

A slippery slope to complicity

Australian policy on Portuguese Timor 1963-76
as revealed by the national archives

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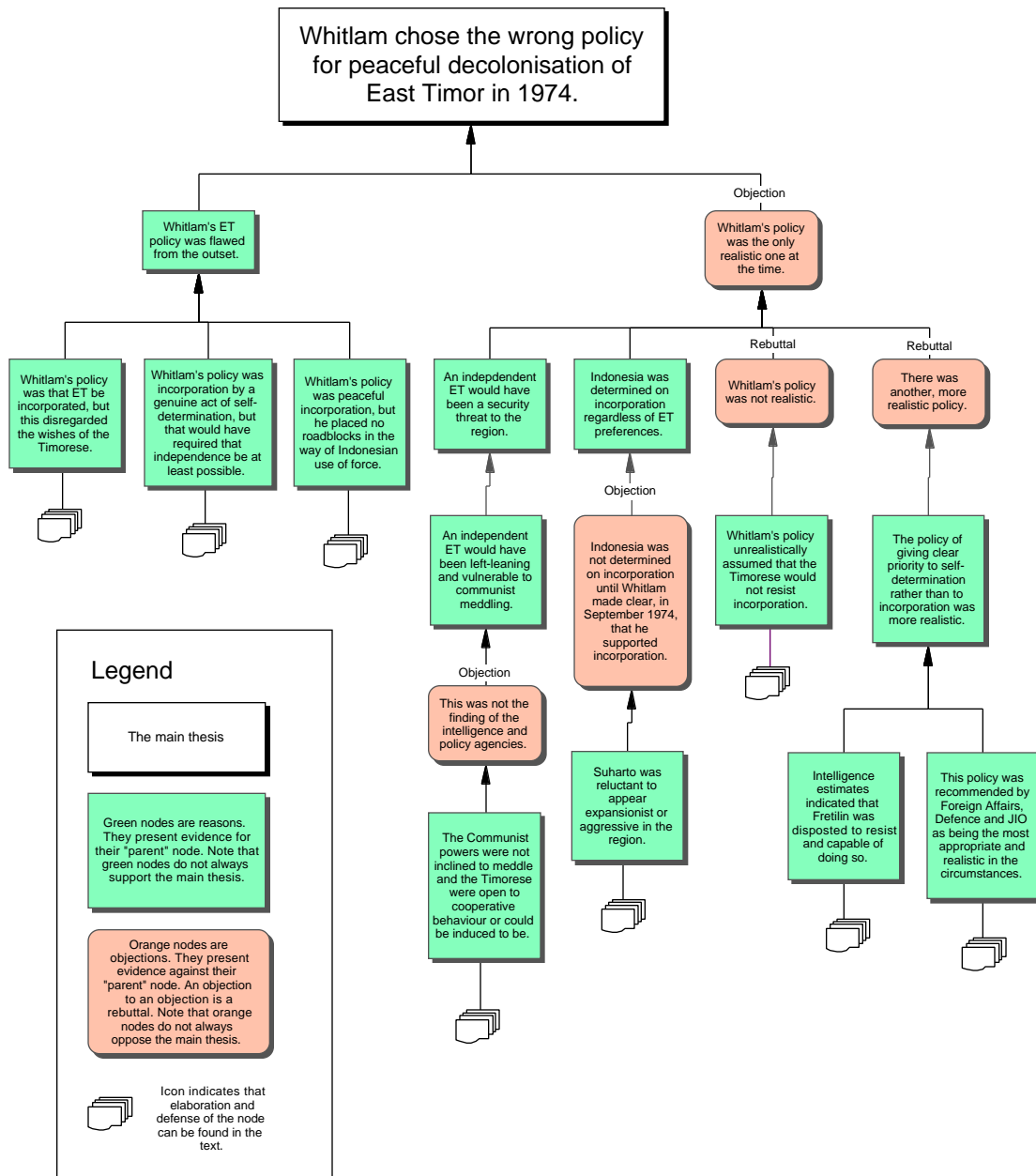
Central Argument

This page presents an argument map of the central argument presented in the paper. The central argument consists of a main thesis, and a structure of reasons, objections and rebuttals (objections to objections).

The goal of the argument map is easy, rapid and accurate communication of the central argument.

Note that this argument map does not present all the reasoning contained in the paper. Rather, it is a high-level map presenting a simplified version of the primary structural features of the argument.

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Opening Remarks.

At the beginning of this year, an essay of mine titled 'East Timor: Truth and Consequences' was published in *Quadrant*. In it, drawing only on already publicly available records, I advanced an argument that it would not do to assert that the policy identified with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Ambassador Richard Woolcott had been the only realistic one in 1975. There had been an alternative policy advocated inside the Government and specifically by the Defence Planning Division, Department of Defence, then headed by Mr W. S. Pritchett. That policy, I showed, consisted in making what Mr Pritchett called 'a major effort of statesmanship' to persuade Indonesia that it could and should accept an independent East Timor ruled by Fretilin, rather than persist in seeking to incorporate the Portuguese colony at the risk of having to try to crush Fretilin militarily. I argued that the events of late 1999 showed that this alternative policy had been vindicated by the way things had turned out, not simply in 1999, but at every step along the way since October 1975.

In September this year, the Government released a vast quantity of classified documents on East Timor policy-making from the years 1974 to 1976, well ahead of the usual thirty-year period. A selection of about 500 of these documents was published in a carefully edited volume by Melbourne University Press, under the title *Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor, 1974-1976*. Many commentators pounced on them in search of evidence to vindicate long and passionately held opinions. On 13 September, in *The Australian*, Paul Kelly described the published set of documents as revealing "deeply flawed diplomacy. Then, on 27 September, after the debate had been raging back and forth for a fortnight as to what the documents really revealed, he wrote that the documents also revealed "the inability of those Australians who wanted independence or self-determination for East Timor to offer any viable means of achieving these aims." The debate should now end, he suggested, with the conclusion that "Whitlam's policy failed, but that Australia could not have saved East Timor in 1975."

I applied for a small grant to come up here and look more closely at the documents and the larger archive from which they were drawn, in order to explore as

thoroughly as possible the extent to which Paul Kelly is right. My sense of the matter was that as a nation we needed to learn as clearly as possible and in detail just why Mr Whitlam's policy had failed and whether our diplomacy had, indeed, been deeply flawed. If the debate ended too soon and with a shrug, then we would learn nothing substantial from the whole vexed episode. I felt, therefore, that Kelly was wrong-headed in wanting to have done with the matter. This was especially so because the independence finally voted for by East Timor in September 1999 clearly has not brought to an end the difficulties Australia faces in its relations with Indonesia over the matter. Understanding in detail and with considerable subtlety how our diplomacy had worked and, in particular, how our relationship with Indonesia had worked in those days seemed to me an extremely important challenge. Problems with Indonesia's internal cohesion as a nation state and wider regional issues of 'self-determination' claims in Melanesia, South East Asia and China are surely going to have to be dealt with for decades to come. We would be very foolish, therefore, not to ponder the lessons of the East Timor case as carefully as possible.

Having received the small grant I applied for, I arrived in Canberra on 19 November and have spent two weeks immersed in the archival record. It has been, I have to say, a deeply fascinating and most rewarding experience. I have learned a great deal very quickly. Having arrived with a rough, working hypothesis – ie that there had been an alternative policy in October 1975 – I was able to test that hypothesis against a wealth of documentation. As an historian, whose skills were honed here at the Research School in the 1980s, I was delighted to find the evidence complex and resistant to any overly simple vindication of my hypothesis. Indeed, within a week I had had to revise my hypothesis. It was at that point that the flier you received was drafted. So interesting did I find the antecedents to the events of 1975 to be that, at that point, I considered confining my presentation to the period up to October 1974, a year *before* Pritchett's memorandum was written. So compelling was the development of the drama, however, that I could not desist and pursued the matter through to its denouement, aided enormously by the quality of the book produced by Melbourne University Press.

The initial challenge, of course, was to try to come to terms with the sheer mass of documentation and avoid the trap of just hunting for evidence to support my hypothesis. The archive contains some twenty shelf metres of documents, totalling approximately 68,000 folios, or pages. How was I to come to grips with this from a standing start, working alone, in just two weeks? The huge labour of the editorial team working under David Lee and Wendy Way is what made it possible. Working minutely through the book they created, checking the evidence against my emerging theory as I went, I was able to supplement their selection from the archives, using their admirable guide to the arrangement of the archive materials. I used my starting hypothesis as an Ariadne's thread for keeping my bearings in the maze of complexities that the documents record. It served me well. I never felt lost or baffled, even as my thinking developed and my appreciation of the difficulties facing the policy makers deepened. Finally, buried in an old file, overlooked or underestimated by the editors of the published documents, I found a little handwritten memo dating back to March 1963, which – in the light of everything I had read – seemed to confirm the revised hypothesis at which I had slowly arrived. It was a little stone, but a very sharp one and with it I dealt the Minotaur a killing blow right between the eyes and emerged from the labyrinth with my analysis in one piece.

