

UNCLASSIFIED



United States Department of State

Washington, D. C. 20520

IØ8

April 16, 1999

CONFIDENTIAL

DECL: 1.6X1

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

S/S

RELEASED IN FULL

TO: The Secretary
FROM: INR - Phyllis E. Oakley
SUBJECT: East Timor-Momentum Shift

The momentum in East Timor appears to have shifted to the pro-Indonesia forces after an early rush of pro-independence sentiment. Prospects are high that a cycle of intimidation and terror will intensify, requiring a neutral UN or other presence to maintain security and facilitate assistance. (C)

* * *

Intimidation by local militias with the support of Indonesia's regular forces is the driving force behind public demonstrations of pro-Jakarta sentiment this week in Dili and elsewhere, but other factors contribute to the new dynamics. (C)

- There is a ripe environment for militias. Like much of Indonesia, a significant portion of East Timor's population is young and without prospects for good jobs. Even without intimidation, youths see monetary and psychological advantage in joining a militia unit. Once involved in a violent incident, the incentive is even stronger to remain, a "revenge" momentum builds, and a snow-ball effect begins attracting more participants. (C)
- After President Habibie's announcement that independence for East Timor could be an option, it appeared that the civilian government in Jakarta was preparing for a Timorese rejection of an autonomy plan and that the military would accept independence for East Timor with proper provisions for a face-saving withdrawal. Recently, however, there are signals that the leadership thinks a "win" on the issue of autonomy is possible. There is no evidence that this sentiment has translated into orders for the military to suppress the pro-independence movement, but Jakarta has certainly given incentive to the pro-autonomy activists. Some local military

CONFIDENTIAL

CLASSIFIED BY: Phyllis E. Oakley, INR A/S

REASON: 1.5(c)(d)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: MURRAY D ZINOMAN
DATE/CASE ID: 31 MAR 2006 200300722

UNCLASSIFIED

commanders are aiding the effort, but the extent or exact nature of their orders is unclear. (C)

- Pro-Jakarta Timorese have few options other than to fight for the status quo. Those Timorese who threw in their lot with Jakarta cannot easily leave the province like the non-Timorese teachers, doctors, and bureaucrats who have been reassigned by the central government. Some of these Timorese have been targeted by radical independence forces and many believe they are on "hit lists" that would be a priority of a new independent government. (C)
- On the other side of the equation, pro-independence rebels were ill-equipped to become political players and strains emerged between leaders on the ground and Xanana Gusmao. Their early parades and demands for independence frightened Timorese with vested interests in the status quo. As Indonesian authorities moved to defend pro-Jakarta sympathizers, including arming local gangs, violence increased, and the rebels stepped up attacks on Indonesian troops and civilian officials. A vicious cycle of gang warfare has erupted in many towns with pro-Jakarta militias clearly having the edge. (C)
- Pro-independence political activists were similarly ill-prepared. They had difficulty forming coalitions as new political organizations and NGOs bloomed in the heady days after President Habibie raised the independence option. Competing parochial interests of Timorese abroad and in-country undermined their effectiveness. (C)

Prospects. Without strong civilian leadership, the radical activists have filled the vacuum. Putting the armed militias back in the bottle may be extremely difficult unless their leaders (regional war lords, in some cases) are assured that their interests will be maintained and that there is no retribution. No one in authority can provide those assurances at present. It is very likely that the cycle of violence and intimidation will intensify and spread, making it extremely difficult for the UN to proceed. A "neutral" presence on the ground appears essential to the restoration of stability and to facilitate aid, but Jakarta may be increasingly resistant to such an outside presence if it interprets the current momentum as part of its "winning" strategy. (C)

**NATIONAL
SECURITY
ARCHIVE**

This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu