

TIMOR-LESTE

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ALPHONSE LA PORTA
Political Officer
Jakarta (1969-1970)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Well, then in '69 you moved over to the political section?

LA PORTA: I took the portfolio for Muslim and outer island affairs. That occasioned more travel. My Indonesian language skills were pretty good and I shifted almost seamlessly into that job. As a consular officer we sometimes did political reporting on our trips.

Q: At that time, was there a concern? I mean you look at the thing, Indonesia on the map and you think this is a place where there would be separatist tendencies, disintegration along the periphery, you know, you've got your center and you've got Java and you've got Sumatra and maybe Bali, you think that a lot of these islands begin to, hell with this, let's go. Was that, were we concerned about it, too, were there any signs of that happening?

LA PORTA: We were very much concerned and still are today. For example, in 1974, Hasan di Tiro founder of the Aceh Merdeka Movement, the Free Aceh Movement or GAM felt that he had been promised regional autonomy by Sukarno back in the early 1960s. When he didn't get it he organized a guerilla group against the Indonesian central authority. Partially as a Malaysian reaction against Sukarno's policy of Konfrontasi received support from across the Strait of Malacca. Some of this support was real and some of it just simply lip service, but the GAM movement continued with peaks and troughs over the years. There were separatist movements in Borneo that were aided and abetted by the communist insurgency that spilled over into the Indonesian side.

There were also Christian dissidents in Manado nearest to the Southern Philippines city of Davao who were campaigning for autonomy. In Maluku you still have the Republic of the South Moluccas (RMS) group going back to the '50s who were agitating for a freedom for the Christian majority region. These Christian groups received support from the Netherlands and from human rights organizations. Moving around to Papua, you had a history of brokering deals, including by Ellsworth Bunker and others, for the Dutch withdrawal and handing Papua over to Indonesian authority under something in 1969 that we jokingly called the Act Free of Choice. The Act of Free Choice was a contrived process for consultations with hand-picked local leaders

on the district level. District assemblies were convened and they said yes, we'd like to be part of Indonesia and we want to be rid of the evil Dutch. Whether that represented any kind of authentic expression of the people is open to debate, but we argued at the time that it was probably as good a popular expression as you were going to get because of the bad communications and the very low state of development of the indigenous society. Now 35 years later the Organisasi Papua Merdeka, the Free Papua Movement (OPM) is still agitating. There are calls from the human rights and civil society organizations for another exercise in self-determination in Papua. I firmly believe that, as in 1969, Papua is nowhere near capable of full self-government; if anything the political, social and economic situation there is more complex than it was in 1969 and there has been a great deal of integration with the rest of Indonesia. An independent Papua would only become a failed state like Papua-New Guinea (PNG) and increasingly East Timor.

Sukarno, I think, made two major contributions to Indonesia. One was the creation of a unitary state and the other was the creation of a national language. Today you have to distinguish carefully between the Aceh and Papua situations. These are very different things. In Papua today we see on TV, all of these well dressed very articulate Papuan representatives of one or another human rights or civil society organization arguing for freedom from the Indonesia government. Okay, what's wrong with this picture? Number one, 35 years ago they would not have been well dressed or hardly dressed at all. Number two, they were all educated in Indonesian institutions and they all speak perfect idiomatic Indonesian. In Papua there are 13 different major tribal groups, usually fighting with each other. They all achieved their status as a result of their affiliation inclusion in Indonesia. In Aceh these GAM leaders headquartered in Sweden are trying simply to gain control over natural resources, not for the greater benefit of Acehnese society, or to advance the cause of Islam, but simply to gain political power and money. I don't find a lot of merit in the Aceh freedom movement, having dealt with them closely when I was consul in Medan. I even had something to do with them when I was in Malaysia.

You will always have these separatist tendencies in parts of Indonesia in varying degrees. Even some Balinese want more recognition for themselves. It is Jakarta's job in this case to deal with those disaffections and to conciliate in a constructive way, not to suppress local sentiment but to make government decentralization, power sharing and resource sharing work. A lot of these things can be negotiated with some sensitivity and patience on the basis of what the local inhabitants want in terms of greater self-government. Since the fall of the Suharto regime, a decentralization law has been passed and special local autonomy laws have been approved for Aceh and Papua. It is within the power of the central government to lose the game, but with a little wisdom and skill most experts in the United States and other countries believe that they can certainly make things better as regards to the separatist feelings. Nevertheless, in some parts of the country, such as Central Sulawesi and Maluku, local tensions are being exacerbated by extreme radical Muslims.

ERLAND HEGINBOTHAM
Economic Officer/Commercial Counselor
Jakarta, Indonesia (1971-1975)

Erland Heginbotham was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1931. He attended Stanford University and entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His career has included positions in Korea, Nigeria, Vietnam, and Indonesia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 3, 1996.

Q: Were we excessively concerned about unrest might over-throw Suharto which might precipitate a return to Sukarno in some form or other? Was that a theme that no matter what we did, we always had to keep our eye on what might happen?

HEGINBOTHAM: Suharto had been extremely effective at getting rid of any meaningful opposition. The concern really was more of a throw back to the immediate post-Dutch period when the 3,000 islands might just simply go their separate way, creating a chaotic situation. The feeling was that the anger against the Suharto family was such that there just that events might spin out of control. The military, of course, was by far the most cohesive force, there wasn't really much prospect that it would implode; it was much more likely that Indonesia would wind up with another military regime, but probably not a Sukarno type of regime. I've already alluded to the terribly socialist, terribly corrupt mentality that made Indonesia such a difficult place. For example, the East Timor problem had really come to a head during my time there and that was very tragic.

Q: Could you describe the East Timor problem at that time and how it affected what we were doing?

HEGINBOTHAM: The effect of the East Timor on what we were doing was very remote. Timor is a far out of the way place. It was a part of Indonesia that just not been developed; it was very neglected, very difficult to reach, very isolated. When the Portuguese decided to pull out, it gave the Indonesian military a golden opportunity annex it without benefit of a U.N.-supervised referendum. We were put in a very difficult position, because practically no one recognized Indonesia's annexation of Portuguese Timor; the blood bath was horrendous; it was just really brutal. It opened a lot of eyes to the real nature of some of the military leadership in Indonesia. It was more of an embarrassment; it didn't have any direct impact on our efforts, but it was so difficult to be supporting what was going on elsewhere in Indonesia when you had this kind of behavior which was repeated in other parts of Indonesia, where different cultures existed.

Q: Did we try to ameliorate government actions in East Timor through our assistance program?

HEGINBOTHAM: I'm not sure that we did. The situation was so horrific that AID just didn't want to be associated with anything that Indonesia tried to do in Timor. The issue was never settled. I mean, it was a constant state of warfare all during the time I was there. What we were doing was putting pressure on the Indonesians through canceling IMET, (the international military education program) which was one of the best programs we had for Indonesia. We tried to put the squeeze on them in terms of military supplies, rather than the AID program, because we didn't really want to put the pressure on through the AID program

which might have undercut and discredited the technocrats That was the very group in Indonesia that you wanted to support and encourage; so I think it was a reasonably compartmentalized approach.

EDWARD C. INGRAHAM
Country Director for East Asia
Washington, DC (1974-1977)

Edward C. Ingraham was born in New York state in 1922. He received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College in 1942 and subsequently joined the war effort and served in the U.S. Army overseas between 1943-45. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. In addition to Islamabad, his posts included Cochabamba, La Paz, Hong Kong, Perth, Madras, Jakarta, and Rangoon. He was interviewed on April 8, 1991 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: When you were back in Washington for those three years wasn't it a relatively quiet period for Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore?

INGRAHAM: There were only a few things going on. There was the East Timor business, which the outside world seized upon. A great deal of righteousness in that one. I was on the minority side. We found ourselves being hauled before Congress to testify.

Q: Could you explain what the issue was?

INGRAHAM: All right. In 1949 Indonesia replaced the Dutch East Indies with one small exception. Jakarta did not take over the eastern half of the small island of Timor, which was a Portuguese colony and had been one since the 16th century. The Dutch had chased the Portuguese out of most of East Asia, but they left them in the eastern part of Timor for some reason. For 300 years it was a decaying little Portuguese colony--not the island of Timor, just the eastern half. The people on both sides of the island were the same. They spoke the same language. The Indonesians put no pressure on the Portuguese. They were perfectly content. Even Sukarno was content to leave Timor alone. And after Sukarno, Suharto couldn't care less about East Timor. He felt the Portuguese colony would sooner or later revert to Indonesia...it would have to because it was part of Indonesia. But there were more important things to do, so no pressure.

Then there was an upheaval in Portugal when everything was overturned and its empire fell apart. The echoes were felt in Timor. Three parties immediately sprang up. One was pro- Indonesian, one was "let us stay the way we are," and the third and smallest was for independence. The independence party wasn't influenced by Lisbon, but, as far as I can tell, by Mozambique. Frelimo in Mozambique was a sort of mother party to the outfit called Fretilin--this is an acronym--in East Timor.

In short order in East Timor there was turmoil. Fighting among the three parties began. It was not particularly serious and was not encouraged by the Indonesians, who couldn't care less at that time. But then, the Portuguese colonial government suddenly and unexpectedly packed up and left. First it moved to an island off shore, apparently because it was getting sick of the low-level turmoil. Their attitude was, "We are going to lose the colony anyway, one way or another, so why should we lose any Portuguese lives."

And at the same time the Portuguese garrison was pulled out. Now, the Portuguese garrison wasn't mainland Portuguese but Portuguese African mainly from Mozambique, and had been infected by the radical currents in Mozambique stirred up when the Portuguese pulled out. So when the garrison left, it turned over its arms to the left wing, pro-independence party in East Timor, which promptly, with those brand new guns, seized Dili, defeated the other parties and declared themselves independent.

The Indonesians suddenly woke up, saying, "We don't care about a Portuguese colony in the middle of Indonesia, but to have an assertive left-wing state...." The Indonesians are even more emotionally anti-communist than we were because of their 1965 experience...They said, "Well, this can't be" and very quickly they simply moved in. They moved in by force and they chased Fretilin out.

The majority of the East Timor people, did they want union with Indonesia? No. Did the majority of the people want independence under Fretilin? No. The majority of the people had a vague idea that they were part of a Portuguese colony but were totally outside the political dispute. The Portuguese, I think, claimed that they had about 30 percent of the population under "administrative control." The rest were just living as they always had. It was a very poor island.

Unfortunately, there was a strange little sidelight on all this. In World War II, in 1942, when the Japanese were advancing down the Indonesian island chain, the Australians had sent a small garrison to try to hold on to East Timor. They hung on after the Japanese had taken the rest of the island chain all the way to New Guinea. The Japanese then landed in Timor...the Australian garrison was still there...and the Japanese really slaughtered the Timorese. The Australian garrison was pulled out, but the Japanese punished the Timorese badly. Because of this, the Australians have always had a guilty conscience about Timor. There was also a little group in Australia that kept up a close interest in Timor, including one Jimmy Dunn, who was something or other in the Australian government...librarian of the Parliamentary Library, I believe...and who started a drive to "Save Timor from the Indonesians." When he came to the States, he testified before Congress and stirred up a lot of worldwide agitation. Also a number of the African countries lined up behind Fretilin, even though their leaders couldn't have located Timor on a map. A lot of countries went after Indonesia on this one. In fact a majority of the United Nations was against Indonesia. But we stuck with the Indonesians throughout the whole thing.

Q: Were you feeling pressure on the Desk?

INGRAHAM: Yes, we were feeling a great deal of pressure from Congress. But the State Department stayed solidly behind Indonesia. We said we were ostensibly neutral, we understood the Indonesian point of view and we would stand by Indonesia. I remember a meeting with

Kissinger...A vote was coming up in the UN to condemn Indonesia and we were planning to abstain. I remember somebody else and I went up to talk to Kissinger. We said, "We realize we are going to have to abstain, but the Indonesians have a real case here, and if there is any way that we could support them on this, because it is unfair"--we were really quite eloquent. And by God, when the vote came up and we went up to New York we were told to vote "no", rather than abstain. All the Europeans abstained, everybody else voted yes and the United States and some of the Arab countries voted no. The Indonesians have always been grateful for that, because we actually stood up for them.

But it caused a lot of criticism. Even religion was dragged into it, unfortunately. The Timorese are basically Catholics on both sides of the island. Jimmy Dunn and the Australians, along with several congregations in the United States, were charging that Christians were being slaughtered by the Indonesians. The Indonesians had moved in rather smartly and had been more brutal than they had to be, although less brutal than they could have been. Partly because the people in Fretilin were not cynics but actually believed in their cause, they fought like tigers, didn't give up but retreated back into the hinterland. The hinterland was being decimated as the Indonesian army went in after them. Their fanatic resistance goaded the Indonesians into being rougher than they should have been.

So it was a very unhappy situation throughout. And the religious side of it...I can remember Jimmy Dunn testifying before Congress that it was not only ethnic genocide but religious warfare, with Christians being mistreated by the Indonesians. I had already testified, so I managed to slip a note to someone saying, "Point out that the Indonesian Minister of Defense is a Protestant and the Indonesian General in charge of the Timor operation is a Catholic. This is not a religious war." Much of the propaganda to the outside world continued to be along those lines. It never has died out. To this day you can see periodic references in the papers to the atrocity of East Timor. It wasn't that, and it never has been. It was just a poor remote little community that got caught up in something that it wasn't prepared for and I don't know who you blame for this. The Australians were wrong, but they believed it. The fanatics in the mountains, Fretilin, believed they were fighting for a greater future for mankind. The Indonesians were utterly convinced that they were simply taking back half an island right smack in the middle of their country that had been forcibly separated for centuries. The African countries felt they were trying to save their people from Asian terror. So it was a very sad situation.

PAUL F. GARDNER
Deputy Chief of Mission
Jakarta, Indonesia (1976-1981)

Ambassador Paul F. Gardner was born in Texas in 1930. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in Madagascar, Laos, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Turkey, and an ambassadorship to New Guinea. Ambassador Gardner was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: Was East Timor a problem at the time?

GARDNER: Yes, a very big problem.

Q: Could you explain what the problem was and then what happened while you were there?

GARDNER: It had happened just before I arrived there. Timor was a Portuguese colony and, as many of the other Portuguese colonies, it had some far leftist military there. There was a Marxist movement called Fretilin which was supported by some elements of the military. The Portuguese were leaving the colony and the Fretilin seemed to be taking over. These were pretty brutal people, the Fretilin were. Not as brutal as the Khmer Rouge, but they had already killed quite a few people. The Indonesians had already had a sort of puppet party there. A party they had promoted and were giving money to. It was a party of little significance.