Summary Interpretation of the Matter:

What, then, is the analysis at which I arrived? Briefly, it is this. The Whitlam policy failed because it was based on two incompatible desiderata, but even more because it had no traction. Having told the Indonesians that we considered incorporation desirable and more or less inevitable, but wanted to see it brought about through a genuine process of self-determination; we had nowhere to go when it turned out that any genuine process of self-determination would *not* yield incorporation, but independence. As Pritchett was to point out in October 1975, our policy was incoherent: what we were offering the Indonesians with one hand, we were taking away with the other. We would have had to *reverse* our policy in order to make Jakarta see how seriously we viewed the matter. This seems to have been what Pritchett had in mind in calling for “a major effort of statesmanship” to convince Jakarta to accept an independent East Timor. This would have necessitated engaging

Ramos Horta and Fretilin in serious dialogue about the situation, but we fastidiously avoided doing so, because we did not want to take any responsibility for the problem. Trying this was urged by several serious thinkers within the Government from December 1974, but *sotto voce* and without any real conviction. In any case, it was not a course that commended itself to Mr Whitlam. We would, under these conditions, perhaps have been better served to do what Jakarta requested: support it more wholeheartedly in its course of action. This is what Ambassador Woolcott suggested from April 1975 and he has been vilified ever since for doing so.

We chose neither course. Indeed, we tried to avoid making a clear choice at all. Instead, we persisted in wanting to have it both ways, while trying to remain uninvolved. Clinging to both desiderata while practising ‘studied detachment’ from what was really happening was not a viable policy and our analysts knew it from no later than December 1974. We had, by then, become complicit in Jakarta’s *end* (incorporation) and even its *means* (covert political intervention) for achieving it. To change course became more and more difficult with each passing month. We were on a slippery slope to what eventually became *de jure* recognition of the fact of Indonesian incorporation of the colony, while professing non-acceptance of the means by which it had been accomplished. When the axe finally fell in December 1975, with the airborne and marine assault on Dili, we let the Indonesians down by not giving them even tacit support, but we had no other options up our sleeve for resolving the situation. The end result was just what Pritchett had anticipated. We offended the Indonesians, outraged a wide section of the Australian public, causing enduring problems for our relationship with Indonesia as a domestic political issue, and found ourselves having to engage in double-talk about our principles and our interests for twenty five years.

From a public interest and diplomatic history point of view, the vital question here is whether all this was, as Paul Kelly phrased it, “deeply flawed diplomacy”. My foregoing summary suggests, of course, that it was, but the case needs to be made carefully and in detail. If our diplomacy was deeply flawed, we ought to be able, with the help of the archives, to point to where the flaws were. We ought to be able to show, especially with the advantage of hindsight, how errors might have been

avoided. If, conversely, we judge, with Kelly, that we could not have saved East Timor in 1975, we need to ask whether it was not the case, therefore, that our diplomacy was *not* flawed at all, but simply did as much as anyone could have done in all the circumstances. Unless Kelly meant that we could have ‘saved’ East Timor *before* 1975, but that at some point in that year it became too late.

I shall argue that it is not clear that the Australian Government ever had the intention of ‘saving’ East Timor. What it wanted to ‘save’ was its relationship with Indonesia. It had perfectly good reasons for wanting to do so. There was, however, a genuine concern about self-determination as a means of decolonisation and an unwillingness to countenance Indonesian use of force outside its national boundaries. In order to reconcile our desiderata in this matter we needed to develop the means to ensure the self-determination of Portuguese Timor, free of military interference by Indonesia, in such a way that Indonesia saw its interests as being served. If this was never going to be possible, it seems unreasonable to describe Australia’s handling of the matter as “deeply flawed”. I think the record shows that it *was* possible, in principle, but that Mr Whitlam’s approach to it was *tactically flawed*. I believe the release of previously classified material enables us to see this and to reason closely about what else might have been attempted. We have a great deal to gain by doing so.

I should say that, after examining as much of the declassified record as I could over the past fortnight, I find myself much *less* inclined than before to see this matter in simple terms, or to cast aspersions on the policy making of *any* of the principle parties involved. I have learned to appreciate the subtlety of what Mr Whitlam was attempting; the candour and realism with which Ambassador Woolcott wrote from Jakarta in the difficult months of 1975 and 1976; the impressive circumspection and statecraft of President Suharto throughout the period in question. The exceptional professionalism of our senior political officers at the Embassy in Jakarta, Jan Arriens, Malcolm Dan and Allan Taylor, impressed me greatly. I used to think, based on very little knowledge of the man, that Allan Taylor, for example, was one of the “deeply flawed” lot who cynically sold out East Timor – a view which, I suspect, is very widespread among those in the media and the universities with strongly critical views of the Australian Government’s handling of the relationship with Indonesia. I no longer think of him like this. As most of you will be aware, he is now Director

General of ASIS. From what I have seen in the East Timor papers, I can understand how he has risen to that important position. I was very strongly impressed by the *quality* of the thinking and the *honesty* of perspective that so many Australian officials brought to this complex matter. I found many of my cruder assumptions and judgements about people and events being qualified and even radically modified by what I found in the record, when I studied it closely.

In many ways, as I approached the end of my intensive research, I found myself recalling Leslie Gelb's wry reflection on the failures of American policy in regard to Vietnam. The irony, he wrote, some twenty years ago, is that *the system worked*. That is to say, one was not looking at criminal conspiracy, or monumental stupidity, but at complexity and miscalculation. Understanding this episode in our history, in other words, is *not* best done by leaping to and passionately maintaining moral or ideological positions for or against Indonesia, or Fretilin, Mr Whitlam, Mr Woolcott or Mr Suharto. Rather, it is best done, in the spirit of the famous maxim of the Roman historian Tacitus – *sine ira et studio*, without anger or bias. It has, of course, long since been observed that Tacitus was certainly not free of either of these things, but the maxim is a sound one nonetheless. Again and again, examining this record, I learned the wisdom of it and in doing so rediscovered one of the abiding reasons for the critical study of history: the deepening of perspective and, with it, the sobering discovery of how limited and unreasonable our assumptions and judgements so often are.

The deepening of my perspective began with the discovery of a SECRET report, called *The Future of Portuguese Timor*, prepared for Sir Arthur Tange, in March/April 1963, when he was Secretary of External Affairs. I was fascinated to discover that the chief author of this report was none other than Gordon Jockel, who was subsequently to become our Ambassador to Indonesia. Under Tange's aegis, he then became the first Director of the Joint Intelligence Organisation; a position he held from 1970 to 1978. It was then taken deeper again, by the long series of intelligence briefings provided to the Embassy by Harry Tjan and Lim Bian Kie of the then newly created and highly influential Jakarta think tank, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). I had previously thought that these briefings had

occurred only as a remarkable exception, in October 1975. In fact they went much further back and were astonishingly frank. With the perspective afforded by the deep background of the 1963 report (to which I shall refer henceforth as the Jockel Report) and the CSIS briefings, I was able to appreciate altogether more realistically the significance of Ambassador Woolcott's cables from Jakarta in 1975. Finally, as I remarked earlier, I came across a short, handwritten memorandum in the archives. It was written to Gordon Jockel. It was dated 13 March 1963. It was written by Sir Keith Waller and reported a conversation he had had with Sir Arthur Tange about what the Working Group, under Jockel's direction, should be primarily looking to do. That little note crystallised the thinking that had been forming in my mind for ten days. I shall come to its content in due course.

In order to show how I developed my theory of the slippery slope and the lack of what I have called "traction" in the policy adopted by Mr Whitlam, I want to take you back through these materials in as summary and lucid a manner as I am able to do. I believe this will provide ample scope for a highly useful and stimulating discussion. Naturally, there will be much that I shall not cover here this morning. The discussions at the United Nations, in Portugal, in Macao, the relations between Defence and Foreign Affairs, the differences on this matter between Senator Willesee, as Foreign Minister and Mr Whitlam as Prime Minister, will all be largely put to one side, so that the structure of the theory can be made clear and not unduly cluttered by digression into too many points of detail. I shall also say nothing about the Balibo affair. I have recently published an essay on that subject and a few copies are available for those interested, but it does not concern me here. I might add, however, for those of you with an interest in that matter, that Bill Blick, the Inspector General on Intelligence and Security, is currently undertaking an unprecedented inquiry into the Balibo affair from exactly the angle that I addressed in my essay. I take this to be a clear indication that, at Cabinet level, Balibo is still not regarded as having been dealt with satisfactorily. Mr Blick will not, apparently, be issuing a public report, however, so perhaps you had better read my essay for the time being.

The Jockel Report: Elements of an Alternative Policy.

