

## SUMMARY

### The Fraser Government and the East Timor Question: The Dilemma between Its Relations with Indonesia and Commitment to the Principle of Self-Determination

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This study examines Australian foreign policymaking under the Fraser government towards Indonesia's military invasion of East Timor (Portuguese Timor), which turned outright and massive after 7 December 1975. It involves the period from 11 November 1975, when the Fraser government was established, to 15 December 1978, when its intention to accept East Timor *de jure* as a part of Indonesia was publicised. Finally, the Indonesians, who declared East Timor as the country's 27<sup>th</sup> province on 17 July 1976, controlled the territory for more than two decades until 1999. Under Indonesia's occupational rule, particularly during the second half of the 1970s, more than a hundred thousand Timorese were reportedly killed because of starvation, disease and war. Did the Fraser government not have any other choice but to condone Indonesia's actions and accept East Timor as part of Indonesia? If not, why was it so?

This study argues that it was difficult for Prime Minister Fraser to have Indonesian President Suharto withdraw his country's armed forces from the territory of East Timor after the full-scale attack on Dili in December 1975. While there might have been a slight chance for Fraser to dissuade Suharto from intervening in such a massive way, immediately after he assumed power as caretaker Prime Minister of Australia on 11 November 1975, such a policy, if introduced, could have caused a serious setback for Australia's relations with Indonesia. Thousands of Indonesian soldiers were already deployed to East Timor. Further, Australia, a middle power, was unable to exert effective pressure on Indonesia to disengage its forces without diplomatic backing from the United States and other Western powers, which had actually adopted a rather cooperative attitude towards Indonesia. Being constantly pressed by the Suharto government, the Fraser government finally relaxed its diplomatic protest against the Indonesian invasion despite its public support for an appropriate act of self-determination by the Timorese, which was expressed by the Foreign Minister, Peacock, many times during December 1975 and July 1976.

The Fraser government's stepwise decisions to recognise East Timor *de facto* and *de jure* as a part of Indonesia in 1978 were apparently unavoidable. However, despite the international community, including the Japanese government and its people, choosing to turn a blind eye to this issue, we should not forget what happened in East Timor.