Because the Portuguese colony shared the island of Timor, with Indonesia, the eastern part was Portuguese and the western part of Timor was Indonesian. So it was one of the few places where Indonesia shared a border with another country and this country seemed to be turning Communist. So Indonesia surreptitiously invaded it, basically to support the non-Communist side and put its own puppet party...although it was really a small minority party...in power.

This happened before I arrived, but we had to deal with the consequences of this in Congress and the bigger consequences in Australia because a number of Australian journalists had been killed by Indonesian military during this takeover. We will never know the complete story about this, but it was unfortunate, to say the least. But there was some bloodshed, of course, when the Indonesians went in and there had been bloodshed before of which the Fretilin were guilty. Then, of course, the Fretilin and the Indonesians engaged in combat. The Fretilin as guerilla troops mainly and the Indonesians controlled the cities.

So this was looked on by some as conquering another country. The United States didn't recognize that there had been free choice in Timor but recognized that Indonesia was the administrative power, because it was there. I don't think our policy condoned it, but it certainly accepted the consequences of it. Many in Congress were very, very worried about the human rights aspects of it. And we felt that Indonesia had its own reputation to think of, a reputation which really could be blacken by Timor. Our policy was trying to get the Indonesians to open Timor up. In other words, let people in and see what's happening and they will understand.

The Portuguese had left the country in terrible shape. They had only 6 kilometers of paved road in the whole country. The Church really ran the place. They had the only schools. I don't think there was a high school. A lot of Timorese had their high schooling in the Indonesian high schools on the other side of the island. The Portuguese had not developed the economy at all. It was quite tribal to a large degree. Very much like in Irian Java or Papua New Guinea. People with spears, bow and arrows, and grass skirts, etc.

So it was a ticklish problem. For one, Indonesia was taking over an area in which there are problems already and they are going to be saddled with all of them. Not only that, but with an infrastructure that didn't exist. So it wasn't a place where you could live off the country because the country had very little livelihood. I think in the long term they actually put a lot more

resources into Timor than the Portuguese did. Of course, the Indonesians also put a lot more of their people in there than the Portuguese did as well. And, of course, the Church was highly Portuguese in its orientation...the Catholic Church people there. They had all been educated in Portugal. So the Church was against the Indonesians to a large degree. So they had some bad problems there.

But, nevertheless, we thought it was best that they open up and let others in there. We were able to persuade them to let some congressional groups go in. One congressional group, at least while I was there. My first visit there was with a congressional group. It was really highly organized. We were taken by helicopter to various places, but we weren't allowed to go off and talk to people on our own. It was very highly structured. But at the same time, if you were a very astute observer you could see what was going on. I was allowed to talk to people without Indonesians overhearing me. So I think on the whole the Congressmen produced a good report. There were different views among the Congressmen on the trip. But they were making a trip through Indonesia as a whole and only two Congressman went to Timor, I think. I think we had three days there and we traveled around from one place to another thanks to the Indonesian transportation.

Then I was able to go out again and this time much more freely. I saw a good deal more. There is a lot of talk about East Timor being not like the rest of Indonesia and it isn't to a certain degree because it has a Portuguese background. Their racial characteristics are more akin to Papua New Guinea. But the languages there are Austronesian, except for a very small minority which belongs to the non-Austronesia group of languages you find in the highland of Papua New Guinea. The lingua franca throughout the island is very close to Indonesian. I found that the children picked up Indonesian very, very rapidly, so that my second visit which was somewhat later, I found that most of the school kids spoke perfect Indonesian. Some of the adults had their education on the Indonesian side of the island. They are Melanesian to look at...they have the kinky hair and the dark skin. They also had the Melanesia sense of independence built around the clans. They are warriors. Small clans against other small clans. The Javanese on the other hand are a highly structured hierarchical society. So they are opposite types of societies to some degree. This causes some problems. The same problems that the Indonesians face in some of the other islands.

But Timor is going to be a bigger problem from now on because the Timorese were incorporated in a way that was extralegal. They have aspirations for independence. I think these are mistaken aspirations because it is such a small and isolated area and very difficult for it to be independent on its own. It is going to need another power to take care of it in some way or another in the modern world. But I think there is always going to be a very strong element for independence there.

I think now the Indonesian administration is a better. They have a local governor now. The governor at first was a Javanese general, or at least an Indonesian general. They have gotten more and more Timorese in the act. The present governor is not from the party they supported but from the larger, non-Communist, anti-Indonesian party. So it seems that they are letting more and more people in. But it is going to be a ticklish problem for some years to come.

Q: While you were there during this 1976-81 period were we making any representations on Timor?

GARDNER: Yes, principally, why don't you open it up? That is much better. The stories you get are going to be bad whether you let people in or not. Why don't you let them see what you are doing there? If you are doing good things there, and we think you are doing some good things there, why don't you let people see them? Let some of the press in there. Let our congressmen in there. This was what we said privately, not publicly. We tried to keep all of this private, because the Indonesians...especially the Javanese like the President...are very strongly adverse to criticism in the press. So we were very careful with the press. But privately, this is what we were telling them, with some success.

Q: Speaking of the press, you probably didn't have resident correspondents there, did you?

GARDNER: We did from time to time. Of course during the 1965 events there were resident correspondents. During the second time we were there, I think we had a Wall Street Journal person. We had some correspondents for the Far East Economics Review, who were Americans. But most of them traveled in and out.

Q: When they came did you have any problems since the Indonesians were so sensitive to the press?

GARDNER: We didn't tell them what demarches we were making to the government, no, of course not. We couldn't do that because then they wouldn't be demarches as we would have lost the confidentiality aspect. We tried to do this privately. I think it was reasonably successful. They did let some people in there. Once they got criticism, as was the case with Australians, they wouldn't let any Australian journalists near it. They wouldn't let Australian parliamentarians in. The Australian press was terribly combative and political, and once they took that line, the Indonesians cut the Australians off. So if you wanted to avoid that, you had to be very, very careful with the press.

Q: In a way you were somewhat protected by the lack of propinquity to Indonesia. The Australian press, I guess, is sort of reflective of the British press instead of...well, there was scandalmongering and...

GARDNER: There was more to it than that. There is a very emotional thing about the Timorese because the Australians had fought with the Timorese against the Japanese. So they had a little brown brother syndrome there. That is one factor. The other factor was the execution of those Australian journalists. You put those two things together...plus also the Irian Jaya thing...they had a feeling that the Indonesians might not be treating the Melanesians of Irian Jaya right.

Q: Irian Jaya being...

GARDNER: The Indonesian half of the island of New Guinea. Of course the Australians had been the administrator of the other half, Papua New Guinea, which was one of their territories, and felt very paternal towards Papua New Guinea which was having trouble with Indonesia over

Irian Jaya. So all of these things coincided. The Indonesians, on the other hand, seemed to think of the Australians as racist. All of these things led to very bad relations. The Australian diplomats, they were the ones who had trouble. Fortunately Australia sent its best diplomats to Indonesia and they were very, very capable people.

Q: Looking at a map of Indonesia, one is overwhelmed by the immensity of it, particularly with all the islands. How as an Embassy were you able to cover it all?

GARDNER: This was the nice part of an Indonesian tour that you could justify a trip to just about all of the islands. We did have consulates in Medan and Surabaya with responsibilities for their area. Medan is in north Sumatra and has responsibility for all of Sumatra and part of Borneo. Surabaya had responsibility for the eastern islands as well as central and eastern Java. Sulawesi belonged to the Embassy directly. But the Embassy people, of course, visited all of these areas. All of them are quite fascinating. There were 250 different language groups to start with. They have most of the religions you can have...Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. You had all the religions and 250 different languages plus some of the most gorgeous scenery on earth. So it made travel terribly interesting. We tried to travel as much as we could, when funds permitted it.

There are many places I haven't seen that I would love to go back and visit. Indonesia is one of those countries that you never get to see it all so there is always something to go back and see. In each one of these areas you find different problems. It is an amazing country and has combined several linguistic groups together and quite successfully, probably in good part because of their choice of language. Indonesian is a lingua franca, originally a market language. It gave no ethnic and linguistic group an advantage over the others. They had a middle ground in Indonesian. It has turned out to be a very dynamic language, borrowing words from all these other languages as well as from us, Sanskrit, German, etc. So this language is a big element. They escaped the linguistic problems of India. No one, so to speak, is Indonesian-speaking by ethnic group. So you don't have that problem. That is one of the reasons that they have been able to develop...because of this amazingly, dynamic and plastic language that they have.

FRANCIS J. TATU
United Nations Political Officer, International Organization Affairs
Washington, DC (1976-1979)

Political Officer
Jakarta, Indonesia (1979-1984)

Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from 1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.

Q: Yes, but that's fine. So in IOUNP I assume you went to the General Assembly a number of times, a couple of years at least.

TATU: Actually yes, two years.

Q: And when the General Assembly was not in session, what did your position entail?

TATU: Well, you know, there were always these considerations coming up. At that time one of the big items was what about Japanese representation. The Japanese, you know, they're still trying to get a permanent seat on the Security Council, so we dealt with that. There was the Korean question, two Koreas, and all of that was very much in the abstract. I think - again, you say any of the international questions that involve Asia - ASEAN was, oh, and East Timor.

Q: Oh, yes, we've heard about that recently.

TATU: That gave slight heartache, because this would happen every single year. Indonesia would be condemned because of its position on East Timor, and they'd just take a walk, they wouldn't move. And this put me in conflict professionally with my own bureau, so to speak, that is, considering EA my home bureau. I remember once Ed Masters, as ambassador in Jakarta then, wanted to go to East Timor, and they didn't want him to go and I was the Roman messenger, so to speak. I had to go and tell him that they frowned upon any visible American official visiting "TimTim," as the Indonesians called it.

Q: Well, you can tell me later. Dick Holbrook at that time was the A Assistant Secretary. East Timor was a perennial issue from the time the Indonesians went in there...

TATU: Absolutely, yes.

Q: Say a few words about Benny Murdani.

TATU: General Leonardas Benny Murdani was the general who was then responsible for internal security in the city of Jakarta. He later became Minister of Defense. Of course now he is very far on the outs but at that time he was a very, very senior, very influential general. He called to say that the march on the embassy had been handled just right. That there was potential for violence, and that if we had noticed there on the periphery of this mob were men with bulges in their coats. Those were his men who were armed and ready.

Q: In case there had been a real problem.

TATU: As I say, the good old embassy didn't write me up, but *Tempo* magazine did. Do you remember *Tempo*?

Q: Yes, sure, sort of an equivalent of Time or Newsweek.

TATU: They referred to me as “Mr. Cool.”

Q: Mr. Cool? That’s quite a compliment from Indonesians, I would say.

TATU: Yes, I’ve always felt very proud of that, but at the same time...

Q: At the same time didn’t really get the support that you would have hoped for.

TATU: Well, I think, you know, somebody in a supervisory position could look for legitimate opportunities to give commendation...

Q: Give support to people.

TATU: ...not only support but commendation. Let me wrap that matter of the demos up with a more human touch. A few days after the PPP visit, we were having a delayed reception for the 4th of July. I was standing aside from the receiving line. And here coming through was one of the old PPP leaders (we had not been petty enough to disinvite him, and those old fellows were always so pleased to be recognized.) When he saw me he broke off from the line, came over and heartily embraced me He was replete with apology. He and his colleagues had to do it, political necessity required that they launch some sort of protest, and since Israel didn’t have an embassy in Jakarta, the Americans were the next most logical. I assured him there were no hard feelings.

Wrapping Murdani up, he professed to be a Catholic, you know. And perhaps because of that he was in charge in East Timor after his Jakarta assignment. He made some wonderful investments. There is nothing wrong, of course, for an Indonesian general to become rich. But the Catholics weren’t too pleased with him. Consequently, he got no help from the church when things turned sour for him.

GRETA N. MORRIS
Wife of Foreign Service Officer
Jakarta, Indonesia (1978-1979)

Ambassador Morris was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Redlands and Claremont College. Before becoming a Foreign Service Officer she accompanied her FSO husband to Indonesia. In 1980 she entered the Foreign Service (USIA), following which she served variously as Public Affairs, Cultural or Press Officer in Kenya, Uganda, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. Her Washington assignments at State and USIA concerned primarily African Affairs. She served as US Ambassador to the Marshall Islands from 2000 to 2006. Ambassador Morris was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: I'm not sure if we've covered this but when you were in Indonesia what was the reaction in your circle and the people you knew and were dealing with and all about the East Timor let's say invasion and subsequent subjugation?

MORRIS: Of course, the official policy was that this was something we did not really have an official position on. This was an Indonesian matter but we did not recognize (I think the phrasing was) that a legitimate act of self-determination had taken place. I think that certainly there were a number of people who were concerned about what actually was happening there. Of course, the reports from the Indonesian government were that there were not human rights violations; they contended that reports of any killings had been grossly exaggerated. But I think, nonetheless, there were certainly some concerns and that was fueled in part by Congressional interest in the whole situation in East Timor. In fact, because of this interest, the Embassy sent my husband to East Timor in early 1980. He prepared a series of reports on the situation there and was a runner-up for the Director General's award for reporting as a result of these reports.

ALPHONSE LA PORTA
Principal Officer, Consul
Medan (1978-1981)

Deputy Director, Office of Malaysia, Burma and Singapore Affairs
Washington, DC (1982-1985)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

LA PORTA: Beyond kind political stability, race relations and then Aceh, was the whole subject of human rights. This had emerged as a strong strain under the Carter administration. The system of human rights reports began about that time and we had this was the one area in which the embassy did have sensitivities about what was said and reported. We could send cables to Washington and worldwide ourselves without having to go through Jakarta or get a prior clearance unless it was a joint reporting project with somebody in Jakarta. But in the human rights area the ambassador and the DCM had sensitivities about what was being said because of the "volatile nature" of the situation back here in Washington. You never knew who your reporting was going to or who would seize on what particular issue. Human rights in Indonesia was most sensitive in the Congress after their take-over of East Timor in 1974.

Q: I mean I realize it was way away from your orbit, but was East Timor, did it come up as an issue, was that something that was talked about where you were?

LA PORTA: Yes it was. Indeed, it was a matter of great U.S. government concern. The imbroglio over the repression of East Timor in 1974 and '75 and the continuing presence of the Indonesians were certainly of great concern. On the other hand, it was far away from us in Sumatra and did not intrude on us as much as it did in Jakarta. But we got the full brunt of that when I returned to Washington after Medan and after a year at the War College, when I took up my job as deputy director in the office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and Singapore affairs.

