David Dickens

Can East Timor Be a Blueprint for Burden Sharing?

Should the United States turn over leadership of responses to regional conflicts to reliable allies?[1] The United States underpins the security and stability of Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, and the Middle East. In addition, the protection of its own sovereignty since September 11 has become more demanding. These are weighty burdens. The United States may not be stretched too far, but it is limited in what it can achieve without weakening existing commitments. How much attention can Washington spare to manage crises in places of secondary strategic interest (realistically, the Southern Hemisphere, including all of Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America), especially where allies and friends have much better local knowledge?

The international intervention in East Timor, led by Australia, may serve as a model for how the United States can turn over leadership of regional interventions to reliable allies. Australia led the operation, and the United States supported it. Australia and coalition partners provided ground troops while the United States gave intelligence, planning, transport, logistics, and communication support. Referring to Indonesia, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell has talked about "let[ting] our ally Australia take the lead as they have done so well." He said that the United States would prefer to let regional allies deal with regional security problems "rather than [the United States] feeling it has to respond to every [call] that's out there."[2] Former U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia Stanley Roth commented in testimony to the Senate that East Timor was a "role model about how nations can take the lead in responding to crises in their own region."[3]

David Dickens is director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. The author thanks Hugh White and various Australian officials for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Yet, is East Timor truly a viable blueprint for how the United States can relinquish the leadership of regional operations to partners? Washington seems to have a bipartisan hope that the answer is "yes." Before addressing this question, however, the ingredients of success in East Timor must be identified.[4]

Why Did the East Timor Model Work?

The operation in East Timor succeeded because Australia possessed key capacities that are the prerequisites to leadership. These capacities are by-products of Australia's self-reliant defense posture. During the last 25 years, Australia has developed sophisticated defense machinery and the military means to implement its defense strategy. In addition, Australia has reformed and revitalized its alliance with the United States (embodied in the ANZUS Treaty) and developed a sophisticated web of defense relationships with Southeast Asian nations, its neighbors in the South Pacific including New Zealand and France (which maintains a respectable military presence there), Northeast Asian states, and Great Britain. At least nine identifiable characteristics of the East Timor model enabled Australian leadership to be successful.

***An independent strategic decisionmaking capacity*:** This capacity enables decisionmakers to mobilize the resources of their own state, build coalitions, and develop regional as well as international support. Canberra was capable of making strategic decisions, gathering and interpreting intelligence, and staffing military and diplomatic organizations with experienced professionals. This infrastructure gave decisionmakers the capacity to manage the crisis. Australia was then able to mobilize international and regional support efficiently and to convince the United Nations (UN) to agree to a Chapter Seven–mandated mission in East Timor (Chapter Seven of the UN Charter authorizes UN Security Council coercive action). Without this mandate, Australia's military position on the ground would have been tenuous.[5]

***Defense relationships with other states*:** States that are long-standing members of defense arrangements and working partnerships are in a good position to mobilize support when needed. Key decisionmakers will most likely know each other and be familiar with working together. Australia's web of defense relationships with Southeast and Northeast Asian states, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom enabled it to garner political and military support quickly.

Australia's sophisticated bilateral relationship with Indonesia, although failing to prevent the crisis, served as a conduit for discussion and information sharing. Consequently, Indonesia agreed that Australia would lead the

international response to East Timor. Without this agreement, Australia would not have intervened.

***Alliance with the United States*:** A long-standing alliance relationship with the United States allows the potential leader of a regional operation to mobilize U.S. assistance. Decisionmakers used to working with the United States know who to call in Washington and what to ask of them. ANZUS membership enabled key Australian decisionmakers to mobilize U.S. support within two days. Australia was able to get the kind of support it wanted from the United States when it needed it, a "perfect example of the Australian doctrine of alliance support."[6] Australia also asked for coalition support for certain critical areas, such as strategic and tactical intelligence (receipt of an EP-3 and other assets), naval presence and protection of sea lines of communication (allocation of the Aegis-class cruiser USS *Mobile Bay* and other force elements), and communications and strategic lift (dispatch of a C-130 detachment and the USS *Belleau Wood*). These U.S. force elements were placed under Australian control, which ensured unity of command. Although the U.S. military support was mostly concentrated on intelligence matters, combat services, and logistic support, the USS *Mobile Bay* was described by one Australian naval expert as the "vital enabler" of the combat maritime presence located off the coast of East Timor.[7]

Should the U.S. turn over leadership of regional conflicts to reliable allies?

