

*JIIA-UNU SYMPOSIUM*

**PEACE BUILDING:  
TOWARDS REHABILITATION OF EAST TIMOR AND AFGHANISTAN**

24 - 25 February 2004  
UN University Centre, Tokyo

Part 2 Session 1: Support to East Timor from the International Community:  
Achievements and Challenges

**EAST TIMOR: SOME PEACE BUILDING LESSONS**

by

Major General Michael G. Smith (Retd), CEO AUSTCARE, former Deputy Force  
Commander of the UNTAET Peacekeeping Force

**Introduction**

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to JIIA and the United Nations University for convening this important seminar. At a time when much of the world's attention has moved-on to Iraq and US Presidential elections, it is most timely that we reflect on the important lessons that have been learned from the peace building initiatives in Afghanistan and East Timor.

I would also like to acknowledge the important contribution of Japan to peace building initiatives in these countries, and particularly to the unwavering financial support that has been given to East Timor since 1999, and more recently the deployment of an engineer battalion. This battalion has made an outstanding contribution to East Timor and the Japanese nation should be very proud of their efforts.

As an Australian it has also been gratifying to see the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force and the Australian Defence Force working so closely in East Timor. This is a much more positive relationship than 60 years ago when we were fighting each other in East Timor and other parts of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia. In itself, this is proof that peace building initiatives can and do work.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution of Sergio Vieira de Mello to East Timor, and pay tribute to him. The world is a poorer place for his death in Baghdad last August, but East Timor is a much richer place because of his commitment and drive.

In this short presentation I will endeavour to provide you with:

- a "snapshot" of East Timor today,
- an overview of peace operations in East Timor since 1999, and
- highlight some lessons that might improve peace building in the future.

In particular, I have been asked to concentrate on the security dimension of peace building, although I am happy to field questions on other important elements such as governance, development and human rights.

My own organisation, AUSTCARE (Australians Caring for Refugees), has been helping people affected by conflict since 1967. Working in partnership with governments, international organisations and other NGOs, AUSTCARE has helped local communities in more than 30 countries to build their capacity in sectors such as health, education and training, food security, leadership, gender equity, and landmine action. AUSTCARE has been working on development projects in East Timor since 1981, and we are increasing our efforts to assist returnees in the vulnerable border districts at a time when many NGOs have moved on to more prominent crises.

My own association with East Timor is more recent than AUSTCARE's, but quite intense nonetheless. In early 1999, as a senior officer in the Australian Defence Force, I was appointed as Director-General East Timor. During that year I worked closely with the United Nations: firstly to assist with the successful UNAMET ballot; then as a liaison officer to the UN Secretariat to report on the efforts of the multinational peace enforcement force, known as INTERFET, as well as to assist in preparation for the UN peacekeeping force that was to replace INTERFET (and subsequently did) as part of the UN transitional administration, UNTAET. In December 1999 I was appointed as the first Deputy Force Commander of the peacekeeping force, and served in East Timor from January 2000 until March 2001. My role ventured beyond the military aspects into issues of development, governance, and human rights. I have since written a book titled *Peacekeeping in East Timor*, and have spoken about East Timor in a number of international forums. I am also a member of the newly formed Australia-East Timor Business Council, an organisation intent on promoting commercial linkages between the two countries.

### **East Timor Today**

East Timor gained its independence on 20 May 2002 and became the 191<sup>st</sup> member of the United Nations on 27 September of the same year. These occasions marked the end of a long and painful struggle for self-determination which began with Indonesia's occupation of the former Portuguese colony in 1975 and its incorporation the following year into Indonesia as its 27th province.

As the newest nation of the new millennium, East Timor is also one of the poorest in the world, with three of every five Timorese earning below US\$2 per day. More than 40 percent of the population is below the poverty line and more than half are illiterate. Of a population estimated to be around 830,000, 46 percent have never attended school, and every second person is below the age of 15. Seventy-five percent of the population is rural, and apart from coffee (the prices for which are currently suppressed), subsistence farming predominates. In a small territory of some 32,000 square kilometres, comprising 13 districts, much of the terrain is mountainous and infertile. Unemployment is rife, particularly amongst the young, and there is a significant urban drift by young people in

search of work, partly caused by the systematic destruction of agricultural infrastructure by the militias following the ballot in 1999. Life expectancy is 50-58 years with high infant mortality. The major prevalent health problems are malaria, dengue, and TB and the system of health care is rudimentary. The Indonesians significantly improved education and health services from the former Portuguese rulers, but East Timor remained their poorest province.