Q: You got out in the summer of '82. Where did you go?

LA PORTA: I had almost precooked an assignment after War College that I would become the deputy director of the Office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and Singapore Affairs in the East Asia Bureau (IMBS). The "B" in the acronym, which was originally Burma, was shifted to the Thai desk so we became Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore affairs. I served in that job from roughly June of '82 until I shifted to management in the fall of 1985. So, I served in IMBS for over three years.

Q: Okay, looking at this first place, where stood Indonesia, I mean Indonesia I take it would have been your major focus, wasn't it

LA PORTA: The East Asia Bureau at that time (the Bush Administration) was headed by Richard Solomon. We had a number of political appointee deputy assistant secretaries but, by and large, there was considerable continuity as most of the office directors, deputies and desk officers had experience in the countries they worked on.

Q: Where stood Indonesia at that time?

LA PORTA: Indonesia was kind of in a parlous state. We had come through the Carter administration when there was a decided de-emphasis on most of Asia and there was a preeminence of human rights concerns. Most of the attention various Asian countries got during that period was pretty negative. Also Indonesia, as we had discussed earlier, was still suffering from its record in East Timor back in 1974 and '75. Indonesia in the mid '80s was carrying a lot of baggage. It was difficult to get a lot of people in the room to talk about Indonesia. Normally if you convoke the interagency community of those people who had spent a significant amount of time on Indonesia policy issues, whether economic, military or otherwise, you'd be lucky to have ten people in the room. Our job on the desk was very much like what I'm doing now – to get some profile for Southeast Asian issues. To a considerable extent that was through ASEAN, through regionalism. I had done my War College thesis on ASEAN military cooperation; if you talk about lost causes, there's one. Our office had an active role in staffing the ASEAN post ministerial consultations and what in the '90s became to be the security dialogues known as the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Q: When you talk about ASEAN, let's see you again, have what countries?

LA PORTA: On the desk? We had Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, so four out of the then six ASEAN countries. The others being the Philippines and Thailand.

Q: Where did the Philippines fit into this?

LA PORTA: The Philippines had their own desk. The Philippines, if my memory serves me correctly, was a single country desk and that was because of the alliance relationship and the U.S. troop presence. So, you had the office of Philippine affairs, the office of Thai-Burma affairs, and then VLC, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodian affairs. The Southeast Asia checkerboard is how you divide up the landscape in terms of how many offices you have and how many directors, how many staffs. There were those of us who vainly argued over the years that there should be a single office of ASEAN affairs covering all of Southeast Asia. If you had what I would call a super-office and staffed it properly with a director and two or three deputy directors reporting to a DAS or having a DAS of its own would have been a far more efficient organization.

Q: We're looking at Indonesia at the time, how was, was Suharto in bad odor by this time or not?

LA PORTA: Suharto was not in bad odor in the early '80s. During the early '80s, kind of the corruption in the system and the venality of the first family with the "first children" being involved in all kinds of rip-offs had not yet come to pass or were not easily apparent. We knew of course there was corruption. We knew there were abuses, in particular in the military. We knew that the military was making money. We knew that they had their own profit making centers, but those things were understood and pretty well contained. In other words, they didn't have the effect on the overall economy so as to bring the entire system down that later occurred in the late '90s. In the early '80s, the thrust here in Washington was to work around the human rights issues. We spent a lot of time on Timor and a few other things.

We also tried to work hard to maximize U.S. interests in terms of regionalism because we thought that that was where the future was.

Q: Where did Irian Jaya fit into this? Was there a problem or was it sort of a place left on its own?

LA PORTA: At that point Irian Jaya, Papua or West Irian, whichever name you prefer, was fairly quiet. Most people, including us in the State Department, were trying to focus our attention on economic development in that area, being the poorest and most remote of the regions, as well as in Aceh. The rebellion in Aceh was fairly quiet at that time. There were no big issues. There'd be an occasional depredation or security alert in the Mobil Oil area of Southeastern Aceh, but by and large internal dissidence and rebellion were not the norm. We didn't really focus a lot on it. What we did do regarding human rights and other concerns was to try to get the government to understand that it had to promote basic economic development in these areas. You were talking about very basic activities like some fairly primitive African states, and to make sure that the Indonesian government got in to do what it could to promote nation building, education, building infrastructure and so on.

Q: What was happening in East Timor?

LA PORTA: Well, East Timor was a discomfort in the sense that the military was largely responsible for controlling East Timor affairs, although they did have a Timorese governor and Archbishop Belo was just beginning to make himself known as the religious leader of East Timor. During the 1980s the military was basically moving in on the coffee culture. They were opening up a lot of new land for coffee plantations. There were relatively few security-related incidents during that period. There was not a kind of a high tide or a rising tide of security incidents where the pro-freedom rebels or other groups were making a whole lot of trouble. You'd have occasional firefights, but usually out in the up-country areas that were hard to document.

We did have a problem with Timorese who fled the region in the 1970s. Many of these people were still stuck on offshore islands as "internally displaced persons" or IDPs. They were being brought back into resettlement camps off the South coast of Timor, so the conditions in those camps were a significant focus of the refugee bureau at State and others who provided resources for relief, training and trying to help alleviate living conditions in those camps.

Q: Was there a feeling that the Indonesian's central government could have placated the Timorese by putting a few more roads in there? In other words, it's a small area, make an effort to make things nice for them or not?

LA PORTA: By all objective indices, the ones that we used to cite, whether they were World Bank figures or ADB figures or even the Indonesian government's own figures on a per capita basis, the government's development budget for East Timor ranked above any other place in the country. The development budget for Papua was probably second in the total amount that the government spent on development projects. That said, there was a lot of the outback, particularly in remote mountain areas or villages, that simply wasn't connected with the central part of the province.

Q: Say we're concerned with human rights. What was going on? I mean I take it that the human rights thing was pretty well concentrated on Timor and on Aceh.

LA PORTA: There were more human rights concerns at that point in Papua than in Aceh. Aceh was pretty quiet. I may have mentioned that during my previous assignment in Medan that Aceh had a reasonably good civilian provincial government. The security concerns were in a clear second place. That was not true in East Timor. On the security side, there were bands of rebels, pro-freedom Timorese that were still marauding in the mountains. The man who is today the president of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao was a rebel leader. He and the exiled Timorese leader Jose Ramos-Horta were later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I'll be totally counterculture on this but Xanana was a killer. He was a terrorist. He was the leader of rebel groups in the mountains and himself were was responsible for a lot of killing, murdering, intimidation of all sorts which reached a peak in the mid '90s.

Q: Did the shift from Secretary Haig to Shultz in 1982 affect your portfolio? What was working with Gaston Sigur like?

LA PORTA: The East Asian bureau under Assistant Secretary Gaston Sigur was low key. Sigur was a courtly academician (for whom George Washington University's China Center is now named). Sigur, as befitted his academic interest, was most engaged with China and frankly left most of the other things, except Japanese affairs, to his deputies and the country desks. Southeast Asia, except for Cambodia (viz. the annual struggle over Cambodian representation in the United Nations), had little front office attention other than residual human rights issues, such as the Indonesian presence in East Timor. There were few issues that engaged official Washington, thus most of our time was spent tending ("gardening" in George Shultz's words) to relatively discrete bilateral relations issues. Regionalism attracted little attention and the emphasis was on our traditional alliance relationships.

JOSEPH A. B. WINDER
Economic Counselor
Jakarta, Indonesia (1980-1983)

Desk Officer; Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Affairs
Washington, DC (1983-1985)

Joseph A. Winder was born in New York in 1939. He received a BA from the University of Michigan in 1964 and his MBA in 1965. Mr. Winder served in the US Army from 1959 to 1962. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1966, he was posted in Santiago, Bonn, Jakarta, Bangkok and Tokyo. In 1999 Mr. Winder was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: What about East Timor?

WINDER: East Timor wasn't a major foreign policy problem when I was there. I visited there a couple of times as DCM to see what was going on and report on it. But, East Timor was clearly run by the army. It was almost a colony so to speak. There was isolated occasional violence, but nothing major.

Q: Were we at all concerned at that time about any resurgence of the communists or were they wiped out?

WINDER: They were brutally wiped out.

Q: Today is October 8, 1999. We are in 1983 and where did you go?

WINDER: In 1983 I came back from Jakarta and took over the responsibility of the desk for Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei affairs. I did that until November, 1985. During my time on the desk it was a very active period. We had a state visit by President Suharto that must have been just after I arrived so I wasn't heavily involved in it. But, then we had big visits involving each of the other countries. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir came for a working visit in early 1984 in which we were actively involved. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore came more than once and we were involved arranging his programs. I remember one time we had a session with Secretary Shultz calling on him at his hotel. Those two were very close confidants and Shultz asked him about our policies and Lee Kuan Yew asked him and there really was an exchange of views between two statesmen on how are we doing. In addition, Brunei celebrated regaining their sovereignty for all aspects of their affairs. I guess they already had control over internal affairs but not external. So, there was a big to do in Brunei and Ken Dam led a delegation of basically private citizens to go out and represent the U.S. at that event, and I went along and did the staff work.

We had a lot of different activities there. A lot of policy problems with Indonesia. Questions about whether we should sell them F-16s. Human rights problems with mysterious killings. The East Timor question wasn't as hot then. It was sort of a low simmering problem but it hadn't really surfaced.

Q: When had the Indonesians gone into East Timor?

WINDER: In the mid-'70s. At the time when the Portuguese empire collapsed brought about by a change in Portugal. The situation in East Timor changed and there were movements favoring independence and union with Indonesia and the army went in and supported the union.

Q: Were we monitoring East Timor?

WINDER: Yes, sure. When I was in the embassy I visited East Timor as acting DCM and looked around and talked to people. Then I filed a report on what I heard and saw. We were trying to stay on top of the situation there.

Q: When you were on the desk was there any sort of East Timor movement?

WINDER: Nothing significant. It wasn't a major issue.

Q: Was Suharto still persona grata as far as we were concerned?

WINDER: Oh, very much so. This was the early '80s. He had only been in power about 15 years. The impact of his policies on the Indonesian development process were apparent to everyone. The economy was booming. The benefits of the development were being dispersed widely throughout the society. Everybody was aware that some of the money was being siphoned off, and there certainly were some serious structural problems in the economy - the indigenous business sector was basically rent collectors, and had a favored position

depending on their political ties. But, on the whole, the economy was growing fast and benefits were being broadly distributed throughout the country.

TIMOTHY MICHAEL CARNEY
Political Counselor
Jakarta, Indonesia (1987-1990)

Ambassador Timothy Michael Carney was born in Missouri in 1944 and graduated from MIT in 1966. Carney studied abroad in France for a year before joining the Foreign Service. In the Foreign Service Carney served abroad in Vietnam, Lesotho, Cambodia, Thailand, South Africa, Sudan, Indonesia, and as ambassador to Sudan and Haiti. Ambassador Carney also spent time working with the Cox Foundation, USUN and the NSC. Carney was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Was there an anti-western core in Islam (in Indonesia)?

CARNEY: No, not at all. There was a period in which the East Timor situation once again went on the boil. Indeed I made sure that the first trip I took as political counselor outside of Jakarta was to Dili in East Timor to inform myself on the Indonesian effort to suppress the East Timorese independence movement, and to look at what Indonesia was doing to make unity with Indonesia attractive. Had a good chat with the military commander there and argued strongly to him, because he contended to me that there had been a number of courts martial for abuses of human rights in Indonesia, that those needed to be publicized, first of all to make the point among the troops, but second to burnish Indonesia's reputation under considerable pressure for human rights violations. It seemed to me that there wasn't much likelihood that the Indonesians would do the right thing and convince East Timorese that they wanted to be part of the greater archipelago.

Q: With the East Timorese, how long before had it been when Indonesia moved in on this?

CARNEY: They moved in '75.

Q: When you got there, did you see any indication that their role had had any effect?

CARNEY: The city wasn't shot up. They (The Jakarta authorities) were opening immigration, to let a lot of traders in from Sulawesi and from some of the other parts of the archipelago. And there was an increasing effort to build teak forests. I remember looking at one in the eastern part of East Timor when we flew out of Dili. Essentially there were lots of Indonesian doctors there. That was one of the programs to try to build bridges and make unity with Indonesia attractive. But the philosophy was, "You do what we want and we'll both be happy."

ALPHONSE LA PORTA
Deputy Chief of Mission
Wellington, New Zealand (1987-1991)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

LA PORTA: Although they're very lacking in some capabilities because the defense budget is very low, the armed forces do have a very high standing in training and expertise. So the New Zealanders said there are some things that we can do that you don't want to do or find it politically inconvenient such as interventions or peace monitoring in various kinds of situations. They did participate in the peace monitoring in East Timor. They have brokered political stand-downs in Vanuatu and Papua, New Guinea and also in the Solomon Islands, but yet they remain politically estranged from us and from the Australians. The paradox is that beginning in the late '80s there was a determined campaign to promote New Zealand's economic interrelationships with Australia. Today there is a virtual common market between the two. Now fast forward to 2004, the United States signed a free trade agreement with Australia and now New Zealand is kind of an appendage of that. The question is when and whether the United States is going to have a free trade agreement with New Zealand itself to cover all the other areas where there is important trade to us. This is nearly 20 years later and the question of NCND and the nuclear policy still bedevils U.S. attitudes in that many of the people in the George W. Bush administration today were in the second Reagan administration or the George H. W. Bush administration and they remember the wrangling on the political level with New Zealand and don't have a good taste for it.

Q: They weren't trying to fill up their country the way the Australians were essentially trying to build up their country.

LA PORTA: Not at all. I think the New Zealanders felt that in order to maintain the standards of their society and the social system, they could not afford to take in large numbers of migrants annually. They wanted to make sure that the migrants that they took in, except for some humanitarian cases, were largely people who could pay or could contribute in a real way to New Zealand society. That included some Americans. We had American family members of people who were in New Zealand who migrated to New Zealand and had to pass the same tests and occupational requirements as anybody else. It's hard to say whether you look at the New Zealand experience as excessively protective, but maybe for the small size of the country and population it may have been a prudent measure.

On the other hand, the New Zealanders were extremely aggressive and generous in doing humanitarian things with refugee populations elsewhere or humanitarian relief in Timor or anywhere where there were issues. Let's say the humanitarian impulse with New Zealanders to go elsewhere and do good was certainly great in proportion to the size of its population.

