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TO CERTAIN MISSIONS TELNO GUIDANCE 213 OF 5 DECEMBER 1975

PORTUGUESE TIMOR

1. On 28 November, FRETILIN (the left-wing Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of East Timor) unilaterally proclaimed the independence of the "Democratic Republic of East Timor" and requested recognition from a number of countries, including the UK. On 29 November the four Timorese political parties opposing FRETILIN, viz UDT, APODETI, KOTA and TRABALISTA, declared East Timor independent of Portugal and opted for immediate integration with Indonesia.

Instructions for Use

2. You should not raise the matter yourself, but if asked, paras 3-7, which are primarily for your background information, may be used at your discretion with colleagues and trusted contacts. Para 8 may be used attributably. Paras 9, 10 and 11 are strictly for your own information.

/Background

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Background

3. Following large-scale hostilities between the opposing political parties in Portuguese Timor in August, the Portuguese administration withdrew from Dili, the capital, in early September to the offshore island of Ata'Uro, where they remain. The hostilities left FRETILIN in virtually complete control of the territory by the end of September, having driven the forces of the two main opposing parties, UDT and APODETI, across the border with neighbouring Indonesian West Timor. It seems likely that they were then regrouped, rearmed and trained by Indonesia and sent back to fight FRETILIN. Little progress was made in October, but in November, almost certainly with the covert support of Indonesian forces, UDT and APODETI succeeded in recapturing large sections of the border area, particularly in the north. By the end of November some of their forces were within 30 miles of Dili.

4. Throughout this period there have been desultory and generally ineffective attempts by Portugal, under pressure from Indonesia and Australia (but hampered by events in Portugal, and Portuguese concentration on disengagement from Angola), to bring about a negotiated settlement between the opposing parties, thus enabling a return to the original timetable for decolonisation (which envisaged independence in 1978). The most recent such attempt at negotiations followed a meeting in Rome between the Portuguese and Indonesian Foreign Ministers. Portugal called for a round-table conference of all political parties in DARWIN for late November. FRETILIN's UDI seems to have put an end to this initiative.

5. Indonesia, which favours integration with East Timor, but has so far stopped short of outright invasion, now seems certain to step up military support for the pro-Indonesian forces in the wake of the UDI. She continues to hold Portugal responsible for the territory and is anxious that any process of integration could at least be presented internationally as a legal expression of self-determination, being reluctant to see her image tarnished unduly, especially with the non-aligned. The 50,000-odd Timorese refugees now in West Timor are also a source of anxiety for the Indonesians, and a drain on her resources.

Recognition.

6. As far as we are aware the only countries to have recognised FRETILIN's UDI at the moment are Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tomé. The MPLA in Angola has also "recognised". It is possible that other African states may recognise. The USSR and China, while reiterating their support for the revolutionary struggle of the people of Timor for independence, are unlikely to extend recognition in the near future, since both wish to improve their relations with Indonesia.

/United Nations

United Nations

7. The problem is currently being discussed in the 4th Committee of the UN, and it seems likely that a resolution introduced by Malaysia, with the support of Indonesia and Japan, will be passed and forwarded to the General Assembly. The UK will vote in favour. Portugal's role now seems to be effectively restricted to limited activity in support of this and similar initiatives at the UN. It is possible that one of FRETILIN's supporters, such as Mozambique, may at some stage seek to take the matter to the Security Council, particularly in the event of a large-scale Indonesian intervention.

British Policy (Attributable)

8. We continue to regard the territory as the responsibility of Portugal, and we shall not in present circumstances extend recognition to FRETILIN. The party does not in any event, meet HMG's normal criteria for recognition. We favour the continuation of attempts to reach a solution by negotiation on the basis of self-determination.

(For your own information only, paras 9-11)

9. It remains our prime aim to keep out of the controversy surrounding Timor as far as possible. East Timor is economically weak and could become a source of instability within the Indonesian Archipelago. In the wake of Vietnam we wish to see a period of prolonged stability in the region. It would therefore make good sense and be entirely compatible with our general interests for the territory to be integrated into Indonesia. But we would hope this could come about in the context of an act of self-determination and not by crude annexation on the part of Indonesia, which we certainly could not support in the Security Council.

Prospects

10. In the absence of external assistance, which is unlikely, FRETILIN seems to have little chance of holding out against a determined push by the Indonesian backed forces, although they could well take to the hills and conduct a prolonged guerilla campaign. Latest reports suggest that Indonesia has now taken a decision to move on a large scale into East Timor (possibly after the conclusion of President Ford's visit on 6 December) in an attempt to take Dili as soon as possible and dislodge FRETILIN before the latter can muster a significant degree of international recognition and support.

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11. The extent to which Indonesia is able to avoid international opprobrium in the event of such action will depend on her success in portraying an invasion as a restoration of law and order in an assumption of the responsibility that Portugal concedes she no longer has the power to discharge. Indonesia's future plans for any act of self-determination (which will have to be internationally acceptable) will be crucial in deciding our response and that of the international community.

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