Significant revenue from oil and gas in the Timor Sea will not commence for a few years, until which time the Government's budget deficit will continue to be bridged by donor grants. A decision on entitlements in relation to the Timor Sea is being hotly contested by Australia and East Timor as a matter of international law, representing a significant hurdle in an otherwise close relationship between the two countries. The outcome will have significant financial implications for the economy of East Timor.

East Timor has no manufacturing industries and its infrastructure is underdeveloped and tenuous. The power supply, systematically destroyed in the post-ballot violence, is unreliable in the towns and non-existent in much of the countryside. The road network is fragile. Outside Dili, telecommunications coverage is poor in urban areas and nonexistent for most of the rural population. There are no rail services, government-owned public transportation, or internal air services (other than restricted flights provided by the United Nations). International air services are normally restricted to Dili, which also provides the main port facility. There are a number of rudimentary ports along the north coast, including in the Oecusse enclave, but there are none on the south coast. The projected rate of development indicates that East Timor's infrastructure is likely to remain in a rudimentary state for many years.

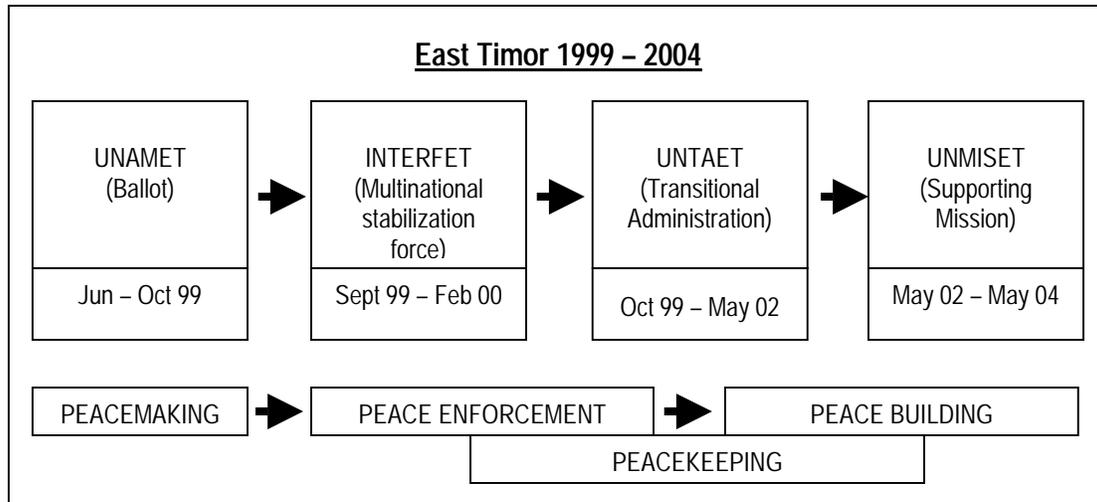
The harsh terrain and climate of East Timor, combined with the tenuous lines of communication and its poor telecommunications, result in the isolation of much of the rural population and create a porous land border with Indonesian West Timor. This isolation has important implications for governance, particularly at the sub-district and village levels, resulting in imperfect knowledge of actual circumstances by the central government as well as its inability to always act in a positive manner. In my view this lack of infrastructure and "situational awareness" could easily lead to political instability, particularly in the border region where the prospect of insurgency from pro-Indonesian integrationists in West Timor can not be discounted.

### **The United Nations in East Timor**

Given the significant role of the United Nations in East Timor it is important to quickly review the sequence and nature of the four UN-mandated missions to date. (Refer diagram 1 below).