GRETA N. MORRIS
Policy Officer, East Asia, USIA
Washington, DC (1990-1992)

Ambassador Morris was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Redlands and Claremont College. Before becoming a Foreign Service Officer she accompanied her FSO husband to Indonesia. In 1980 she entered the Foreign Service (USIA), following which she served variously as Public Affairs, Cultural or Press Officer in Kenya, Uganda, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. Her Washington assignments at State and USIA concerned primarily African Affairs. She served as US Ambassador to the Marshall Islands from 2000 to 2006. Ambassador Morris was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: How about Suharto? Had we lost confidence in Suharto by this time?

MORRIS: No, Suharto was still very much our man. Of course, there were lots of problems and the East Timor issue was continuing to be a problem. But Suharto was still someone that we supported; Indonesia during the '80s and the early '90s was developing at a great pace. At the same time we were also trying to encourage Suharto to introduce greater democracy, to be more supportive of human rights and also the corruption issues were becoming a greater concern in Indonesia. This was a time when people talked about Suharto's wife, Tien Suharto, and called her "Madam ten percent," because she was at least perceived as taking a percentage off the top of any development assistance project or any other project for her own use. There was certainly a lot of concern about Indonesia and about Suharto but still we basically supported Suharto.

This was also a time I would say that there was a growing perception of the role of non-governmental organizations in several countries in East Asia, including in Thailand which, of course, during this period of time had yet another coup and a military government, this was in 1991; but the NGO movement was gaining momentum in Thailand, in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. I think many people in the U.S. government saw that NGOs could be engines for democracy so we were working more with the NGOs and providing support to the NGOs as a way of trying to help foster democracy in some of these countries.

Q: What was other than the tremendous operation of integrating two separate entities how about the East Asian side of things? What was going on?

MORRIS: Right before I left the Philippines in 1998, things were really coming to a head in Indonesia. Suharto stepped down and the process of democratization was beginning to take place in Indonesia. One of the things that led to Suharto's downfall was the Asian economic crisis and countries in Asia were still very much dealing with that crisis.

Also, in Indonesia, the issue of East Timor was coming to a head. The Government of Jusuf Habibie, Suharto's successor, agreed that there would be a referendum, or "popular consultation" (as it was called) in East Timor, scheduled to take place in September 1999. The popular consultation was supposed to give the people of East Timor the opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted to be independent or continue to be part of Indonesia. They had the popular consultation and immediately after that, when the vote went in favor of autonomy for East Timor, violence broke out, with rampaging by the Timorese militias that had been sympathetic towards Indonesia and, certainly, the U.S. and the international community believed there were elements of the Indonesian military that were also very much involved in that violence. People were killed and their homes destroyed. That violent confrontation and all of the destruction in East Timor had a major impact on our relations with Indonesia, which really had not completely recovered from the end of the Suharto era. We saw this as the Indonesian government going back on its pledge to allow the people of East Timor to make their own decision on autonomy or integration, to have an opportunity for genuine self-determination. This put a tremendous strain on our relationship with Indonesia and particularly any military to military relationships (military relations with Indonesia were cut off in 1999 for several years). I think that was certainly the big issue in East Asia. There were always continuing issues with China and with the human rights in China but I would say that a lot of the focus was on what was happening in Indonesia.

Q: Did this require or were we on the public diplomacy side what were we doing? Were we keeping our heads down or promoting something? What was that?

MORRIS: The embassy and the public affairs section at the embassy – I was still back in Washington at the time – was very involved in trying to encourage democracy, trying to promote democracy, trying to work with the new government to promote democracy. At the same time, they were dealing with all these issues and very serious riots in Indonesia, including some terrible riots against the Chinese population, so there were a lot of human rights issues, there were a lot of democracy issues but certainly on the public diplomacy side the embassy was very active in trying to promote democracy. We had to fight to keep our programs going, because there were some in the State Department who were suggesting that to punish the Indonesians after East Timor perhaps we should cut off all their Fulbright Programs, we should cut off all their IV programs. So we argued this was exactly the wrong thing to do; through these programs we were trying to help them understand democratic values, we were trying to help them understand U.S. policy, where the United States was coming from, to help them understand human rights. With a lot of these grants we were bringing some of the people who had had problems, to try to help them develop their leadership skills so that they could be more effective. If anything, we should increase these programs; we should not decrease them. I think we were successful in making that argument because the programs did not decrease.

ROBERT L. BARRY
Ambassador
Indonesia (1992-1995)

Ambassador Barry was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He attended Dartmouth College, Oxford University, St. Anthony's College, and Columbia. He served in the US Navy and entered the Foreign Service in 1962. He served in Yugoslavia, the USSR, Sweden, and Indonesia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: Today is the 14th of December, 2001. Bob, in the first place did you have any problems getting confirmed to Indonesia?

BARRY: No, not at all. It was not a country that was very high on the congressional screen at the time. In fact it still isn't despite all the things that have happened because it's sort of over the horizon. There were obviously some issues concerning Indonesia which the Congress had some interest in. Human rights, East Timor, the issue of military training, but you know in many ways Indonesia was kind of like Yugoslavia, that is the American relationship with Indonesia was forged in the Vietnam period where we were concerned about the growth of communism in Asia. So we had had a pretty good relationship going back to the immediate post war era. We had trained their military; we had provided lots of assistance to them. One of the reasons I picked Indonesia in fact was because of ex-AID director for Indonesia was working with me on aid to Eastern Europe and when he heard that Indonesia was a possibility he said that that would be a very interesting place to go. As indeed it was. So, I guess to be honest about it, the greatest resistance I had was not from the Congress, but from the East Asia Bureau.

Q: Oh, yes.

BARRY: Because I was parachuted in on them by Eagleburger and they had had somebody in mind themselves to go out there.

Q: I can't remember, Bob, had you had any Asian experience at all?

BARRY: No, none whatever.

Q: Well, you'd been to Eastern Bulgaria I guess.

BARRY: That's about as far East as I got. But they were cordial in accepting me.

Q: Well, you were by the way in Indonesia from '92 to when?

BARRY: The summer of '95.

Q: Before you went out, you did your reading and getting briefed?

BARRY: Did some Indonesian language training and so forth, but I also spent a lot of time with the business community because I was in the process of remaking myself for the third time. I had remade myself from an arms control Soviet specialist into a transitional development assistance person and then the now third remaking was to be a promoter of American business. We had lots of big business interests there ranging from oil companies to mining companies and a lot of power companies and that kind of thing.

Q: When you were getting ready to go out did you sort of without anybody telling you or did you mentally have your own list of agenda in your portfolio when you went out there that you wanted to do?

BARRY: Well, having worked closely with Eagleburger, Eagleburger was very big on promoting American business. I didn't have to be told that, that should be my central priority in Indonesia. Of course, the other things, questions like human rights, trying to get military training, the IMET program going again and the overall problem of trying to understand a very diverse huge country which I had never known anything about before. In fact, when I first came home to tell Peggy that we were going to Indonesia, I bought a book on the way home that told me for the first time that Bali was in Indonesia which rather delighted Peggy. Actually the first experience we had in Indonesia was a truly remarkable one because we got to know various people who had a long acquaintance with Indonesia and one of them called up one day and said oh you must go to the cremation. I didn't understand what she was talking about, I thought she meant coronation, but no, cremation. Indeed we did. It was the raja of Bali and they have periodically ritual cremations for people who have died, not just one person, but hundreds of people at a time. So, even before presenting my credentials, we went off to Bali and went through this truly remarkable ceremony. Thousands and thousands of people and they build these huge cremation towers.

Q: Pyres?

BARRY: Well, not pyres. They are, well they are several stories high, depending upon the dignity of the person being cremated. Each one of them is carried by a thousand people because they are so huge. So, we went there and we went to the palace of the raja, a very educated person who had been the foreign minister of Indonesia back in the '50s and were welcomed into his family and we went through a ceremonial dinner for 5,000 people and then all of these pyres were carried up to a hill where they were burned. The raja invited me to the position of honor sitting next to him where he smoked a big Monte Cristo cigar watching the pyre go up; then all of the ashes were gathered together and taken down to the coast where they were put in outrigger canoes and sent out into the sea where they were scattered on the ocean. Going up the hills they had to zigzag because they wanted to make sure that the spirits got confused and didn't find their way back somehow. So, it was an amazing experience. That was my first lesson in the diversity of Indonesia. Of course, the Balinese are Hindu, not Muslim. There is a variety of Hinduism I had never quite experienced before.

Q: What was sort of the position the governmental position both just sort of as a government, Suharto I assume at the time, but also what was that position and then what was the financial situation when you got there?

BARRY: Well, the Indonesian government was at that point rather annoyed with the U.S. because we had cut off military training and had said a number of critical things about them. This was still the Bush administration that just became more pronounced during the presidential campaign. The relationship with the U.S. had always been a close one particularly with U.S. business. In addition to Mobile's big LNG operation and this mining operation, the copper mine in Irian Jaya and another big oil operation in Sumatra. We just had a very active business community, probably 10,000 American businessmen living there at the time. What was the rest of the question?

Q: Well, I was just wondering, Suharto's role was firm, I mean, as we saw it at that time?

BARRY: It was very authoritarian. There was no crack in the facade. There was an opposition lead by Megawati Sukharoputri, the current president, but it had no traction and periodically her headquarters were burned down or something like that because the Suharto's forces were not allowing any opposition to take place. I mean this was a period of prosperity for Indonesia and certainly the positive part for Suharto period was although there was a lot of corruption and businesses had to do some unpleasant things, it was quite profitable for American businesses to be there, so the business community was happy with things as they stood.

Q: Were there any at that time because we're very close to the time, it wasn't just Indonesia, but Thailand and other places, I mean, there had been too many cozy loans, I mean the economy was not on firm ground. I'm talking about throughout Asia.

BARRY: That was later. In '92 none of that had appeared.

Q: So, was anybody I mean your economic counselor was saying, "Boy, we may have a problem here" or something like that?

BARRY: There were problems with the banking system as there always are in countries like that, but the income was going up. Essentially a lot of the work that was being done was for investment coming in businesses, which had migrated south. In other words, you started out with having a lot of labor intensive stuff done in Japan and then it moves to Thailand or Southeast Asia and then labor becomes too expensive there and it moves south to Indonesia or China. A lot of the controversy about Indonesia at that time was about outfits like Nike and what they did for their workers, or were going to do for their workers and controversy about then human rights. We did investigate some of those issues at the time.

Q: How about what was the impression you gained both through meeting and dealing with and your embassy with Suharto at the time?

BARRY: Suharto was a typical Javanese prince, that is his whole aura was, he didn't say very much, it was hard to draw him out on any subject. You had to deal with him through the foreign minister or his great protégé, B.J. Habibi, who later became president. Habibi was treated by Suharto like a son. He was unpopular with the military. There was no question that he was a charismatic person and a modernizer in the sense that he set up an Islamic organization which was a modernizing outfit called the Association of Muslim Intellectuals. A lot of my dealings with Suharto were through Habibi and I would make a suggestion about something they ought to do and he would go see Suharto and come back and tell me the decision. Even though I did spend a number of times in conversation with Suharto I seldom got anything.

Q: So, he wasn't in a way the man to see really, I mean, he might be the man to make his decisions, but you dealt with others.

BARRY: The vice president was a former commander of the army, the minister of defense when I got there was Benny Moerdani who had close ties with the U.S., but was strongly nationalist. The state secretary was the sort of path of communications with Suharto himself and Habibi was then the minister of science and technology. Those were the people to see.

Q: How did you find your embassy?

BARRY: It was a good embassy. Many of the people there were repeaters. One of the things about Indonesia is it is sort of addictive. People who go there usually come back again a second or a third time. My predecessor as ambassador had had three assignments in Indonesia.

Q: Who was that?

BARRY: John Monjo. He spoke fluent Indonesian. The DCM was on his second tour, the political counselor was on his second tour, the defense attaché was on his third tour and that kind of thing.

Q: Well, did you have to spend a bit of time sort of establishing yourself?

BARRY: Well, I did have to spend a lot of time traveling when I first got there. One of the first trips I made was from one end of Indonesia to the other. I was in Aceh first because it was the key place both in terms of the longstanding separatist trends in Aceh, but it was also where we had a major oil company interest. Then with Habibi on one of his airplanes I flew from Aceh all the way to Irian Jaya. A distance of some 4,000 miles. We had an attaché aircraft there we used that liberally to get around the country to get to know as many people as possible and to take with the embassy with you on all those trips.

Q: You mention Aceh, was there a rebellion going on at that time?

BARRY: There has been a constant state of rebellion going on in Aceh since the time of the Dutch. The Dutch lost more soldiers in Aceh than any other war the Dutch ever fought. So, all of those centrifugal forces were present then, but kept under control by Suharto.

Q: What was our thinking, were we concerned that some of these centrifugal forces might actually take place, in other words in Sumatra or at least part of Sumatra might peel off or something or was this?

BARRY: Well, I think it was a worry because of the example of Yugoslavia. When I came there it was known to Indonesians that I had previously been destined to go to Yugoslavia and so the press was saying oh well the Americans think we are going the way of Yugoslavia, that's why they're sending this guy here. Of course, later on we sent Bob Gelbard there after he had been the czar of the Balkans and that sort of underlined that idea. It wasn't anything we particularly wanted to see happen. We could foresee if there were such an event that would take place, it would be very bloody.

Q: But, we didn't see it, I mean when you look at Yugoslavia, you know this is going to be a very destabilizing within that part of Europe all over, at least that's the potential. Did we see if Indonesia fell apart, this would cause problems?

BARRY: Well, we certainly saw it that way, but the Australians saw it a lot more clearly because if there were an event in that country ten times as large as Yugoslavia, the nearest place for the refugees to end up would be Australia.

Q: So, the concern was really more refugees?

BARRY: Well, no, the concern was, I mean, we knew that it would be very bloody. There would be lots of killing that would take place. You go back to 1965 the "Year of Living Dangerously," the word amok is the loan word that we have from Bahasa Indonesia and you'd still go around to the villages and you'd find somebody in a wooden cage in the middle of the village and the explanation was this was somebody who had run amok. Once an Indonesia runs amok he reaches for his machete and goes after the neighbors. As we saw and as we see now in places like Mallaca.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the business community. What did they want from the embassy and what could the embassy do for them?

BARRY: Well, concretely we could give them lots of advice, we could intervene on their behalf with the key players to get permission for various things to be done. For example, the idea of private electric power generation was just getting started and there was an American company called Mission Energy that wanted to build a very large combined cycle power plant. When it came to getting permission to do that kind of thing there was potentially a lot of corruption involved. There was potentially the idea that you had to get one of Suharto's children involved in the thing so we were called on in that case to try to run interference for them. This was GE who was ready to put some capital into this, but they wanted some

assurances that this was going to work out all right, so Jack Welch came to Indonesia and asked.

