

charisma-challenged Jay Garner, a long and difficult road lies ahead.

If it all turns to disaster it may be morally and politically difficult for Australia to avoid shouldering a greater burden in the consolidation phase of the campaign. A requirement to contribute a reasonable number of ground troops to the occupation of Iraq would impose a near-impossible burden on the ADF, especially while our commitment to the security of East Timor continues. We simply lack the troops to meet, let alone sustain, both commitments.

Fragmentasi?

Last month hopes for a peaceful solution to the Aceh problem in Indonesia were again dashed. The current Indonesian government has again resorted to trying an exclusively military solution to what is a political, religious and cultural dilemma. It is noteworthy that the Swedish diplomats mediating the negotiations between Indonesia and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), representing the secessionist Acehnese, have attributed the failure of the talks almost exclusively to Indonesia.

The Indonesian leadership and military (TNI) appear to have learnt little from their long but counter-productive campaign in East Timor, or indeed from previous counter-productive campaigns in Aceh. Initial objective international press and Red Cross reporting from Aceh has not helped Indonesia's case. While GAM are certainly not angels either, it will be hard for Indonesia to hide abuses by excluding the international and domestic media, and diplomats and NGO, as it did in East Timor during the 1970s and most of the 1980s.

The problem of Aceh is likely to pose a growing moral and practical dilemma for Indonesia's neighbours. While the case for Aceh's secession from Indonesia is different in fact and international law from that of East Timor (and of West Papua), continued Indonesian atrocities in Aceh may eventually cancel this out as it did for Serbia over Kosovo. There are clearly limits to the legal defence of invoking state sovereignty, especially where persistent and serious human-rights violations are involved and the secession appears to have considerable popular support in the territory concerned.

Furthermore, even more importantly, Indonesia itself cannot properly democratise while it is prepared to sanction the use of armed force — rather than consent — to hold on to provinces that strongly desire to secede. As Mahatma Gandhi noted, 'you cannot really be free while you oppress others'. Indonesia cannot be truly democratic itself at the national level unless it permits free provincial elections in Aceh (and elsewhere). While it is arguable how much popular support GAM really has, especially if not allowed to sway the result by intimidation, Indonesia needs to truly face the prospect that GAM or a moderate secessionist party might overwhelmingly win a free election. There is also no accurate method of determining GAM's true level of support without such a free election.

Australia's strategic relationship with Indonesia is an exceptionally complex one by any standard of international relations. We are locked together in perpetuity by simple geographic proximity and strategic inter-dependence. As well as coping with all the contrasts in ethnicity, religion, culture, economics and demography, our two countries have starkly differing national foundation myths.

Australians freely chose to join in a federal union, with some other possible constituents (such as New Zealand) deciding not to. Most Australians would have accepted a choice by the Cocos Islanders to go their own way if they had chosen this option in their UN-supervised 1984 referendum. Similarly, while it is an unlikely possibility it is virtually unthinkable, for example, that Australia would not let Western Australia or Norfolk Island secede should they freely choose to do so. Most secessionist impulses in Australia attract only fringe support because the arguments for and against secession can be freely debated and tested in a calm atmosphere. Federalism in Australia is as democratic as it can be and matures as our country matures. It minimises our regional differences by genuinely popularising our shared history and outlook. On the whole Australian federalism also shares national resources between its constituent states, with the resources largely flowing from the richer states and regions to the poorer ones by general consent. Our federalism draws us together in fact and perception.

In contrast, Indonesian decolonisation and 'nation building' was based on the concept of 'inheriting' Dutch authority over an otherwise diverse group of ethnic communities, cultures and polities. Despite promises to the outlying islands, federalism was strangled at birth because it was, and largely still is, seen as driving 'Indonesians' apart rather than drawing them together. Many Indonesians in the outlying islands also consider that national resources are being plundered by the majority Javanese rather than shared equitably. Three generations of Indonesians have also grown up deliberately immersed in the questionable belief that any successful secession would mean the end of multi-ethnic Indonesia as a whole. Particularly when general Indonesian federalism is perpetually postponed, the danger is that such a myth can needlessly become self-fulfilling when a secession becomes inevitable anyway. These effects can be seen in the manner in which many Indonesians have superficially reconciled themselves to the loss of East Timor. Many, perhaps most, regret its loss rather than truly face up to why Indonesia 'lost' the territory. The farcical sentences now being awarded by Indonesian courts allegedly trying cases of human-rights violations in East Timor exemplify the enormity of Indonesia's self-perception problem.

