no problem with Suharto's removal, even though it had not actively sought this outcome. In fact, his successor, B. J. Habibie, was "well regarded . . . in Japan, where his preference for protectionist policies was accepted."<sup>14</sup>

Habibie's desire to please the international community led him to appoint an economic team that satisfied international financial interests, and to pledge support for the IMF reform program. Furthermore, as one of Habibie's foreign policy advisors has pointed out, Habibie's desire also meant that he wished "to make his mark by resolving the East Timor issue once and for all, as part of his credentials abroad."<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, on January 27, 1999, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas announced that Jakarta was prepared to accept immediate independence for East Timor if the East Timorese rejected the autonomy proposal offered by Indonesia. This triggered Japan's first public reaction to Habibie's East Timor policy, with Tokyo officially welcoming the decision and proclaiming its hopes for a peaceful solution.<sup>16</sup>

On February 8 and 9, 1999, Indonesia and Portugal agreed on the overall terms of the wide-ranging autonomy proposal. On March 11, Indonesia accepted that the popular consultation would be done by direct ballot. The MOFA of Japan said it was pleased at this progress, and reiterated its hopes for a peaceful solution.<sup>17</sup> On April 23, Indonesia and Portugal finalized an agreement, which was signed on May 5. Again, Tokyo "welcome[d] the agreement . . . and the Indonesian's Government reaffirmation that it [would] continue to carry out its responsibility for the maintenance of security in East Timor."<sup>18</sup> Tokyo said that it was "prepared to make as much [of a] contribution as possible" to the process.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Tokyo aimed to support, as long as

13. John Bresnan, "The United States, the IMF, and the Indonesian Financial Crisis," in Adam Schwarz and Jonathan Paris, eds., *The Politics of Post-Suharto Indonesia* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), p. 95.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "The East Timor Crisis: An Indonesian View," in Bruce Brown, ed., *East Timor—The Consequences* (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 2000), p. 20.

16. "On the East Timor Issue," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), statement by the press secretary/director-general for press and public relations, January 28, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/1/128-2.html>>.

17. "On the East Timor Issue," *ibid.*, March 12, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/3/312-8.html>>.

18. "On the East Timor Issue," *ibid.*, April 24, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/4/424.html>>.

19. "Position of the Government of Japan on the Tripartite Talks on East Timor," MOFA, press conference by Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata, April 27, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/4/427.html#2>>.

possible, both the Indonesians *and* the East Timorese. However, the violence in East Timor increased sharply in April, and there was increasing fear about the future. Tokyo did not ignore this, and Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura said he “hope[d] that the Indonesian Government and the Armed Forces (TNI) [would] continue to devote as much effort as possible to the maintenance of safety and security in East Timor, so that the peace process [could] proceed peacefully and smoothly.”<sup>20</sup>

During this period, as much of a contribution as possible meant money and little else. The first instance of the Japanese diplomatic checkbook approach to East Timor came on June 1, when Tokyo announced that it would be providing \$10.1 million to the U.N. to fund the ballot.<sup>21</sup> The U.N. Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was established by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1246 on June 11 to organize and conduct the ballot initiative for the East Timorese to accept special autonomy within Indonesia, or reject it, leading to independence.<sup>22</sup> Since security was Indonesia’s responsibility, UNAMET was only allowed to deploy up to 280 civilian police officers (CivPol) and 50 military liaison officers (MLO). Significantly, Japan sent only three civilian police officers and a few more liaison officers.<sup>23</sup> Although this was a minor contribution, it was nevertheless a difficult decision for Tokyo, owing to Japan’s peacekeeping experience in Cambodia, when the killings of a young volunteer and a policeman in April and May 1993, respectively, provoked a huge outcry among the Japanese public, making the government leery of again sending its citizens to dangerous places. The increasingly frequent attacks by militia groups on pro-independence East Timorese, as well as the assault on the UNAMET regional office in Maliana and on a humanitarian relief convoy passing through Liquiçá, led to a statement from the Tokyo government that it was “deeply concerned.”<sup>24</sup>

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20. “Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Masahiko Komura on East Timor,” *ibid.*, May 7, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/5/507.html#2>>.

