Chapter - VI

US DIPLOMACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN

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During the post Vietnam War period, one of the stated foreign policy goals of the United States was that, it would consider human rights as an integral factor in its bilateral relations with other countries. Within a few months of entering the White House, President Carter outlined three principles that would together serve as the foundation for his foreign policy. Important among them was the vocal expression of concern for human rights. In a major foreign policy speech delivered to the Congress on 20 January 1978, President Carter said:

We are a confident nation. We've restored a moral basis for our foreign policy. The very heart of our identity as a nation is our firm commitment to human rights. We stand for human rights because we believe that, government has a purpose to promote the well-being of its citizens. This is true in our domestic policy; it's also true in our foreign policy. The world must know that in support of human rights the United States will stand firm.¹

Subsequent Congressional hearings held before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs on Human Rights and Strategic Interests in Asia of the House

Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1978, endorsed the President's view by stating that, no government should be allowed to torture, murder, detain without charge, or cause its citizens to disappear in the name of security interests. Complying to this an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1976 was introduced before the subcommittee on International Organization of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 2 May 1979. The Act, as finally adopted stated, "The principal goal of the foreign policy of the United States shall be to promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights".

It is, however, ironic to note that though the United States was determined to criticize human rights violations taking place in several parts of the world, and suspended military as well as security assistance to some countries of Latin America such as Peru, Chile, and Argentina, where human rights were systematically violated by dictatorial regimes, some of the most blatant human rights violators, especially the

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governments of South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia escaped aid cuts.⁴

So far as its policy towards Indonesia was concerned, the US government did not criticize that country for its violations of human rights. On the other hand, the United States defended the Indonesian action, and military as well as security assistance to that country were increased. In reply, it was stated by Patricia N. Derian, Former Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, in one of the Congressional hearings of 1978 before the Foreign Affairs subcommittee of Asian and Pacific Affairs, on human rights in Asia that, "Indonesia was a country of great value to the United States combined with its strategic location, economic dynamism, internal stability and pro-western stand of the Suharto regime".⁵ It was because of these reasons that the United States did not intend to earn the hostility of a friendly nation which would have in turn affected its broader security interests in Southeast Asia. However, an


understanding of the US policy towards Indonesia, over the human rights issue requires a profound understanding of the contemporary political situation as well as the human rights condition in that country.

**Political Situation:**

For Indonesia the year 1966 witnessed a major change in the country's domestic policy. Because, in that year President Sukarno was thrown out of power and the country was unified under the leadership of General Suharto, the army general who had rallied the country to defeat the communist coup attempt of 30 September 1965.\(^6\) He later on became the second president of Indonesia. The experience of the past, the presence of a large number of Chinese in Indonesia, and their loyalty to the government of People's Republic of China forced the Suharto regime to appoint more armed forces personnel in the administrative structure of the country, in the name of protecting internal security and preventing further communist subversion in their country. The communist victories in Indochina in 1975 further alerted the

government of Indonesia. It feared that the events of Indochina would provide support to the Indonesian communists and they would become more active. The rise to power of a communist insurgent group, avowedly known as "Fretillin", in the Portuguese controlled island of East Timor, adjacent to the Indonesian border confirmed its fear. This prompted the Suharto government to take stern action against the supporters of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). Fresh arrests followed and rules for the trials of already detained prisoners tightened. As a result the number of political detainees in the country rapidly increased.

Human rights conditions in Indonesia: Status of the Political Prisoners

Jakarta's domestic record on human rights was one of the worst in the world. It was reported that Indonesia had one of the world's largest number of political prisoners and for that reason it was most


widely criticised with regard to the legal status and releases of political detainees. According to the government sources of Indonesia, there were approximately 35,000 persons suspected of being involved in the 1965 attempted coup or of supporting the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Other non-governmental sources estimated, the figure to be as high as 100,000 people held in a system of prisons, concentration camps, penal colonies, or other forms of confinement throughout the island chain.

Most of the detainees had been held for years without specific charges and without access to legal counsel, or the court system. They were categorised under three groups. Category 'A' prisoners, for whom the government claimed to have strong evidence of involvement in the coup or membership in the PKI, numbered about 3000. The great bulk of prisoners were in category 'B'. They were considered as threat to the society. In addition to this, there was an additional

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10 The Indonesian News (Jakarta), 17 December 1977.

