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US Department of State
Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Intelligence Assessment
09/02/1999

Indonesia and East Timor--Struggle for Control (U)

East Timor remains volatile, with militia active in several locations attacking homes, offices, foreign and domestic journalists, and other individuals seen as associated with the independence movement. If there was political will, the security forces on the ground would be able to restrain the militias. Military forces to date have largely stayed out of the action, giving the police full responsibility for law and order. Additional police and armed forces arrived today. However, there continue to be mixed signals on how Jakarta intends to handle the militias and, given the expectation of an overwhelming vote for independence, the transition and withdrawal. (C)

Reining in the militias

It is unclear whether Jakarta is now committed to restraining the militias it created. Also unclear is whether the current rampages are part of a campaign to derail the process or reflect a last gasp by gangs who fear the military will abandon them.

[redacted] and the nature of the forces on the ground further complicate the picture. The police, who have the primary responsibility for crowd control and protecting The UN Assistance Mission for East Timor (UNAMET), are afraid that the militias enjoy high-level military support from elements such as the special forces. Local battalions of East Timorese troops are suspected of being independence sympathizers. [redacted] trying to undermine the independence movement are working throughout the province. (S)

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Moreover, Indonesia's military is suffering significant morale problems. Officers are questioning the current civilian leadership, and pressures are mounting to resolve the more significant threat than East Timor--the growing rebellion in Aceh. Even if the leadership issues clear orders, implementing them on the ground may still be problematic. In addition, the potential for former pro-independence guerrillas to take to the streets should be factored into plans for establishing security. (S)

Political steps ahead

Reporting suggests that Jakarta is resigned to a clear vote for independence. But, that does not guarantee smooth sailing through the political process. The new assembly (MPR), which is scheduled to open October 1 and is charged with accepting or rejecting the vote, may contain many who are highly more nationalistic, including the large Megawati bloc. Consideration of the Timor issue could be put off, because it has no clearly defined place on the MPR agenda. The delegates may decide they have higher priorities, including choosing the next president. (C)

[redacted] argue that Indonesians will be eager to put East Timor behind them and move smartly to bless the vote, even designating January 1 as the transition date. President Habibie could call a special MPR session for that purpose only, but [redacted] no evidence of planning for that. Habibie is not very effective at swaying public opinion and no groundwork has been laid in Jakarta for losing Timor with honor. (C)

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Pulling out

[redacted] senior officers are sufficiently concerned about Indonesia's international image to refrain from an abrupt departure that would leave a security vacuum. Although some Indonesian officials now talk about an eventual peacekeeping operation, they remain opposed to the deployment of armed peacekeepers as long as East Timor remains, in their view, a sovereign part of the nation. (S)

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Once the political formalities are worked out, however, and a peacekeeping operation authorized, a rather rapid removal of Indonesian forces is likely. [redacted] favors an early and complete withdrawal, probably because he is wary of leaving troops unprotected in a potentially hostile environment. His more

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pressing concerns are Aceh, Ambon, and security for the MPR session in Jakarta. Some of the ethnic East Timorese in the two native battalions may opt--or be allowed--to remain as part of a fledgling East Timorese defense force, but they would be suspected of being a fifth column working for Indonesia's return. (S)

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