Each of these missions has been judged by the international community to have been successful, although the UNTAET interregnum revealed enormous challenges to be overcome by the United Nations in the future. The diagram shows the progression from

peacemaking, through peace enforcement, peace keeping and peace building. It also shows the concurrent nature of these last three activities, thereby illustrating the fuzzy boundaries between them.



I am delighted that the Secretary-General has recommended the extension of UNMISSET's mandate for a further 12 months, with a smaller military and civil footprint, to continue to assist in the process of peace building. This contribution of less than 600 personnel includes:

- a reduction from 70 to 58 civilian advisers,
- a reduction from 325 to 157 civilian police advisers, and
- a reduction in the military peacekeeping force from 1,750 to 350 (comprising 42 military observers and a protection force of 308 troops).

In relation to the proposed military contribution I understand that a number of countries - including the US, Britain and Australia - are not supportive of maintaining a protection force and that discussion is continuing on this issue. For reasons that will become evident in my presentation, I concur with the Secretary-General on this matter and believe that an armed UN force is still required. AS well, my own preference for the Military Observers would have been to have them positioned on both sides of the border to report impartially on security issues and to provide a confidence building measure to both East Timor and Indonesia.

### **East Timor - a Unique Case Study**

More recent regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan have re-taught us that the toppling of corrupt or broken administrations is certainly much easier than replacing them with democratic alternatives. These operations have also revealed that sustainable peace requires the continued commitment of the international community, but that such commitment can not be imposed from without. These lessons have less relevance to East

Timor where the political and military situation was vastly different. A common lesson from most peace operations, and certainly from East Timor, is that the boundaries between conflict and post-conflict reconstruction are murky, as are the distinctions between peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building.

In the case of East Timor a number of factors coalesced to make this series of peace operations more the exception than the rule.