11 According to a pamphlet, "Indonesia: The Prison State", issued by the British Campaign for the release of Indonesian political prisoners, the number held without trial and in unpleasant conditions were 100,000. See, Guardian Weekly (Manchester), 22 March 1975.
3,000 to 6,000 prisoners awaiting classification as "A" or "B" and temporarily classified in category 'X'.

The Plight of the Political Prisoner

According to one of the reports of Amnesty International from among lakhs of persons, arrested in the wake of the abortive coup in Indonesia, close to 100,000 were still languishing in prisons or remote penal settlements in horrible conditions. Trials for the political detainees had been sporadic and non-existent for many. Initially, after 1965, individuals brought to trial for political offences were tried outside the regular criminal justice system, in special military courts. Amnesty International charged that these individuals did not have the same rights in courts as individuals charged with non-political crimes.

It had also been reported that the released prisoners had been forced by the Indonesian authorities


14 Ibid.
to live in penal settlements instead of returning home. The Amnesty International reported, "even after the release, the travels of the prisoners were by no means over. The doors of the government departments were closed to them. The private firms had also been discouraged by the Indonesian military authorities from giving them jobs."

The report further pointed out that, all the so-called released prisoners had to spend a year or more under town arrest, which meant that they must report regularly to specified military officers, and must apply for permission to leave town. Besides, a released prisoner was required to have a known, fixed address. This precondition of release posed a real problem for many whose family lives had been destroyed as a result of their long years of imprisonment. The report also gave an idea of shocking conditions in which prisoners had been transferred to distant islands after their release and forced to spend the rest of their lives there. According to the same report, the Indonesian

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15 After much discussion over the release of political prisoners, in December 1975, the Indonesian Government announced a plan for the phased release of about 30,000 untried prisoners between 1977 and 1979 and released political prisoners of 'B' category (1,309 in December 1975, 2,500 in December 1976, and 10,000 in December 1977). See The Indonesian News (Jakarta), 2 December 1975.

Government made an attempt to settle at least 14,000 persons on the island of Buru, and other islands (Sumatra, Borneo and Moluccas), which had been for the most part covered with dense jungle and had no means of communication worth mentioning. Although the Indonesian Government sources defended the centres as providing those released with a viable and relatively prosperous life with substantial government aid in the form of land, housing and assistance in agriculture, in actual practice the situation was much different.

The Amnesty International claimed in its report that the penal settlements on the islands of Buru had in particular acquired much notoriety in the world press. The report said, it had received many reports of deaths among the prisoners within days of their being brought to Buru island either as a result of illness or because they choose to commit suicide.

Mystery Executions a cause of Psychosis of Fear in Indonesia

Apart from delaying the trial of the political prisoners, the Indonesian Government also created psychosis of fear through executions. According to one

17 Ibid.

estimate, there had been at least 3,000 to 4,000 clandestine executions since President Suharto's Government began a vigorous anti-crime campaign in 1981. Although, the role of government agencies in the execution was unclear, the victims were always identified by the authorities as known malefactors. In addition to the mystery executions the government was often accused of violating the freedom of speech, press and religion, and more generally, depriving citizens of the right to take part in government directly or through representatives.

Human Rights Conditions in East Timor

The situation in East Timor said to be one of the worst case of violations of human rights in the world. As stated earlier Indonesia invaded the Portuguese Timor on 5 December 1975. From December 1975 to March 1976, heavy fightings occurred in Timor between Indonesian forces and the forces of Fretilin with a heavy loss of

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19 The International Herald Tribune (Paris), 17 May 1983.


life.\textsuperscript{22} The actual numbers killed and the circumstances under which they died were disputed because immediately after the invasion, Indonesia, having gained control of air and sea access to East Timor, imposed a news blackout and allowed no independent journalists to travel freely in the territory. Disclosures of real conditions in East Timor came only from Australian Intelligence leaks and other indirect sources.\textsuperscript{23}

Confirmation of the reports on Temorese death came in November 1976, when an Indonesian Catholic Relief Group released a secret report, based on a trip to East Timor during which local priests were interviewed. It stated that as many as 100,000 East Timorese had been killed by the invaders.\textsuperscript{24} The contents of the Indonesian Catholic Report stimulated further investigation.