***Threats*:** Their absence was important. Australia could not have dedicated its armed forces to the East Timor intervention if it had been preoccupied with a grave threat to its national survival.

***Political constraints*:** Countries in the Asia-Pacific region and others internationally generally supported Australia's leadership of the East Timor operation. Good fortune also played a role. By pure coincidence, the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum meeting was held in Auckland, New Zealand, just as the East Timor crisis came to a head. At the APEC meeting, political support was garnered from Asia-Pacific states and the European Union (EU) (whose representatives also attended the meeting).

***Strategic intelligence capacity*:** An indigenous strategic intelligence capacity is vital. Australian experience allowed it to develop its own intelligence assessments and, as importantly, enabled the United States to plug into the Australian systems seamlessly. Consequently, Australia could use additional intelligence that the United States supplied, which was critical, especially when Indonesia's political and military leaders were promising co-

operation while other segments of the Indonesian military were acting inconsistently. Not only did the Indonesian military wreak havoc throughout East Timor but it also backed the militia and aggressively forward-deployed potent forces, such as submarines and fighters.

***Military capacity*:** Australia's credibility as a potential leader of a major military coalition rested on the reputation of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The structure, equipment, command and support systems, and training of the ADF are modeled on NATO standards. Consequently, the ADF is interoperable with the armed forces of all NATO states—including the United States, Great Britain, and France—and regional allies such as New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. Although the ADF is designed for the defense of Australia, its organization and capabilities were relevant. Key capabilities are:

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- **C4ISR (or Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance).** These enablers are essential to leadership at the operational level. The potential leader will need a strategic headquarters, an operational joint-force headquarters, and a tactical-level command-and-control capacity. C4ISR interoperability with the United States is an essential determinant of possible U.S. support.[8] If U.S. C4ISR systems cannot communicate with those of the potential leader, possible cooperation may be delayed, complicated, or even prevented.
- **Deployable utility forces.** A potential leader must have the core of the peacemaking force that will deploy to a regional contingency. The potential leader's force structure and capability mix will need the flexibility to respond to planned as well as contingency tasks and the ability to operate in all kinds of terrain and weather within the theater of operations. In East Timor, Australia provided the core special forces (fleshed out with British Special Boat Service and New Zealand Special Air Service soldiers) and a light infantry brigade to gain control on the ground. Contingents from Great Britain, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Canada, and Ireland were incorporated (with specialist support from the United States) around this brigade structure.
- **Logistics/lift.** A potential leader will be expected to provide the organizational core and capacity for the support, sustenance, and movement of a force. Lines of communication may span very long distances. The East Timor operation, for instance, was sustained entirely by sea and air lines

of communication between various bases in the north of Australia and East Timor. Australia provided the nucleus of the tactical and strategic lift and, as importantly, the command and control of logistics movement across this gap. East Timor was, however, within Australia's reach. Had it been more than a few hundred miles away, it would not have been accessible. Here, the U.S. provision of logistics and lift was critical (although states such as Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and Singapore also provided extra tactical lift).

- **Force protection and deterrence.** Any leader must possess this essential capacity if it expects other states to allocate forces to an operation. The leader of a regional operation must be able to overcome any potential adversary. Levels of required force protection and deterrence will vary depending on the threat. In East Timor, the land component, although lightly equipped, was provided with very robust rules of engagement, could deploy force elements with much greater levels of firepower if necessary, and had close air support on demand. A powerful fleet of warships (built around an Australian core, with the USS *Mobile Bay* and additional warships from Great Britain, France, New Zealand, and Portugal) protected sea lines of communication, and air power in turn protected the ships.[9] Australia developed offensive sea and air plans, and the full spectrum of its sea and air power force elements were deployed forward to deter an attack from forward-deployed Indonesian submarines, warships, and fighter aircraft. Leaders communicated the purpose of Australian deterrence in public and private messages to Indonesia. Consequently, Indonesia withdrew its maritime and air assets, an action that Australia matched in kind.

> East Timor was unique in the sense that vital national interests were not involved.

Synchronization with the United States: The United States can realistically only support states with which it can interoperate. It has a limited capacity to support states that have standards of military organization, doctrine, operating procedures, and equipment that lack synergy with U.S. systems. The ADF and the U.S. armed forces have a high degree of commonality that is a consequence of common doctrine, standards, systems, and equipment, reinforced through combined training.

Leadership record: A historical record of leadership provides a strong indicator of whether a state is willing to lead a particular operation. Australia led a major peacekeeping mission in Cambodia in the early 1990s and a

smaller operation in Bougainville, in addition to contributing forces to peacekeeping missions in Somalia and elsewhere. As important, if not more, is Australia's leadership of its own defense, involvement in regional military cooperation, and ANZUS cooperation with the United States.