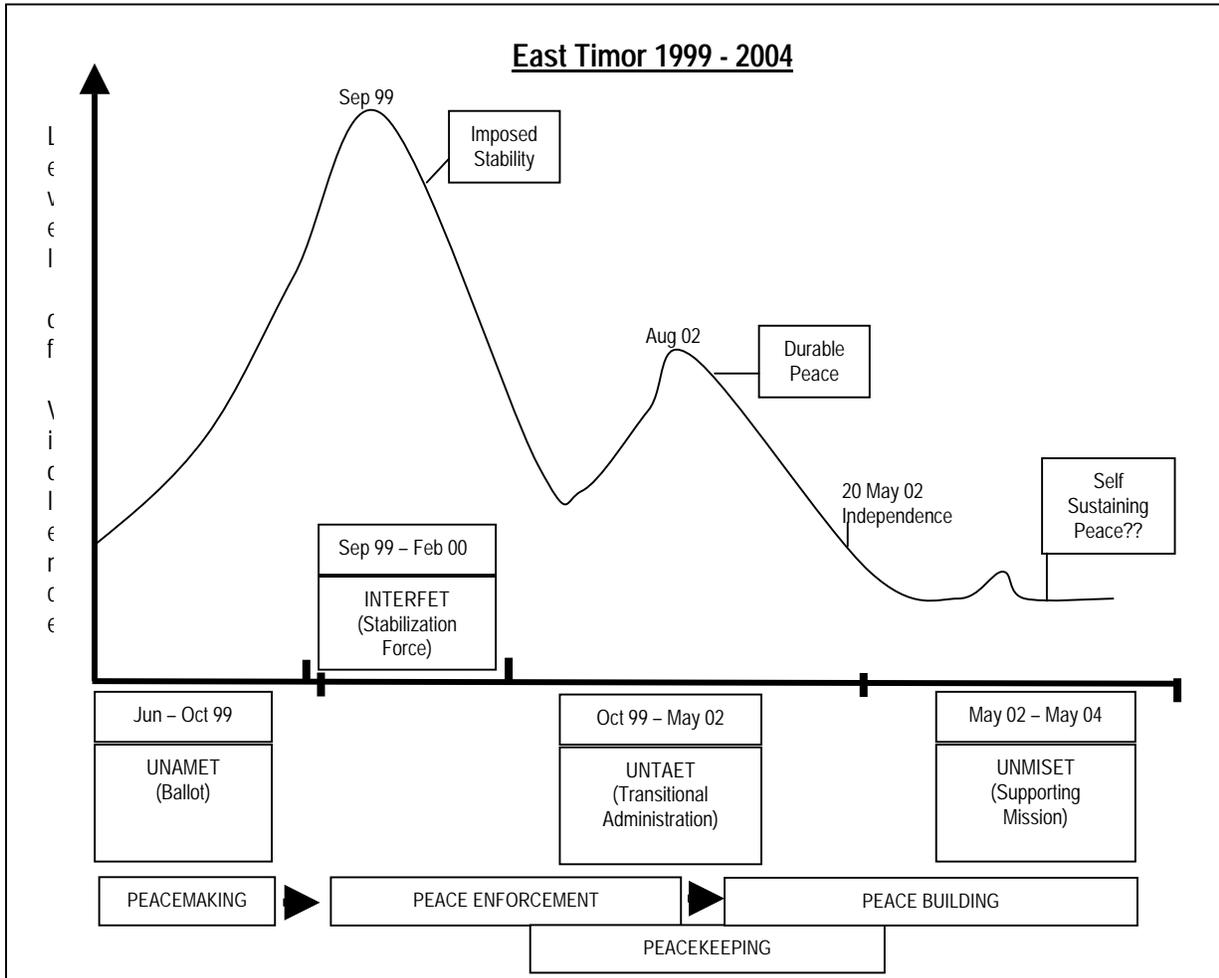
- Firstly, the initiative for potential regime change (by way of a ballot) was initiated and approved by the governing power, Indonesia, and the United Nations (rather than another sovereign power or coalition) provided the vehicle for this to occur. Although this was not new in the annals of peacemaking initiatives (as already witnessed in Namibia), such events are not common. Moreover, by utilising the United Nations as the vehicle for change, “legitimacy” was established at the outset and was then maintained throughout subsequent phases. This stands in stark contrast to the more recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Secondly, Indonesia agreed to an international peace enforcement force, and since Indonesia’s withdrawal from East Timor they have generally accepted the outcomes of the ballot. The relationship between Indonesia and East Timor is cordial if not close. Such an outcome is also rare in international politics.
- Thirdly, the host population generally has been supportive of the United Nations and other international organisations. Local leaders may not always have applauded the efforts of the United Nations or the World Bank, but none have wanted these organisations to depart. This has not always been the case in post conflict environments.
- Fourthly, and accept for the terrible violence following the ballot, the security environment in East Timor has remained far more benign than in most other post-conflict situations. The combatants were separated with the arrival of INTERFET. There are relatively few weapons in the country, and no legacy of landmines. This also is unusual in the modern world.
- And fifthly, the international community has remained very supportive of East Timor long after the emergency phase. The number of countries who have continued to provide assistance, from all continents, is truly amazing. This support has been demonstrated by significant bilateral assistance, by multilateral assistance through the Bretton Woods institutions, and by Security Council and General Assembly support for successive UN missions.

Perhaps the word that best applies to the unusual circumstances in East Timor is “legitimacy” – legitimacy based on the “justness” of the struggle; legitimacy based on the morality underpinning each of the UN-mandated missions; and legitimacy of the basic “right” of a small population of under one million people to determine their own future and to break free from the poverty cycle. In a sense, East Timor fleetingly helped return

the United Nations to its core beliefs and it might well represent the high water mark of the UN's authority and success.

### Security in East Timor

Since the post-ballot violence of 1999 - and in all measures - East Timor has been a relatively safe place to live. Unlike many other post-conflict environments, the level of security in East Timor has improved, as shown in diagram 2 below. Although this diagram is not specific, it correctly identifies the trend since September 1999.



Despite this rosy assessment, security concerns exist along the border with Indonesia, where about 25,000 refugees remain encamped in West Timor, including some hard core militia leaders who continue to be tolerated by the Indonesian Government. The fledgling East Timorese border police and defence force would be unable to counter a resurgence in militia activity – their combined capabilities being significantly less than the Peacekeeping Force. I welcome, therefore, the Secretary General's recommendation for the extension of the military peacekeeping force and have some reservations about Indonesia's ability to contain or control hard core militia elements.