21. “Grant Assistance for the Peaceful Solution of the East Timor Issue,” MOFA, June 1, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/6/601-2.html>>.

22. United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1246, S/RES/1246, June 11, 1999 [accessed September 18, 2001], <<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1246.htm>>.

23. “Dispatch of Civilian Police Officers to East Timor,” MOFA, press conference by Deputy Press Secretary Masaki Okada, June 15, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <[www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/6/615.html#2](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/6/615.html#2)>.

24. “Response of the Government of Japan to Reported Attack on the Regional Office of the United Nations Mission in East Timor,” MOFA, press conference by Deputy Press Secretary Chikahito Harada, July 2, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/7/702.html#2>>.

Initially planned for August 8, owing to logistic and security constraints the popular consultation was delayed. Eventually, in a tense political atmosphere, the ballot took place on August 30, 1999. Despite the campaign of violence led by the militia groups under TNI supervision, 98.5% of registered East Timorese cast their ballots. Afraid that the result would be leaked, on September 4, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced that 78.5% of eligible voters, casting 344,580 votes had rejected autonomy within Indonesia, while 94,388 voters, or slightly more than one-fourth, had accepted it.

Confronted by such a clear result, Foreign Minister Komura “welcome[d] the free and fair implementation of the ballot” and stressed the need for the Indonesian government “to take all necessary measures for the maintenance of security and safety of the U.N. and other personnel, including control of the militias.”<sup>25</sup> This was something that Indonesia had failed to do in the run-up to the ballot. Yet, despite clear evidence of this failure, Tokyo refrained from outright criticism. In fact, and despite increasing diplomatic attention, East Timor continued to rank much lower than Indonesia on Tokyo’s foreign policy agenda. Indeed, East Timor was important to Japan in so far as it could trigger problems for Jakarta. This can be seen in a September press conference at the MOFA in Tokyo:

The developments in East Timor may affect a larger picture, which is the challenge that Indonesia itself is facing in this very important transitional period. At the same time, it is very important for Indonesia to achieve this transition toward a new system of government, and that is also an important consideration. All of these factors need to be seen in balance. . . . [W]e would like to see peace and safety restored in East Timor. At the same time, we would like to see Indonesia achieve this very important transition smoothly as well. We will have to take all of these factors into account in deliberating our policy.<sup>26</sup>

Amid increasing chaos and violence in East Timor, amid rumors of a death toll reaching into the thousands, together with other countries Japan continued to insist on the right of the Indonesian government to fulfill its responsibilities for maintaining security and safety. For its part, Japan made no attempt to press for the insertion of an international peacekeeping force. Yet, Tokyo also tried to support East Timor as long as this did not disrupt its relations with Jakarta. On September 8, Japanese Ambassador to Indonesia Takeo Kawakami met Habibie and told him that “the current situation [was]

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25. “Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs,” MOFA, September 4, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/9/904.html>>.

26. “Japan’s Position in Regard to the Possibility of Withdrawing International Monetary Fund Financing from the Republic of Indonesia,” MOFA, press conference by Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata, September 7, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/9/907.html#4>>.

not in the interests of Indonesia” and therefore Jakarta should “fulfill its responsibility in maintaining security and safety” in East Timor.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Indonesia should try to control the situation, otherwise Jakarta might confront an international ultimatum.

This possibility was raised once again on September 9–10 during the APEC summit in Auckland. APEC foreign ministers and Robin Cook, the U.K.’s foreign minister representing the European Union, held a special meeting chaired by New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon, to discuss the situation in East Timor. A consensus was reached that the international community had to intervene.<sup>28</sup> Even so, as late as September 10, Japan was still continuing to object to the idea of increasing economic pressure against Jakarta. At this stage, Japanese officials were “not contemplating stopping ODA to Indonesia,” even though Japan’s ODA to Indonesia accounted for about 60% of Indonesia’s total aid.<sup>29</sup> In other words, despite its economic leverage, Tokyo did not intend to use it.