The question of Portuguese Timor did not first come under close consideration in Canberra in 1974, with the April coup in Portugal. It was closely considered many years before that. In the wake of the Indian seizure of Goa (another tiny Portuguese enclave in Asia) and the incorporation by Indonesia of West Papua, in 1962, the US State Department had been urging Australia to take the initiative, with some sort of *preventive diplomacy* to head off a possible military seizure of Portuguese Timor by Indonesia. The Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, and the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, were keenly aware of the dilemma confronting Australia, because of the anachronism of the tiny Portuguese colony on the edges of the archipelagic nation state of Indonesia. Our intelligence services were also aware of Indonesian designs on the colony. Against this background, on 25 February 1963, Sir Arthur Tange, then Secretary of External Affairs, instructed a small working group within his Department, headed by Gordon Jockel, to prepare a report on the future of Portuguese Timor. The report, classified SECRET, was submitted on 5 April 1963. It recommended that action be taken to “steal the Indonesian wind” and open up the possibility of the territory being decolonised without its being annexed by Indonesia. Excerpts from this report have been published in the Melbourne University Press book, but the full version repays a close reading and should belong in any documentary history of the subject from now on.

In his instructions to Jockel, Tange wrote:

“The United States and the United Kingdom are looking to Australia to take some initiative to avoid the Western world finding itself in a situation where a nationalistic revolutionary power, backed by Russian arms, can achieve its ends by force of arms. This power is at Australia’s doorstep.”

Now, of course, what leaps to the eye here is that this is, geopolitically speaking, quite the obverse of what was feared by the more conservative policy-makers in 1975: a leftist regime in East Timor being used by the Communist powers *against* Indonesia. Tange’s instruction to Jockel is of interest, all the same, because he wanted a report that would:

“...explore all possible measures and analyse developments which, if they can be initiated or encouraged, would produce the least embarrassment to Australia’s foreign policy and national interests.”

I would ask you to weigh in your minds the two phrases: ‘all possible measures...which...can be initiated or encouraged’ and ‘the least embarrassment to Australia’s foreign policy and national interests’.

In the summary of the report, its authors remarked that early discussion of the future of the colony in the United Nations could help to head off the unwelcome possibility of unilateral, violent action by Indonesia. They added:

“What we have to fear in particular is an uprising and bloody suppression leading to Indonesian intervention. If the matter is already actively before the United Nations, Indonesia may itself allow the main action to be determined in the United Nations. In any event, there would be better chances of a realistic engagement of the United Nations in such a situation and better chances for Australia avoiding a head-on clash with Indonesia.”

There were, they observed, “some pointers which suggest that Indonesia may act in a more cautious and more acceptable fashion.” Indonesia would not wish to appear expansionist, they believed, and if the matter was handled pro-actively by Australia, “may be somewhat flexible on the international status of Timor after the Portuguese have gone.” For all these reasons, they concluded, “we are inclined to think that the sooner the question is brought before the United Nations the better.”

The crucial paragraph in the Jockel Report, in the light of subsequent developments, is para 35:

“While letting Indonesia understand that Australia would not oppose the territory eventually becoming a part of Indonesia through satisfactory processes of self-determination, we might also urge that there are other worthwhile possibilities for consideration. For example, the territory might acquire a measure of autonomy under

the protection externally of Indonesia...In talking to the Indonesians we should avoid being over eager to suggest that inevitably the territory of Portuguese Timor should pass to them and that we don't have any scruples about that eventuality except the use of force. We should make continued reference to the argument for self-determination. Otherwise, we place ourselves in the position of being an accomplice of Indonesia in an exercise in Realpolitik which we believe would earn the reverse of their healthy respect."

Superficially read, this may appear to be exactly what the Whitlam policy attempted and failed to achieve. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that something very close to this is what Mr Whitlam imagined he was doing. Tactically, however, he missed all the subtleties suggested by Jockel, in my judgement. In his meetings with Mr Suharto, as I read the record, Mr Whitlam gave the Indonesian leader to understand that he did, indeed, regard the incorporation of the colony within Indonesia as inevitable. More than that, he stated clearly that he saw this as highly desirable. This was very different from saying that Australia would not be opposed to such an eventuality, but foresaw other possibilities. It meant, as I see it, that the *traction* Jockel had been suggesting be created to slow or inhibit Indonesian moves towards unilateral and violent action was foresworn by Mr Whitlam at the outset. From that point, just as Jockel had foretold, Australia was on a slippery slope to becoming "an accomplice of Indonesia in an exercise in *Realpolitik*." We resisted, we went into denial, we pretended we were not involved, we looked the other way, we wrung our hands and we protested after the proverbial horse had bolted, but we slid all the way down the slope between 1974 and 1979.

To drive home the point I am trying to make here, let me summarise the recommendations of the Jockel Report, as I read them. There were six key ones:

Call for the progressive development and self-determination of Portuguese Timor in the United Nations;

Take the initiative in this matter, to 'steal the Indonesian wind' and *pre-empt* any move towards unilateral action aimed at annexation;

Make clear, in early talks with the Indonesians, that there are *other possible futures* for Portuguese Timor than incorporation into Indonesia;
Avoid giving any reason to the Indonesians to believe that we regard incorporation as inevitable;
Make clear that satisfactory processes of self-determination *have priority* over any particular outcome of those processes;
Do not become an accomplice in any Indonesian exercise in *Realpolitik*.

If we want to reach a considered judgement as to whether the accusation against Mr Whitlam is justified, that he gave a “green light” to Suharto to take unilateral action in East Timor in 1974-75, I suggest that these recommendations are the place to start.

When the matter became a policy issue a decade later, with no progress on any of the above grounds having been made ad interim, so far as I can establish, John McCredie, Minister in the Embassy in Jakarta, wrote to Graham Feakes, FAS S. E. Asia and PNG in the Department of Foreign Affairs, in May 1974:

“Indonesian absorption of Timor makes geopolitical sense. Any other long-term solution would be potentially disruptive of both Indonesia and the region. It [absorption] would help confirm our seabed agreement with Indonesia. It should induce a greater readiness on Indonesia’s part to discuss Indonesia’s ocean strategy. We might be able to provide some assistance to a smooth transition.” [AIPT Doc. #9]

This, of course, comes very close to embodying what the so-called “East Timor Lobby” accused the Whitlam Government and subsequent Australian Governments of conniving in. Certainly, as you can see, it represented a totally different approach to that recommended in the Jockel Report. The fact that Indonesia was now seen as under a more tractable and pro-Western regime must be regarded as accounting for some part of the shift, but what McCredie called “geopolitical” sense was unambiguously part of it, as well.

Yet things did not evolve quite as simply as that. Feakes responded to McCredie, on 6 June, as follows:

“My own feeling, which I think would be widely shared in the Department, is that there will have to be an internationally acceptable act of self-determination...In our view, the best result of that act of self-determination would be for the Timorese to choose union, or some form of association, with Indonesia. The diplomatic problem for us is how to bring that result about. We have to face up to the possibility that the Timorese may choose independence...Timorese resistance to absorption by Indonesia may come as a shock to the Indonesians; and we may have a role in suggesting to the Indonesians that they take into account the possibility of such resistance and start to think seriously about how Indonesia might live with an independent Portuguese Timor. We should not assume that it would be beyond the Indonesians’ capacity to do so and fairly quickly to gain a dominant influence there.” [AIPT Doc. #10]

From this note three things: the desideratum has moved from inhibiting unilateral Indonesian action, through pro-active and constructive measures, to facilitating, if possible, the absorption of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia. Feakes, of course, allows that the Timorese might *choose* not to accept absorption, but offers no suggestions as to how their freedom to choose might be guaranteed. The fact that he is speculating at this point on whether Australia *may have a role in suggesting* to Indonesia that other futures than absorption be considered is pretty clear evidence that no such action or initiative had been undertaken in the eleven years since the Jockel Report had recommended just such talks with Jakarta.

Enter Mr Harry Tjan.

As it happened, the clock was ticking. It was at just this point in time that the CSIS began a remarkable series of briefings to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. On 3 July, Ambassador Furlonger sent a TOP SECRET cable to Canberra reporting that Harry Tjan had had an extraordinary conversation with Jan Arriens (First Secretary, May 1973 through November 1974). As far as I have been able to establish, this briefing of 2 July 1974 was the first such provided to the Embassy. By my count, in the published documents alone, there were another forty five such briefings, in an uninterrupted sequence, up to June 1976. Their content is of the kind that secret

intelligence officers dream about. This first one is one the greatest importance, as Furlonger's own wording makes plain, if we use the Jockel Report as our benchmark for policy formulation on the matter. Furlonger wrote:

“Harry Tjan told Jan Arriens on 2 July that he intends to submit a paper to the President this week recommending that Indonesia mount a clandestine operation in Portuguese Timor to ensure that the territory would opt for incorporation into Indonesia...Ali Murtopo...would appear to have directed Tjan to draft a paper setting out the operation. Tjan's extreme frankness indicates that the Indonesians are confident that we would favour an independent Portuguese Timor as little as they do.”[AIPT Doc. #12]

No such confidence as this had existed in the Sukarno years. In January 1963, the Embassy had received a secret intelligence report indicating that General Magenda, Intelligence Chief for the Indonesian Combined Forces Staff, had been in West Timor preparing for a covert operation intended to spark border incidents “which would ultimately justify annexation of Portuguese Timor.” This had been part of the reason for the commissioning of the Jockel Report. Magenda's plans had not gone into operation. The case had changed, however, after the firm accession of President Suharto, in 1967-69. In 1971, Indonesia's intelligence agency BAKIN (*Badan Koordinasi Inteligens Negara*, or State Intelligence Co-ordination Agency) had established a regular liaison relationship with Australia's Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO). CSIS had been set up, under the guiding hand of Ali Murtopo, Deputy Director of BAKIN, in the same year. The briefings initiated by Harry Tjan, in July 1974, were plainly intended to cement a geopolitical and intelligence relationship.