Q: He was the CEO of General Electric?

BARRY: CEO of General Electric. He wanted my advice about whether he ought to go ahead with this thing or not. This was the inception of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC and the first APEC summit had been held I think in Malaysia, but the APEC summit was scheduled for Indonesia in 1993 and Clinton came to that summit. We were active in trying to promote APEC and trying to insure that the climate for business was improved and the corruption was kept under control and so forth.

Q: How did American business particularly at the top level deal with the fact that Suharto's family, the sons and daughters were seen to be involved in everything? I mean it was a form of, it was corruption, I mean, but.

BARRY: Well, they dealt with it very carefully because of the foreign corrupt practices legislation. Take for example, Mission Energy, they would not allow any Suharto relatives to get in on the deal, but their coal contract was with a company which had Suharto's children's involvement in it. Probably they paid an excessive price for the coal, but it was that kind of arm's length relationship. One of the biggest interests was the Freeport Macmoran copper and gold mine in Irian Jaya, truly remarkable thing. Irian Jaya is very mountainous and this particular copper mine was about 3,500 meters. There was even a glacier there almost on the equator. The CEO of Freeport Macmoran was sort of a remarkable figure from Louisiana, best known for his Elvis interpretations.

Q: Elvis Presley, yes, deceased star, rock and roll star.

BARRY: Anyhow, he would periodically come out in his private 767 and distribute liberal gifts around to everybody, but not of the kind that was sort of an envelope full of money, but he was sort of skating along the edge of foreign corrupt practices act I suspect.

Q: For one thing, we're talking about the foreign corrupt practices act which we were the first to put this sort of thing in and it was considered to make us operate at a considerable disadvantage?

BARRY: Oh, well, that's quite true, it did because none of our major competitors were under the same kind of constraints. The OECD finally did put into place a requirement that bribing be criminalized, but that was well after I left, so say the French Total Oil Company or the Siemens which also had many interests in the country, they were certainly actively into corruption.

Q: In a way, say the Indonesians and this probably worked in other countries, sort of understand the rules we operated in, I'm talking about at the bigger level and we were still getting contracts because we could come up with a pretty good deal or not?

BARRY: Yes, I mean, when we told them several times that yes, you can get a deal from Siemens, for example, and there will be some payback for you, but the deal will be much more expensive because there is no free lunch. The money for the bribes gets added onto the contract price. Also, I think for political reasons the Indonesians felt it was desirable to have the Americans involved as much as possible in the country. The business connection was valuable.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Suharto family, the sons and daughters and all?

BARRY: I stayed away from them. I did know the son-in-law Prabowo who was a general in the army and had been the commander in East Timor for some time and we did run into some of the children at social occasions, but I never entertained them.

Q: I mean, was this sort of a deliberate thing? I mean, these people, there was an odor about them that you wanted to watch out for?

BARRY: Absolutely.

Q: How about the East Timor situation? What was it when you arrived?

BARRY: There had been an outbreak of violence in East Timor occasioned by a visit by an American ambassador a couple or three years before. Ambassadors had not visited East Timor for the last couple of years before I arrived and I thought it was important to get out there and see it for myself. I went there early in my tour of duty and went back several times, three or four times. I traveled around the country and got to know the bishop and some of the missionaries that were working there. Of course I got to know the military commander both in East Timor and in Denpasar because the regional military command was there in Bali. Actually one of the things that I was proudest of during my tour of duty was the project we got started in East Timor which had been under the Portuguese. They had a lot of coffee plantations, but these coffee plantations had been neglected. The army was in charge of the Timorese economy, that's how they supplemented their income and they paid very little to the coffee growers for coffee and then sold it on the world market for much higher prices. Somebody who was a long term resident of Indonesia gave us the idea of organic coffee growing because they hadn't had fertilizers because they were too poor and the kind of coffee grown there was a high value coffee so in fact with some funding from AID we got this thing started and it grew very fast. We bypassed the army for marketing. Eventually Starbucks, for example, began to buy some of this organically grown Timorese coffee.

Q: Just for the record, Starbucks being an American coffeehouse chain, extensive coffeehouse chain.

BARRY: Anyhow, several thousand people eventually got involved in this and I understand that it is thriving today in independent East Timor. So, we were looking around for things like that, projects that were going to generate income for the Timorese and loosen the grip of the army on the economy out there. Also, we were constantly on the backs of the army about excessive force being used in trying to deal with the Timorese insurgency. The head of that

insurgency Xanana Gusmao was captured or surrendered to the Indonesian military in '94 I guess it was and jailed. Eventually with a visiting congressman we went to see him in prison to insure that he was being well treated. Of course, he is now the president of East Timor. One of the highlights of my time there was just on the eve of Clinton's arrival for the APEC summit when a whole bunch of Timorese jumped over the fence of the embassy and set up camp on the embassy grounds. We had to intervene quite vigorously to keep the army from trying to come into the embassy grounds and haul these guys out. Eventually when Clinton came they were still on embassy territory and they were demanding to meet with Clinton and talk about East Timor.

Q: These were East Timorese?

BARRY: Yes. Then after Clinton left we had the issue of trying to make sure that they did not leave the embassy grounds and go directly to jail. Eventually, they were allowed to leave and many of them went to Portugal.

Q: How were we getting news? Did we get much news about what was happening in East Timor?

BARRY: Well, this was the age of the Internet so a lot of the information came through the Timorese emigres, some of them from Australia and some from Portugal. We had embassy people there quite often. The Australians had somebody in residence there who worked on aid issues. Of course we had the largest intelligence organization in the world there, the Catholic church and spent a lot of time talking to the papal nuncio, who traveled back and forth fairly often. Of course Bishop Belo was one of the leading pro-independence people in East Timor and we had a lot of contacts with him. I knew the governor pretty well and when the governor would come to Jakarta he would call on me and when I went there I would talk to him. He had been educated under the Portuguese, the first governor, and the second governor, and came from more proletarian class. I guess he had been a truck driver before, but in time he became sort of a confidant and would come to me despite what he had to say publicly about the magnificent Indonesia rule and would talk about what needed to be done to give them more running room.

Q: As you were there, where did you see East Timor going? Independence, war, sovereignty, get the army out, I mean what?

BARRY: Well, I tried to persuade the Indonesians that it was much in their interest to let East Timor go, that it was clearly a drain on the economy that was damaging their reputation internationally and the foreign minister certainly agreed with that and periodically would try to intervene with Suharto to try to make that case to him, but the military felt very differently about it partly because they were so much involved in the economy. The military budget of Indonesia is about 30% of the cost of the military and so the military commanders were required to make up the rest of their expenses from the local economy. East Timor was a leading source of income. The army argued and Suharto believed that once you let one province of Indonesia go, the rest of them were going to want to break away, too. This goes back to the 1950s when the CIA was involved with an operation in support of Mallacan

independence and a federated Indonesia. In fact, we got caught with a CIA person flying a bombing mission a la the Bay of Pigs and that whole episode was still fresh in the minds of many.

Q: Which brings up a topic, how well do you feel you were served by your station?

BARRY: Quite fine. We didn't have any kind of major operation going on there. We were involved in some intelligence collection, but there was no policy difference of any kind. The defense attache was a very experienced person with lots of ties. One of the most respected Americans in Indonesia had been a three time defense attache named George Benson who had very, very close ties with all of the military. He was at that point a retired colonel and he was involved in advising oil companies and other businesses. He came all the time to see the generals. He would come and talk to me and talk to John Hazeman who was the defense attache then at my time. When it came time to try to get a message across to the military it was often most effective to send our defense attache over and say, "Look, now I'm on your side. I've been trying to get military training restarted, I've been trying to improve ties with the defense department, but you've got to understand that if you do this, the reaction is going to be that" and I think that restraining the military, for example, from trying to break into the embassy and seize the East Timorese.

Q: What was the training issue? You've mentioned this a number of times.

BARRY: Well, ever since 1948 we've been involved in a close relationship with the Indonesian military. We were of course in 1946 or '47 leading advocates of Indonesian independence from the Netherlands. Then because of the domino theory, we were involved in the strengthening of the Indonesian military, sending them equipment such as C-130s and training many of their officers here in both military and political military issues. It was the so-called International Military Education and Training, IMET. The year before I got there we had canceled IMET because of the human rights issue.

Q: The human rights issue being focused on East Timor?

BARRY: No, in general the military was involved in governments at the provincial level and they were heavy handed, not only in East Timor, but also in Aceh and Sumatra and anyplace where there was sort of rumbling of dissent, the military often went in with excessive force. This caused a great deal of unhappiness especially among outfits like Amnesty and in the congress there was a move to cut this off and by the time I got there it had been cut off and there was a lot of resentment on the Indonesian side. The U.S. military was unhappy about it, too. Of course, that was the age of the CINCs and CINCPAC, commander-in-chief, Pacific came frequently to Indonesia. The right of passage of U.S. war ships through Indonesian waters was very important to us and of course we had our special forces that came and trained in Indonesia and so trying to restart the relationship was a priority of mine. One of my predecessors twice removed was Paul Wolfowitz who was at that point Under Secretary of Defense in the Bush administration and of course he had an active interest in this whole thing.

Q: Well, while you were there in the '92 to '95 period were you ever able to get it restarted?

BARRY: Partly. We got something called expanded IMET, which concentrated, on training in human rights. So, they would come to a war college or something like that, but they would take a curriculum that had a lot of international military law and stuff like that.

Q: Did you see while you were there the Indonesian military changing its approach? Do you think they were getting the message?

BARRY: Several of them did. The younger generation of people I think were beginning to reform, but there was a category of people around Moerdani who had been the previous head of the army who were very nationalist and they were very afraid that any kind of loosening of the ties would end up in the disintegration of the country.

Q: What about Australia? It was the other.

BARRY: Well, the Australians and the Japanese were the two other major countries involved. Japan had, as you can imagine, very extensive investments and the Japanese sent some of their most able diplomats there. Their ambassadors there were top notch and likewise the Australians. Of course, they were all knit together in APEC.

Q: Well, I would imagine that the Japanese would be completely, almost completely focused on trade?

BARRY: Well, of course they were interested in protecting their investments and the Indonesians were heavily in debt to Japan so they wanted to make sure that the debt service was taken care of. But, in order to do that they had to be interested in the politics of the situation in order to make sure and there was really no difference in outlook between say myself and the Japanese ambassadors there about need of some kind of reform process.

Q: The Australians, how did you see their role in it?

BARRY: Australia unlike the United States recognized the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia back in '75 and so they were inclined to downplay the Timorese issue although quite conscious of the fact that it was something that might come an issue in the longer term. I don't think their outlook was much different from our own.

Q: How did the when you shortly after you arrived there they had the APEC?

BARRY: It was a year after I arrived.

Q: And Clinton came and all, what was your impression even beforehand of the Clinton administration approach? Was there a different one?

BARRY: Well, initially of course the issue of human rights was greater than it had been, Clinton had said some things during the campaign about independence for East Timor and things like that, but there was an interesting sidebar here because when Clinton had been

governor of Arkansas, one of the leading Indonesian business banking families (I should say Indonesian Chinese because they were like many of the rich people in Indonesia a Chinese family), the Riadys had bought a bank in Little Rock and became quite close to Clinton. So, James Riady went to the inauguration and I remember seeing a film clip of himself with Clinton. He emerged as a channel to the Clinton White House which later turned into a scandal because the Riadys contributed money to the campaign. That was one of the things that was investigated during one of the many investigations going on in the Clinton period. The Riadys, being Chinese, were critical of a lot of the things that Suharto and the military did, but they were critical quietly and they were in the meantime doing deals for example with Wal-Mart to open a big retail outlet in Indonesia and building big housing developments and things like that. I guess when Clinton was there for the summit he had an unpublicized side meeting with the Riadys, went to their house and so forth. It caused the Suharto government to treat the Riadys more leniently than they might have otherwise.

Q: Oh, the games. Did you have, Winston Lord I guess was Assistant Secretary for East Asia. What did he have, did he have much interest in East Asia?

BARRY: Well, he did, but he was I think never quite pleased with his own role in Indonesia. He had been on the trip that Ford made to Indonesia in 1975 and Henry Kissinger had been on the same trip when Lord was Kissinger's executive assistant. It was widely rumored, but never admitted, that in 1975 the Indonesians had given Ford and Kissinger and Lord advance notice of their intention to move into East Timor. They had gotten if not a green light at least a yellow light. Now it has come out as some of the papers from that period have been released that the response of Kissinger or Ford was, "Well, if you're going to do it, do it quickly and get it over with." Of course, subsequently, Lord and his wife in particular had become major human rights activists and so the issue of what had transpired then was a sensitive one and I think colored some of his approach to Indonesia.

Q: He didn't want to get too involved?

BARRY: There weren't really any big geopolitical issues at the time that would have required this. It was kind of as I would say off the beaten track in terms of congress and things like that.

Q: What about Islamic fundamentalism. Was that a concern or not?

BARRY: No, not much. This is a very syncretic form of Islam. Much of Indonesia has got Islam late, in its period of decline. Much of Islam came to Indonesia from China, not from Saudi Arabia or places like that. One of my good friends at the time was Abdurahman Wahid, who later became president of Indonesia. He was the head of the largest Islamic organization. He was a graduate of the University in Cairo and so forth, but a very moderate person. I remember once that he and I were meeting with a bunch of Islamic youth and they were going on about the terrible things in Israel and how awful the Jews were and he took out after them in no uncertain terms and called them all stupid and said, "If you people were half as creative and well educated as the people your age in Israel, this country would be a lot better off." There had been a period back in the '50s when the Islamic political parties wanted to do

things like bring in Sharia law, but that was stopped by both Sukarno and later Suharto. The military was a very secular organization and was very cautious about political power of the Islamic parties. In Aceh there was some movement in the direction of fundamentalist Islam, but again it was suppressed by the military.

Q: What about the indigenous Chinese? What was the situation of them?

BARRY: Well, I remember in '65 when 500,000 of them were killed. Most people think of overseas Chinese as being the rich businessmen and indeed among the rich businessmen most of them were Chinese, but there are also poor Chinese and you can go to any of the provinces around the country and find, the Chinese may be involved in trade, but they certainly weren't doing well by it. They ran the kiosks and things like that. So, there was a lot of resentment and periodically when I was there, there was a big riot in Sumatra where the people went out and burned the Chinese stores and houses.