An additional push for the deployment of a multinational force in East Timor came on September 12, during the U.S.-South Korea-Japan Trilateral summit. Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, and U.S. President Bill Clinton issued a press statement expressing their grave concern about the events in East Timor. Moreover, they urged the Indonesian government to “take prompt measures to ensure that the free will of the East Timorese people . . . is respected.”<sup>30</sup> More importantly, they also agreed to “work closely with the United Nations and other members of the international community toward that end.”<sup>31</sup> On the same day, the MOFA press secretary stated that “if the Indonesian government cannot fulfill its responsibility of restoring safety and order, we should ask Indonesia to promptly accept the support of the international community and restore safety and order.”<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Tokyo made clear that it was “not contem-

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27. “Japan’s Position in Regard to the East Timor Issue and the Possibility of Japan Participating in United Nations Peacekeeping Forces,” *ibid.*, September 10, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/9/10.html#3>>.

28. David Dickens, “The United Nations in East Timor: Intervention at the Military Operational Level,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23:2 (August 2001), p. 216.

29. “Possibility of Other Methods Which Could Be Taken to Contribute to the Resolution of the Situation in East Timor,” MOFA, press conference by Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata, September 10, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/9/910.html#4>>.

30. DFAT, *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000*, p. 136.

31. *Ibid.*

32. “Situation in East Timor,” MOFA, press conference by Press Secretary Sadaaki Numata, September 12, 1999, [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/apec/1999/briefing1.html#2>>.

plating any change in [its] policy regarding ODA to Indonesia.”<sup>33</sup> Again, a MOFA press conference excerpt is revealing:

Prime Minister Obuchi took the position that the responsibility to rectify the unacceptable situation in East Timor and to restore order there [lay] with the Government of Indonesia, and that if the Government of Indonesia could not discharge that responsibility, it should immediately accept support by the international community to address the situation. We also took the position that Indonesia’s political and economic stability is extremely important for the stability of Asia as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

Like many other countries during the period between January and September 1999, besides being “pleased,” “welcoming,” or “hoping,” Tokyo was not prepared to do much more. The Japanese government felt constrained because any other stronger option would have implied a political clash with Jakarta. And a conflict with Indonesia over East Timor was totally out of the question. Therefore, like Canberra, Tokyo was prepared to do as much as possible only *vis-à-vis* options that Jakarta accepted. Under enormous pressure, on September 12, Habibie finally “expressed the readiness of Indonesia to accept an international peacekeeping force through the United Nations in East Timor.”<sup>35</sup> Three days later, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1264 authorizing the establishment of a multinational force (International Force East Timor, or INTERFET), a development welcomed by Japan.

Confronted with a possible request to send peacekeepers to INTERFET, Tokyo skirted the issue on the grounds of constraints imposed by the International Peacekeeping Law (IPL). This was a serious limitation, bearing in mind that Japan “could hardly watch Indonesia’s territorial-sovereignty authority being challenged so directly by Australia.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Tokyo had no other option but to resume its long-standing “checkbook diplomacy.” In fact, Japan was prepared “to make a substantial financial contribution to the multinational forces.”<sup>37</sup> This was particularly important because multinational forces such as INTERFET do not receive funding from the U.N.

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33. “Situation in East Timor,” *ibid.*, September 12, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/apec/1999/briefing1.html#2>>.

34. “Overview of the Current Situation concerning East Timor,” *ibid.*, September 17, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/9/917.html#2>>.

35. United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1264, S/RES/1264, September 15, 1999 [accessed September 18, 2001], <<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1264.htm>>.

36. Takashi Inoguchi, “A North-East Asian Perspective,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 55:2 (July 2001), p. 206.

