

PRABOWO SUBIANTO

Background briefing

Pat Walsh¹, November 2023

This briefing offers an international human rights perspective on Prabowo Subianto, a leading candidate in Indonesia's 2024 presidential campaign.

The briefing draws particularly on evidence in East Timor's CAVR truth commission report, *Chega!* regarding Prabowo Subianto's practice of unconventional warfare during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. Based on this evidence, the briefing asks Indonesian voters to consider whether Prabowo Subianto is fit and proper to lead their important country at this point in its history.

East Timor was a Portuguese, not a Dutch, colony. Under President Suharto, the Indonesian military invaded, occupied and waged war against this Portuguese territory 1975-1999. This intervention was forced, violent, and a violation of international law and UN resolutions, including the right of the Timorese people to freely decide their status.

Prabowo served in East Timor at least four times during the occupation. As an officer, and later commander, in Indonesia's elite and secretive special forces (Kopassus), his role was unconventional and made use of his close family connection to Suharto to operate independently of the regular military. He was once removed from East Timor for not following orders.

Prabowo was active in East Timor in 1976 soon after the invasion; he commanded the unit that killed East Timor's legendary leader, Nicolau Lobato, in 1978; in 1983, he bypassed a superior officer and undermined a peace process and is accused of massacres in Kraras the same year; in 1986-7 he developed an anti-Resistance strategy that was used to foster covert proxy war by pitting locals against locals; he was associated with stealing Timorese children; he groomed a number of East Timor's most violent offenders such as Eurico Guterres; and in the 1990s used Kopassus to train and direct militias and create 'ninja' gangs to terrorise Timorese. These violations not only failed to deliver East Timor to Indonesia but were counter-productive.

The proxy warfare concept and shadowy role of Kopassus allowed Prabowo to plausibly deny responsibility for deaths and violations. It enabled him to attribute these crimes to local in-fighting, or what he called 'civil conflict'. By accepting Indonesia's illegal annexation of East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province, he could also claim that he was repressing an 'insurgency'.

¹ The author was an adviser to CAVR (*Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação*), East Timor's internationally funded truth commission 2001-2005 and its successor body. He is currently adviser emeritus to *Centro Nacional Chega!* (CNC) whose mandate is to facilitate implementation of CAVR recommendations. He was a pioneer of Indonesian in the Victorian school system, co-founder of *Inside Indonesia* magazine and facilitator of extensive NGO and people-to-people relations with Indonesia. He was awarded an Ordem de Timor-Leste in 2009 and an AM by Australia in 2012.

CAVR and several other inquiries, including one by Indonesia's Human Rights Commission, found that violations committed by the Indonesian military were crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of Indonesian law for which perpetrators should be held responsible. Kopassus was the worst offender.

Prabowo denies responsibility and has not been tried for these crimes. But as an active participant, planner and officer with command responsibility, he clearly shares responsibility in international law for such excesses. They are the reason he was banned from the US by three presidents, though he has been permitted access since his appointment as Minister for Defence. Until cleared by an independent tribunal, his suitability to serve as president of Indonesia must remain in serious doubt.

This paper also references allegations of human rights abuses by Prabowo that were committed in Jakarta during the tumultuous transition away from the Suharto era in the late 1990s.

Does post-Joko Widodo Indonesia need to recycle a damaged product of the Suharto era? In view of his deeply compromised narrative, what is the point of Prabowo and what principles would underpin a Prabowo presidency? Will not his past dog his international performance and damage Indonesia's good name? Is it fair for East Timorese victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity to have to accommodate their tormenter as leader of the important neighbour their country needs to work with? What would his presidency mean for West Papuans?

Annex 1

PRABOWO: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Prabowo Subianto is a 72 year old, wealthy, former Indonesian military commander in East Timor, son-in-law of Indonesia's President Suharto, and a leading candidate in Indonesia's 2024 presidential elections.

Born in 1951, he belongs to one of Indonesia's most powerful families. He is the son of Sumitro Djojohadikusumo (1917-2001), a noted Indonesian economist. His mother, Dora Maria Sigar, was a Protestant Christian from Sulawesi (Celebes).