Q: Were the Chinese important politically, the rich Chinese or did they keep out of it?

BARRY: Only behind the scenes. They were important because they were closely tied to the Suharto family and most of the things that were done with the Chinese was in partnership with somebody in the Suharto clan, but they couldn't pretend to any kind of public political position because it was too unpopular.

Q: Were you still having to deal with the allegation that we supplied the Indonesians with a death list in '65?

BARRY: It came up occasionally from one source or another, but you know, I had it on good advice that even by a person who was primarily accused of this, Bob Martens, that there was no truth to this. There are some people in the U.S. who still held that view.

Q: What about Cornell during that Sukarno period and for a while afterwards, Cornell was one of the major intellectual centers regarding Indonesia and the United States, the university and usually cast a very critical eye on what we were doing and all. Was the Cornell syndrome still going or not?

BARRY: Well, my Deputy Barbara Harvey was a product of Cornell. She had studied at Cornell and later taught in Australia and she was somebody I particularly selected as somebody who really knew her way around. She'd done a lot of research on that period.

Q: I mean was Cornell still kind of the powerhouse regarding American intellectuals?

BARRY: Well, no, by this time the graduates of Cornell had spread out around the country I guess there was an important center at Northwestern. There were of course the people in Indonesia, the technocrats, who were in charge of the economy were known as the Berkeley mafia because they had studied at Berkeley and the leading people of academics who came out were, yes, there were Cornell people among them, but they were not predominant.

Q: How about the Philippines? Did the Philippines play much of a role I mean they are both two large island nations and all, did they clash at all?

BARRY: Well, they weren't clashing, they were in APEC together, but, well you have to understand that Suharto he felt his role as the senior person of the largest country in the region gave him the right to be the leader of Asan in which he often clashed with Mahatir in particular.

Q: In Malaysia.

BARRY: There was absolutely no love lost between them. It goes back of course to the period of confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia, Mahatir was on the verge of boycotting the APEC summit in Indonesia and there was a lot of criticism flying back and forth between the two. As far as the Philippines were concerned, there wasn't much going on.

Q: You weren't having to, I mean nobody was, there were no big island disputes or anything like that?

BARRY: Not really. There were some with Malaysia, particularly concerning the border between Northern Borneo and Kalimantan.

Q: Was this the time when we were beginning or had withdrawn from the Philippines?

BARRY: Yes, we had withdrawn and that was one of the reasons why over flight and naval port visits and so forth in Indonesia were important to the U.S. military. We had some ships that used to come into Indonesian shipyards for repair, mostly to keep the Indonesian shipyards busy. On one occasion we had a carrier in the area so we flew a lot of the senior Indonesians to the carrier and they got to watch our carrier flight operations and so forth. That kind of military to military and political military contact was important.

Q: Were we thinking of perhaps in time of some crisis that we couldn't even think about at that time but keeping the relationship up with Indonesia because it might be occupying a good piece of real estate?

BARRY: Oh yes, that had been a consistent factor of our relationship with Indonesia for 50 years and it occupied a huge piece of real estate and it was very important to us to be able to use that for innocent passage at least.

Q: Were there any other things, issues that I haven't?

BARRY: There was a period there soon after the Clinton administration when Clinton had the idea of appointing the ex-governor of Hawaii to my job and they had even asked for agreement from him and then it turned out to be politically undoable because he had gotten into a big fuss with Jesse Helms before about flying the Hawaiian flag above the American flag at the capital and there were issues about the money and so forth. So, that all went away, but there was a period when I thought my term of duty was going to be cut short.

Q: There's nothing more satisfying than being an ambassador and having a new president come in and pick somebody whose going to hang around for a while and become controversial.

BARRY: Well, in the event one of my old colleagues and friends, Stape Roy was ambassador in China at the time. He had been scheduled to go on to Thailand, but as my tour of duty came to an end they decided to send him to Indonesia instead, so it was a very amicable turnover.

Q: Well, then you left there in 1995?

BARRY: Yes, and by that time I had been career minister for something like 12 years so failing another appointment that I had to retire and so I did and got involved in some business operations with Ivan Selin.

EDMUND McWILLIAMS
Political Counselor,
Jakarta, Indonesia (1996-1999)

Mr. Williams was born and raised in Tennessee and educated at Atlanta University, the University of Illinois and Howard University. After newspaper work in Atlanta, he went to Washington, DC, where he served several assignments on Capitol Hill before joining the State Department in 1962. There he served in the Office of Protocol and as Staff Assistant and Special Assistant in several departments dealing primarily with management issues. After his resignation from State, Mr. Williams in 1968 joined the University of Chicago as Assistant Vice President, where he was involved in the creation of the Universities Joint Center for Poverty Research. Mr. Williams was interviewed by Ambassador Ronald Palmer in 1994.

Q: Well, can you talk- first place, could you talk about the regime, who was in charge, who was doing what?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Well Suharto had taken over in a strange coup environment back in 1965. There is still historical debate as to who initiated the coup and how it was that Suharto became the great victor in this coup scenario but there's no question about the fact that it was an extremely bloody affair where over half-a-million people probably died in this coup attempt, principally victims of the military and some Islamic militias that they had formed. And we proceeded to work very close with Suharto in two senses. Certainly we helped his military, had a very close relationship with his military through the years but also we saw this as a great platform for development by U.S. companies. Big U.S. companies went in, extractive industries principally, oil and gas but also of gold and copper and so on. So it was a very friendly environment for the major corporations, it was a very close military-to-military relationship.

Things began to become difficult only in 1991 when there was a massacre in East Timor involving the Indonesian military where they killed well over 270 peaceful students. And it turned out that a couple of American journalists were actually there and there was a German who was filming this. And it became kind of a cause celebre back here and finally I think what had been a longstanding concern about human rights generally in Indonesia came to a head and restrictions were put upon our ability to work with the Indonesian military. And this came in 1992. And really from 1992 until just a few months ago, in late 2005, there have been restrictions on our cooperation which I very much supported.

But this takes us to say, late '96, I'd been there about six months and the embassy wrote a message arguing very strongly for a reinstatement of the military-to-military relationship, specifically with the IMET program, International Military Education and Training program for the Indonesian military. And I felt this was wrong, I felt that we hadn't seen any real reform and I wrote a dissent on that and it was initially, I thought, well received by the ambassador, not by his DCM but the message went out as a dissent. It was a Friday night I recall and I thought well this was pretty good, the ambassador was true to his word, that he would allow dissenting perspectives to go out as he had allowed a lot of our reporting to go out that was essentially setting a new picture for Indonesia. But at the end of the day I got word from his secretary that he wanted me and my team to stay in the office past closing time. And he came down and pulled us all into my deputy's room and began a ranting lecture saying that he was very dissatisfied with the political section, that it wasn't reporting what he felt needed to be reported and so on and so on, loud and intimidating. And he was very clear this was a consequence of my dissent earlier in the day. So we listened to this for three or four minutes of this I said Mr. Roy, I think you don't want to talk to my team, you want to talk to me. So let's go over to my office and talk this out. And he sort of said well okay. And as I went out I remember I slammed the door and then slammed my own door behind him and essentially lectured him and said this isn't right, this is not right. This is, first of all, this is not the way you respond to dissent and number two, you don't intimidate my team which has done a great job, you talk to me, you deal with me. And that, I think established a good relationship because we became well, I took evermore a dissenting perspective there on lots of issues but I think there was sort of a baseline respect between the two of us from that moment forward.

I might say my team, after he left our suite, was very shook up and I remember one of the members of my team saying, you know, in the future if I ever want to dissent I should talk it out with the team and I think I took the position essentially that, you know, they or I could and should dissent when we felt it was necessary because they agreed with my perspective on this but they hadn't anticipated the consequences. But it was just one of a series, I think I've had four or five major dissents in my career and each one has been problematic but I think that was the most confrontational that I encountered.

Q: Well did you find, I mean when you look at this, I mean we're talking about aging regimes and all you do is look across, you know, look over to your right or whatever, look to your east and see the Philippines where you had a parallel. I mean, I understand Mrs. Suharto was Mrs. Five Percent or something.

MCWILLIAMS: Ten percent.

Q: Excuse me, ten percent.

MCWILLIAMS: Ibu Tien.

Q: I mean, corrupt as all hell. I don't know as she went for shoes the way Imelda Marcos did.

MCWILLIAMS: No, that wasn't the problem.

Q: But the point being that here were regimes that started out rather promising and over periods of time just got worse and-

MCWILLIAMS: I guess-

Q: Maybe it isn't promising.

MCWILLIAMS: I think frankly when you consider the regime, the Suharto regime, began with a bloodbath, which we overlooked essentially, and of course this was the Cold War period, we were just getting involved in Vietnam and so on, but I'm not sure that the Suharto regime was ever a good regime. It was good in the sense that it made space for our firms and it worked with us in an anti-communist way. When it invaded East Timor it was done in the context of overthrowing an incipient leftist regime in East Timor and so on. But I'm not sure it was ever a good regime. You've made reference to Ibu Tien, Suharto's wife. I just wrote a review of a book about the presidency in Indonesia and I make the argument, and it's not my own it's one that I picked up from Indonesians that Ibu Tien, who died in 1996 or late '95 really was the one who held the regime together because what happened after her death was that the children of Suharto and Ibu Tien became rampantly corrupt, blatantly corrupt. They'd always been corrupt but she'd always sort of held it in, to some extent held the reigns so that they wouldn't compete with one another, that it wouldn't be too blatant, that it wouldn't be scandalous. She kept sort of a bit of a hold on them. When she disappeared Suharto was not able to restrain his own kids and they became blatantly corrupt, competing with one another in various sectors and I think first of all it was known among the local population but it became ever more an irritant. But what Suharto had relied on all those years was an elite within Jakarta, business elite essentially, that he had basically promoted and helped and so on but I think even they became scandalized at what the family was doing. So I think in the very brief period from her death in late '95, early '96 until his fall in '98 the corruption became a very critical problem. Of course there was also the financial crash in '97 to which he did not respond well, nor did we I might add. And so I think the combination of definite economic downturn for Indonesia plus the scandal-ridden regime that he was operating, that prompted his removal. But again Ibu Tien I think was sort of a critical player. Had she lingered on she might have been in a position to keep some of the scandals off the front page that was essentially prompted by her family.

Q: Well let's take a look at our attitude. By '90- you got there in '90-

MCWILLIAMS: Six.

Q: Six. So we're talking about the Cold War was definitely over.

MCWILLIAMS: Oh yes. Totally over.

Q: And we were making nice to Vietnam at that time or at least-

MCWILLIAMS: Clinton clearly was trying to restore a relationship.

Q: Yes. And so there weren't external pressures and also terrorism was not-

MCWILLIAMS: Terrorism was not an issue.

Q: -was not an issue so what was there- you see what I'm getting at.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Well, you know, I think, as I said earlier, to some extent it was autopilot. I think that the old Indonesia clique in the State Department and to some extent in the Pentagon genuinely liked working with the Suharto regime, they knew how to deal with these people. As corrupt as they were it was an old relationship, often personal relationships, that things just kind of kept going on autopilot. In addition there was a think called the U.S. Indonesia Society, still is, in Washington, heavily financed by corporations who are invested in Indonesia. They acted as an ally to the old Indonesia network in the State Department and the Pentagon to sort of keep things as they are. It was a comfortable relationship for them. I think they didn't take into full account and what we were trying to do with our reporting was to reveal the incredible discrepancy between the wealthy and the poor in Indonesia, the abysmal record of the military which was truly a human rights abuser of enormous proportions like in East Timor and so on. I think it was, as I say, autopilot but also, and this I think was an addition from Ambassador Roy drawing from his China experience, he saw Indonesia, as did I think some people in Washington, as a potential ally in a possible confrontation with China. A rising China might constitute a genuine threat to the region and we're looking for allies particularly an Asian and Indonesia was a logical counterbalance, counterweight to Chinese influence in Southeast Asia particularly given the fact that Indonesians were basically not very fond of the Chinese even on an ethnic level.

Q: Yes well, I mean, of course, you know, they had these riots again and again.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: I mean, as in the Philippines.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: Which were basically anti-Chinese.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Well, when we speak about that massacre in 1965-67 at the time of the coup most of the victims were Chinese.

Q: Yes.

MCWILLIAMS: Anyhow.

Q: What- can you talk about during your time, East Timor?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. I think probably, at least in the early stages, the first year or two, that was the principle bone of contention between myself, my section I should say, and the military in the embassy. Because it was a horrific story, tremendous abuses going on out there. And for many years there had been I think growing concern in Congress, certainly in the press about what the Indonesians were doing to East Timor and the embassy for many years had acted as a defender, an advocate for the regime, trying to basically defeat these arguments that in fact Indonesia was guilty of human rights abuse on a grand scale in East Timor. Our reporting, and I had a particularly good officer, Gary Gray, who was out there, spoke Portuguese which helped a lot, as well as great Bahasa, and his reporting was particularly well done and I think established a baseline of much better understanding what was going on in Indonesia for Washington. There was in the summer of '97, excuse me, summer of '98 an opportunity to write another dissent in which I proposed that we begin thinking about advocating a referendum in East Timor. Not well received at the embassy, not well in Washington. I had a conversation subsequently with the assistant secretary in the fall of '98 in which he said look, I agree with what you've said, I've agreed you know, morally, historically you're right, but I just don't believe East Timor is economically viable and therefore I think an argument for a referendum which might lead to independence is just not going to work. And I undertook to write for him a long message which looked at the economic question, viability of East Timor, anticipating oil and gas revenues and so on. Oddly enough I published this, I sent out this very long report, 20-some pages on the very day that, in January that President Habibie announced that he was going to allow a referendum in East Timor. And I know there was great thinking in the embassy and I understand subsequently in Washington that somehow I had advance word of that; it was just a coincidence. But it was from that point forward, January, that we began to look to a referendum that would be monitored by the United Nations in East Timor which along with the fall of Suharto was one of the two great events of those three years that I had there.

Q: Keep with the Timor thing, I want to come back to the political thing.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: What about the Australians and this because they played quite a role? I mean, they, I mean it was a border town, a border city, a border country.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Australia had been, even more than I think we had been, a supporter of the Jakarta policy in East Timor. They had made a deal in the '70s whereby they drew a line between their oil and Indonesia's oil which was quite beneficial to them but the quid pro quo for that was essentially a policy that would support Suharto's occupation of East Timor. So they were not friends of East Timor but essentially Habibie, who was not highly regarded by anybody, changed the game because here was Indonesia finally saying well, let's have a referendum. So

you had U.S. policy and Australian policy which had long essentially acquiesced in Suharto's occupation of East Timor now looking at a very new situation in which a referendum was coming.

