



'Tens of thousands of Timorese have been starved into submission by the Indonesians.'
DOUGLAS WILKIE on ...

Our sordid, shameful Timor story

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AUSTRALIA'S ignoble spectator role in the Timor tragedy on its doorstep is ending as it began.

In the beginning, a shabby evasion of the responsibilities which go into the making of a creditable foreign policy.

Now, as the corpses rot and the living cry for help, a timid shying away by Canberra from the sort of gesture by which Australia could make some amends for its military weakness and gutless diplomacy.

Such a gesture would require us to prove that our humanitarian principles are not propaganda cant — but something to be asserted determinedly, promptly and without cringe to "protocol". Tens of thousands of Timorese have been starved into submission by the Indonesians.

Most of them are innocent victims of the cross-currents of civil war and a ruthless Indonesian take-over of their country, under-written by the Whitlam and Fraser governments. Many of them were our brave allies against Japan.

But before RAAF transports can fly in emergency rations and medical aid, and the RAN be organised to take supplies by sea, Canberra must study yet another "report". This is the plea of a spokesman for Mr. Peacock.

This is a way of saying that

we cannot risk offending the sensitivities of Jakarta.

Jakarta has hitherto refused to allow the International Red Cross into Timor, on the excuse that it could handle the situation by itself (No prying eyes, please!).

So President Soeharto and his generals must now be saved from loss of face.

They must not be forced into admitting that the ships and planes they could muster to mount a military invasion of East Timor could not be spared to lay in the stockpiles of food that would inevitably be needed to meet the consequences of a conquest-by-starvation strategy.

The generals must not be seen as begging for international aid to get them out of a horror situation of their own deliberate making.

And Canberra, it seems, feels obliged to play along.

Our foreign policy, what there is of it, is tightly geared to a "friendly" Indonesia, and to the good will of all those other Third World nations which spend three times as much on arms as they receive in foreign economic aid.

Our shirking of any overt co-

operation with Indonesia to achieve a peaceful transfer of sovereignty in Portugal's derelict colony was bad enough.

Even worse was our studied avoidance, in 1975, of any help for those Timorese who sought to flee the impending holocaust.

These facts are written indelibly into a shameful chapter of Australian history.

So is the sordid political gamesmanship in Canberra, as all the parties have tried to unload their guilt complexes on each other.

Before Israel's Prime Minister Begin went to Camp David he called in the Labor

Opposition leader to consult him in private.

When an Australian Prime Minister embarks on foreign policy-making he can be certain that the Opposition leader will insult him in public, regardless of the national interest!

Australia has reduced itself to military impotence. It relies instead on a "koala" diplomacy which invites a sneer from its potential enemies and a sad smile from its potential allies.

What fruitful foreign policy initiatives CAN we claim in all of the five years that have elapsed since Mr Whitlam be-

latedly carried an olive branch to Peking?

Recognition of Moscow's annexation of the Baltic republics? A few more swipes at South Africa and Rhodesia? Protests of loyalty to the United Nations, as long as it conveniently avoids involving itself — or us — in any of the more pitiable tragedies of our time, in Indo-China, black Africa, and Timor?

To be fair, we did send a squad of 35 police to help enforce "peace" in ravaged Cyprus.

Whether or not they're still there not one in a thousand Australians knows — or cares!