Prabowo married Titiek Suharto, Suharto's second daughter, in 1983. They divorced in 1998 during the Indonesian political crisis following Suharto's resignation. Their son, Didit Hediprasetyo, is a Paris-based women's fashion designer and socialite. Prabowo's younger brother, Hashim Djojohadikusumo, is one of Indonesia's wealthiest entrepreneurs, a philanthropist and Christian. European educated, he has a wide diversity of interests in forestry, plantations, coal mines, oil and gas from Aceh to Papua and international interests in Russia and Canada. Hashim is a member of Prabowo's Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement) party, backs Prabowo's presidential

campaign publically and financially, and argues that his brother is the best qualified and experienced of the three candidates.

Prabowo has extensive experience in the West and is said to be 'solidly secular'. He was educated in London, married in the Netherlands, has had military training in Germany and the US, and has interests in Jordan.

Wealth

Prabowo is wealthy in his own right. His Nusantara Group has extensive holdings, particularly in Kalimantan, and is reported to control 27 companies in Indonesia and abroad. His business interests include palm oil, forestry, fishing, paper, and energy (coal, gas, oil). He heads a number of national associations, including Indonesia's martial arts organisation. Prabowo has a well-guarded 24 hectare ranch near Bogor that includes a mansion, swimming pool, helipad, library, stable of at least 18 thoroughbred polo horses, vet, exercise track and staff. To launch his 2014 election bid, he rode a white stallion (estimated worth \$300,000) into the stadium.

Military career

Prabowo Subianto has spent most of his professional life in the military viz. 1974-1998, and in business. He has never served in the legislature or in government. For most of his time in the military, Prabowo was a member of Kopassus, including as its commander for three years (1995-1998).

Also known as the Red Berets and Ghost of the Jungle (*Hantu Rimba*), Kopassus is the Indonesian military's secretive 'special operations' force. It specialises in unconventional warfare, counter-insurgency, intelligence gathering and anti-terrorism. Its basic concept is to use locals against locals in order to gather intelligence, infiltrate and foster covert, proxy warfare. The strategy gives officials the option of plausible denial of responsibility for deaths and violations and the additional option of attributing these to local in-fighting and grievances that Kopassus can even claim to be trying to settle. In plain English, locals are recruited and bribed to do Kopassus's dirty work and, if necessary, to take the blame.

The strategy owes a lot to the West. The British employed a version in Malaya and the French in Indochina in the 1940s. The US, which had used it, inter alia, in its support of the Contras in Nicaragua, trained the Indonesian military in its use against communism in the 1960s. As a creation of the Cold War, it depicted communism as a threat to civilisation so evil that the full spectrum of responses was justified, including the dark arts of unconventional warfare..

Following tours in East Timor, Prabowo is believed to have used a military study course in Bandung 1986-1987 to develop a version of the model for use in East Timor where communism was also used to justify illegal acts.²

² Based on its examination of violations committed in East Timor in 1999, the joint Indonesia/Timor-Leste Commission for Truth and Friendship concluded that there was a 'structural interconnection between the TNI (Indonesian military) and militia' that went back to 'long before 1999' and that the 'evidence showed unequivocally that these groups (militia and other paramilitary) regularly employed violence to achieve their goals that resulted in gross human rights violations'. *Per Memoriam Ad Spem, Final Report of the Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF) Indonesia-Timor-Leste*. 2008, p. xvi.

Prabowo is known to be quick-tempered and independent-minded. His military graduation in 1974, for example, was delayed for a year due to disciplinary offences.³ Later, he was removed from East Timor by General Benny Moerdani for failing to follow orders⁴ and in 1999 was dismissed from the military.

In 1996 in West Papua, Prabowo led a Kopassus operation to free a group of WWF (World Wildlife Fund) researchers who had been taken hostage by the West Papuan resistance in a bid for independence. Following the release of most of the captives, Prabowo is alleged to have led his troops in reprisal raids against villages believed to have supported the guerrillas. Allegations that he used a helicopter with International Red Cross (ICRC) markings have been denied by the ICRC.