Identifying Leadership Candidates

Few would disagree with the assessment of Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC) Adm. Dennis Blair that the coalition, led by Australia and backed by the United States, was a resounding success and "brought security" to East Timor.[10] Australia was undoubtedly a leader, but what about other states? Can the United States really expect to turn over leadership of regional interventions to reliable allies?

A word of caution must first be given. The situation in East Timor was unique because pressing national interests were not involved. The important consideration of most states that got involved, or backed intervention, was their bilateral relationship with Indonesia. Canberra now must work through the longer-term implications for its relationship with Jakarta stemming from Australia's leadership during the East Timor crisis. Despite its well-developed institutional capacity, Australia found the leadership of the East Timor campaign exhausting. This one operation absorbed much of Australia's political and defense capacity from late 1999 into early 2000. Australia is still faced with the challenge of the consequences to its defense force of the cost of the East Timor operation while sustaining a long-term military commitment to that small and impoverished country. This state of affairs does not mean that Australia could not assume the leadership of another regional contingency in the future. In the short term, however, Australia would most likely think through the consequences of assuming the leadership of any regional operation very carefully. Nonetheless, by highlighting weaknesses that have since been, or are being, addressed, the operation in East Timor in fact strengthened Australia's capacity for leadership.

How Would Others Measure Up?

Thailand and the Philippines both led the UN force in East Timor after Australia relinquished control. Both states have strong regional and international credentials. Both have experience in peacekeeping and are allies of the United States. Internal security problems, however, are especially serious for the Philippines, which imposes a significant limitation on its ability for force projections. Although both states possess professional armed

forces, especially light, deployable utility forces, they have limited strategic intelligence and C4ISR capacities. Neither state has an adequate force-protection capacity. The technical professional competence of the Thai military is a level above that of the Philippines. (Thailand's greater wealth, which gives its military more resources, partly explains this difference. The continual strain on the Philippine military of maintaining large numbers of military personnel on active service does as well.) Thailand and the Philippines are especially adept at peacekeeping, rather than robust peace enforcement. This distinction limits the types of regional operation that both states would feel comfortable leading, though it also makes them contenders to lead operations once the peace enforcement phase is completed. U.S. familiarity with the armed forces of both the Philippines and Thailand would offset some of the problems of interoperability.

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Malaysia is also a contender for leadership. Although not a U.S. ally, Malaysia is a member of the Five Power Defense Arrangements with Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Singapore. Its military operating procedures are largely derived from British practice and adapted to local conditions. It has a strong record of involvement in peacekeeping (most recently in Somalia and Bosnia) and has deployable utility forces and a good lift capacity. Its C4ISR and logistics capacity are uneven, however, and its force-protection deployment capacity is somewhat limited. Its technical military capacity for leadership would be enhanced if it drew on Singapore's command, control, intelligence, and logistics expertise. Unfortunately, political tensions between Malaysia and Singapore limit the potential for closer military cooperation between them. Malaysia's willingness to take the lead is also questionable. During the East Timor crisis, Malaysia called for Asian leadership of the operation, yet did not readily provide forces.

Southeast Asian states possess the great political attraction of being seen by China as credible and nonthreatening leaders of operations in the Asia-Pacific region. Among them, Indonesia also has a capacity for leadership. Indonesian peacekeepers performed especially well in Cambodia. An uncertain political environment and demanding internal problems, however, sap Indonesia's leadership potential in the short term.

Of the Northeast Asian countries, only two states may be considered contenders to assume a leadership role: Japan and South Korea. The Japanese armed forces are thoroughly interoperable with U.S. forces and are well equipped and trained. Japan has reasonable strategic and tactical lift, which

U.S. support could compliment. The critical limitation, however, is Japan's reluctance to assume a greater role in regional security, a domestic judgment attuned to lingering suspicions about Japan's ambitions in some parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Except for a dramatic reassessment of its own security role, this impediment effectively excludes Japan from consideration.

South Korea possesses many of the strengths of a potentially strong leader of regional operations. South Korea is faced with a genuine threat to its own security, however, of such a magnitude that any diversion of attention and resources from the deterrence of its unpredictable neighbor is unlikely. For these reasons, Seoul's enthusiasm for leadership of a regional operation would be constrained.

The U.S. does not have many reliable allies of the quality of Australia.