Furlonger went on to say:

“It is interesting to note the Indonesian preoccupation with Portuguese Timor which is now coming through to us – from Ali Murtopo at the discussions (half a line deleted) [almost certainly this deletion referred to the latest round of BAKIN/JIO talks] last week and now with Tjan. It is true that all these discussions were initiated

on our side, but the Indonesians clearly decided to take the opportunity offered by them to take us along on a Realpolitik approach to the problem; and they are speaking surprisingly frankly. We are, in effect, being consulted. They clearly expect a response from our side: a failure to do so soon will be taken by them, I fear, as tacit agreement. Although I recognise that there are sometimes evolving situations where policy is best left grey and obscure, I doubt that that is desirable in this case..." [ibid]

Furlonger, in short, was aware of the problem adverted to by the Jockel Report, but he did not himself recommend any pre-emptive action. He sought guidance from Canberra. The guidance was uncertain and showed that Canberra did not have a thought through position on this matter, much less one based on the tactically astute guidelines suggested to Sir Arthur Tange in 1963.

The response from Canberra came, once again, from Feakes. He wrote, on 26 July:

"The information conveyed to Jan Arriens by Harry Tjan was most valuable, but...we should not encourage the Indonesians in any way to talk to us along those lines. Australia could not afford to be associated with an Indonesian covert operation because of the risk of exposure. Any hint of Australian involvement or even acquiescence would be damaging to the government's reputation overseas, to its domestic credibility and to the confidence in us of small countries, especially PNG. In terms of domestic opinion, there are enough problems in maintaining our present policy towards Indonesia without the complication of association with a doubtful operation in Timor which would scarcely be consistent with the government's support for self-determination in Portuguese colonial territories."

As the record shows in exhaustive detail, however, the Indonesians were in no way discouraged from talking to the Embassy "along those lines." This did carry the risk of exposure, but for that reason great efforts were made to conceal the fact that we knew and to deny or ignore the fact that the covert operation was going on, once it got under way.

That, however, was still some months away when Feakes was writing to Furlonger in late July 1974. And Feakes added a comment which, if he and his colleagues had in any way recalled the reasoning of the Jockel Report, might conceivably have led to some rigorous thinking about pre-emptive steps and policy initiative:

“I wonder whether the Indonesians may not underestimate the difficulties of a covert operation in Portuguese Timor and the risk of exposure... One can guess at the thinking underlying Harry Tjan’s idea. It might go like this: Indonesia can have the best of both worlds by employing covert tactics for expansion in Timor; OPSUS has the necessary skills and has demonstrated them in West Irian; the agency or political interest that secured Portuguese Timor for Indonesia would gain great kudos domestically. It seems to us that the danger that this approach illustrates is that self-interest may distort rational thinking and the assessment of risks.” [AIPT Doc. #16]

It seems to me very striking that, despite making these astute observations, Feakes did nothing by way of urging that Tjan be challenged on the advisability of such an operation. While he saw possible problems for Indonesia in undertaking such an operation, he does not seem to have fully appreciated that Australia could not simply look the other way and keep its innocence; for once such an operation started it would have direct implications for Australia. This was the first hint, in fact, of Indonesia going off on a course of its own and seeking to take Australia along, one way or another, as Furlonger had plainly put it, on a *Realpolitik* approach to the problem.

Urgent and vigorous action at this juncture might have pre-empted the operation in question. Feakes was circumspect, rather than decisive. He coordinated the briefing paper for the September 1974 visit by Mr Whitlam to Java for talks with Suharto and in this briefing he told the Prime Minister of the covert operation plan and suggested that “we should aim...at maintaining a dialogue about the problem that Portuguese Timor represents to divert them from a forward policy in Timor that would place our other interests at risk.” He suggested that Australia adopt the position that “any future disposition of Portuguese Timor which was contrary to the wishes of its people would be likely...to have a destabilising influence in the region.” What he

did *not* do was to make any reference to the need for something other than a diffuse dialogue to give *traction* to Australia's policy, given that Indonesia was inclining towards Tjan's covert intervention.

Commenting on Feakes's briefing notes after the completion of the Prime Minister's talks with President Suharto, at Jogjakarta and Wonosobo, on 6 September, Ambassador Furlonger wrote on the cover sheet:

"This was all very cautious and rather different from the line the PM actually took."

[AIPT Doc. #24]

The briefing paper had been sent from Canberra, by Dick Woolcott, who, in a handwritten postscript to his formal note of transmission, asked Furlonger:

"Are you satisfied with the way the P. T. issue is working out?"

Furlonger's own comment suggests that he was not completely so, but he seems to have thought that the matter could be handled satisfactorily, as Feakes had said, by keeping some sort of dialogue going.

What Mr Whitlam had said to Suharto was that his personal views tended to become Australian Government policy and that he had two basic views on the subject of Portuguese Timor: that it "*should become part of Indonesia*" and that "*this should happen in accordance with the properly expressed wishes of the people of Portuguese Timor.*" We need not conclude too categorically that this gave Suharto a "green light" to seek a West Irian sort of solution, as proposed by Harry Tjan, but we can, I think, agree that it might very well of been so understood by President Suharto, who certainly will have known that Harry Tjan had told the Australian Embassy about the proposed covert operation. Feakes had advised the Prime Minister to tell Suharto that self-determination for the Timorese was firm Australian Government policy and that this should "*not exclude any of the three future options for Portuguese Timor*" – ie sustained links with Portugal, independence or association with Indonesia. Instead, Mr Whitlam told the Indonesian President that, while a belief that Portuguese Timor

should be part of Indonesia was “not yet Government policy...it was likely to become that.” [AIPT Doc. #26]

Why did the Prime Minister exceed his brief in this fashion? There are a number of possible explanations. Two of them seem to me the most plausible. Firstly, he had been assured by Furlonger [AIPT Doc. #25] that Suharto saw Australia as “unique among countries of Western origin in the degree of understanding that we show towards the problems of Indonesia and the region” and that “he and those around him admire your reshaping of Australian foreign policy.” So Whitlam allowed the heady sense of working with Indonesia’s strongman in reshaping the region to cloud his judgement. He allowed himself to believe that the two of them could work it out and never mind the details for the time being. Secondly, he had no patience with micro-states in general, whether in Melanesia or the Baltic and was highly susceptible to the argument that Portuguese Timor could never be a viable independent state. Its absorption into Indonesia was, therefore, inevitable and should be helped along, not retarded by Australian policy.

This approach by Mr Whitlam was contrary not only to the “very cautious” brief given him by the Department of Foreign Affairs, but, whether he knew it or not, even more to the strategically thoughtful assessment by Tange’s working group in the Menzies years. From this point, Australian policy was caught between the millstones of two desiderata which were only ever likely to be reconciled by the means Harry Tjan had proposed, with all the dangers that Graham Feakes had foreseen. Just to the extent that the Timorese exhibited an unwillingness to be absorbed into Indonesia, Australia would be faced with an invidious choice between its two desiderata. Suharto, however, having been told what he had been by Mr Whitlam, would expect Australia to quietly support its covert, but as the months went by increasingly blatant efforts to, as Harry Tjan had put it, “ensure that the territory would opt for incorporation.”

Feakes’s concerns about encouraging the Indonesians to talk to us as Harry Tjan had begun to went by the wayside now. Tjan told the Embassy that Australian talks with Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik and DEPLU, the Department of

Foreign Affairs, were likely to prove unproductive, because Malik was “not being kept fully informed of developments” regarding covert plans for Portuguese Timor. The best channel was CSIS, especially through Lim Bian Kie, private secretary to Ali Murtopo [AIPT Doc. #33]. This was priceless intelligence and one could only wish always to have such access to the inmost counsels of foreign governments, but the Embassy was listening and had created no evident defences against what Furlonger had apprehended: *being drawn into Jakarta’s Realpolitik gambit*. If this was not so, one would expect to find more evidence of the divisions and uncertainties in Indonesia being “exploited” by Canberra to open up a path to self-determination in Portuguese Timor that would have *precluded* the covert operation – the West Irian solution. Feakes had suggested a dialogue, at least, along these lines. The Prime Minister, however, had left the matter wide open to the *Realpolitik* approach at the Jakarta end, *but without, I think, realising where this was likely to lead*. My impression is that, from this point, Furlonger believed he had the ‘guidance’ he’d sought: it was to play along with the Suharto/Murtopo/Tjan line, while assuming that good will and dialogue and ‘discretion’ would prevent it all from ending in exposure and disaster.