37. “The Role of Japan in East Timor,” MOFA, press conference by Deputy Press Secretary Chikahito Harada, October 1, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <[www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/10/1001.html#6](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1999/10/1001.html#6)>.

peacekeeping budget.<sup>38</sup> The countries that decide to contribute are expected to pay for their own participation. This fact raises the difficulty of finding countries willing or able to support their own presence. Therefore, Japan's declared willingness to make a substantial financial contribution—\$100 million—to the United Nations Trust Fund for INTERFET might have convinced some Southeast Asian countries to participate in the “coalition of the willing.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, during this period, Japan also took part in the Core Group that coordinated the practical efforts to get UNAMET established, as well as the crucial “day-by-day diplomacy” in September.<sup>40</sup>

### Japan and East Timor during the Path to Independence (1999–2002)

The same legal constraints that prevented Japan from participating in INTERFET resurfaced again on October 25, when the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1272, establishing the U.N. Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which was given overall responsibility for the administration of East Timor and “empowered to exercise all legislative and executive authority,” including the administration of justice.<sup>41</sup> As before with INTERFET, one of the Five Principles governing Japanese participation in the U.N. peacekeeping operations created difficulties for the deployment of its Self-Defence Forces personnel in East Timor. Without an agreement on a ceasefire (Principle 1), the SDF could not participate in INTERFET and in UNTAET.<sup>42</sup>

Beyond its long-standing financial contributions to the U.N., Tokyo simply could not comply with the demands of most peacekeeping operations. Once again it became obvious that the legal limits to Japan's contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations would have to be changed if it was to participate fully. Pressure to revise the International Peacekeeping Law was mounting, not only due to the Japanese paralysis with regard to INTERFET in East

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38. DFAT, *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000*, pp. 43–44.

39. “Japanese Contribution to the United Nations Trust Fund for the Multinational Force in East Timor,” MOFA, October 4, 1999 [accessed September 16, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/10/1004.html>>.

40. Ian Martin, *Self-Determination in East Timor: The United Nations, the Ballot, and International Intervention* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p. 130.

41. United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1272, S/RES/1272, September 25, 1999 [accessed September 20, 2001], <<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1272.htm>>. Concerning the lessons and legacy of UNTAET, see Paulo Gorião, “The Legacy and Lessons of the United Nations Transitional Administration of East Timor,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24:2 (August 2002), pp. 297–320.

42. Japan Cabinet Office, Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, “The Five Principles” [accessed September 14, 2001], <[http://www.pko.go.jp/PKO\\_E/pref\\_e.html#5rules](http://www.pko.go.jp/PKO_E/pref_e.html#5rules)>.

Timor but also thanks to earlier events elsewhere. Pyongyang's August 1998 launch of a missile over Japan, and the intrusion into Japanese waters by two alleged North Korean spy ships in March 1999, had further deepened the perception that Japan had to change not only the IPL but also its pacifist Constitution, in particular Article 9, which says that the Japanese people forever renounce war.

Amid the disaster that was unfolding in East Timor in September 1999, Obuchi said that he would "seek to lift legal restrictions so that Japan can fully participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations."<sup>43</sup> With Japan barred from INTERFET, three key parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Liberal Party (LP), and New Komeito (NK) agreed that the SDF should be allowed to participate in all aspects of future U.N. peacekeeping operations.<sup>44</sup> This reflected an increasing consensus that Japan should play a more important role on the international political stage and show more commitment to Asia's regional security. Yet, no concrete outcome seemed to result from this agreement. It would take another change of prime minister, with the emergence of Junichiro Koizumi in April 2001, for Tokyo to start to reconsider more seriously an IPL re-evaluation, and an eventual SDF personnel involvement in East Timor. By mid-June, it became known that the director-general of the Defence Agency, General Nakatani, would visit East Timor, a signal that Koizumi wanted to take a "more assertive role in diplomatic and security matters."<sup>45</sup> Set to occur on September 12, the trip was cancelled at the last minute owing to the terrorist attack against the U.S. In fact, the terrorist attack became an opportunity to further review Japan's role in the world and its contribution to international security. As a consequence of the September 11 events, Japan created new legislation enabling the SDF to assist the U.S.-led military campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan.