As early as 1977, James Dunn, former Australian Consul in Taiwan, and official of the Australian Legislative Research Service, testified before the House International Organizations Sub-committee in March 1977


\textsuperscript{23}The Indonesian News, 15 November 1977.

\textsuperscript{24}D. Jenkins and K. Randal, "Trembles Over Timor", \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review} (Hong Kong), vol.96, 7 December 1976, p.31.
that, the Indonesian troops had killed possibly 50,000 to 100,000 Timorese.\textsuperscript{25}

James Dunn issued another report, comparing pre-war Portuguese Census data with 1979 Indonesian military estimates of the East Timorese population. He found that 300,000 persons were missing.\textsuperscript{26} Arnold Cohen, a journalist, citing East Timorese and Indonesian Church sources assessed fatalities at 200,000.\textsuperscript{27}

The Indonesian government was also charged by the Amnesty International for directly fostering the famine through its search and destroy missions. According to Amnesty's report, accounts of famine conditions in East Timor rivalled those of Cambodia, Biafra and Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{28}

Many accounts of starvation deaths were also reported. By mid 1979, most reports spoke of the possible starvation of at least 200,000 in addition to


\textsuperscript{26}Scott Sidel, "The United States and Genocide in East Timor", \textit{Journal of Contemporary Asia}, vol.10, no.1, March 1980, p.49.


\textsuperscript{28}\textit{The Indonesian News}, 17 February 1982.
the 150,000 to 200,000 East Timorese already dead. Senator Edward Kennedy submitted a message to the Senate in November 1979 predicting the possible starvation of 250,000 East Timorese people.\textsuperscript{29}

Starvation was further aggravated by widespread diseases. Malaria and diseases associated with malnutrition affected most of the population, particularly children, many of whom had to suffer extensive brain damage. One report estimated that half generation of East Timorese children were rendered mentally retarded because of these diseases.\textsuperscript{30}

Allegations of other human rights violations had also been frequently cited by the journalists and International Human Rights Organizations. In January 1977, James Dunn, was asked by the Church and Relief Organizations to interview East Timorese refugees newly arrived in Portugal. After conducting the interview, Dunn commented that, "all accounts of the Indonesian military action against East Timor, and conditions under Indonesian occupation until as late as September 1976,

\textsuperscript{29}Tom Harkin, "Our Proxy War in East Timor: The US abets a brutal annexation", The Progressive (Madison), vol.44, no.12, December 1980, p.46.

portrayed a grim picture of the situation in the territory.\textsuperscript{31}

The refugees described their arrival to the Camps as both degrading and humiliating. They explained how they were forced to stand at attention or bow when they addressed by the Indonesian soldiers. They also contended that food and other relief items sent to them through the International Red Cross never reached. The few medical services and supplies that were available required payment of fees.

Dunn told the Times of London that Indonesian actions in East Timor could justly be compared with the brutality of the American troops at My Lai.\textsuperscript{32} According to the report, dated 11 February 1977, the refugees said that in the mountain areas whole villages were reportedly wiped out as Indonesian troops advanced into the interior. Whole families were allegedly shot to death for having the slightest relation to Fretilin. Dunn's report stated, "families were shot when the Indonesians discovered a Fretilin flag in their house. One family was reportedly shot to death for giving a

\textsuperscript{31}Sidel, n.26, p.51.

chicken to Fretilin soldiers". One refugee reported that, "when the Indonesians captured certain villages (Remexio and Aileu), all the Timorese in the village except under the age of three were shot, because, it was said, they were infected with the seeds of Fretilin".

Shepard Forman, a US Anthropologist, who was an eye witness to the brutal action of the Indonesian soldiers described, "I have seen disasters in Timor, fires which spread from mountain hamlet to mountain hamlet in moments, hundreds of houses destroyed, and families left homeless and without their food and their acquired wealth. The idea of a major offensive to wipe it out, so to speak, was terribly disturbing".