In 1998, Prabowo was appointed chief of Kostrad (Strategic Reserve Command) at the behest of Suharto, his father-in-law. Shortly after his appointment, and in defiance of Wiranto, the head of the army, Prabowo had hundreds of Kopassus brought to Jakarta from East Timor to quell demonstrators who were demanding the resignation of his father-in-law. Prabowo called them ‘traitors to the nation’.

Prior to that Prabowo organised the kidnapping of 23 student protesters. Some were released but 13, including the well-known poet Wiji Thukul, are still missing. During the same period Prabowo demanded to replace Wiranto as head of the army but was demoted by President Habibie instead. A military council found Prabowo guilty of kidnapping the anti-Suharto activists; he was dismissed from the military and went into voluntary exile in Jordan.

These violations and alleged crimes in East Timor led three US presidents from both sides of politics (Clinton, Bush and Obama) to ban Prabowo from visiting the US. However, after President Joko Widodo appointed him Indonesia’s defence minister in 2019, the Trump administration lifted the ban, a decision denounced by some in Congress and numerous Indonesian and US human rights organisations.

Electoral record

Prabowo is the chair of Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement Party), a right-wing populist political party, which he set up in 2008 to serve as a vehicle for his political ambitions. The party has branches in youth, women, Muslim, Christian, Hindu-Buddhist, and Chinese sectors.

Prabowo has run for high office in all four of Indonesia’s direct presidential elections. He failed to secure a party nomination in 2004 and lost as the vice-presidential nominee in 2009. He has since lost presidential bids twice. His first attempt, in 2014,

The CAVR *Chega!* report arrived at similar conclusions. See *Chega!* Vol. IV Responsibility and Accountability, #444-493 (pp. 2367-2378).

³ Dr Ingo Wandelt, *Prabowo, Kopassus and East Timor, On the Hidden History of Modern Indonesian Unconventional Warfare*. regiospectra, 2007, p. 123. Dr Wandelt is a German Malaysia and Indonesia specialist and author of several Indonesian language dictionaries.

⁴ ‘I sent Prabowo to East Timor to set up long-range patrols,’ Moerdani told Adam Schwarz. ‘He became obsessed with catching Xanana. He had gone out of control. I heard reports that Prabowo was beating patrol leaders when they came back empty-handed. I had no choice but to bring him back to Java.’ Quoted Wandelt, op.cit. p. 132

was challenged by Indonesian lawyers who called for him to stand trial over allegations of human rights abuses. It failed. Many NGOs also called for him to step down, possibly contributing to his loss. Prabowo, however, blamed the loss on 'massive cheating that is structured and systematic'. Experts, world leaders and Indonesia's Constitutional Court all rejected that claim. He also blamed cheating for his second loss in 2019; again his appeal was rejected by the Constitutional Court. The claims sparked riots that left eight people dead and hundreds injured.

In addition to his Trump style rejections of election results, Prabowo has also made outrageous claims such as that studies showed Indonesia would fall apart in 2030 and that Indonesian terrorists were not Muslims but foreign controlled infiltrators. He has also been accused of pandering to hard-line Islamists.

Prabowo is also prone to broad, messianic type commitments. According to his Facebook page, he is promising that, if elected in 2024, he will free Indonesia from poverty, hunger and malnutrition so that its children will grow up happy, strong and smart.

Current legal challenges

In response to legal challenges, Indonesia's Constitutional Court headed by President Joko Widodo's brother-in-law, handed down two critical judgements in October. The first was that, though legally too young at 36, President Joko Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, could campaign as Prabowo's vice-presidential running mate because of his experience as governor of Solo. The decision was only made after Gibran's uncle, the chief justice, attended to vote. Professor Tim Lindsey, Indonesian law expert at the University of Melbourne, thinks it 'reeks of political manipulation and interference'.⁵ The ruling is currently being challenged on grounds of conflict of interest.