On November 6, Koizumi set in motion the bureaucratic mechanisms required to dispatch an SDF engineer unit to East Timor in the spring of 2002.<sup>46</sup> Australia immediately welcomed the decision.<sup>47</sup> The tasks planned for the SDF personnel were rearguard logistical duties such as building and

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43. "Obuchi Calls for Loosening Limits on SDF Deployments," *Japan Times*, September 17, 1999.

44. "Parties Agree to Expand SDF Reach to U.N. Missions," *ibid.*, September 29, 1999.

45. Michael Millett, "Japan Mulls Peacekeeper Position in East Timor," *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 23, 2001.

46. "The Initiation of Preparations for Dispatching a Self-Defence Force Engineer Unit to Peace-Keeping Operations in East Timor," MOFA, November 6, 2001 [accessed November 12, 2001], <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2001/11/1106.html>>.

47. Alexander Downer, "Japan's Contribution to U.N. Peacekeeping Force in East Timor Welcome," DFAT Media Release, November 8, 2001 [accessed November 12, 2001], <[http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/foreign/2001/fa166\\_01.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/foreign/2001/fa166_01.html)>.

repairing roads and bridges.<sup>48</sup> Tokyo took this decision after the November 1, 2001, Security Council endorsement of May 20, 2002, as the day of independence for East Timor, and after the decision that U.N. peacekeepers would stay in the territory for probably another two years. Quite significantly, Japan also took the opportunity to revise the much-criticized IPL before sending troops to East Timor. On November 20, 2001, Koizumi backed a bill aimed at expanding the scope of SDF participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations and easing restrictions on the use of weapons in such missions.<sup>49</sup> From then on, Japan's SDF could monitor ceasefires, disarm local forces, patrol demilitarized zones, and collect and dispose of abandoned weapons. In addition, SDF personnel could protect "those 'under their control' such as troops from other countries, refugees, and personnel from the U.N. and other international organizations."<sup>50</sup> On November 30, the Diet's lower house, the House of Representatives, passed the bill and, on December 7, the law was enacted at a plenary session of the upper house, the House of Councilors.<sup>51</sup> This was a major shift—qualitative and possibly also quantitative—in Japan's contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations. Qualitatively, Japan can now take part in core peacekeeping activities. Quantitatively, while hitherto, Japanese personnel have accounted for less than 0.1% of U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world, under the new conditions, Japan can increase its participation levels.

Moreover, key East Timorese political leaders want SDF peacekeepers in the territory. This is especially true of José Alexandre "Xanana" Gusmão, José Ramos Horta, and Mari Alkatiri. Gusmão, the independence leader, said that "if Japan decides to dispatch its own PKF [peacekeeping force] units, I will welcome the decision."<sup>52</sup> Senior Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ramos Horta said he also would "welcome participation of a Japanese

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48. "Japan Orders Preparations for Peacekeepers to East Timor," Kyodo News Service, November 6, 2001; "Japan to Prepare Military for East Timor Peacekeeping," Reuters, November 6, 2001.

49. "Japan Approves Bill on Larger Peacekeeping Role for Self-Defence Forces," Kyodo News Service, November 20, 2001.

50. "Japan Approves Bill." See also "Cabinet Approves Bill Easing SDF Peacekeeping Restraints," *Japan Times*, November 21, 2001; "Cabinet OK's PKO Revision Bill," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November 21, 2001.

51. "Japanese Lower House Approves Expanded Peacekeeping Role for Defence Forces," Kyodo News Service, November 30, 2001; "Japan Passes Bill to Beef Up U.N. Peacekeeping Role," *Agence France-Presse*, December 7, 2001; "Diet Approves Bill That Boosts SDF Role as Peacekeepers," *Japan Times*, December 8, 2001; "Revision Expands SDF Role," *Asahi Shimbun*, December 8, 2001.

52. "East Timor Leader to Welcome Japanese Participation in U.N. Peacekeeping," *Mainichi Shimbun*, July 14, 2001.