Many accounts of rape and looting were also reported. The refugees claimed that the Indonesian soldiers looted extensively. Many sources stated that it was common for young Timorese girls to be rounded up in trucks and raped by Indonesian soldiers.

Thus, the East Timor situation was well constituted as the most serious contravention of human rights facing

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33 Sidel, n.26, p.52.
34 Ibid.
the world in those years. Father Leoneto do Rogo, a priest in East Timor for 23 years, described the situation there, as a relentless attack on the people. He accused the Indonesians of stealing relief food and selling it for their personal profit.36

Congressman Tom Harkin (D., Iowa), a long-time human rights activist, cited a number of reports which indicated that the Indonesian Army continuously committed human rights violations since their invasion in 1975.37 These reports, primarily from church officials, claimed that the Indonesian army had employed brutal tactics to eliminate Fretilin resistance. These tactics included indiscriminate killing, starvation, bombing and crop destruction.

Official US Response

Although US Government officials said a good deal about the general issue of human rights in foreign countries, and specifically addressed the conditions in some countries on several occasions, they said very little about the violation of human rights in Indonesia. For example, in a congressional hearing held in 1978

36Kohen, n.27, p.554.
before the subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs on human rights, Don Bonker, Chairman of the subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organization, expressed concern about the stated problem in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Latin American countries and condemned these governments for not allowing political activity there. These countries were also threatened by the US government that American aid would be drastically cut unless they make an attempt to improve the situation there. In comparison to those countries the US government made absolutely no effort to focus its attention on the human rights situation in Indonesia. The United States did not even officially acknowledged that widespread killing did occur during the invasion by the Indonesian troops.

**President Ford and the Human Rights Conditions in Indonesia**

When Indonesia launched a full-scale invasion of East Timor on 7 December 1975, nine days after the former Portuguese colony declared its independence, on 6 December 1975. Twelve hours before its initial attack,

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President Ford and the Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger concluded a state visit to Indonesia, with an announcement that the United States would continue to provide security assistance. Furthermore, the US also pledged a 450 per cent increase in military assistance for the forthcoming Financial year 1976 and the subsequent Congressional approval of President Ford’s request sent 160v-10 Broncos, 45v-150 armoured cars, three C-130s, US $92,000 worth of rifles, US $104,000 worth of small arms spare parts and some communications spare parts to Indonesia, all of which were used in East Timor.

Apart from providing security assistance, the US Government also defended Indonesia against world-wide criticism of its brutal action. For example, when questioned by newsmen about the invasion, Secretary of State Kissinger replied that, "the US understands Indonesia’s position on East Timor... such an action in East Timor was necessary". Similarly, when reports of bloody fighting and the indiscriminate execution of East Timorese civilians by Indonesian forces appeared in the

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41*Department of State Bulletin*, vol.73, no.1903, 15 December 1975, p.867.
World Press, both Kissinger and the US State Department declined to comment.\textsuperscript{42}

In addition to this, the US officials had frequent discussions with Indonesian leaders about its concern over the human rights situation. During these discussions, the US Government made the Indonesian authority aware of those sections of US Legislation relevant to human rights, and of the overall concern of the Congress and Administration in this regard.

For example, in March 1975, the US ambassador to Indonesia Edward E. Masters, met with the Acting Foreign Minister Ali Murdani. During the meeting he passed the text of a new US Legislation on Foreign Assistance relating to human rights. He also held meetings with other senior Indonesian officials at which the problem was discussed and international concern about it was stressed.\textsuperscript{43} Commenting on the passage of the new US Legislation on Foreign Assistance relating to human rights the Acting Foreign Minister Ali Murdani said, "it

\textsuperscript{42}M. Hertsgaard, "The secret life of Henry Kissinger (minutes of the State Department meeting discussing US role in Indonesia's invasion of East Timor)", The Nation, vol.251, no.14, 29 October 1990, p.373.

would certainly help in the promotion of good relations between the two countries".  

The US ambassador again met with the Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik and Attorney General Ali Said, in June 1975, and with Admiral Sudomo in August 1975 to outline Congressional interest in human rights questions in countries which received US aid and to discuss a possible visit to Indonesia by members of Congress.  