The Court also over-ruled a challenge that Prabowo was in breach of Article 169 of the election law that disqualifies candidates who have betrayed the State, been corrupt or committed other serious criminal acts. Petitioners argued this disqualified Prabowo because he had been guilty of kidnapping students in 1997-1998. Their request that the article be clarified to include human rights violations was rejected. The petition did not mention Prabowo's record in East Timor.

Both court decisions favour Prabowo whom President Joko Widodo supports over Ganjar Pranowo, his own Democratic Party (PDI-P) candidate⁶. Why Widodo favours Prabowo is not clear. Some suggest it is because Prabowo has pledged to continue Widodo's signature project of re-locating the capital from Jakarta to Kalimantan. Prominent Indonesians such as the popular musician Iwan Fals and writer Goenawan

⁵ <https://johnmenadue.com/a-twist-in-indonesias-presidential-election-does-not-bode-well-for-the-countrys-fragile-democracy/>

⁶ Ganjar, 54, is from the Javanese heartland of Central Java. Though university educated, his background is far humbler than Prabowo's. His father was a police officer, his mother a small vendor. He is described as populist-left. During his time as a PDI-P opposition member of the national parliament and his two terms as governor of Central Java, the photogenic Ganjar, a user of social media, has earned a reputation as an anti-corruption campaigner and a pro-people social reformer.

Mohamad, who previously supported Widodo, are publicly condemning the president for pushing his son to be Prabowo's running mate.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this profile is of a man who has been definitively shaped by his military and privileged background. The narrative also portrays a hard-line, failed, disgraced, ambitious and deeply unconventional individual who is prone to bending the rules and has been prepared to use military, high-level and far-right connections to advance his interests and career at the cost of the lives and human rights of others. Violence has been a feature of much of his professional life. He continues to face allegations of grave human rights violations committed over many years in East Timor and in Indonesia. The recent Constitutional Court cases strongly suggest judicial favouritism and possible corruption on Prabowo's behalf and do not bode well for the rule of law if he is elected president. Overall, the picture that emerges is anything but the image of someone who understands, respects and complies with the rule of law that is so badly needed in Indonesia and internationally at this time.

Annex II

PRABOWO SUBIANTO AND EAST TIMOR⁷

Indonesia invaded, occupied and waged war against East Timor, a former Portuguese colony, 1975-1999, in violation of international law. Following military and popular resistance, international advocacy, and the fall of Suharto, East Timor gained its independence in 1999 through a UN-facilitated referendum.

East Timor's internationally funded truth commission, CAVR⁸, concluded that Indonesia committed crimes against humanity and war crimes during its 24 year military occupation. Kopassus⁹, said CAVR, was the military unit associated with most human rights violations. A second truth commission that focussed on 1999 and was conducted jointly with Indonesia (CTF)¹⁰ arrived at the same conclusion for the final year of the occupation. No Indonesian military commanders, including Prabowo, have been punished or sanctioned for these violations. As he was not in East Timor in 1999, Prabowo was not indicted by the UN Serious Crimes Unit. Like other Indonesian senior officers, he has been rewarded with appointments or honours. His cv includes a long list of awards.

⁷ *Chega!* p. 2415 has a summary of Prabowo's appointments.

⁸ CAVR (*Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação*), the Timor-Leste truth and reconciliation commission, functioned 2001-2005. Its 5-volume report, entitled *Chega!* (no more!), documents and attributes responsibility for human rights violations committed on all sides 1974-1999. Visit TiSA CAVR report (Bishop's University, Canada) for the full report in English (including index).

⁹ Kopassus has been known by different names but has had the same role throughout its history.

¹⁰ CTF (Commission for Truth and Friendship) was a joint Timor-Leste/Indonesia commission that functioned 2005-2008. Its report entitled *Per Memoriam Ad Spem* (through memory towards hope) focussed on institutional, not individual, responsibility. See Bishop's University TiSA archive.

The years of Prabowo's military service (1974-1998) coincide closely with the years of Indonesia's illegal war against East Timor (1975-1999). He served in East Timor at least four times, most of it with the Kopassus Special Forces.

Prabowo is believed to have arrived in East Timor in March 1976, and to have been a lieutenant during the height of the war and the devastating famine of 1977-1978.

