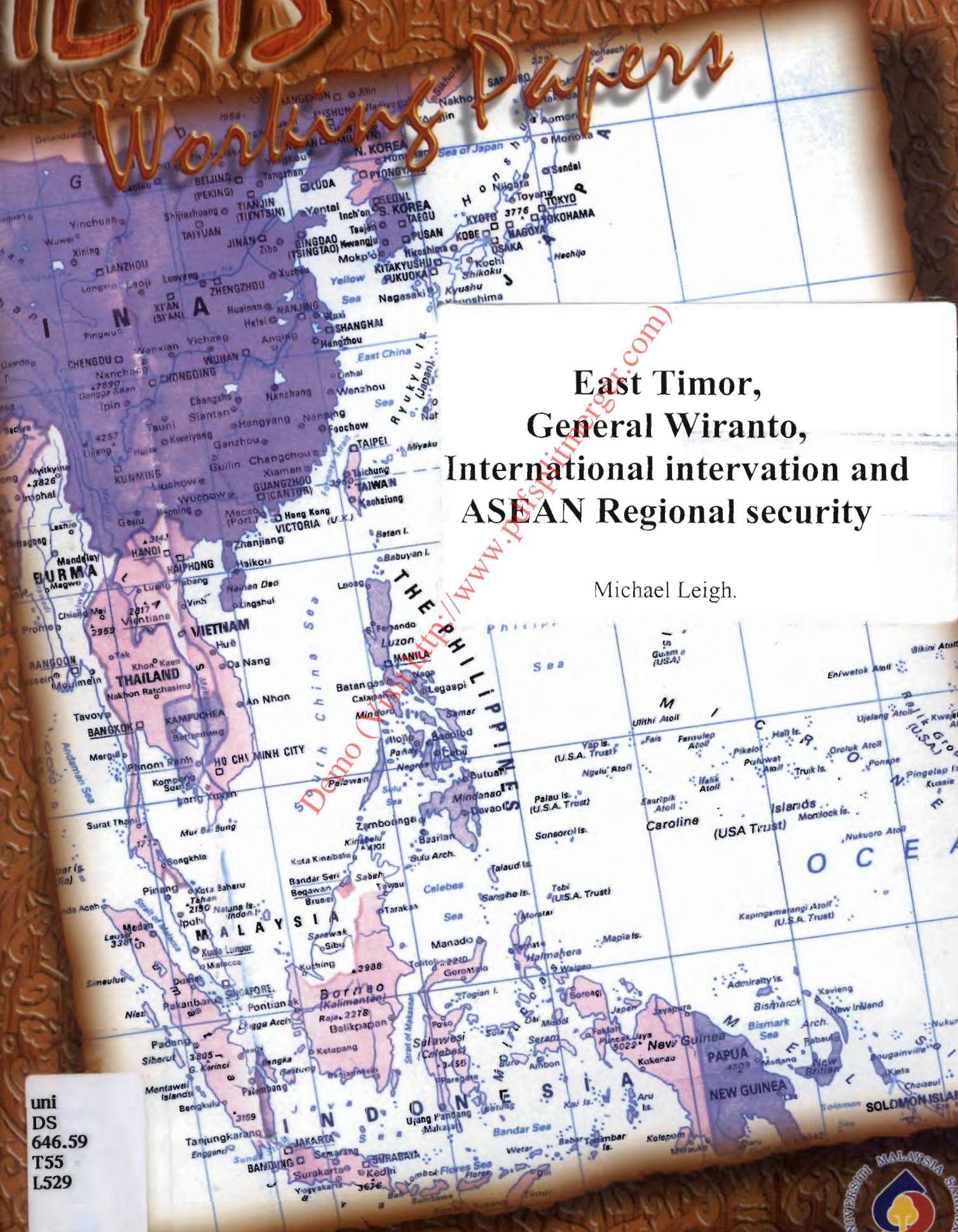


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East Timor, General Wiranto, International intervention and ASEAN Regional security

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East Timor, General Wiranto, international intervention and ASEAN Regional security

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The Institute of East Asian Studies has a responsibility to convene seminars on important issues of the day that affect the region. This paper was delivered on Monday, 13th September, the morning after President Habibie agreed to invite a United Nations Peacekeeping force to enter East Timor. We analyze the situation on four levels: the local, the national, the international and the ASEAN region.

The Local Dimension: East Timor

East Timor had been a grossly neglected colony, ever since Portugal seized control in 1642. Only in 1913 was the exact boundary demarcation settled by the Netherlands and Portugal. After the collapse of the military dictatorship in Portugal, its administration and authority withdrew, and in 1975 East Timor declared its independence. A chronology of recent events is attached.

In December 1975, Indonesia forces invaded, and shortly thereafter declared East Timor to be the nation's 27th province. An armed struggle ensued for more than 20 years between Fretilin [the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor], and the occupying Indonesian authorities.

The reasons for the Indonesia invasion were seen to be twofold. Firstly to combat the threat of communism and secondly to combat the threat of separatism. The Indonesian fear of an independent left-leaning Timor government was comprehensible in the historical context, for in April 1975 the American forces had been defeated in Indo-China, President Soeharto's legitimacy was largely based upon his elimination of the threat of communism throughout the archipelago, and the Indonesian Armed Forces were paranoid about the threat of regional rebellions.

- Most Indonesians believed their country brought schools, roads and development to East Timor.
- For the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia [ABRI] as a whole, this was a very expensive operation, with high casualties and apparent humiliation by a small and stubborn armed group of Fretilin fighters. On the other hand, ABRI ran a closed province, its senior officers and presidential cronies controlled the lucrative coffee production from East Timor.