I think the critical issue as it emerged up until that referendum was actually held in September of '99 was how we would deal with the growing military repression in East Timor in advance of the referendum, the intimidation, the killing and so on. Again, I had a reporter, Gary Gray out there much of the time who did a wonderful job talking about what was in fact growing militia attacks against civilians, militias obviously organized by the military against civilians. I went out there quite frequently also to support his reporting but unfortunately what we needed to that point was a strong U.S. position essentially telling the military to knock it off, that we were aware that they were setting up these militias basically as cat's paw to intimidate the local population into voting the way Jakarta wanting them to vote and so on, and we had massacres of over 50 people in this period, a very, very rough situation. But unfortunately the U.S. never actually took a hard line with the Indonesian military about stopping these militias which were conducting these killings. Our argument was, in the political section, you've got to disband these militias and get rid of them whereas the embassy took the line favored by the DAT's office, the defense attaché's office that well, we just have to counsel with these people and you know, encourage Aubry, TNI as it became to be more responsible here and get the facts and so on. And as a consequence the United States didn't take an opportunity to require the military to reign in these militias in advance of what happened in September which was a mass killing of East Timor as a consequence of their vote for independence.

Q: How did you find in East Timor and also in West Irian, the role of the NGOs, various UN and all of that? I mean, were these kind of essential elements in monitoring this vast island empire?

MCWILLIAMS: Very much so. Again, because we were so limited in terms of what we could do on the ground, especially in Papua, because getting there was 13 hour flight and frankly was very expensive and there were limitations on how often I could go out there. I had given myself responsibility for West Papua on the team so as a consequence we relied very much on local NGOs. The Indonesians had pretty much prevented international NGOs from operating in places like Aceh or East Timor or West Papua. As a consequence we relied very much on local organizations which were often harassed and the ICRC which in East Timor played a very important role.

Q: Why would they be an International Red Cross?

MCWILLIAMS: The International Committee of the Red Cross, they had a very shaky position in East Timor essentially at international community insistence, basically hanging on by their fingertips but they did a good job there. They were, and of course we would rely on contacts with journalists. There was a particularly good- as things began to fall apart in Indonesia you had more and more international journalists based in Jakarta and we had a very good relationship with them in the political section and fed off each other very much, frankly, for what was going on. So we were able to use NGOs and journalists and I might say also local clergy very extensively. In East Timor, of course, you had Bishop Bello and the Church, which we were tightly tied in with. In West Papua it's essentially Animus Christian and both the Catholic and

the Protestant churches there were very active on the human rights side and we had very beneficial contacts with people who had credible reporting. You know, it's funny when you're reporting from an outpost like that if you can quote a doctor or a church person, any kind of religious clergy, somehow that gives you some authenticity. So we would seek out medical people or religious people for interviews.

Q: What about Ache?

MCWILLIAMS: Ache again, I had one officer assigned, actually two officers, there was a split, one went home and one stayed, working in Ache and again, it was a very difficult area for us because there was a burgeoning, well an ongoing conflict there but I think from our perspective East Timor had the higher draw on our reporting assets.

Q: What about Islam at that time? It was an Islamic state but I mean, how did this play from your perspective?

MCWILLIAMS: Islamic, in Indonesia Islam is not the aggressive political force, at least it wasn't them, that it has been and continues to be in much of the rest of the world. I think that's changing now. But for the most part it was a syncretic approach to religion and we were not dealing with fanatical Islam to any great extent. Just at the end of my tour that began to be apparent as the military began to develop some militias, as I've said like in East Timor and other places, which were specifically Islamic fundamentalist. In one instance particularly in a place called the Maluku Islands just as I was leaving the military sponsored the movement of several thousand Islamic militants to this largely Christian island enclave. As a consequence we had communal fighting there for several years which has led to the deaths of thousands of people. That was an example of the Indonesian military specifically lined to Islamic fundamentalism. But since my departure, of course, you've had a growth in Islam and political Islam in Indonesia. It was interesting, one of the young people on my, a very young person on my team, a woman took an interest in this and began exploring the pesantren, which is to say sort of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, actually visiting them, interestingly, as a woman and frankly as a Jewish woman. I always thought rather innovative and brave on her part but she did some very good groundbreaking, I think, really reporting on what was becoming then a more political approach to Islamic teaching in these essentially grade and middle level school scenarios. At the time we didn't recognize it well enough but I think we did a little reporting on it. Because of the financial crash the education system was very, very much weakened. Although nominally free people had to pay for their kids to be educated, to bribe teachers, to buy books, to buy uniforms and so on, it wasn't free as the Suharto regime contended. And the real crash for the economy meant that a lot of parents couldn't really fund the education of the children. So what happened was a lot of money came from the Middle East to establish these Islamic schools, these pesantren, and many of them were quite radical.

Q: Was this sort of a replica of the madrassa?

MCWILLIAMS: It's sort of like, yes.

Q: You know, the Saudis apparently had a lot of-

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Madrassa generally is thought to be sort of upper level education, virtually colleges whereas the pesantren would take you from the age of six. It's more primary school and middle school. Now some madrassa would actually have also very early education but for the most part when I speak of pesantren I'm talking about primary school, middle school. And that's where the money came in to essentially fund the set up of small schools, often in urban areas, usually led by fairly radical Islamic teachers, not particularly well-schooled teachers. But as a consequence you had a generation of Indonesians that were moving through these rather radical schools in much greater numbers than previously, I think to some extent as we look at the increasing Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia this was a source for some of that.

Q: Well were we able, you mentioned the young lady, Foreign Service officer who went, were we able to monitor this? Because my understanding is often a movement like this can sort of pass by-

MCWILLIAMS: No.

Q: -the knowledge of an embassy or a political section.

MCWILLIAMS: I think to a significant extent it did pass us by except for her reporting. Because she would actually sit down with students and talk with them--she had good Bahasa--and with the teachers and so on. And she picked up the fact that we were seeing this movement. And I, I forget whether it was her reporting or some of the reporting I had done, talking to scholars and so on because we had good contact with a number of religious teachers there including a former--the future president who had some of these concerns about radicalism sort of beginning to take shape in Indonesian Islamic society.

Q: Who's the name of this officer?

MCWILLIAMS: Shawn Dorman. She's retired. She retired early. She's now working as the deputy editor of the AFSA magazine, Foreign Service Journal. Oddly enough, all of my team members now, well now, four of the five of them, three of the five of them have retired early and I think it's particularly sad because every single one of them were superb.

It was interesting, just to give you one example of how things work in the Foreign Service, I guess. One of my officers, the one who had covered East Timor, at great personal risk because it was a very, very dicey situation out there, I had nominated for the political reporter of the year award and he got it. He was notified he'd won and he was invited back to Washington to accept the award, he notified his parents and so on and then four or five days later a message came out saying no, we've made a mistake, you didn't win. And I forget now what the screw up was but it was a political decision in Washington, not related to this particular individual or even his set of reporting but he had already of course informed his family he was coming back to accept this great award and that's how things work sometimes in the Foreign Service. We were aghast and we wrote petitions back saying this is absurd, make it a dual award, he deserves this. But anyway, he has since left the Foreign Service. And a stellar fellow who worked for me on politics in Indonesia has left the Foreign Service and Shawn has left the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, I mean, did you feel was this sort of dissatisfaction with the Foreign Service or was it just that-

MCWILLIAMS: Oh, on their part again, you'd have to talk with them but yes, I think to some extent. My own sense is again, both based on my own experience, I left in 2001, but in close talking with a lot of good friends, the Foreign Service is a different institution than what I think it was when I went in certainly.

Q: In what way?

MCWILLIAMS: I think it's very much an old bureaucracy, essentially it's very careerist. I think there is very little room for dissent now and I think people are basically punching tickets. I think the people remain very good people but the system, I think, is not serving the American people, serving its mission of keeping Washington policymakers informed.

I mentioned it earlier on in a very simplistic way, I think there's an emphasis on good news and trying to make the situation in the field fit the perspective and the shape of things as they're seen in Washington. I think there's a reluctance to change that, at least that's what I'm told by friends now.

Q: Well, to put this in more specific terms, do you feel this is because of the change in administration? We're now in the fifth or sixth year of the Bush II administration which seems to be far more oriented the way you say.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, there's very much a perspective that this is politics really drive promotions, particularly at senior level. That policy is set in Washington and you basically, there should not be reporting that challenges that policy in any sense. But I don't think this is only the problem of this administration. Again, my own experience which has been rather bloody in the '90s, well the late '80s, in Islamabad and subsequently in Indonesia, suggests to me that this is a system that, as I say, is not open to dissent, either formal dissent or even reporting that seems to go against the grain. I know I've been in touch with some people who actually monitor dissent in the formal sense and there are very few dissents now that are offered. You know, you think back to Vietnam and the scores of dissents that came from the Foreign Service about- and I mean these were dissents that were career enders in many cases. But the Iraq war, notwithstanding the very broad and I think well founded opposition to that war and to the way it was conducted, has produced nowhere near as many dissents. And I think that, from my perspective reflects on first of all the atmosphere, the environment that doesn't welcome dissent and I think also perhaps a change in the kinds of people who are in. Ever more now I think people don't come into the Foreign Service with the expectation of spending a full career here. They're going to punch a ticket in the sense in their broader careers and of course coming from the Foreign Service is great for lots of careers. But the people like myself and perhaps yourself that envisaged staying for their entire careers, that's rather rare now in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well let's go back to the political situation in Indonesia, I mean, basically the regime. Did you come out, I mean with the, I mean you were the new boy on the block-

MCWILLIAMS: Very much so.

Q: -in Indonesia politics, but you know, all of us look around and you couldn't help but look at the Philippines and some other places and aging dictators go, you know?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: I mean, you know, and usually there's something that follows that's not necessarily a replica of the regime before. Did you sort of come out with the idea well, you know, this guy's probably, Suharto's maybe on his way out or something like that?

MCWILLIAMS: Well again, I sort of described it earlier as events taking control. We were only, by I'd say early '98 monitoring the situation, I had proposed, our section had proposed that we begin to insist on some democratic reform just prior to the end but in point of fact that didn't happen. But I think the people were insisting on democratic reform. And Suharto was out. Not only that but I think for the first time there was really a flowering of criticism of what the old elite had done to Indonesia including the military, obviously very critical of the military and the military was very much on the defensive within Indonesia. I think also by virtue of what it did in East Timor in September, now this is after I left, in September of '99, destroying over 70 percent of the infrastructure of East Timor, killing 1,500 people, killing some foreigners, ex-pats died as well in this, as a consequence of that I think that in Washington there was a willingness and a readiness to basically shut off our cooperation with the Indonesian military. But what I found stunning was, now this is sitting back in Washington in a different job but monitoring the situation in Indonesia very closely, notwithstanding what had happened in September before the end of the year in '99, the Pentagon was again petitioning for reestablishing a relationship with the military. That basically has never not been the mindset in the Pentagon. This is the Clinton white house, of course. But I think essentially those people who had dominated our policy for years and years and years in Washington towards Indonesia essentially retained the same interests. That is to say to maintain as good a relationship as possible with the military and secure the environment for U.S. investment, major U.S. investment. And I think to this day that continues to be the dominating interests of our administration.

Obviously in the post-9/11 world a new element came into that which is to say concern about terrorism. Terrorism has become a growing problem in Indonesia, the Bali bombings twice now and bombings in Jakarta. And the Pentagon and the Bush administration generally have made the argument well, we need to work with the army to crush terrorism. Well, as the problem presents itself in Indonesia terrorism is a police problem, it's small cells, it's not like in the Philippines and the southern Philippines where you have armies roaming and so on where you need military _____. This essentially is a police problem and we've worked with the police, I think well, to develop their forensic skills and so on but nonetheless, and it's been defective in Congress to some extent, the Pentagon and the administration have argued that well we have this terrorism problem that means we have to work with the military. And a number of us who are on the NGO side now continue to argue that that really doesn't make sense, it's a police problem and number two we argue as well, that the Indonesian military itself has ties to Islamic fundamentalists which should give us pause.

Q: Talk about you arrived in what, '96?

MCWILLIAMS: '96 in January.

Q: And you were there until when?

MCWILLIAMS: Until July of '99.

Q: Okay. When you arrived can you talk about the political situation, leadership and all and what developed there?

MCWILLIAMS: Okay. When I arrived the Suharto regime was intact, there were no challengers or challenges to its rule, the only question being his health, he was in his middle to late 70s at that point but I think no one anticipated that he would not actually seek a new term, which he did, of office, extending his rule in '98. But I think what essentially changed that scenario, that understanding was the financial crisis in '97 and-

Q: This is '98?

MCWILLIAMS: This is '98. And we recognized that this is perhaps going to be the spark that sets things off and that's why there's tremendous interest in the State Department that night about what was going on. But the next morning the riots began and this is the riots, principally in Jakarta but also in Malang and elsewhere and it was three days of rioting, burning of buildings in which the military played a very interesting role, apparently actually organizing some of the rioting, which leads me still to think that the military did have in mind a situation in which there would be rioting- by the way, President Suharto was out of the country at that time at a meeting in Cairo, which was again very suspicious in my mind. But we had three days of terrible rioting and I remember in the first day our embassy switchboard started getting calls from Chinese residents of the city pleading for the U.S. embassy to help them, that they were being attacked in their rather Chinese compounds, Chinese sections of the city, women were being raped and killed and so on. And I recall having the secretary at the switchboard send the messages up to the political section so we're talking to people who are screaming for help and so on. Meanwhile most of us of course are out in the city trying to report what was going on as best we could. And I got a couple of these calls and I said, especially the English speaking ones, I said forward this up to the ambassador's office. He got a couple of these calls. And I went up at that point, I said you know, we've got a situation that's coming out of control here, can't we contact the military here to at least go into these Chinese quadrants of the city to sort of establish some control there because it seems to be worse there? So he said yes and moreover I'm concerned about Americans living in certain sections, try to get the military out there to, you know, defend these areas against what is just wide scale rampant rioting.

Anyway. We started making the phone calls, couldn't reach any of our military contacts, no one would answer the phone. And it was at that point, I think I had said to him, sir if we can't reach the military then we basically cannot defend Americans in the city and, you know, this is the time we need to start talking about evacuation. So in the middle of this growing rioting in the

city we began evacuation of the city of all Americans including the embassy staff, cutting way back on the embassy staff. But the thinking was that if we can't reach our supposed good friends in the military to act even to defend American citizens then this is not a stable situation for us.