CAVR reports that Prabowo led the Kopassus Nanggala Unit 28 that located and fatally wounded Nicolau Lobato, then President of East Timor, on 31 December 1978. (*Chega!* pp. 228, 2708n) Lobato is Timor-Leste's revered hero whose statue stands at the western entrance to the capital of Dili.

Along with a number of surrenders by Resistance leaders, the death of Lobato was a triumph for the Indonesian military and Prabowo. It also occurred at a time of mass surrender of civilians forced out of Resistance control by military-induced starvation. Undertaken to separate 'the fish from the water' (i.e. to isolate the Timorese guerrilla resistance from the people by forcing them out of the interior), this humanitarian disaster accounts for most of Timor's war-related deaths. (*Chega!* Forced displacement and famine, pp. 1165-1363). CAVR does not directly associate Prabowo with the famine, but he was active in the war zone at the time and the strategy has all the hallmarks of the unconventional warfare in which he and Kopassus specialised.

In 1983, the Timorese governor Mario Carrascalão joined with Indonesia's military commander, Colonel Purwanto, to negotiate a ceasefire and talks with the Resistance leader Xanana Gusmão. CAVR believes that Prabowo undermined the ceasefire. *Chega!* attests that Prabowo, then deputy-commander of a Special Forces unit, was in the general area at the time and that, following the breakdown of the ceasefire, Kopassus troops under his command committed massacres in the Kraras area. (*Chega!* passim, including pp.250-255, 1288-1290, 1996-1998).

Denial of responsibility

Prabowo denies responsibility for these killings. In a letter to the *Jakarta Post*, dated 28 December 2013, he wrote, 'I was nowhere near the site'.¹¹ Being somewhere else and denying personally shooting those who had surrendered, however, does not excuse an officer of responsibility. 'Under international law it is not only the person who directly carries out a crime that is responsible, but also that person's superiors, especially in the military or government' (*Chega!* op.cit. p.119)¹². This obligation was ignored by Prabowo's commanding officers. Late in 1983, he was promoted from captain to major, a high rank for a 32 year old.

Proxy warfare

¹¹ This letter was a reply to the Amsterdam-based Indonesian journalist Aboeprijadi Santoso. In a letter to *Jakarta Post* dated 20 December 2013 (in the run-up to Indonesian elections in 2014), Santoso asked, 'What ever happened in Kraras, Timor-Leste, 'Pak' Prabowo?'

¹² See Professor Gerry van Klinken's detailed account of the Kraras killings entitled *Prabowo and human rights* in *Inside Indonesia* magazine #116, April-June 2014. The article is based on the CAVR report which devoted 27 pages to these killings. At the time of writing, van Klinken was professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Amsterdam. The article is also available in Bahasa Indonesia.

As reported by Dr Wandelt above, Prabowo spent 1986-7 taking courses at a military institution in Bandung where he worked on the proxy militia concept explained above. The concept was based on framing the Timor issue as an ‘internal conflict’.¹³ It shows Prabowo the problem-solver and ambitious careerist at work. He believed the model would seal Indonesia’s victory in East Timor, enhance his status and absolve the Indonesian military like him from blame. He implemented the plan on his return to East Timor in 1989.¹⁴

Chega! highlights the central role of the militia and paramilitary organisations during the last two decades of the Indonesian occupation. These groups were responsible for widespread abuse in violation of both international and Indonesian law.¹⁵ Prabowo and Kopassus, records *Chega!*, engaged in a form of psywar to intimidate and terrorise the Timor-Leste population, increased military training of civil servants and university students, expanded the paramilitary teams, and established new militia organisations.

One of these was a Timorese youth organisation called Gadapaksi¹⁶. Prabowo personally funded its creation in 1995. Initially intended to showcase Indonesian welfare for youth on the fringes of society, Gadapaksi ‘quickly developed a host of illegal or semi-legal smuggling, gambling, and protection rackets’.¹⁷ It grew rapidly and sent hundreds of its members to Indonesia for training by Kopassus. Dressed as black-clad ‘nijas’, members roamed the streets of Dili at night terrorising the local community. The activity, notes *Chega!*, was similar to the state-sponsored Petrus killings of some 5000 petty criminals – described by Suharto as ‘shock therapy’ – that General Benny Moerdani initiated in Java in the early 80s. It also evokes Prabowo’s abduction of student activists in Jakarta in 1998.

