

of indigenous origin. Consequently, it was in Australia's national interests (and the interests of the free-world) to support the regional great power, Indonesia, in its brutal but necessary repression of East Timorese independence.<sup>83</sup> We are still to see precisely what the implications of this decision will be for Australian foreign policy. Suffice to say that any future problems in relations with the Suharto regime (or any similar successor) emanate from a choice made by an ALP government, two-decades before the 'melt-down' crisis, to reject a claim for democratic self-determination in favour of a three-centuries old model of (European) power politics reality.

In the current period of 'economic' crisis the Australian foreign policy establishment continues to cling to the most corrupt government in Asia in a quite extraordinary way. So extraordinary that Deputy PM Fischer recently invoked Suharto as "perhaps the world's greatest figure in the latter half of the 20th Century".<sup>84</sup> But this kind of judgement is by no means the exclusive preserve of the current Conservative government. Former ALP leader Paul Keating was an enthusiastic supporter of the Suharto regime and over the past decade or so Australia's 'open regionalism' perspective has been characterised by the desire to place all its "diplomatic and strategic eggs into the Suharto basket".<sup>85</sup>

Whatever else all this might mean in the longer term it surely suggests that a number of crucial questions need addressing on Australia's seemingly unequivocal relationship with a regime founded on brutal and increasingly fragile foundations. And while one might not endorse entirely the view that Indonesia is "a time-bomb slowly ticking away" above Australia's northern coastline it is evident enough that Suharto's regime is essentially unaccountable and repressive and detached from the everyday needs of the great majority of Indonesians, particularly at a time of social dislocation and crisis.<sup>86</sup>

In this situation Australian policy-makers run the risk of becoming detached from the forces of change that are becoming increasingly insistent in Indonesia, as they reject and ignore any other reality than that of the governing clique and military elite. More generally if our policies of 'cooperative security' and 'open regionalism' have no place for other than ruling state elites they will effectively silence those seeking a

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<sup>83</sup>See J. Dunn, *Timor: A Country Betrayed* (Queensland: Jacaranda Press, 1983)

<sup>84</sup>See G. Barker, "Australia Needs Tougher Line on Succession" in *The Australian Financial Review* August 6, 1996:10; and D. Lague "The Looming Crisis With Jakarta" in *The Sydney Morning Herald* August 3, 1996:15

<sup>85</sup>See P. Hartcher, "Howard's Discomfort over Jakarta" in *Australian Financial Review* July, 29 1996:

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<sup>86</sup>See N. Abjorenson, "Few Listen as Indonesia Fuse Hisses" op. cit. 1997