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TELEGRAM

Timor file

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INFO CHRON

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RELEASED IN FULL

R 030656Z MAR 75
FM AMCONSULATE SURABAYA
TO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 3399
BT
SECRET SURABAYA 0162

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PT

SUBJECT: ESTIMATE OF INDONESIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

REF: DAO 280940Z FEB 75

1. APPRECIATE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON REFTEL WHICH I PRESUME WAS SENT HERE WITH EMBASSY CLEARANCE. MOST USEFUL CONTRIBUTION FROM HERE WOULD BE TO FLAG PROBLEMS AN INDONESIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE WOULD ENCOUNTER IN A "WORST-CASE" SITUATION ON THE GROUND, I.E. IF THE 4,000 PORTUGUESE AND TIMORESE TROOPS AND THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION REFUSED TO SURRENDER IMMEDIATELY. EVEN IF THE PORTUGUESE DID LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS, MANY OF THESE PROBLEMS WOULD REMAIN. IN EITHER CASE, I THINK A STRONG ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE FOR THE APPLICABILITY OF MPHY'S LAW.

2. PORTUGUESE TIMOR IS NOT WEST IRIAN. IT IS TRIBAL AND PRIMITIVE, BUT THE TRIBES HAVE BEEN PLUGGED INTO THE PORTUGUESE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE FOR CENTURIES. THE TRADITIONAL CHIEFS HAVE THEIR OWN ARMED FORCES AND ARE RELIGIOUSLY LOYAL TO PORTUGAL. THEY DO NOT SPEAK INDONESIAN, TEND TO CORRELATE THE THREAT FROM INDONESIA WITH BITTER MEMORIES OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION, AND ARE UNLIKELY TO PROVIDE GUIDES OR LOCAL INTELLIGENCE. THE PORTUGUESE DID NOT PRACTICE APARTHEIT AND INTER-RACIAL RELATIONS ARE EXCELLENT. THERE IS NO POTENTIAL RESERVOIR OF SYMPATHY FOR INDONESIAN OVERLORDSHIP AMONG THE TIMORESE ELITE OR THE POPULATION AT LARGE.

3. WITHOUT LOCAL INTELLIGENCE AND A SYMPATHETIC POPULATION, CONDUCTING MILITARY OPERATIONS IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR WOULD SEVERELY TAX THE CAPABILITIES OF THE BEST ARMED FORCES IN THE WORLD. THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN IS EXTREMELY RUGGED AND THERE ARE NO FOOD AND WATER RESOURCES. THERE ARE ALSO NO VALID MAPS. IN TIMOR WE FOUND THAT EVEN THE BEST USG MAPS (AMS SERIES 1541 JOG) PROVIDED INSUFFICIENT TERRAIN AND

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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VEGETATION DATA, IMPRECISE ROAD AND STREAMBED ALIGNMENT, AND SKETCHY REEF AND FORESHORE INFORMATION. AIRDROPS WOULD BE DIFFICULT IN THE MOUNTAINS BECAUSE OF WEATHER CONDITIONS AND LACK OF NAVIGATIONAL AIDS. IF THE INDONESIANS PLAN ANY AERIAL OPERATIONS THEY WOULD BE WELL-ADVISED TO PRE-POSITION RADIO BEACONS AND USE IFR-QUALIFIED PILOTS.

4. THE SUB-STANDARD ROADS IN THE PROVINCE WILL SERIOUSLY HINDER MOBILITY. EVEN WITHIN A 50-KILOMETER RADIUS OF DILI, WE AVERAGED ONLY 10-15 KPH IN A FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE VEHICLE ON TRIPS TO LIQUISSA, REMEXID AND ERMERA. THIS WOULD PARALYZE ANY PROJECTED GROUND ASSAULT FROM INDONESIAN TERRITORY, ACCESS ROADS FROM WHICH ARE NO BETTER THAN MOUNTAIN TRAILS. MOREOVER, THE LACK OF ROADS AND PRIMITIVE AGRICULTURE MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYONE BUT TRIBAL INHABITANTS TO "LIVE OFF THE LAND." THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT AGRICULTURAL AREAS ARE ALONG THE SOUTH COAST, LINKED TO THE TOWNS BY ANTIQUATED CHINESE TRUCKS AND ROADS THAT COULD EASILY BE CUT. IN THE DRY SEASON, WATER IS NOT GENERALLY AVAILABLE. THE INDONESIANS SHOULD BE PREPARED TO SUPPLY EVERYTHING THEIR EXPEDITIONARY FORCES WILL REQUIRE, INCLUDING DRINKING WATER.