Stolen children

Chega! and other sources¹⁸ associate Prabowo with the transfer (also referred to as ‘stealing’) of Timorese children from their families and country. High-level civilian and military officials, including Suharto, his wife Tien Suharto and their daughter, Titiek, Prabowo’s wife, were also involved in the practice. Transfers of this nature are

¹³ Prabowo’s letter to the Jakarta Post, op.cit.

¹⁴ ‘As soon as he arrived, signs of unconventional warfare began to appear in East Timor’s capital, Dili: In July 1989 [...] new covert operations were unleashed in Dili and the urban centres. During this period hooded gangsters, referred to locally as *buffo* (clowns), terrorized Dili at night. [...] They were, I. W.] East Timorese collaborators given special training by the Special Forces for intelligence, interrogation, and assassination work.’ Kammen, Douglas (2001) *The Trouble with Normal: The Indonesian Military, Paramilitaries, and the Final Solution in East Timor*. In: Anderson, Benedict R. O’G., ed., *Violence and the State in Suharto’s Indonesia*. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University, 160-162. Quoted Wandelt, op.cit. p. 137

¹⁵ See *Chega!* op.cit. pp. 121-123

¹⁶ Gadapaksi is short for *Garda Muda Penegak Integrasi* (Young Guards Upholding Integration). Wandelt believes the organisation represented the institutional realisation of Prabowo’s 1986 study, that it was a model organisation of East Timorese ‘contras’ for unconventional warfare. Op.cit. pp. 139-140.

¹⁷ Kammen 2001: 168-169. Quoted by Wandelt, op.cit. p. 140. For more on the proxy-organisations see Greenlees, Don and Robert Garran (2002) *Deliverance. The Inside Story of East Timor’s Fight for Freedom*. Crows Nest, Allen&Unwin, 129-136.

¹⁸ See Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) <https://stolenchildren.asia-ajar.org/> Also Helene van Klinken *Making them Indonesian, Child Transfers out of East Timor*, Monash University Asia Series, 2012. For a discussion of motives (largely assimilationist), see van Klinken pp. 39-44.

a grave breach of international law. Occupying powers are prohibited from deporting protected persons.¹⁹

One of the roughly 4000 stolen generation was Rozario Marcal, better known as Hercules, the code name he was given by Kopassus. Hercules, a feared underworld figure in Jakarta (*preman* in Indonesian), is unwaveringly loyal to Prabowo. Pre-independence, Prabowo bribed Hercules to intimidate nationalist Timorese students and during Prabowo's presidential bids in 2014 and 2019, Hercules mobilised his network of strongmen and vigilantes in support of his patron.

Indicted protégés

East Timor also found itself saddled with a number of other Timorese who could be described as Prabowo clones. Four examples taken from *Chega!* follow.

One is Prabowo's protégé Joanico Cesario Belo, also a Kopassus officer, who headed up the Team Saka militia in Baucau. (*Chega!* p. 2657) In 1999, the Saka militia was responsible for the deaths of 43 Timorese, the destruction of property and displacement of hundreds of families. Belo was indicted by the UN Serious Crimes Unit, but not his *dalang* (puppeteer) Prabowo.

Martinho Fernandes, the district head (*bupati*) of Viqueque was another. Fernandes, a former associate of Prabowo and honorary member of Kopassus, strongly supported the local militias. (*Chega!* p. 2803)

A third Prabowo clone was Abilio Osorio Soares, the governor of East Timor from 1992 till the end of the Indonesian occupation. *Chega!* reports that Prabowo was instrumental in the appointment of Soares to the top job. In 1999, Soares fully backed the formation of the Sakunar (Scorpion) militias and used his position to secure funding for militias. (*Chega!* pp. 295, 2800) A large pro-Indonesia rally held outside Soares office in April 1999 preceded a violent rampage through the capital that resulted in 13 killings. Soares was indicted by the UN Serious Crimes Unit and found guilty by the Indonesian Ad Hoc Human Rights Tribunal. It is not known if Prabowo spoke up for him.

