

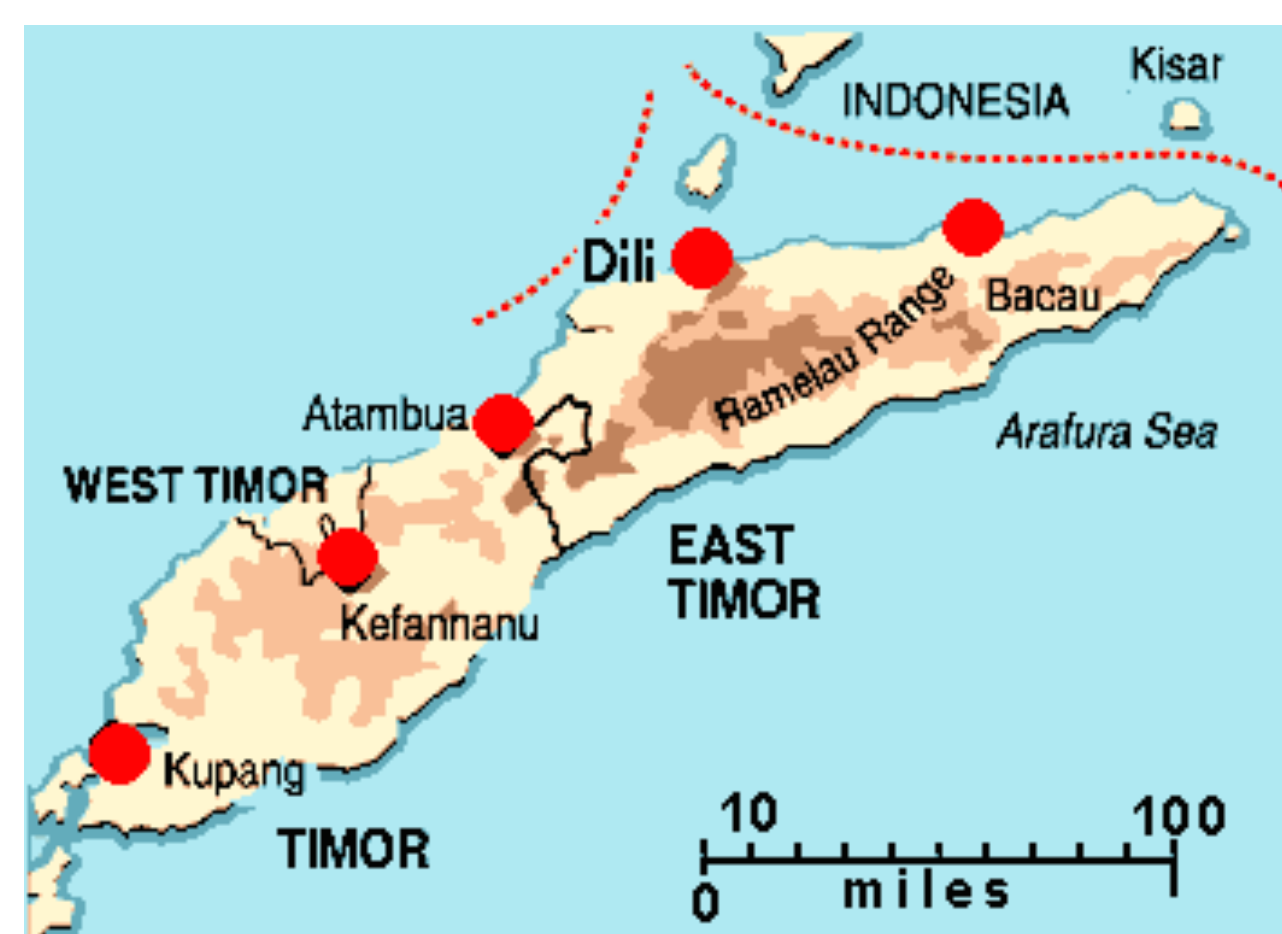
The “Genocide” of Timor-Leste: A Study of Human Suffering and International Ignorance

Molly Ledwith

Advisor: Dr. Anthony Talbott

Overview

The Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste in 1975 resulted in the deaths of an estimated 200,000 Timorese, which accounted for more than a quarter of the territory’s total population. Unfortunately, this terrible injustice went almost completely unrecognized by the international community. But even more disturbingly, there is evidence to suggest that the United States was not only aware of these injustices, but perhaps encouraged the Indonesians’ violent invasion. A mass killing of this magnitude is normally dubbed “genocide.” However, the situation that occurred in Timor-Leste has never been labeled as an actual “genocide,” most likely due to the involvement of the United States and other Western countries trying to avoid blame.



Indonesian Occupation

Indonesia invaded Timor-Leste in December 1975, and by 1979 an estimated 120,000 Timorese were killed. 35,000 Indonesian “volunteer forces” maliciously attacked innocent civilians, tortured prisoners, forced women and children into sex slavery, and sprayed chemical napalm on villages. Because these mass killings accounted for the deaths of 1 in 6 Timorese, this invasion is among the worst atrocities in modern history.

US Involvement

More recently released documents have identified close relations between the Ford administration and President Suharto of Indonesia during the time of the occupation of Timor-Leste. It has since been discovered that the US supplied about 90% of the weapons used for the invasion. Not only was the US aware of the invasion, but the Ford administration supported and condoned Suharto and his troops as well.

International Ignorance

So why don’t more people know about this? Mostly because President Suharto closed Timor-Leste to outsiders during the 1980s, making it easy to control any information about the brutality of the Indonesian military from leaking out of Timor-Leste. During this time, the issue of Timor-Leste largely disappeared from mainstream news and from international consciousness.

1700

Japan occupies Timor-Leste

1945

Indonesia invades shortly after visit from President Ford

1999

Timor-Leste is reborn a sovereign nation

Under full Portugese control

1942

Portuguese return for 3-decades of control

1975

Suharto resigns, Indonesia welcomes new President Habibe

2002