SDF logistical unit in a U.N. peacekeeping operation.”<sup>53</sup> Last but not least, Chief Minister and Minister of Economy and Development of the Transitional Government Alkatiri stated that he supported a Japanese contribution to the U.N. peacekeeping troops in the territory.<sup>54</sup> On December 3, this position was communicated directly to the new Japanese foreign minister, Makiko Tanaka.<sup>55</sup> In fact, from the point of view of the East Timorese leaders, whether the SDF deployment is circumscribed within logistics, or involves a full peacekeeping capacity, is not highly relevant. What they really want is their physical presence in the territory. The only opposition in the territory, mainly motivated by World War II memories, comes from East Timorese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) stating that Japan has not yet apologized for its past atrocities in the territory.<sup>56</sup> But this criticism is something that the East Timorese leaders can ride out.

East Timorese support for the SDF deployment was welcome but was beyond their direct political responsibility. Indeed, Japan’s decision to send peacekeepers to East Timor was reached after consultations at state level. Australia’s Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told his Japanese counterpart, Tanaka, in Tokyo on May 28, 2001, that Canberra “urged Japan to participate in peacekeeping operations in East Timor in addition to providing financial assistance to the area.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Indonesian government officials have also given their consent to the change. General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the coordinating minister for political, social and security affairs, stated as much when he met Taku Yamasaki, LDP Secretary-General, in Jakarta on August 17. They discussed Japan’s plan to take part in U.N. peacekeeping operations, and it is clear that Yudhoyono gave his approval.<sup>58</sup> Then it was the turn of Indonesia’s President Megawati Sukarnoputri to give her consent for the SDF deployment, a *sine qua non* from the Japanese point of view. On September 11, Megawati told General Nakatani in Jakarta of her “understanding of Japanese plans to dispatch SDF personnel to East Timor next year to take part in U.N. peacekeeping operations.”<sup>59</sup> Japan could not find any better conditions to take the opportunity to contribute to regional

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53. “Timorese Leader Ramos Horta Welcomes Japanese Peacekeeping Role,” Kyodo News Service, August 22, 2001.

54. He expressed this view to the author during the inaugural conference of the International Institute for Asian Studies and Interchange (IASI) in Porto, Portugal, on October 24, 2001.

55. “East Timor Backs Japan’s Plan to Take Part in PKO in Territory,” Kyodo News Service, December 3, 2001.

56. “Twelve NGOs Oppose Japan SDF,” *Suara Timor Lorosae* (Voice of Timor Lorosae) (Dili), September 5, 2001.

57. “Australia’s Downer Urges Japan to Help in East Timor,” *Japan Times*, May 29, 2001.

58. “Timorese Leader Ramos Horta Welcomes Japanese Peacekeeping Role.”

59. “Indonesian President Backs Japanese Peacekeeping Role in East Timor,” Kyodo News Service, September 11, 2001.

security. Not only was there broad international agreement favoring the SDF deployment in East Timor but also the political and physical risks were quite low by this stage.<sup>60</sup> Over the next two years, we can expect that East Timor will be a test case that will allow evaluation of whether Japan is prepared to play a more important role on the international political stage, and to show more commitment to Asia's regional security.

## Conclusion

This article provides information and analysis about Japan's foreign policy toward East Timor from 1975 to 2002. Undoubtedly, the recent decision to send SDF personnel to East Timor under the U.N. peacekeeping operation is a major event, not only within the bilateral context but also regionally. Indeed, this is a win-win situation for those involved. From the point of view of East Timor, the presence of Australian and Japanese military peacekeeping forces in the territory—forces from two of the most important U.S. allies in the region—is the perfect situation. The East Timorese position might be summarized as follows: If the U.S. does not want to be a formal ally of East Timor, then East Timor will ally itself to the U.S. by being an ally of its allies.<sup>61</sup>

Canberra too expressed its desire to see the SDF personnel as peacekeepers in East Timor. Bearing in mind that the U.S.-Japan relationship is the "key pillar" of U.S. strategic engagement in Asia,<sup>62</sup> Canberra sees Tokyo as an important player in guaranteeing "freedom and security of navigation and trade, and strong support for the U.N.'s role in global security."<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Australia hopes that Tokyo will assume a more active role concerning regional security. Australia and Japan might work as the two anchors in Asian security.<sup>64</sup> A Japanese SDF presence in East Timor is seen as a further step. Furthermore, Canberra thinks that as Jakarta's faithful, informal ally, Tokyo's good diplomatic relations with Jakarta will contribute to directly diminishing the security threats to the territory.