Another major concern with external security is the inability of East Timor to effectively patrol and police its coastal waters, thereby increasing the threats of the spread of communicable diseases as well as criminal activity – the latter including people trafficking, smuggling, drug and gun running, money laundering, and piracy. To my knowledge this matter has not been seriously considered, and I believe that the United Nations could make a significant contribution by providing a coastal maritime patrol unit. Such assistance has not been seriously considered by the United Nations, or requested by the East Timorese – yet this need is no less certain.

Of more immediate concern, however, is the potential for internal unrest, partly fueled by historic political differences and partly by high levels of youth unemployment and unfulfilled expectations in the aftermath of independence. We know that the 1975 invasion by Indonesia was preceded by acts of politically motivated violence. I am not suggesting that these events would necessarily be repeated, but equally it would be foolish to ignore that a core of disaffected and influential militia remain in West Timor, and that they have connections with individuals and political groups in East Timor.

Thinking more domestically, and as demonstrated during the internal unrest of December 2002, the community can quickly be incited to riot. The “rule of law” is not yet firmly established: the local police force remains underdeveloped, and the judicial system and correctional service still has a long way to go. These were weak and largely unsuccessful components during the transitional administration and will take many years to mature, requiring assistance from the international community.

Another issue of security concern is the distrust between the newly created defence force (comprised mainly of former Falintil resistance fighters who remain loyal to their former leader and now President, Xanana Gusmao), and the nascent police force (the leaders of which tend to be more supportive of the Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri). The defence force has significant respect within the community, but the mechanisms to ensure civilian control remain ambiguous and underdeveloped. The defence force has little faith in the police force and (despite the President’s recent warnings against such action) could be persuaded to take a leading role in any internal security disturbances, rather than assisting the police force in situations of last resort.

### **Some Lessons Relearned**

Let me now highlight some of the lessons relearned by the United Nations in East Timor, related to **security**. This list is not extensive, and you might find some of these to be controversial.

- **Legitimacy and host-country support.** Without “legitimacy” and the “support of the host community” peace building efforts are unlikely to be lasting.
- **National security architecture.** Working with the host community, there is a need to identify the security architecture and the steps required to achieve it. This

means distinguishing clearly between keeping the peace through UN intervention, and building the capacity of local institutions. There is a distinction to be made between peacekeeping and peace building, but these will often occur concurrently, and frequently by the same organisations. Helping to build the host country's security apparatus will ultimately be more important than keeping the peace until the date of departure. And it needs to be built from the outset and included in the mandate. Better integrated security planning is required between military and police, and between multinational, UN, and local forces. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure a clear division of responsibility and enhance cooperation. This was not done particularly well in East Timor, and although progress has been made, the security architecture remains fragile.

- **UN mandates must be simple and achievable.** In line with this, and at the risk of disagreeing with the Secretary-General, seldom will UN forces be “neutral”. “Impartial” maybe. But SRSG's, as well as their military and police commanders, have specific jobs to do and they must be empowered to do them. They need the tools and rules of engagement to fulfil their mandate, and they must also be held accountable for their actions. Invariably this will mean taking sides, at least as perceived by some community elements or “spoilers”.
- **Effective peace building requires good leadership, teamwork, respect, and accountability.** The United Nations may have little choice in the selection of local leaders, but it can only blame itself if it assigns weak leaders in key UN appointments, and fails to resource the mission adequately.
- **Separation of Combatants.** For peace and security to be maintained the combatants must be separated, and there must be effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). The UN needs to include these issues in its planning and to work more closely with the World Bank group on DDR. Early separation of combatants was achieved in East Timor, but DDR was inadequately considered during the planning.
- **Infrastructure.** I agree fully with Madame Ogata's point yesterday about the critical need for roads – and I would add telecommunications. I continue to be concerned at the inadequate state of these in East Timor. They impact directly on security and governance. Japan is one of the few countries having the capability to fix roads and build bridges as part of their development projects. The ADB's efforts have been less than acceptable in my view, and reflect the views of economists rather than strategists.
- **Transition.** Another lesson relearned in East Timor is that peacekeeping forces are most vulnerable shortly after they transition from multinational forces. There is a tendency to provide UN forces with insufficient combat and logistic capabilities. It is much better to go heavier and then drawdown, rather than the reverse. Diagram 2 clearly indicates the increase in militia activity following the transition from INTERFET to UNTAET. “Transition” also includes the role of

indigenous forces. This must be agreed and planned early in consultation with the host country.