A fourth protégé is Eurico Guterres, whom Prabowo recruited into Gadapaksi. The most violent and notorious of the militia leaders, Guterres personifies Prabowo's impact on East Timor. In 1999, Guterres established his own militia called Aitarak (thorn). Both prior to and following the UN-facilitated referendum of 30 August 1999, the fire-brand Guterres terrorised the Timorese community and was responsible for several massacres. These included murders at the home of Manuel Carrascalão and a massacre at the church in Liquica. As Wandelt notes, 'He (Guterres) was the ultimate 'product' of Prabowo's UW (unconventional warfare)'.²⁰

Having failed in East Timor, Guterres exported his experience in unconventional warfare to West Papua, where he set up a pro-Indonesia militia group to combat the Papuan resistance. It also failed. In keeping with the proxy character of Prabowo's

¹⁹ See UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. International Criminal Court (2016). CAVR recommendation on separated children, 11.2 (*Chega!* p. 2611)

²⁰ Wandelt, *op.cit.* p. 141

unconventional warfare model, Guterres, not Prabowo his creator, was found guilty and sentenced to prison by an Indonesian court for crimes in East Timor.

Conclusion

Prabowo Subianto's fingerprints are all over East Timor, from the beginning to the end of the occupation, even – thanks to the Timorese militia he co-created - when he wasn't there. Using Kopassus's specialist function and his family connection to Suharto, Prabowo could operate independently of local Indonesian commanders. His shadowy movements have also made it difficult to attribute particular violations or events directly to him.

Binding UN Security Council resolutions in 1975 called on Indonesia 'to withdraw without delay all its forces from the Territory'.²¹ Prabowo defied this ruling, and more generally the rule of law, by fighting and commanding a range of military operations in East Timor after that time.

Prabowo does not deny that he waged war against East Timor, nor that he agreed with Indonesia's illegal annexation in 1976 that the UN rejected. He denies, however, that this makes him accountable for the crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during his tours of combat in East Timor that have been documented by two truth commissions²², several independent inquiries²³ and academic studies.

There are four reasons behind this denial.

First, Prabowo maintains that the East Timor issue was an 'internal conflict' that Timorese on one side asked Indonesia to help resolve.²⁴

Second, after Indonesia declared East Timor its 27th province in July 1976²⁵, the conflict could be construed as an insurgency against Indonesia that was Prabowo's responsibility as a counter-insurgency specialist to deal with.

²¹ UN Security Council Resolution 384 (1975) # 2

²² The two commissions are the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) and the bi-lateral Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF). In 2008, Indonesia's then president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), endorsed CTF's findings.

²³ Two UN-authorized investigations, conducted in late 1999, and Indonesia's Human Rights Commission concluded that crimes against humanity were committed in 1999, that Indonesian authorities bore prime responsibility, and that an international criminal tribunal should be established to investigate and punish those responsible. This tribunal did not eventuate. Indonesia was given the benefit of the doubt and allowed to conduct its own trials. All those charged were acquitted except for the notorious Timorese militia leader, Eurico Guterres. The trials were widely condemned as a travesty of justice.

²⁴ Following Fretilin's declaration of independence on 28 November 1975, the Timorese parties that had fled to Indonesian Timor after a civil war petitioned Indonesia (under Indonesian pressure it is claimed) to support them with personnel and weapons to defeat Fretilin which was depicted as communist. The latter label was only partly true but, given the Cold War milieu of the time and Suharto's positive reputation in the West for his liquidation of communism, the claim affected the judgement of many, including Suharto, and sealed East Timor's fate. Though East Timor never attacked Indonesia proper, Fretilin-led East Timor could easily be depicted as a threat to Indonesia. It was only when resistance continued in East Timor after the end of the Cold War that the falsity of this propaganda became clear. Though covert to begin with, Indonesia's military intervention on 7 December 1975 was overt and a full-scale invasion by air, land and sea by regular troops.