The U.S. has also long been pushing Japan to assume wider regional security responsibilities. Concerning the issue of Japanese contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations, and following the terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Ar-

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60. I am grateful to Kimberly Zisk for the insight about how the risk assessment influenced the final decision. Personal email communication, September 14, 2001.

61. I am grateful to Carlos Gaspar for this insight. Personal email communication, September 5, 2001.

62. Department of Defence (Australia), *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2000), p. 18.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

64. See Inoguchi, "A North-East Asian Perspective," pp. 199–212.

mitage said, "Japan must show the flag."<sup>65</sup> At least since the Gulf War, Washington has viewed Tokyo's financial contributions to the region as insufficient. Obviously, the SDF contribution to the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and to the U.N. peacekeeping operation in East Timor fits this agenda.

The U.N. also wants SDF personnel in East Timor not only because of Tokyo's long-standing relations with Indonesia but also because of its willingness to make a significant economic contribution. Japan has been one of the major financial contributors to INTERFET, as well as to the development of the territory through the East Timor Donor's Meeting, co-chaired by the World Bank and UNTAET.

Portugal, the former colonial power, wishes to encourage the SDF presence in East Timor as a way to balance Australia's increasing political and economic influence in the territory. Tokyo's status as a major U.S. ally is a significant element of dissuasion against the Indonesian military, which still opposes an independent East Timor. Furthermore, the presence of Australian and Japanese peacekeeping troops will guarantee a minimum U.S. interest in the territory. Washington will not allow developments to veer in the wrong direction.

Indonesia welcomes the SDF peacekeeping contingent since it feels that as a long-standing ally, Japan will be more sympathetic to its national interests. Compared to Australia, Jakarta thinks that it will have more capacity to influence Tokyo's peacekeeping attitudes. Besides, from the Indonesian point of view, Australia seems "to be crowing with triumph, exulting in its leadership role in East Timor."<sup>66</sup>

Last but not least, Japan sees East Timor as an opportunity to contribute more to regional and international security, while at the same time promoting its own national interests. A wider military commitment reinforces its calls for a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council. Tokyo's lack of commitment to regional and international security in the past has been damaging to its international pretensions as a major power. By seeking a more visible peacekeeping contribution, Japan will make an active contribution to regional security and appease those critics who say that Tokyo does not "sweat" and does not contribute to security burdensharing. In other words, East Timor might be one vital step toward the end of the perception of Japan as a security free rider. The SDF peacekeeping presence in East Timor might be another move toward the ultimate goal: a Japan with full international economic, political, and military status. The earlier SDF participation in the U.N.

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65. Howard W. French, "Japan's Prime Minister Pledges Support for American Retaliation," *New York Times*, September 20, 2001.

66. Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "A Southeast Asian Perspective," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 55:2 (July 2001), p. 218.

peacekeeping operations in the 1990s led to the analysis that Japan had “embarked on a new stage of its evolution as an international power.”<sup>67</sup> Yet, overall, the 1990s were seen as a lost decade.<sup>68</sup> Whether this perception will continue in the next one is too soon to evaluate, but a new generation of politicians symbolized by Koizumi allows gloomier predictions.

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67. Aurelia George Mulgan, “Japan’s Participation in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations,” *Asian Survey* 33:6 (June 1993), p. 561.

68. See Yoichi Funabashi, “Japan’s Moment of Truth,” *Survival* 42:4 (Winter 2000–2001), pp. 73–84.