- **Warfighters are Peacekeepers.** Good peacekeeping forces are comprised of professional troops that are well led, well equipped, with good warfighting skills, properly trained in the laws of armed conflict, culturally aware, gender tolerant, and respectful of the local community. This is a big ask, even for developed nations.
- **CIMIC.** As well as having good warfighting skills, peacekeeping forces must possess capabilities in civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). CIMIC falls into two main areas:
  - Constabulary capabilities to help implement the rule of law. This includes the use of more military police and military legal staff, but also the training and provisioning of infantry forces to undertake constabulary functions.
  - The other area of CIMIC is in humanitarian and nation-building capabilities. Military forces have significant assets that can help kick-start reconstruction, re-establish basic medical services, assist in the movement of displaced people, and help facilitate food security. The lessons from INTERFET show that in the emergency phase better cooperation is required between OCHA, UNHCR and military forces. Unfortunately most militaries have little doctrine or experience in working with civilian relief agencies and NGOs. In conducting CIMIC, care must also be taken to prevent dependency on the occupying military force that will create difficulties when they withdraw.
- **Civilian police are critical.** The UN must rethink how it plans its police operations and how it selects and prepares its police officers. It must also be able to train local police forces more effectively than was the case in East Timor.
- **Intelligence/Information.** UN forces (military and police) require better intelligence/information gathering capabilities. Without accurate information they are unable to maintain security. This includes simple measures, such as the provision of interpreters and translators, as well as more sophisticated technology.
- **Aviation.** Aviation is critical in harsh environments where infrastructure is underdeveloped. There is a need to separate military/police requirements from administrative requirements, and to remove this responsibility from the Chief Administrative Officer. UN aviation procedures largely reflect the requirements of smaller monitoring missions, rather than larger complex peace operations. This means empowering the Force Commander and requiring troop contributing nations to assign their aviation assets under central military authority.
- **Military engineers are critical,** particularly in the emergency phase and during the initial phase of reconstruction. UN administrative practices, however, are not

responsive for these operations and need to be reviewed. In East Timor the engineer battalions from Pakistani and Bangladesh were under-utilised because of UN procurement procedures and the inability of these battalions to finance their own operations.

- **Maritime Security.** A final lesson is that maritime patrol capabilities are important to secure coastal waters and economic zones. In most circumstances the threat is not so much from opposing armed forces, but to prevent piracy and the illegal movement of people and prohibited goods. This issue was not addressed in East Timor.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude. Overall, the UN's intervention in, and assistance to, East Timor has proved successful. Nevertheless, many of the same lessons from previous missions were relearned. The conclusion seems clear enough: if the United Nations is to be effective in peacekeeping and peace building it requires more support from its member states. The recommendations from the Brahimi Report provide a road map for the way ahead, but this journey will only be successful if fully supported by the world community, and particularly by the US and the other members of the P5. The United Nations is both a product of the imperfect system of states and a guardian of that system. It has played a significant role in helping East Timor - the newest and one of the poorest nations of the new millennium – join this system. For East Timor to prosper it will continue to rely on the United Nations for many years, as current events in Haiti remind us all too clearly.

Contact details:

Michael G. Smith

CEO AUSTCARE

Sydney, Australia

E. [msmith@austcare.org.au](mailto:msmith@austcare.org.au)

Ph: 61 2 9565 9111

Fax: 61 2 9550 4509

AUSTCARE's mission is to assist refugees overseas, displaced people and those affected by landmines to rebuild their lives through the expert delivery of development programs in partnership with local communities and other agencies. For more information about AUSTCARE please visit our website [www.austcare.org.au](http://www.austcare.org.au) or for donations within Australia call 1300 66 66 72.