On 14 January 1976, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations Robert J. McCloskey acknowledged a serious human rights problem stemming from the prolonged detention without trial of about 35,000 persons in Indonesia. He stated, "Indonesia's slow progress in dealing with this situation is unfortunate but understandable".  

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Similarly, in July 1976, Masters spoke on US foreign policy in an Election Year, before the Public Relations Associations of Indonesia, and pointed out that there were Americans who remained concern about its relations with a nation which still had a number of persons detained without trial. The speech was widely reported in the Jakarta Press and the comment on detainees became the subject of an editorial in the Indonesian News. Appreciating the US ambassador Edward E. Masters' view on the status of political detainees, the editorial in the Indonesian daily wrote, the Indonesian government is encouraged by the US stand. In future also the government would make sincere effort to release the remaining political prisoners as early as possible. 48

In addition to that, the US Embassy in Jakarta provided information on UN activities and services to Indonesian legal officials, and facilitated high level contacts with Congress and with representatives of International organizations active in the human rights field. 49 Efforts were also made by the US embassy to promote understanding of the adherence to

47 Ibid.
49 Congress and the Nation: (1977-80), vol.5, p.39.
internationally recognized standards of human rights through educational and cultural exchanges and in unofficial, informal contacts.

Congressional Response

In August 1975, a delegation of eleven Congressmen, headed by Republican Lester L. Wolff, Chairman of the Sub-committee on Future Foreign Policy Research and Development, toured four Asian countries including Indonesia. In the Study Mission's report, two Congressmen referred to the existing human rights problem in Indonesia. The House Sub-committee on International Organizations held hearings on human rights in Indonesia, on 18 December 1975, and on 3 May 1976, receiving testimony from non-government witnesses who described the situation in Indonesia and the nature of its human rights policies from various view points. In their testimony whereas Mrs Carnel Budiardjo, Director of the Committee for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners, and a former member of the British Communist Party, was the most outspoken critic of the Indonesian Government, Colonel George Benson, US Army,


51US, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, n.46, p.16.
retired, tended to justify the actions of the Indonesian Government in his testimony. Mr John Newman, Chairman of the office for Asia and the Pacific Ford Foundation, Dr George Otto, Chairman of the Rockey Mountain Conference of the United Church, and Professor Ben Anderson, Chairman of the Cornell Modern Indonesian Project, also testified on the status of human rights in Indonesia and justified Indonesia's action.\(^5^2\)

On 7 April 1976, the Sub-committee on Future Foreign Policy Research and Development held a hearing on the future of Indonesia in which the issue of human rights were briefly discussed.\(^5^3\) Assistant Secretary of State for Eastasia and Pacific Affairs, Arthur W. Hummel testified before the Special Sub-Committee on investigations of the House Committee on International Relations on 28 September 1976 regarding US policies in South East Asia. In his prepared remarks, Mr Hummel emphasized the strategic location and importance of Indonesia but did not mention about the human rights situation in that statement.\(^5^4\)

\(^{52}\)Ibid.

\(^{53}\)Ibid.

\(^{54}\)Ibid.
The Carter Administration’s Reaction

The Carter Administration believed Indonesia to be of great value to the United States. In a testimony before the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs on human rights conditions in Asia on 1978, Patricia M. Derian, former Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs said, "we must try to keep ASEAN alive. It is the cornerstone of US policy in Southeast Asia Indonesia is the biggest country in ASEAN; a major arena for US trade and development and strategically located, Therefore we must give it what it wants." The United States’ reluctance to criticize the armed invasion in East Timor and the subsequent activities of Indonesian troops, lucidly illustrated this point.