India has an excellent record of leadership in regional operations. It has a large, professional, and reasonably well-equipped military. India's armed forces are structured along British lines but its operating procedures are genuinely unique—derived from British standards and adapted to its own circumstances through trial and error. The Indian armed forces are equipped with a mix of indigenous, European, and Russian equipment and possess particularly strong, mobile light forces; a good strategic and tactical lift capacity; and an impressive force-protection capacity. India's command-and-control systems are indigenous, which presents a challenge rather than a barrier to interoperability. India has successfully controlled deployed forces in the past. India has yet to overcome logistics (as demonstrated during the Kargil crisis) and communications limitations. Cooperation with the United States has resumed with a new vigor, possibly helping both states overcome existing barriers (especially the lack of systems commonality) to interoperability. The greatest barrier to Indian leadership is a self-imposed reluctance (after its experience in Sierra Leone) to lead unless unity of command can be guaranteed. The threat to India from Pakistan may be a constraint (especially if, at the time when Indian leadership was needed, a periodic crisis with Islamabad preoccupied New Delhi).

Tensions with India are a major constraint on potential Pakistani leadership of a regional operation. Other significant limitations are the challenges of combating Islamic militancy and controlling its border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has participated in a number of peacekeeping missions and is an ally of the United States. Pakistan's armed forces have similar strengths and limitations as those of India. In the current strategic environment, Islamabad seems unlikely to seek the leadership of a regional operation.

Of states in Africa, Nigeria and South Africa stand out as potential leaders. Nigeria has strong ambitions as a leader of regional operations and has participated in numerous UN and regional interventions, with varying degrees of success. Its latest efforts in Sierra Leone, however, were counterproductive. Nigeria's armed forces are large but poorly equipped, undisciplined, and have very limited C4ISR, logistics, and force-protection capacities. The central limitation to Nigerian leadership is its lack of political credibility. Nigeria is also a military dictatorship with an uneven human rights record.

South Africa, in contrast, has considerable political credibility and military capacity. South Africa's defense machinery is well organized and competent. South Africa has strong links with the armed forces of other African states, as well as India, Great Britain, and several other NATO states. South Africa's armed forces are the best in Africa, are professional, and possess a deployable command-and-control, communications, logistics, lift, and force-protection capacity. Despite years of isolation and the challenges of broadening the recruitment base of the military, South Africa's armed forces have retained their competence. The procedures and doctrine of the South African Defence Force are modeled on the British, which makes interoperability with the United States a practical option.

The strongest credentials for leadership rest with the British.

Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico are possible leaders. All have mobile forces that possess the capacity to deploy in Central and South America and possibly further abroad. Argentina and Brazil possess a maritime deployment capacity as well as the ability to move light forces by land or air. All three states structure and organize their military with a mix of indigenous and Western practices and are used to cooperating with the United States in a variety of settings.

Canada also has the capacity to lead a regional operation. Although it has the organizational capability to build an international coalition at the political level, its capacity to pull together a military coalition is much weaker than a country such as Australia. Canada has not diversified from its long-standing relationship with NATO and lacks the dense network of defense cooperative relationships in the Asia-Pacific region that Australia has patiently constructed. Canada is an alliance partner of the United States; its C4ISR and logistics systems are interoperable; and it can control, deploy, and to an extent sustain light utility forces. Surprisingly, given Canada's self-proclaimed emphasis on peacekeeping, it lacks a strategic lift capacity. Canada does, however, have the capacity to provide the nucleus of force

protection for a deployed force. Overall, on paper, Canada is an ideal candidate for leadership of a regional operation where U.S. support could cover a variety of Canadian logistic, lift, force protection, and strategic intelligence deficiencies. The greatest limit on Canada's potential is the variability of its political resolve.

Of the states discussed in this survey, the strongest credentials for leadership rest with the British. The British possess the most capable political, diplomatic, and strategic machinery and have more experience, confidence, and a better track record of controlling out-of-area operations than any other state. The British, thanks to an excellent C4ISR and balanced force structure, have the capacity to command and deploy the nucleus of the force needed to mount an operation in almost any region. The British armed forces are more interoperable with the United States than those of any other state. In some relevant roles, the force structure and capabilities of the British military compliment deficiencies in U.S. force structure. Great Britain sets the standard for the leadership of regional operations.