Was Mr Whitlam, having been briefed on the covert operation, tacitly giving Suharto a nod and a wink? The record suggests that he was. In a cablegram to the Foreign Minister, Don Willesee, then in New York, on 24 September, Whitlam, in his capacity as Acting Foreign Minister, stated, on the one hand, that:

“I think it is important that the Indonesians and Portuguese should understand that, while one major element in our policy towards Portuguese Timor is that we favour its incorporation into Indonesia, the other main element in our attitude is that the Timorese should have the opportunity for a genuine act of self-determination to decide their political future. We also think that the Timorese should be allowed to proceed deliberately towards their decision about their future”,

but, on the other hand, that:

“We have no intention of raising the question of Portuguese Timor in the United Nations”,

which, as you will recall, had been one of the key initiatives suggested by the Jockel Report as a way to head off an Indonesian *Realpolitik* approach; and, rather tellingly, that:

“...the best informed person about Portuguese Timor among the Indonesians in New York will be Ali Murtopo’s private secretary, Lim Bian Kie. (A) later telegram from Jakarta makes it clear, however, that Mr Malik has been fully informed of Indonesian policy and is now in sympathy with it. You may, therefore, consider it more appropriate for contacts with Lim Bian Kie to be pursued at the official level...”

[AIPT Doc. #36 SECRET ROUTINE]

Now Mr Whitlam is a highly intelligent man and it seems to me that we would be doing him an injustice to assume that he failed to understand what Indonesian policy was; as now agreed between Ali Murtopo’s covert operation people and Mr Malik.

If there was any doubt on this subject, it ought to have been dispelled by the next SECRET report on Harry Tjan’s briefings to Jan Arriens in Jakarta. It came in on 30 September. The key passage is crystal clear:

“I saw Harry Tjan this morning...(He) said that he had now developed a ‘grand design’ on the future of Portuguese Timor, which had been submitted to the President...The first stage consists of securing legal access by Indonesia to Portuguese Timor through economic cooperation. Australia will be invited by Indonesia and Portugal to join in this cooperation. The second stage will be to invite the UN to send a team to inspect conditions in Portuguese Timor. At the earliest this would take place in 1975, but probably not until 1976. The third stage would be a referendum, the result of which would be ensured by the territory’s exposure to Indonesian influence. Tjan said that the President had endorsed the plan as the ‘basic guidelines’ for Indonesian policy. It still remained, however, for the plan to be converted into operational terms by Ali Murtopo.”

How did Harry Tjan expect Indonesian influence to take effect so quickly – within a year or two – after 450 years of Portuguese rule? And what if the Timorese proved resistant to that influence? From an Australian point of view, these should have been fundamental considerations, but I can find no evidence in the archives that Mr Whitlam had any strategy for inhibiting the Indonesian gambit getting out of hand. This is not simply the wisdom of hindsight, of course, because we know that just such considerations had exercised Gordon Jockel in 1963 and had occurred to Furlonger and Feakes as soon as Harry Tjan raised the very idea of a covert operation, in early July 1974.

Mr Whitlam's stated commitment to self-determination for the Timorese and their being allowed to proceed deliberately towards their decision about their future was well and fine in principle. He may have been perfectly sincere, but his desideratum in this regard was not supported by any active or practical diplomacy designed to ensure that it would take place. One is left with the impression that either the Prime Minister was being strategically naïve, which I feel certain he would not want to accept; or that he was being Machiavellian in a twofold sense. He knew what the Indonesians were thinking and believed that this would provide the appearance of self-determination; while ensuring the other desideratum, which was incorporation of the colony into Indonesia. That was the first sense. The second was that he believed that if things did somehow go wrong, he had provided himself with an alibi: he could say that he had never endorsed any covert operation or blatant Indonesian intervention. Indeed, we know that he did make and continues to make this claim. It was a subtle game to play, but it did not work either in Portuguese Timor, in Australian relations with Indonesia or in domestic political terms. Mr Whitlam has no alibi. He gambled and lost.

The real danger, to some extent hidden by Harry Tjan's language and Suharto's real intentions in September 1974, was that covert intervention would either become exposed and backfire or escalate into military intervention. Freudians talk of 'the return of the repressed'. It could be said that this is what happened in the case of Australian policy on Portuguese Timor in 1974-75. The fear of Indonesian military intervention in the colony and its implications was repressed, due to the overriding

desire for good relations with Jakarta and the strong rapport developed between the two great leaders, Mr Suharto and Mr Whitlam. Therefore, no roadblocks were created in its way. It should be emphasised that Mr Suharto clearly did *not* intend to use military force – *unless it was absolutely necessary*. The problem is that covert operations have a dangerous tendency to roll downhill in this direction and from Wonosobo onwards the whole relationship between Canberra and Jakarta was made hostage to the dubious assumption *that Harry Tjan's covert operation would succeed* without running out of control.

If there was any doubt in Mr Whitlam's mind that this was, indeed, the latent danger in the *Realpolitik* gambit that was being designed by Harry Tjan for Ali Murtopo, it should have been dispelled by the two alarming briefings that Lim Bian Kie and Harry Tjan gave to Furlonger and Arriens in mid to late October 1974. On 16 October, Furlonger sent a SECRET AUSTEO letter to Feakes summarising the conversation with Lim, on his return from New York. He wrote:

“Lim is rather concerned about the impact that Ramos Horta is likely to make on the Committee (of Twenty Four, the UN's consultative body on decolonisation) and that there will be nobody in Apodeti capable of matching him...Lim feels that if the Indonesians cannot influence matters in the direction they want within eighteen months, they will be unable to do so at all.

Lim said that by 1976 it should be possible for Indonesia to gauge fairly accurately what the likely outcome of a plebiscite would be. If it was clear that the territory would not vote for incorporation into Indonesia, Lim said that the use of force could not be ruled out. (Harry Tjan agreed). He spoke of the possibility of fomenting disorder in Portuguese Timor and of the Indonesian forces stepping in to salvage the situation at the request of certain sections of the population.”

Needless to say, this is exactly what was to occur. Indeed, it is a little haunting to consider that this SECRET AUSTEO letter from Furlonger was sent on 16 October, a year to the day before the Indonesian covert military intervention began and the five Australian network journalists were killed at Balibo.

If Australia's tacit policy and, certainly Mr Whitlam's, was to accept a West Irian solution in Portuguese Timor, while avoiding Indonesian use of force, this ought to have caused very serious alarm in Canberra. All the more so because Lim went on to tell Furlonger and Arriens that "*the operation would be a considerably more difficult one than that in West Irian.*" Moreover, Furlonger wrote that he had asked Lim whether Indonesia was not exaggerating the difficulties it would have with an independent Portuguese Timor and whether it might not be better to exert a preponderant influence over such a little state than use force to incorporate it. "*Lim indicated that the latter was not a real alternative for the Indonesians.*" [AIPT Doc. #49 SECRET AUSTEO]. In short, not only was Australian policy now on a slippery slope, but we had been forewarned that Indonesia would move down that slope with its eyes open if need dictated.

Shouldn't this have set off every alarm bell in sight? Didn't this mean that Indonesia had *no intention of allowing a genuine act of self-determination in Portuguese Timor*? That it had no intention of participating in a gradual and careful preparation of the territory for self-determination, but was set on a course of precipitate action? Surely this indicated that Mr Whitlam's policy was not viable, that he could not have both of his desiderata, much as he might have wanted to – unless, of course, the gamble worked and Indonesian influence won the hearts and minds of the Timorese inside eighteen months. Yet the published documents record *no response from Canberra to this telling letter from the Australian Ambassador of 16 October 1974*. Was Mr Whitlam unconcerned?

As if all this was not serious enough, on 26 October Arriens again spoke with Harry Tjan and was told that Ali Murtopo had been replaced by Benny Murdani as real operational chief of the covert action plan, that the grand design had hardened into policy and that Indonesian "*determination to take over Portuguese Timor had now developed an almost irresistible momentum.*" [AIPT Doc. #54 SECRET AUSTEO]. This metaphor of momentum rather powerfully suggests, I believe, that my own metaphor of the slippery slope is an apt one. The telling thing about this briefing from Tjan is that it came six months before the famous Whitlam/Suharto talks in Townsville and a year before Suharto finally gave Murdani permission to start

a substantial, if still covert military invasion of the by then Fretilin-controlled territory. Yet the momentum was far less irresistible at this point than it would become from August of 1975 and if Australia did not wish to slip down the slope of the *Realpolitik* approach now so frankly spelled out by Lim Bian Kie, surely this was the time to put on the brakes? The problem was that the Whitlam policy did not have any brakes built into it. As I have said, it was a policy without any traction. It had, at this point, either to be jettisoned or radically re-engineered to give it such traction, to put some brakes on the tacit understanding with Jakarta. Instead, the “dialogue” Graham Feakes had recommended continued – all the way down the slope.