²⁵ Suharto's attempt to legitimise Indonesia's integration of East Timor followed a petition from an Indonesian convened Popular Assembly of some 30 selected East Timorese held in Dili in May 1976.

Third, Prabowo maintains that Timorese leaders do not hold him responsible. ‘*I have been accepted*’, he wrote in 2013, ‘*and even photographed in meetings and friendly conversation with former Timor-Leste president Xanana Gusmão (April 20, 2001), Lere Anan Timur (November 21, 2008) and Mari Alkatiri (June 20, 2013)....Would Xanana and other Timorese freedom fighters, our nation’s former enemies, have befriended an Indonesian officer truly guilty of such despicable crimes against civilians?*’²⁶

Fourth, in his *Jakarta Post* letter, Prabowo states that the UN has not charged him with human rights violations either. It is true that the UN Serious Crimes process that functioned in East Timor before full independence in 2002 did not indict Prabowo. However, its indictments only related to crimes committed between January and October 1999 and, as mentioned previously, Prabowo was not in East Timor at that time. As someone with command responsibility in East Timor during the war, however, Prabowo cannot hide from the principal findings of the CAVR truth commission on the State of Indonesia and the Indonesian security forces. The 19 paragraphs in question are a profoundly disturbing litany of injustice that demand accountability. The illegal use of force - against a state, its civilians, culture, property, women and children - is the feature common to the executions, massacres²⁷, bombings²⁸, torture, imprisonment, starvation, sham trials, sexual abuse and other forms of violence that were perpetrated at various points throughout the war.

There is no denying that Prabowo enjoys a teflon quality and Trump-like self-belief. These attributes have allowed him to deny all allegations arising from his responsibility as a soldier and commander in East Timor. He is running for the presidency of Indonesia in the hope that amnesia, the passing of time, an ignorant electorate (that ironically includes millions of tech-addicted millennials prepared to live in an alternative universe), are on his side. Prabowo will also find comfort in the knowledge that a compliant international community is prepared to favour pragmatism over principle and excuse him from the much trumpeted rule of law.

But as a US Ambassador to Indonesia observed during one of Prabowo’s previous failed election campaigns, the final arbiter of the claims and counter-claims surrounding him has to be an independent, properly constituted inquiry or judicial court, not the court of public opinion. The onus, said the Ambassador, is on Prabowo to allow the claims and evidence to be tested. The *Jakarta Post* recently carried a piece calling on Prabowo to apologise for his human rights ‘mistakes’.²⁹

Most countries declined to send observers to the event and the UN rejected it in Resolution 31/53 (1 December 1976) and called for a genuine act of self-determination. That Assembly closely resembled the engineered ‘Act of Free Choice’ that Indonesia had held in West Papua only seven years before. This time, however, most countries would have nothing to do with its Timor iteration.

²⁶ As already mentioned (fn 8) Prabowo’s letter was in response to a letter in the *Jakarta Post* by the Indonesian journalist Aboeprijadi Santoso. In a second letter, not published by the *Post*, Santoso points out that, as politicians and diplomats, Timorese leaders have had to deal with Prabowo differently to when he was their sworn enemy.

²⁷ See list of at least 101 massacre sites, *Chega!* pp. 3104-3105.

²⁸ Late in 1978, Indonesian bombing of Mt Matebian nearly wiped out the remaining Resistance. *Chega!* suggests this bombing included napalm. (p. 227) Research by the Swiss historian, Dr Regula Bochsler, demonstrates that this napalm was a Swiss product. (See *Nylon and Napalm*. 2022)

²⁹ Kornelius Purba, *Jakarta Post*, 6 July 2023.

Until he is cleared of allegations of wrong-doing, Prabowo is not fit and proper to serve as the president of this great nation. Surely a country of 280 million has other options.

If Prabowo is elected a dark cloud will settle over Indonesia. Indonesia will be perceived as regressive, prepared to forget rather than remember and learn, and to tolerate impunity when, in fact, it could be a beacon of democracy and champion of the rule of law in a much troubled region and world.