When the new Administration came into office, observers in the United States and Indonesia wondered what bearing Carter’s human rights pronouncements would have on American policy towards the issue. Because during the 1976 election campaign Carter had often stated his intention of breaking with the cynical

realpolitik of the Kissinger era. But when he entered the White House in 1977, there was no evidence in any of the Congressional hearings of the same year on Indonesia and East Timor that, this promise would be fulfilled. In fact, the Carter Administration made it clear at the very beginning of his administration that it will not only continue the Ford-Kissinger policy on East Timor, but as a consequence of its greatly increased military and political support for Jakarta, will deepen American support of Indonesia's military intervention. With this pronouncement, he quietly requested and received from Congress a major increase in military aid to Indonesia, a country that had been characterized by Amnesty International as an Asian Gulag and supplied weapons to conduct the internationally condemned war in East Timor. The Carter Administration requested a record US $58.1 million as military aid for Indonesia in fiscal year 1978, a 28 per cent increase over the US $
46 million granted in fiscal year 1977 and double the amount given in fiscal year 1976.\textsuperscript{59}

The Carter Administration declined to comment on the allegations that, the government had imposed restrictions on the outside observers which restricted the precision of the reports on East Timor, and the people were not satisfied with the Indonesian integration. On the other hand, a Congressional delegation reported in March 1977, which had just concluded a visit to East Timor, that there was no restriction on the outside observers and the people were satisfied with the integration.

In March 1977, a Congressional delegation was invited to visit East Timor. This invitation was extended shortly after the US House Committee on International Relations and Sub-committee on Asia and Pacific Affairs was convened to discuss the use of US military equipment in East Timor. Congresswoman Helen Meyner, a member of the delegation, described her visit as one that was completely structured and restricted by the Indonesian government, but regarded such restrictions simply as security measures to protect the safety of the delegation. Mrs Meyner explained that the delegation was required to go where it was taken and at

\textsuperscript{59}Congress and the Nation (1977-80), vol.5, p.34.
no time were any of the members allowed to privately converse with the East Timorese people.

Although, Mrs Meyner stated that the restriction on her visit limited the delegation from drawing any firm conclusions, she had testified that the delegation received impression that the Timorese people were satisfied with the Indonesian integration. In response to alleged atrocities, Mrs Meyner stated that, there was no indication of ongoing repression, quite the contrary, the people appeared free and uninhibited.\(^6\)

In addition to this, US officials virtually ignored the Dunn Report. The US State Department stated that Dunn's charges were greatly exaggerated and that total fatalities were under 10,000. In October 1977, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Robert Oakley in his testimony before a congressional committee cited generally positive trends in the areas of political prisoners and political and civil liberties. He stated before the US House Committee on International Relations that, "most reports on the situation on East Timor were greatly exaggerated and that the generally accepted

State Department figure for fatalities occurring during the Indonesian incorporation of East Timor was close to 10,000". 61

The US officials also highly lauded the Indonesian government for its announcement in October 1977 that it would release 10,000 political detainees. On 31 December 1977, the State Department issued a statement praising the release of 10,000 detainees, which stated that, "prisoners were permitted to return to their homes and were not assigned to transmigration centres as originally anticipated." 62

Patrician Derian, State Department co-ordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, during her visit to Jakarta in January 1978 praised the release and indicated that the Carter Administration would favour an accelerated release programme for the remaining detainees. 63 Of course, President Carter implicitly took some credit for the release when he declared in his


January 1978 State of the Union address that his human rights policy had been influential in the freeing of thousands of political prisoners in several parts of the world.\textsuperscript{64}

The only exception to the generally favourable attitude was the Administration's actions in delaying Title I, PL-480 food shipments to Indonesia. At the end of 1977, the Carter Administration delayed making new commitments for Public Law 480 food shipments to Indonesia, citing the International Development and Food Assistance Act of 1977, which prohibited sales to any country that engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognised human rights.\textsuperscript{65} This incident caused some strain in United States-Indonesian relation. But this period was soon over with the Carter administration's praise for Indonesia's human rights performance and announcement of new commitments of military and economic assistance.\textsuperscript{66}

State Department officials gave different accounts of this affair when interviewed. Some emphasized that

\textsuperscript{64}US, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, 2nd Session, n.37, p.455.


bureaucratic problems and negotiating delays were responsible for the situation as much as human rights considerations.\textsuperscript{67} Others stated that the action was taken because of the political prisoners question. They also said that the Department did not mean to suggest that Indonesia was a gross violator of human rights.\textsuperscript{68} The implication may be that the Department used the delay as leverage to influence the manner of the December 1977 releases of political prisoners because it was concerned over whether the Indonesian Government would permit those, "released", to return to their homes.