I believe that October 1974, not October 1975, was the end of the line for the Whitlam policy. Having been told what we had by Lim Bian Kie and Harry Tjan, we had either to find the means to oppose Indonesia – ie to harden and clarify our own policy by giving self-determination unambiguous priority over incorporation, or to acknowledge, at least to ourselves and the Indonesians, our acquiescence and complicity in their *Realpolitik* project. Certainly it was rather late in the day for any more pro-active policy to be undertaken, but for the pretence to continue from this point that Whitlam’s declaratory policy had any substance or integrity amounted to either delusion or mendacity. It is also clear from this document that, contrary to widespread perceptions, it was *not* the fall of Indochina to Communism in April 1975 that led President Suharto or even General Murdani to shift from eschewing expansionism, honouring self-determination, consulting Australia and taking things slowly, to plans for precipitate and uncompromising action. This shift must be attributed to *endogenous not exogenous influences on Jakarta*. Finally, it is also clear from this document that, Ambassador Woolcott’s line, in mid-1975, about Jakarta having made up its mind and expecting Australia to go along with it, was not something concocted by him after his arrival on post in March 1975. It was something that had become clear many months before that.

Sotto Voce Dissent, December 1974:

In a SECRET cable from Jakarta dated 1 November 1974, Ambassador Furlonger wrote to Gordon Jockel, who was by then, as I have said, Director of the Joint

Intelligence Organisation, concerning the “series of conversations with Tjan, Lim Bian Kie and Yoga (Sugama, head of BAKIN) *regarding the possible resort by Indonesia to military action of some sort to advance its policies in Portuguese Timor.*” [AIPT Doc. #56]. He told Jockel that, “the Indonesians can be in no doubt that we regard talk of military action as misplaced in current and *currently foreseeable* circumstances.” He then added:

“I assume in any event that you will be using the resources available to you to keep a close watch on military activity and deployment, just in case our judgement of likely Indonesian behaviour on this whole question should be excessively optimistic.” [ibid]

Two things seem to me to stand out about this. The first is that Furlonger has shifted from questioning the advisability of a covert operation to being optimistic about Indonesia not finally resorting to force. He has slipped down the slope some distance, but gives no sign of having realised that he had done so. Of course, he was in good company back in Canberra in this regard. Yet among the ‘currently foreseeable circumstances’ was there not already the possibility that Portugal would not agree to a rapid transition, ie by mid-1976, or that it would simply hand over autonomy to the Timorese, or that, if there was a plebiscite the Timorese would *not* vote for incorporation? And had not Lim Bian Kie plainly told Furlonger that, in such circumstances, the use of force could not be ruled out? Had not Harry Tjan hinted that Benny Murdani was in the wings waiting to head such a use of force?

The second thing about Furlonger’s cable which seems striking to me is that he writes of Jockel using “the resources available to you” to keep a ‘close watch on military activity’ in Indonesian territory with a view to possible action directed at Portuguese Timor. Exactly what these resources were remains classified, but in general we are talking of surveillance by signals monitoring and photo-reconnaissance, as well as defence intelligence liaison with other foreign intelligence services. This surveillance of Indonesia had long been one of our primary tasks within the UKUSA signals intelligence treaty arrangements and it has become even more so since then. (It was, incidentally, due to a complication in these arrangements that the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) liaison officer in Washington D.C., Merv Jenkins, was driven to suicide in June 1999). This question of surveillance resources

is worth noting, simply because intelligence records of the period under discussion have not been released, but there have been unconfirmed claims for nearly twenty years that a report based wholly on them, covering the entire Indonesian covert operation and invasion of Portuguese Timor, was compiled at Jockel's direction in about 1976 or 1977.

If I may digress momentarily from the slide down the slope, I think it is worth noting here that, in July 1975, when Foreign Affairs challenged the Embassy on whether Harry Tjan's briefings should be taken completely seriously – let me repeat, this was in July 1975 – Malcolm Dan responded at length and forthrightly setting out the many reasons for taking Mr Tjan completely seriously, then added an intriguing comment, which has found its way into the published documents, despite the censoring of intelligence material in general:

“...With regard to Portuguese Timor, we have enough evidence from other [words expunged] sources to know that what Tjan is telling us is accurate. (The [words expunged] sources are fascinating. I have suggested that someone in Australia might compile a report exclusively from these sources.)”[AIPT Doc. #157 SECRET]

It seems to me conceivable that Dan's suggestion may have been the first germ of the idea for the report in question, which insiders have long referred to, off the record, as *The Blue Book*. This report was described to Des Ball in the early 1980s, by a senior JIO officer who had worked closely with Jockel in 1974-75, as “the best study of Australian operational intelligence” he'd ever seen.

But I digress. The slide down the slope had, I am arguing, begun at Wonosobo and was implicitly confirmed by the cable traffic through October and into November. On 11 December 1974, senior Foreign Affairs and intelligence officers met to discuss the situation and Gordon Jockel raised the question of military calculations. His analysis has been strongly vindicated by what has happened since October 1975, so it is all the more interesting that it was put on the record as early as it was. The record of the meeting tell us that:

“Mr Jockel said that what concerned him was the appreciation of the situation on the ground; there was a risk that Portuguese Timor could turn out to be a ‘running sore’ for Indonesia. The situation was very different from West Irian; many of the inhabitants had military training (1,000 in the army, 15,000 formerly in the army and therefore with some military experience and 3,000 in the reserves who received regular training); given the nature of the terrain, it would be easy to mount and sustain a liberation movement with outside support. If a liberation movement did in fact develop, it would gradually attract international attention and Portuguese Timor would become more of an international issue...” [AIPT Doc. #66]

Now, of course, what this fairly plainly indicates is that thinking had shifted from heading off an Indonesian intervention, or hoping that a covert political intervention would work, to reflecting on whether a military intervention could *succeed*. Once this was where the issue stood, it all became a matter of competing intelligence estimates. As the record shows, JIO’s were more sceptical than BAKIN’s, but Ambassador Woolcott – in late 1975, when the die was cast in any case – would reject JIO’s arguments [AIPT Doc. #262 SECRET AUSTEO PRIORITY] and run with Benny Murdani’s assurances that Indonesia would do whatever it took and would clean up Fretilin by the end of the year [AIPT Doc. #257 SECRET AUSTEO PRIORITY].

Given that Jockel had been the author of the 1963 report on *The Future of Portuguese Timor*, his views as of December 1974 are more than usually interesting. Having offered his estimate of ‘the situation on the ground’, the record relates that he went on to say:

“...that he had sympathy for the Indonesians in the present situation, in wanting to take control of Portuguese Timor now in order to prevent the realisation of their worst fears. The real danger, however, was that the Indonesians would alienate those not in favour of integration and so push them to some form of extreme action. There were signs of a strong stiffening of Portuguese resistance to recent Indonesian activity; the situation was therefore becoming more difficult.”[AIPT Doc. #66].

At this point, Michael Cook, then First Assistant Secretary North and West Asia Division, Foreign Affairs, who was to become the Director of the Office of National Assessments (ONA) in the 1980s and later Ambassador in Washington, commented that:

“...he agreed with Mr Jockel...There seemed to have been a basic assumption that Portuguese Timor would be like West Irian, the people would accept integration; and from this assumption followed our commitment to an internationally acceptable act of self-determination. However, what was now clear was that the people of Portuguese Timor were not malleable, integration was not a winnable goal...(so that) in the long run independence may be better than integration...” [ibid]

This was, of course, a very telling implicit admission by Mr Cook. He was saying that agreement to an internationally acceptable act of self-determination was predicated on the *assumption that the Timorese would accept integration* (never having been consulted on the subject); but isn't the very idea of such self-determination grounded in the common *uncertainty* as to its outcome? And should not our policy towards Indonesia have been predicated on precisely this uncertainty? And had not Harry Tjan's and Lim Bian Kie's briefings have made it clear that the Indonesians themselves were not confident that the Timorese were “malleable”?