Q: Well what was the reaction of our military attaché's office?

MCWILLIAMS: Interestingly they nominally were the ones attempting to contact the other military and not being successful at it. But some months after that I had been invited to a reception for the incoming new military attaché, a rather good fellow, and in making small talk with a lot of the senior military, this is post rioting, practically post Suharto regime, this is some months later, I had talked about, I was talking about the new fellow coming in, speaks good Bahasa but of course, I said to this one particular general, he doesn't have the great language skills of his predecessor, who really knew your society and knew the language and so on. And I got sort of a noncommittal response from him. And I sort of said well you worked with him I'm sure. He says well we never really knew him very well. And what the take was, was that first of all he was always very close to Suharto's son-in-law, a guy named Prabowo, who was a general, very corrupt fellow, and he was sort of a rising star because of his relationship to Suharto, very much disliked within the ranks of the military but to which our military attaché office essentially had attached itself. And this general said not only did we not know him well because he basically did his business through this one fellow but during the days of the rioting, did you know that he was with Prabowo in civilian clothes through most of the day, going from place to place? And frankly I didn't know that but I do recall him not being in the embassy during this critical first day of the riot. So the thinking was that unfortunately we had allied ourselves with elements within the military very close to this one commander, the son-in-law of the president, which might have seemed like a good idea but which alienated a lot of the other elements of the military who frankly resented the fact that this young son-of-a-bitch, forgive me for saying it, was rising so fast by virtue of his ties to the Suharto family. Anyway, it was a very complex environment.

Q: What happened?

MCWILLIAMS: Essentially the military belatedly stepped in. I think frankly the rioters simply got tired. After three days it began to quiet down. And the vice president, for whom no one had any respect, a fellow named Habibie, was moved in as the caretaker and did a reasonably good job.

Q: He was blind wasn't he?

MCWILLIAMS: No.

Q: No, this wasn't-

MCWILLIAMS: No, you're thinking of Wahid Gus Dur, who subsequently, yes, he was blind. But it was funny, people felt that when Habibie ran for president just before the rioting and so on took place, when I say ran for president, it's a parliamentary decision essentially, he had nominated this fellow Habibie, who nobody had respect for, who had frankly people felt he

might even be a little crazy, and the thought was that Suharto, being clever politically, recognizing in '98 he was in trouble, decided to put someone in as vice president whom they'd never want to succeed him but nonetheless he did. And he was a very strange fellow but ultimately I think a rather good caretaker and of course as I mentioned earlier he made that critical decision to subsequent in January of '99 to allow a referendum in East Timor to the great disgust of the military and many of the nationalists in Indonesia but ultimately I think a wise decision.

Q: And how did we respond to Habibie? He won the election or?

MCWILLIAMS: Well it wasn't- he basically moved up on virtue of having been vice president and we wanted a transition that would be constitutional and so on. So we, who had personally been sniping at him viciously for years in our embassy reporting suddenly had him as a president. But as I say I think he was something of a surprise. He was a radical and said crazy things. And I can remember some CODELs that went very badly with him. But he basically held the fort and held things together and we didn't have a military transition, thank goodness, and although he didn't make it in the next reelection, he was succeeded by the cleric, Abdurrahman Wahid Gus Dur, he was an interesting fellow who basically held things together.

Q: You mentioned congressional delegations. Particularly in areas like Indonesia, the Philippines and all, Congress plays quite a role and they have interests and-

MCWILLIAMS: Very much so.

Q: -often concerns about human rights and this sort of thing that embassies would almost prefer-

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: -not to deal with.

MCWILLIAMS: Very much the case.

Q: What was happening here.

MCWILLIAMS: Very much the case, very much the case in Indonesia. And the interesting thing that I found, and I've continued to work the Indonesia case really since '96, is that within Congress you have a very significant body of expertise about Indonesia, people who've gone to East Timor, gone to Indonesia, repeated trips sometimes, and there is, as you suggest, a very deep concern about human rights out there in the Congress and what I found striking and continue to be very pleasantly surprised about is that it goes across partisan lines. You have some of the very best friends of human rights in Indonesia, very conservative Republicans. At the same time you also have some very liberal democrats, progressive democrats, who are also dependable contacts and supporters for human rights in Indonesia, opponents of assistance to the military and so on. So it's frankly for me it was quite a revelation having always sort of been part of the executive administration to find first of all the degree of expertise on Indonesia that in fact was there in Congress but also the compassion, the concern, a willingness even to this day of

significant Republican players in Congress to buck the administration vis-à-vis its policies of supporting the military for example in Indonesia. So I come away, I think from my years of government experience with a lot of respect for

Congress, notwithstanding the problems that we all know too well of corruption and so on.

Q: What about congressional delegations during this critical time, this series of changes in the Indonesian government?

MCWILLIAMS: Well of course as you know when things get tough, when things are becoming unstable there is an effort by the State Department to sort of limit the number of CODELs, wisely I think, going out. So we didn't have in the really critical period too many staff dels or CODELs coming out. I do recall one though in particular, Chris Smith, who was a significant player on the House International Relations Committee then and now, a very conservative Republican out of New Jersey, had come out, had a long reputation of interest in human rights situation in Indonesia and I was able to put him together with Megawati and that went very well. They, I think he got- had a good impression of the kind of person she was and the people around her. I remember Mitch McConnell, another Republican coming out at that period. Again, I put them- put him together, I was his control officer, with Megawati's people, so that he had some sense that there is an alternative leadership that's not necessarily crazy, there's an alternative political future for Indonesia that's not necessarily military or Suharto family. I remember Madeleine Albright, now this is not a CODEL or staff del, coming out in, actually she came out in '99, this is after the change but she had a useful impact I think on our policy out there in that she had an opportunity to sit down with the East Timor leader, Xanana Gusmão, who was still in prison at that point, and I think had a very good impression of him, and as a consequence I think went back to Washington feeling that if in fact East Timor were to become independent there was a leadership there with which we could deal. Which was, I think, a pretty important understanding to have at the senior levels.

Q: Back on East Timor, as things developed, were you in consultation with the Australians?

MCWILLIAMS: There's an interesting episode there. Yes. Frankly, I had been very close to the Australians. I might add also the Canadians had a great embassy in Jakarta; small but great. But the Australians and this isn't so much a Jakarta problem, but actually the Australians had superb intelligence on what was developing in East Timor which for various reasons was not entirely shared with the U.S., which was really a breach of the confidential relationship we had at the international level for many years. There's a very involved story in which a defense attaché for Australian embassy here in D.C. was accused of having shared more than he should have shared with his American counterparts and as a consequence he was being called on the carpet for this, being pulled back, and he committed suicide here in Jakarta- here in Washington. Frankly I don't know the background of this because it wasn't set in Jakarta but although we had close relations with our friends in the Australians embassy there were problems in the relationship at that time.

Q: By the time you left what had happened?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, I left, unfortunately, just as things were breaking loose in July of '99. What I had done before I left my very good East Timor fellow, Gary Gray, had been reporting, I think very accurately, of the growing threat of the militias so I made one last trip out there in which I sought to see what was going on across the East Timor border in West Timor and made a trip from Dili, actually commandeering a taxi to do it to get me across the border because no one was moving at that time in East Timor on the roads. But I went into West Timor and then along the border back into East Timor, trying to see if I could see military build up or something that was going on on the other side of the border and I did see some things and I got that reporting out. But I think I didn't anticipate and I don't think certainly Washington didn't anticipate fully what the military had in mind if the referendum went against them.

I just was looking at some notes last night that I had written up. I did report, on the basis of that trip in, I guess June of '99, talk of a Plan B, which is to say what the military would do if they lost the referendum and it was pretty ominous. And that all got reported but Washington and the embassy didn't take it seriously enough and very frankly, to be fair, I don't think I fully anticipated how bad it would be.

Q: Yes. This was when they went in with- under the cover of militias-

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, exactly.

Q: -and practically leveled a country.

MCWILLIAMS: I had the assumption, made the assumption that so long as the international presence was there, the UN were there, it would be a restraining, there would be constraint. And it simply wasn't. And that was the amazing thing for me.

Q: I've had a long interview on all sorts of subjects but on later effects with Peter Galbraith who went in there.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, yes. He went in subsequently, of course. Yes.

Q: Yes.

MCWILLIAMS: But that was a terrible time and just to reiterate the point I made earlier, I think, for my money historically the U.S. made a fundamental mistake in not leaning on the military to disband those militias. Because I think it would not have been possible for the Indonesian military to assault the UN as the militias did and that was the whole point of the militias. And unfortunately there's a fundamental flaw in the way we approached this. Stanley Roth, who was assistant secretary, who was out there like every four or five weeks it seems, I think was good. I think he got it and I think he made the points significantly that we wanted him to make, that you know, this is not working but we never took officially the position disband those militias. But as he was going out there representing the U.S. government you had very senior military players from the Pacific Command and so on going in there and they were taking a very different line. They were still being very soothing and kind in their discussions with the military, no hard points, no insisting that the militia things stop and so on and I think as a consequence the military chose

to listen to our military, not surprisingly, which had a very soothing message, and frankly ignored this civilian. And as a consequence I think, U.S. policy was mis-presented and thereby misinterpreted and it was a mistake.

Q: Well then, you say (that since retirement) you work off and on pro bono for various human rights organizations?

MCWILLIAMS: Mostly human rights organizations. I did a little traveling. I went over to, I went to Afghanistan in early 2002 essentially to sort of ground myself a little bit in what was going on over there and make old- renew old contacts and did a little bit of writing on the basis of my Afghan interests. But more I think I have been mostly involved essentially with human rights issues vis-à-vis Indonesia and East Timor where I work in some ways almost daily now, lobbying issues related to Indonesia.

Q: Well what's happening in your particular field, human rights and all, in East Timor and Indonesia?

MCWILLIAMS: Well the great fight in Indonesia really just continues back from my tour there back to '96 of a concern that the Indonesian military is, has been and continues to be a rogue institution operating essentially with impunity before the Indonesian courts. Its abuses of human rights, its corrupt, terribly corrupt institution and we see it as a threat, not only to individual human rights but even to democracy out there. We're very distressed that this administration, not unlike the Clinton administration, sought to reestablish military to military ties between our military and their military which had been suspended way back into the '90s because of some particularly egregious abuses by the Indonesian military. Unfortunately just a few months ago Secretary of State Rice used a national security waiver to evade limitations on the mil-mil relationship and we now are in a situation where we have established, reestablished full military relations for the first time in over a decade, notwithstanding the fact that military remains unaccountable for a whole series of abuses and indeed is continuing to commit abuses.

Q: Well do you see establishing these military to military relations in your experience has that helped? In other words, you know, I mean, sort of getting inside the tent, can we work things so that things are better or not?

MCWILLIAMS: That's the argument that's made in this Indonesian case. We argue against that by observing that for many decades the U.S. had a very tight relationship with the Indonesian military. IMET, the International Military Education and Training was available to them. They had all sorts of people here in the United States training and in point of fact during those decades we saw terrible abuses which were uncontrolled. Most recently just in the newspapers today as a matter of fact it's reported that there is now proof that over 183,000 people died in East Timor thanks to Indonesian military actions, that they used napalm, by the way dropped from U.S.- provided aircraft against civilian targets. And this is all now very clear. It was clear, it's been clear for a long time. But that military relationship we had did nothing to reduce the abuses that we saw in the Indonesian military and indeed some of the officers within the Indonesian military

with whom we had the closest relationships, who took the most training, spoke the best English and so on were among the worst abusers. So I think the notion, which is argued by the Pentagon, that well, this is the way we can reform them, if we simply get close to them and show them how we do things. Well I'm sorry but that didn't work in the past and I think they're hard put to demonstrate how it's going to work in the future.

GRETA N. MORRIS
Public Affairs Officer
Jakarta, Indonesia (2000-2003)

Ambassador Morris was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Redlands and Claremont College. Before becoming a Foreign Service Officer she accompanied her FSO husband to Indonesia. In 1980 she entered the Foreign Service (USIA), following which she served variously as Public Affairs, Cultural or Press Officer in Kenya, Uganda, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. Her Washington assignments at State and USIA concerned primarily African Affairs. She served as US Ambassador to the Marshall Islands from 2000 to 2006. Ambassador Morris was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: You were in Indonesia from when to when?

MORRIS: I arrived on the 3rd of March in 2000 and I was there until July of 2003, so a little over three years.

Q: What was the political situation in Indonesia when you arrived?

MORRIS: When I arrived Abdurrahman Wahid (or Gus Dur) was the president of Indonesia. Again, it was a very confusing time in Indonesia because things were moving forward in many ways as far as trying to consolidate the democratic gains. On the other hand, there were still all these issues connected with East Timor and trying to help East Timor move toward independence while at the same time trying to have some accountability for the militia groups and the elements of the Indonesian military that had been involved in helping the militia groups with the rampaging in East Timor; there was a lot of concern about that. There were concerns about the Suharto family about all of the millions and millions of dollars that the Suharto family had siphoned off from assistance money and other things.

Q: Well now way at the other side what was happening in East Timor when you were there?

MORRIS: Of course East Timor was moving gradually toward independence. The UN transition authority for East Timor was there and I was able to visit East Timor I think three times during my time there, all before the actual independence. The first time was in June of 2000 so the

territory, I guess I should call it, was still in very bad condition. Virtually all of the buildings were without real roofs but the UN had provided blue plastic sheeting to put over the roofs of the buildings so people could live in them. Many of the buildings had been burned out and were in very bad shape. It was certainly an area that was in shambles. People were starting to come back and the UN was extremely active. During my second visit I was able to meet with Sergio Vieira de Mello and I was very impressed with his commitment and energy...

Q: This is a UN diplomat killed in Iraq?

MORRIS: Yes, that is right and, of course, he was head of the UN mission in East Timor. He was very committed to trying to make East Timor work as an independent country and I think the UN really did very good work in East Timor.

Q: at a certain point did they cut you, our Jakarta embassy, off from East Timor and pass it on to somebody else?

MORRIS: Basically we were taking care of the U.S. diplomatic presence for East Timor including doing any kind of exchange programs for East Timor; we did do some exchange programs including one training program for ten future East Timorese diplomats who had been picked out by the Foreign Minister Jose Ramos Horta to be the future diplomats for East Timor. He wanted them to have some training in diplomacy skills in the U.S. So we did arrange a training program for them. But, yes eventually we did have a liaison office in Dili and then, of course, at the time of independence that became the U.S. embassy in Dili.

End of reader