Reagan Administration's Response

The Reagan Administration which came to power in 1981 decided to pursue an aggressive and assertive foreign policy without giving much emphasis to the human rights issue.\textsuperscript{69} President Reagan did not touch at all on the situation in East Timor. On the other hand, in fiscal year 1981, the United States concluded over $45

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., no.2036, March 1980, p.55.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., no.2038, May 1980, p.31.

\textsuperscript{69}Congressional Record, 1982, p.8077.
million worth of foreign military sales agreement with Indonesia.\textsuperscript{70}

The United States not only increased the military aid to Indonesia but also Senator Paul E. Tsongas (D., Mass.) and Congressman Tony P. Hall (D., Ohio) introduced a resolution concerning East Timor. The Resolution stated, "our friendship with the people of Indonesia is not incompatible with our concern for the plight of the people of East Timor. However, we must not let our friendship with Indonesia prevent US from raising with the Indonesians our concerns about the humanitarian and political problems of East Timor.\textsuperscript{71}

The Resolution expressed the view of congress that the administration should work with Indonesia to open up East Timor to the outside world and to permit the fullest possible international participation in the human rights issues facing the territory. At the same time it urged the administration to take a fresh look at the underlying political causes of these issues.\textsuperscript{72}

In addition to this the United States along with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and

\textsuperscript{70}Basic Documents of American Foreign Policy, 1982, Document No. 502, p. 1059.

\textsuperscript{71}Congressional Record, 1982, p. 8134.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., p. 23144.
Catholic Relief Services (CRS) undertook following programs for the upliftment of the Timorese people. In the first place, it provided technical assistance to the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) in support of food and health programs in East Timor. Secondly, it served as the intermediary for family reunification of persons with immediate relatives in Portugal and elsewhere. Third, it administered a training program to assist Timorese both in Timor and abroad to locate missing or displaced relatives. Fourth, in February 1982, it began a program of prison visitations. This visitation program increased the effectiveness of the tracing operation.

The United States was the largest contributor to this effort providing US$300,000 in funds to the ICRC program and US$11,039,088 in funds and commodities to the CRS effort. Through this assistance about 330,000 persons in East Timor were provided with food and medical care. Apart from providing assistance to Indonesia through ICRC and CRS, the Indonesian ministry of Health

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74 Congressional Record, 1982, p.31583.

75 Ibid., p.23144.
and USAID signed a $3.6 million loan agreement for a malaria control program for Timor island.\textsuperscript{76}

The United States not only supported the Government of Indonesia in its developmental efforts but also declined to comment on the issue of human rights violations in East Timor. Even during Reagan's visit to the Indonesian island of Bali in May 1986, the issue remained in the background.\textsuperscript{77} In replying to a question from the Amnesty International, the President said, I didn't see any atrocities in East Timor. The people are fine there.\textsuperscript{78}

But towards the end of his administration an unfortunate incident took place which upset the Indonesians. The controversy cropped up when about 229 democratic Congressional members (47 Senators and 172 Congressmen) submitted a petition to US Secretary of State George P. Shultz, to intervene in the East Timor problem and drew the attention of the Indonesian government to their claim that the decolonization


\textsuperscript{77}The New York Times, 2 May 1986.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid.
process had not been carried out there properly, and violations of human rights and food shortages had caused many deaths.\textsuperscript{79}

In response to a petition made by the US Congressmen, 390 out of the 500 Indonesian Parliamentary members signed and submitted an open letter to Foreign Minister Ali Alatas rebutting the groundless allegation of the US Congress members. The Indonesian parliamentarians stated in their letter that the statement of the US Congressmen on East Timor, particularly concerning constitutional rights and decolonization, was absolutely groundless. The integration of East Timor to Indonesia was in accordance with the democratic procedures, and with the UN Resolution on Decolonization No.1514 (XV), 1541 (XV), and 2525 (XIV).\textsuperscript{80}

They further contended that East Timor was self-sufficient in food and no body was hungry there. In their opinion, the efforts to increase the welfare of the East Timorrese in the last thirteen years had been far better than what the people had received during 150 years of Portuguese domination.