What, then, to do about the Whitlam policy? It is sobering to discover that even Jockel, who had so lucidly set out the options in 1963, had no policy suggestions to offer at this critical juncture. All he was able to say is that “incorporation into Indonesia should not be regarded as a foregone conclusion.” Truly? But had not the Indonesians stated plainly that they intended to “ensure” this outcome? What now stood between their “determination” and an escalation of their covert machinations into military intervention? An intervention, which Jockel apprehended, could turn into a ‘running sore’ for Indonesia. Only Mr Suharto's word to Mr Whitlam that he *did not intend* things to end up that way; an assurance, by the way, which I believe Mr Suharto meant perfectly sincerely. He miscalculated quite as badly as Mr Whitlam did. Even the greatest leaders are at times fated to do so. The problem at the Canberra end was that the Whitlam policy was now based on a tenuous corollary assumption:

that if the Timorese failed to prove “malleable”, Mr Suharto would pull back and refrain from military intervention. But Lim Bian Kie and Harry Tjan had expressly indicated that he probably would not.

By December 1974, Jockel and Cook seemed to appreciate that it was what the Bible people call “come to Jesus time”. Feakes appreciated that, as he put it to Willesee on 13 December, “there are grounds for regarding the outlook in Portuguese Timor as ominous” [AIPT Doc. #67 SECRET]. Woolcott was not inclined to agree and certainly did not believe that the Whitlam policy needed to be modified in the circumstances. He told the 11 December meeting that:

“...he was not sure that the situation was as bad as some seemed to think; the Prime Minister thought it would be better if Portuguese Timor was incorporated into Indonesia, but he had escape clauses if necessary.” [AIPT Doc. #66]

Escape clauses? What a remarkable admission by Woolcott, by then a Deputy Secretary in Foreign Affairs and Ambassador designate to Jakarta. *Escape clauses?* Surely this is confirmation of my earlier reasoning that what Mr Whitlam had sought to create for himself was an alibi, in the event that Indonesian military intervention proved to be the only way to ensure incorporation? It would have been quite a different matter had Woolcott stated that the Prime Minister had a clear understanding with President Suharto that military intervention would be both unacceptable to Australia and destabilising in the region. That’s not what he said, however. He said the Prime Minister had “escape clauses.”

In a lengthy submission to Willesee following the 11 December talks, Graham Feakes suggested that we might make a number of points to the Indonesians to the effect that, if an act of self-determination led to an independent Portuguese Timor, that would not necessarily damage the interests of either Indonesia or Australia. In other words, we should continue the dialogue with them about this, but as for any more robust action he thought it would only impede our *freedom of movement*. He told the Foreign Minister:

“...the less we become involved...and the less we are called upon publicly to explain our views about self-determination, the freer we are in our choice of policies and tactics...and the more options we can keep open the better.” [AIPT Doc. #67]

Just what options he believed would be open, if OPSUS proceeded, the United Nations was not involved and the Timorese insisted on independence, he did not even attempt to spell out. What was going through his mind? He conceded the situation was ominous, but thought that Australia's freedom of manoeuvre would be best enhanced by doing nothing other than continue a dialogue which had already implicated us in Indonesia's covert efforts to have its way. This was not freedom of manoeuvre, I suggest, it was free fall. The fascinating thing is to observe how the Australian Government in Canberra kept imagining for months after this that it was being very clever, when all it was doing was falling short of cementing the relationship with Jakarta, deluding itself, lying to the world about its commitment to genuine self-determination for the Timorese and laying up trouble for itself domestically.

Policy Coherence and Realpolitik:

On 22 January 1975, the two largest political groupings in Portuguese Timor, UDT and Fretilin, declared that they had merged and that jointly they sought “total independence” for the colony, to be arranged under UN auspices without either Indonesia or Australia (which was seen as under Indonesian influence) being involved. *This was the point of no return for Australian policy.* Willesee had already written to Whitlam on 14 January stating that the 11 December meeting had indicated that the two desiderata of the established policy were *incompatible* – “*self-determination is likely to yield a result other than the association of Portuguese Timor with Indonesia.*” [AIPT Doc. #71]. On 30 January, Harry Tjan briefed Allan Taylor, the new First Secretary in the Embassy, who had replaced Jan Arriens the previous month, to the effect that the UDT/Fretilin Joint Communique had strengthened the influence of the HANKAM (Department of Defence and Security) hardliners, led by Benny Murdani, on the special committee which made policy on Portuguese Timor. He said that President Suharto and members of the special

committee *“had difficulty in understanding why Australia placed so much emphasis on the need for an act of self-determination.”* [AIPT Doc. #75 SECRET AUSTEO]. If, at this point, the desideratum of incorporation, with its corollary of good relations with Indonesia, was allowed to stand, then it entailed giving up both the desideratum of self-determination for the Timorese and fastidiousness about Indonesia’s means in denying it to them. Mr Whitlam had the call.

On 28 February 1975, the Prime Minister wrote a letter to President Suharto, which was delivered to the latter by Ambassador Woolcott on 8 March. In it, Mr Whitlam did raise with the Indonesian leader the possibility of a new understanding about the situation in the colony. The letter would repay close analysis, but I shall not linger over it here, because no such new understanding in fact emerged. On 10 March 1975, Harry Tjan told Allan Taylor that, in all the circumstances, President Suharto *“placed great store on what Mr Whitlam had told him about Australian policy. He believed that he could trust Mr Whitlam to fulfil his word.”* [AIPT Doc. #109 SECRET]. What ‘word’ was that? We have to assume it was that he would ensure that Australian policy would remain in favour of incorporation and that Australia would give priority to its relationship with Indonesia over its concerns about self-determination for Portuguese Timor.

Mr Whitlam had his chance to clarify any possible misunderstanding on this matter when the two leaders met at Townsville on 4 April 1975. Although both leaders stated there that they did not want the matter to come down to the use of force, the record indicates that Mr Whitlam did reiterate to Mr Suharto that ultimately desideratum number one had priority over desideratum number two. I believe the record also shows that President Suharto made a strenuous effort, between April and October 1975, in good faith with Mr Whitlam, to avoid the use of force. He first tried all other avenues for ensuring rapid incorporation of the colony into Indonesia, but none of them bore fruit. Australia slipped with him all the way down that slope, hoping each new effort would finally work.

On the eve of the Townsville talks, the new Ambassador to Indonesia, Richard Woolcott, wrote to Whitlam:

“My own belief is that we should seek to disengage ourselves as much as possible from the Timor situation, which could well become pretty messy. Indonesia is very unlikely to mount a military invasion of Timor unless it regards the situation there as hopeless and as a real threat to its security. But the Indonesian Government has not abandoned its ultimate objective of integrating Timor and it will pursue both covert and overt activity to influence Portuguese Timor to decide in favour of integration at the eventual act of self-determination.” [AIPT Doc. #121 SECRET]

In the months that followed, Woolcott was to become the clearest-minded advocate within the Government for a coherent policy, given that the two desiderata of the Whitlam policy of 1974 had manifestly come asunder. And it is his testimony, in a cable to Canberra dated 15 October 1975 – the eve of the covert military invasion of Portuguese Timor by General Murdani’s special forces – that Mr Whitlam had made plain to President Suharto at Townsville that, if it came down to a choice between the two desiderata, then he (Whitlam) would side with Suharto rather than insist on self-determination for the Timorese.

Mr Woolcott wrote, and I quote this cable at length, because this was, it seems to me where the final slide began, even though Canberra dragged its heels and persisted in its doubletalk all the way to the *de jure* recognition of Indonesia’s annexation of East Timor, in 1979:

“On the basis of the Townsville talks, President Suharto will assume that the Australian Government will make every effort to give Indonesia what support and understanding it can. The Prime Minister’s statement in the House of Representatives on 26 August confirmed this assumption. An example of Indonesia’s confidence that the Australian Government understands and is sympathetic with its objective of integration is the extent to which it keeps us informed of its secret plans. The Indonesian Government is aware of the different views in Australia on relations with Indonesia and on the Portuguese Timor issue. It expects criticism in Australia. It expects the Government to react critically against the future of Portuguese Timor being decided without the wishes of the people of the territory being ascertained. But

there is no doubt in my mind that the Indonesian Government's fundamental assessment of our position is predicated on the talks between Mr Whitlam and President Suharto in Townsville. Particularly important to the Indonesians was the Prime Minister's view expressed in the Record as follows: 'He wished to reaffirm, however, that we strongly desired closer and more cordial relations with Indonesia and would ensure that our actions in regard to Portuguese Timor would always be guided by the principle that good relations with Indonesia were of paramount importance to Australia.' While the way in which the situation has evolved – the collapse of Portugal's decolonisation policy, and UDT and Fretilin's resort to force – was not foreseen in Townsville, the President would, I believe, make the assumption that if the two main strands of Australian policy, namely understanding of Indonesia's position and support for integration, on the one hand, and support for self-determination, on the other, were to become irreconcilable – as they appear to have become – then the Australian Government would attach more weight to the former consideration than the latter.” [AIPT Doc. #262, SECRET AUSTEO PRIORITY].

Some would judge this passage damning of both Mr Whitlam and Ambassador Woolcott. I do not. I think Mr Woolcott's reasoning was pellucid. This was, indeed, long since the position in which Mr Whitlam had placed Australia's policy on the matter and none of those in the Department of Foreign Affairs to whom Ambassador Woolcott was writing in October 1975 had taken robust steps to have the policy amended or its priorities reversed, in all the months between Harry Tjan's first briefings and his famous one of 13 October 1975, informing Malcolm Dan and Allan Taylor that the covert military invasion was about to start.