France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands are other strong European candidates for leadership of regional operations. Of these states, perhaps only the French possess the capacity to pull together a coalition at the political and military level. All are U.S. allies, and their military capacity is balanced and interoperable (with some exceptions) with the United States. All have deployable joint-force headquarters or experience in higher-level command. The Netherlands has a particularly strong record of working alongside deployable British forces such as the Royal Marines. The French, Spanish, and Italian force structures include aircraft carrier–based force projection and respectable strategic lift, though the Netherlands has only a limited strategic lift capacity and Germany has none. U.S. support could offset these limitations. With U.S. support, each of these European allies could project force almost anywhere in the world. All of these states have considerable peacekeeping experience: France has led a number of major regional operations, and Germany is currently commanding a NATO Task Force in Macedonia.

Although all may be considered potential leaders of a coalition force, the political will of these states can be questioned. France has consistently adopted an independent stance on international affairs. Germany is cautiously taking a more outward-looking role in international security affairs. Italy led a major operation in Albania, but its domestic political fragility restricts its capacity to lead. Spain lacks a record of leadership, and the Netherlands's experience in Bosnia exposed limits in its strategic decision-making capacity and the culture of its army. The military doctrines of France, Germany, and Italy are perhaps less suited to robust peacemaking than those of the British or Australians. All these countries, however, provide substantial contributions to the EU's Rapid Reaction Force.[11]

Table I: Potential Leadership for Regional Operations[12]

Tier 1	Great Britain, Australia	Alliance partners of the United States; robust political will; fully interoperable armed forces; advanced military infrastructure; support systems and a military culture adaptable to regional operations.
Tier 2	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands	Variable political will; alliance partners of the United States; advanced deployable military infrastructure; support systems limit military cultures' adaptability to regional operations.
Tier 3	Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, India	Bounded political leadership aspirations; military relationship with the United States varies; military infrastructure, support systems, and deployment limitations; military cultures focused on particular regional operations.
Tier 4	Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan	Major political constraints or threats.

Policy Implications for Washington

As Table 1 shows, the United States has only a limited number of friends and allies upon whom it can confidently rely to assume leadership of responses to regional conflicts. For U.S. decisionmakers looking for partners to share the burden of security, this news is not good. Yet, some observations are heartening, if indirect. The experience in East Timor may not be a blueprint for future engagement, but it does highlight the direct payoff of maintaining very close military interoperability and cooperation with like-minded allies. It also demonstrates the benefit over time of nourishing alliance and defense relationships with less like-minded states, which may be the central lesson of the East Timor endeavor. The United States does not have many reliable allies of the quality of Australia. If Washington would like others to assume responsibility for the leadership of regional contingencies, a reasonable number of states must be nurtured and developed so that more will have the capacity and will to do so.

The United States was able to support Australia because of the interoperability between the armed forces of both countries. The growing gap between the military technology of the United States and its friends and allies

may unintentionally limit the number of states (even if they may be willing to assume leadership of a regional contingency) that the United States can logistically support.

The United States should maintain or increase relevant military assistance and cooperation with states that have the potential, but lack the current capacity, for leadership of regional operations. The payoff will be a longer list of states that can share the burden of leadership of humanitarian interventions and other regional contingencies.

Notes

1. By "response," I mean command of peace support operations.
2. "To Arms," *Economist*, February 3, 2001, p. 43.
3. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Stanley Roth, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 22, 2000.
4. Most observations and judgments in this article are based on my research of Australian leadership in East Timor, first published in "The United Nations in East Timor: Intervention at the Military Operational Level," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 23 (2001): 213–232.
5. Hugh White, interviews by the author, 2000–2002; Hugh White, correspondence with the author, 2000–2002. White, as deputy secretary for strategy at the Department of Defence, was responsible for the day-to-day management of Australia's response to East Timor.
6. Hugh White, interview by the author.
7. James Goldrick, "East Timor, Maritime Lessons," RAN Maritime Studies Centre, HMAS CRESWELL, 2000, pp. 2–3.
8. Alan Ryan, "C4ISR Interoperability in Coalition Operations on Complex Terrain: Learning from Operation Stabilise in East Timor," Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, 2000, pp. 2–3.
9. The deployment of combat forces with the capacity to deter an attack eliminates most small powers from leadership.
10. Adm. Dennis Blair, remarks at the Senior Policy Symposium, East-West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii, August 6, 2001.
11. Although this force presents a credible capacity to respond to a major regional contingency independently of the United States, the issue is beyond the scope of this article.
12. The author is indebted to Professor Paul Dibb of the Australian National University for granting permission to draw on an idea of how to rank states by military capacity. See Paul Dibb, "The Revolution in Military Affairs and Asian Security," *Survival* 39, no. 4 (winter 1997–1998): 98.