

Initiative "one book in one snapshot"

Title of the book/paper After the buffaloes clash: Moving from political violence to personal security in Timor-Leste (Case study report published by Overseas Development Institute)

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Sectors/areas of interest security, post-conflict country

Summary (maximum 2 pages)

In this paper the authors analyse the progress made since 2008 by Timor Leste in the personal security related issues, after the centuries of colonisation and decades of occupation. In spite of being seen as a post-conflict success story, Timor Leste remains a fragile country and the 2006 political and military crisis violently reminded about this fragility.

In this paper there are three key questions:

- 1) What progress has Timor Leste achieved in personal security?
- 2) What factors are driving these changes?
- 3) What challenges remain for improving personal security?

1)

The authors have analysed various available data including crime statistics, national data on violent incidents, police reporting data and international organisations' data. They came to the conclusion that the overall trend is positive and that the number of violent incidents has significantly decreased from on average 3 incidents per month in 2009 to 1-2 in 2014. This analysis is in line with the perception survey data showing that the perception of the personal security among Timorese people becomes more and more positive.

Also, according to the available data, there has been the reduction in political and martial arts violence, this being important as those two types of violence has the potential to evolve into other forms of violence. For example, the elections of 2012 were rather peaceful while during 2006 crisis armed gangs, paramilitaries and martial arts groups used violence on a large scale. Since 2008 the number of those groups is decreasing, nevertheless they still remain a significant threat to the personal security. It should also be noted that, however since 2008 there have been significant socioeconomic improvements in Timor Leste, many important social and economic problems remain unsolved.

2)

In the paper, the authors mention several factors that drive the change, such as peacekeeping interventions, a relatively stable political settlement, "buying the peace" approach, the ongoing development of national police force, effective state responses to security threats and local responses to violence.

There have been 5 United Nations missions and 2 international peacekeeping interventions in Timor Leste. In spite of the criticism, these actions led to the legitimisation of Timor Leste as a state and helped to ensure the personal security. According to the interviewees, it is doubtful that Timor Leste could cope with the conflict and post-conflict reality on its own. In turn, the stability of the political settlement in Timor Leste is consolidated on the strong position of the Timor Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão on one side and on the leaders of the Revolutionary Front for Liberation of East Timor on the other. Both of them seem to accept the status quo after the 2012 elections as the best solution. With regard to the "buying the peace" approach, the revenues from gas and oil were transferred to the vulnerable groups for example via one-off payments to the Internally Displaced People after the 2006 crisis or to the veterans as a compensation for the demobilisation. Also the government favoured the veterans while contracting the state-funded projects within the framework of Decentralised Development Programme. According to the authors, these actions should be seen as a "necessary evil" in order to maintain the security.

The national police force of Timor Leste became fully responsible for the state security in 2012, after the withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission of United Nations. After several important reforms the level of the national police meritocracy increased, nevertheless as numerous pardons were granted to the police officers involved in 2006 violence, the issue of the national policy credibility remains delicate. The government response to the security threats can be seen through the actions varying from the open dialogue or banning groups to adopting strict security measures. On a local level, the response to the security threats is based on the negotiations among different types of local authorities.

3)

According to the paper, there are still important challenges in the personal security related matters. Several forms of violence, such as violence by security forces and martial arts remain in spite of reforms, several, such as sexual violence are still underreported and the number of several forms, such as land, youth and urban violence is increasing. It should also be noted that current Prime Minister has wide public confidence and it is doubtful whether his successor will gain the same level of recognition. Also "buying the peace" approach can be seen as fuelling the conflict as on one hand the revenues are distributed unequally and on the other hand the natural resources are limited and the revenues will finally decrease. Moreover, the fact that the revenues from the gas and oil are mostly being spent on "buying the peace" leads to the situation that very little money is being invested in the sustainable growth, development and long term personal security.

Another challenge can be seen within the security sector itself, for example the reforms in this sector are rather limited and, as the authors point out, the national policy forces operate under the "rule of the deal" rather than under the rule of law.

Takeaway messages for DG DEVCO (maximum 1 page)

There are several important messages for the international actors, including DG DEVCO that should be taken into account.

It should be noted that there is the elite in Timor Leste that continues to benefit from the development dividends while the poverty and inequalities remain striking. Therefore there is a lot to be done in terms of equal distribution of the development aid.

Also, the authors point out that the state-building activities should be in line with the citizens' needs and expectations and that they should fit to the local reality. For example, the abolishment of the decentralised governance structures and localised service provision such as agricultural extension and market linkage support services, was not welcomed by the citizens as their livelihood depend on this sort of services. Therefore the majority of the population lost their trust in the authorities. The key message is that all such activities should be based on the consultations with the local communities, for example during the project identification studies.

Also the authors suggest that international actors should make an effort in order to better understand the history and the key personalities in the post-conflict Timor Leste reality. It is important that the international community realise that strategies (such “buying the peace”) which can be successful in the short term do not lead to the sustainable and inclusive development. The authors suggest that the development dividend should be distributed equally and not just among those that could threaten the security. Therefore another message is that there should not be the "security first – development second" sequence in the international actors approach towards post-conflict transition countries as these two issues are interdependent and should be tackled at the same time.

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