\textsuperscript{79}The Indonesian News, 19 November 1988.

\textsuperscript{80}UN Chronicle (New York), vol.13, no.11, December 1975, p.14.
The Armed Forces faction of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia also rejected the letter on East Timor presented by the US Congressmen. Reacting to the US stand on human rights conditions in Indonesia, the head of the Armed Forces Faction, Sundro Syamsuri said to the press, they have intervened in our internal affairs. So, the Faction regretted unfriendly action. The integration of East Timor to the Republic of Indonesia was the right choice of all Timorese people. It is our responsibility to develop East Timor as other provinces in the framework of REPELITA (Five Year Development Plans) in order to eliminate poverty, he asserted.\(^1\) The Faction also said that, "the condition now in East Timor strongly ensured that the proclamation of the Timorese people in Balibo on November 30, 1975 was the best alternative in order to guarantee their future.\(^2\)

The Indonesian Government welcomed the statement signed by 390 members of Parliament and the statement made by the Armed Forces Faction rebutting the contents of the letter sent by the American Congressmen to the

\(^1\)The Indonesian News, 22 November 1988.

\(^2\)Ibid.
State Secretary asking for US intervention in East Timor.\textsuperscript{83}

A special commission, consisting of personnel from Defence, Foreign Affairs and Information Department, under the Chairmanship of Imron Rosyadi was set up to look into the matter. After making a thorough investigation, the chairman handed over a 25 page report to the Foreign Minister ad interim, L.B. Murdani. Rosyadi said, the government was aware that the American Senators had forwarded the petition basing their information on an old and inaccurate report of the subject. He stressed that the letter of the US Congressmen had touched on the decolonization process and accused that it was done through invasion and forced annexation by Indonesia. "But it is open knowledge. that the process was a result of the implementation of the right of self-determination of the people of East Timor in accordance with the UN Resolution No. 1514 (XV), 1541 (XV) and 2525 (XIV)".\textsuperscript{84} Replying to the charge of a lack of food and famine condition in the province, the Chairman said, be fair gentleman, since East Timor became part of the Republic of Indonesia, the agricultural sector have improved by leaps and bounds

\textsuperscript{83}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., 23 November 1988.
and the region is self-sufficient accordingly. He further said, what is true is that after thirteen years of integration, East Timor has made progress in all fields of development, hand-in-hand with the other parts of the country. Portugal had left East Timor helter-skelter, without any sense of responsibility for the land which they had colonized for more than four hundred years. This had caused chaos.

The controversy over the human rights issue in East Timor subsided when a US Congress delegation, headed by Republican Senator Robert Dole paid a four day visit to Indonesia beginning from November 22 to November 25, 1988. During their meeting with the Indonesian leaders, the US Senate Republican leader Robert Dole admitted that there had been lack of information and understanding on East Timor. We primarily wanted to learn, not to preach on the issue. We have come here as friends and like any other Congress delegation or parliamentary Group we did not have all the information. We learned a great deal from this visit, and we would like to know more on whatever the issue might be", Dole added.

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85Ibid., 24 November 1988.
86Ibid.
Another Senator in the delegation, James A. McClure stressed that the Congressmen who had signed the statement on East Timor understood the sovereignty of Indonesia and in no way intended to interfere in the local affairs of the country. Both the Senators stressed that they did not want the East Timor question to dominate in the Press Conference organized by the Indonesian authority during the visit. "It was not an issue in the broadly based and continuing strong and excellent relationship between Indonesia and the United States. During our discussions with President Suharto and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and Speaker of the Parliament, Kharis Suhud, we have reaffirmed the importance we in the Congress place on our relations with Indonesia. We want to see our contacts expanded and strengthened even further, Senator Dole said.**

The preceeding discussion clearly shows that, the US foreign policy was always guided by its own national interests. It's attitude towards Indonesia over the human rights issue was a glaring example of such American policy. This was evident from the fact that, though the United States declared in the beginning that the principal goal of American foreign policy would be the promotion and observance of internationally

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recognized human rights, and it would not allow any government to encourage human rights violations of any sort, later on the view was changed in the pursuit of achieving good relations with friendly countries.