If one disagreed with Mr Woolcott's reasoning at that late stage, and many did, from Mr Pritchett in Defence Planning to Alan Renouf, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, then one needed an alternative policy with some traction. Such traction, as I have shown, never had been built into the Whitlam policy. Nor had an alternative policy with such traction been developed or submitted for Mr Whitlam's consideration after the Wonosobo talks. Graham Feakes had, of course, quietly suggested points for dialogue and a few people spoke out *sotto voce* about the possibility that the Timorese might prove less than 'malleable', but the dominant

desideratum of the policy was that incorporation take place and that relations with Indonesia not be adversely affected by any stand Australia might take. To the extent that the subordinate desideratum ever received greater consideration, no means were advanced whereby it might be engineered in such a way as to directly inhibit Indonesia's slide toward military intervention. When Bill Pritchett suggested a 'major effort of statesmanship' to this end, on 9 October 1975, he was, though he did not know it, trying to bolt the proverbial door after the horse had bolted.

That Small, Handwritten Memo of March 1963:

A great deal more, obviously, might be said about many aspects of this subject and I do not wish to suggest for a moment that my coverage of it in this working paper has been exhaustive or even completely just to all the people whose work I have been reflecting on, including Mr Whitlam. What I do want to suggest, however, is that Paul Kelly was surely correct in stating that our diplomacy in this matter was 'deeply flawed', though I'm uncertain whether he would see the same flaws I have identified. He was correct in stating that Mr Whitlam's policy failed. Ironically, that was ultimately because President Suharto's policy failed, something, which is not widely appreciated. Kelly was also correct in stating that there was, by late 1975, no viable alternative policy open to the Australian Government that would have 'saved' East Timor. Never having taken the initiative in the matter suggested by the Jockel Report and having freely told the Indonesians that we desired incorporation and placed our relationship with them ahead of the principle of self-determination, what ground did we have to stand on in October 1975? Not very much. Having listened to the briefings from Harry Tjan and Lim Bian Kie for so many months, we knew perfectly well that we were complicit in a covert plan to subvert genuine self-determination in Portuguese Timor. We also knew, step by step, that it was not working. Yet we adopted, at the suggestion of the Department of Foreign Affairs, a policy of "studied detachment". We had a dialogue with the Indonesians about purely notional alternatives all the way down the slippery slope – and then, to Dick Woolcott's frustration, in December 1975 and for some months thereafter, we let them down by protesting against their use of force, rendering our policy both insincere and incoherent, as well as hindering their efforts to finish the matter 'legally'.

Should we single out Mr Whitlam in all this for some special blame?

Ultimately, as the Prime Minister and also the self-styled architect of Australia's foreign policy, as well as the immediate interlocutor between this country and President Suharto, he has to take responsibility. Responsibility for the failure of his policy; responsibility for his complicity in Suharto's *Realpolitik* gambit; responsibility for exceeding the brief provided to him in September 1974, when Suharto had not yet made up his mind on the subject and might have been influenced by a different and, as Bob Furlonger put it, "rather cautious" approach to the matter. He must, paradoxically, finally take responsibility for the fact that the Indonesians felt betrayed by Australia, when it voted in favour of a censure motion against Indonesia in the United Nations, in December 1975. To be sure, he had never said that Australia could condone the use of force. He had, in fact, said precisely the opposite and so had other Australian officials on many occasions. Yet, as Dick Woolcott argued, we had given what the Indonesians took to be assurances of tacit partnership in what they had undertaken to see through.

In June 1976, Harry Tjan came to see Allan Taylor once again – the briefings never having ceased since July 1974. Taylor cabled Canberra as follows:

"... We had a long discussion about the history of the Timor issue. Tjan's main point was that Australia with good intentions had planted the idea that East Timor should be part of Indonesia and events had moved so quickly that it had not been possible to work out a solution with the Portuguese. I said that I did not accept that Australia had determined the general direction of Indonesian policy to the extent that he claimed. He said that what he was really claiming was that Australian interest had focussed Indonesian attention on East Timor..." [AIPT Doc. #457 SECRET AUSTEO].

This is an extraordinary exchange and quite fascinating in its implications. It takes us back to the original Tjan/Arriens exchange of 2 July 1974, in which Arriens, by his own account, had told Tjan that "*in his personal view Timor would scarcely be a viable state, that he was aware of marked concern in Indonesian circles about the potential dangers of an independent Portuguese Timor and that it seemed to him a*

relatively simple matter to do something about it.”[AIPT Doc. #12 TOP SECRET]

More crucially, however, it takes us back to Jogjakarta and Wonosobo and Mr Whitlam’s statement that he thought Portuguese Timor should be part of Indonesia and that his view would very likely and quite soon become Australian policy.

This preference, I want to suggest, had been the shadow side of Australia’s policy all along. It is in this regard that I found the little handwritten memorandum from Keith Waller to Gordon Jockel, of 13 March 1963, so fascinating, when I stumbled upon it in the archives while following up the Jockel Report itself. The Working Group had, at that point, still several weeks ahead of it, before it submitted its report. As we have seen, Jockel’s written instructions from Sir Arthur Tange were to “explore all possible measures...which, if they can be initiated or encouraged, would produce the least embarrassment to Australia’s foreign policy and national interests.” Waller wrote to Jockel:

“The Secretary said this morning that the Working Group on Timor should look for the circumstances which would make it easiest for any Australian Government not to become involved with military obligations while acquiescing in the passage of Timor to Indonesia.”

It is quite clear that Mr Jockel did *not* so interpret his brief, since this is by no means what the Jockel Report offered to the Secretary. Might it not be, however, that the reason why the recommendations of that Report never did get acted upon has something to do with the conversation between Sir Arthur Tange and Sir Keith Waller on that autumn morning in 1963? Might it not be that it was, if not that conversation or the advice of either Tange or Waller, the same sentiment, which prompted Mr Whitlam to adopt the policy that he, did in 1973-74? I am tempted to believe so.

Now, of course, the circumstances which would have made it “*easiest for any Australian Government not to become involved with military obligations while acquiescing in the passage of Timor to Indonesia*” would surely have been those suggested by Mr Whitlam to Mr Suharto at Jogjakarta and Wonosobo, in September 1974: an internationally acceptable act of self-determination by the Timorese resulting

in incorporation into Indonesia. Had there been any serious prospect of such an act and such an outcome being genuine no-one could have objected. When it became clear that a genuine act would *not* yield 'passage to Indonesia', Australia had to choose. It did not want any military obligations in 1975, any more than Tange had done in 1963, and it liked Jakarta a great deal more in 1975 than in 1963. That made the choice difficult, but it was a false choice, or would have been had Jockel's proactive diplomacy informed policy earlier. We would have served both the Timorese and the Indonesian, as well as ourselves, far better by having in place a policy that would have supported President Suharto in *not* intervening covertly and militarily in the affairs of the Portuguese colony. Ironically, the unravelling of the Indonesian annexation of East Timor in 1998-99 landed us with all but ineluctable military obligations in the passage of the territory *from* Indonesia, while causing some considerable difficulties for our relationship *with* Indonesia.

Little states are often morally and strategically inconvenient in the geopolitical affairs of the world. Portuguese Timor was an awkward anachronism in the 1960s and 1970s and Indonesia's concerns about it were comprehensible. It is now, as a newly independent state, less an anachronism in the archipelago to our north than an aneurism. There is no good reason to believe that the problems caused by its awkward realities have now been dealt with. There are good reasons to believe, to the contrary, that it is now but one of an increasing number of Melanesian and Islamic would-be micro-states in our immediate region whose uncertain status and restiveness will require our vigilant attention for many years to come. One of these, as you will all be aware, is West Papua or Irian Jaya. It is, surely, a marvellous historical irony that, whereas the 1962 passage of Dutch West Irian to Indonesia prompted the Australian Government and that of Indonesia to turn their attention to the anachronism of Portuguese Timor, the 1999 passage of East Timor *from* Indonesia has led both Governments to turn their attention to the unrest in West Papua. The wheel has turned, if not full circle, then 180 degrees. Under these circumstances, I believe we should reflect deeply on the ways in which our efforts to *avoid responsibility* in the past served us badly and led to compromised and 'deeply flawed' diplomacy. We cannot ultimately avoid responsibility for the stability and security of our region by seeking the easiest way out. We have found that over twenty five years in the case of

East Timor. Let us recognise it and act upon it in the years ahead in regard to West Papua and the many little states or would-be states of the South West Pacific. Let us be imaginatively and responsibly pro-active, rather than taking the path of least resistance. Let us, also, however, construct policies that have traction and are not founded on wishful thinking or complicity in slippery exercises of *Realpolitik*.