At this juncture, Australia has little alternative but to maintain a public position that Aceh is an internal Indonesian problem. Obviously attempts need to be made to encourage peace talks to resume and for the Indonesian government not to sanction continued harsh repression

by the TNI and national police. GAM should also not be allowed to get away with egregious propaganda. This will be a hard 'row to hoe' for Australian diplomacy. Meanwhile it is probable the civilian casualties will continue to mount and the world will continue to take notice. It remains more than likely that elements of the TNI will again shoot Indonesia in the foot — perhaps mortally.

In the longer term, especially if, as seems probable, the TNI campaign continues to harden rather than weaken Acehnese resolve, Australia faces the same fundamental moral and strategic dilemmas posed by the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. In the case of East Timor, our de facto and subsequent (unique) de jure recognition of the territory's forcible incorporation into Indonesia because of supposed 'realpolitik' eventually collided with our other enduring national interests. These included Australia's moral conscience, pervasive democratic outlook and burgeoning international pressure for resolution. Just as importantly, 'realpolitik' eventually dictated the strategic need to finally heal a continually festering and worsening wound infecting the overall bilateral relationship. As many observers have noted, even a threatened or actual short war with Indonesia in support of East Timorese independence in 1975 might have caused far less bilateral damage in the long run. Even more to the point, these collisions over enduring national interests were driven more by Indonesian blunders and wider international consequences than by our own shrewd diplomatic navigation.

By the early 1990s, as Falantil resistance in East Timor strengthened rather than weakened after a long colonial occupation, some perceptive Indonesians realised the game was up. Indonesia had by then lost even the option of achieving a compromise solution, such as provincial autonomy within the republic, because of central government intransigence and loss of moral authority through repression. It seems such a great pity that a harsh lesson of Indonesian history seems about to repeat itself over Aceh.

As in East Timor (and West Papua), Indonesia faces the continuing paradox of colonialism eventually faced by all colonial powers. That most Indonesians cannot even begin to see themselves as colonisers only exacerbates the fundamental problem of confused national identity. True democratisation of Indonesian society would help such national self-realisation, but even if this occurs it seems probable it will not happen quick enough to forestall another disaster.

More Indonesians need to study French history. The French were unwilling to acknowledge the lessons of their forced withdrawal from Indo-China in the mid 1950s. In the late 1950s too many of the French could not accept that Algeria was not a department of France itself but an overseas colony yearning to be free. As with Indonesia's continuing colonial dilemma in West Papua and elsewhere, the parallels in Aceh with French colonialism in Algeria remain striking.

While Australia obviously cannot be seen to be encouraging the dismemberment of its largest neighbour, some contingency consideration needs to be undertaken. If some measure of Indonesian disintegration becomes inevitable, would it not be better for both our countries to assist Indonesia to manage such a transition. Despite the lessons of East Timor (and many other examples with other countries), Australian policy, at present, often seems to be based on an assumption that Indonesia is an immutable polity, and that if we ignore secessionist pressures in Indonesia they should, and will, simply go away.

Japan strikes in

In the light of continued North Korean brinkmanship Japan's Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has finally said openly what many Japanese leaders have said privately for years. Mr Koizumi made his remarks to an upper house parliamentary committee in late May examining proposed war contingency legislation that has already passed through the lower house of parliament. The bill is intended to provide the government with greater powers to forestall or react to potential attacks on Japan.

Mr Koizumi's preparedness to consider pre-emptive action against aggressors (most notably North Korea) echo similar remarks by Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba earlier this year. To exemplify the change of stance Mr Koizumi has also proposed renaming the Japanese Self-Defence Forces as a navy, army and air force. These latest changes to Japan's defence posture are understandable steps along the progression that really took off with Japan accepting the responsibility in the mid 1980s to protect its sea lanes of communication out to one thousand nautical miles from Japan itself.

Japanese participation in US plans for theatre missile defence now seem certain, as does Japan's acquisition of cruise missiles for a first-strike capability. Japan is, however, not proposing any reconstitution of the large force projection and strategic mobility capabilities that allowed it to conquer much of the Pacific Basin in the early 1940s.

The reaction of China and South Korea to these latest comments will prove very interesting. Japan's neighbours have known this day would eventually come but are nonetheless not comforted by the forecast. Japanese diplomats are no doubt working overtime in Seoul and Beijing. In the latter capital, they are no doubt alluding to China's part in forcing the decision through its failure to satisfactorily influence North Korea to be a responsible international actor.

While the two generations of Australians with personal experience of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 1940s grow ever smaller, a strong degree of strategic suspicion concerning Japan also lurks in the Australian national psyche. This has not been alleviated by Japanese official and popular reluctance to face up to its past in the same manner as Germany or even Russia. Contemporary