5. WITH SUPERIOR PLANNING AND PREPARATION, DILI COULD BE TAKEN BY A CAPABLE MILITARY FORCE, BUT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO HOLD WITHOUT A MASSIVE EXTERNAL SUPPLY EFFORT. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE INDONESIANS COULD MAKE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS WITHOUT TIPPING THEIR HAND TO THE PORTUGUESE, WHO HAVE ALREADY PENETRATED THE RUMP "APODETI" ORGANIZATION IN INDONESIAN TIMOR, AND MAY ALSO HAVE A MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CELL IN KAPANG. WITH A MINIMUM OF DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS AND A FEW DAYS WARNING, I BELIEVE THE PORTUGUESE COULD BOTTLE UP THE INDONESIANS IN DILI WITHOUT EXPENDING MUCH BLOOD OR ORDNANCE.

6. THERE ARE TWO PROSPECTIVE LANDING BEACHES NEAR DILI. ONE IS CALLED "WHITE SANDS BEACH", LOCATED ON THE WEST SIDE OF PONTA FATU COMA AT YA 8657. THE OTHER IS TEN KILOMETERS WEST OF DILI, AT YA 7354, NORTH OF THE VILLAGE OF TIBAR. "WHITE SANDS BEACH" HAS MAJOR REEF OBSTRUCTIONS AND EXTENSIVE FORESHORE SHALLOWS. THE TIBAR BEACH IS PERFECT FOR AN AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT, WITH A GOOD SLOPE, GRANULAR SAND, LOW CUSP AND LIGHT SURF. HOWEVER, IT IS BACKED BY EASILY DEFENDED LIMESTONE HILLS AND, LIKE "WHITE SANDS BEACH" COULD BE ISOLATED FROM DILI BY CUTTING THE COASTAL ROAD WHERE THE LATTER WINDS AROUND STEEP PROMONTORIES AT THE WATER'S EDGE. THE DILI AIR-STRIP IS DIRT/GRAVEL IN POOR CONDITION AND COULD BE CRATERED WITH A FEW GRENADES. DILI HARBOR IS STREWED WITH CORAL REEFS AND GETTING LARGE SHIPS INTO THE DOCK REQUIRES A SKILLED PILOT WITH LOCAL KNOWLEDGE.

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7. DILI ITSELF IS RINGED WITH LOW MOUNTAINS AND THE ONLY ROADS LEADING OUT OF TOWN COULD BE BLOWN WITH LIGHT CHARGES. THUS IF THE PORTUGUESE DECIDE NOT TO SURRENDER, THEY CAN BLOW THE POWER STATION AND WATERWORKS IN DILI, CUT ALL ROADS, CRATER THE AIRSTRIP, AND TAKE SANCTUARY IN THE HILLS BEHIND DILI. FROM THERE, THE PORTUGUESE COULD MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH VARIOUS DISTRICT (CONCELHO) TOWNS BY SSB RADIO, HARASS DILI WITH MORTARS AND SAPPER TEAMS, PERHAPS STIR UP TROUBLE BY THE 1200 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DILI, AND WAIT FOR THE INDONESIAN SUPPLY SYSTEM TO COLLAPSE. MEANWHILE A BROADER-BASED OPPOSITION FORCE COULD BE ORGANIZED AND ARMED IN THE CONCELHOS FOR A LONG-TERM CAMPAIGN.

8. AS TO THE INDONESIAN SUPPLY SYSTEM, THE NAVAL ASSETS LISTED REPTEL SEEM SOMEWHAT QUESTIONABLE, RELIABLE LOCAL SOURCE INDICATES THAT IN A CRUNCH THE INDONESIANS COULD POSSIBLY GET FOUR US-FURNISHED DE'S, FOUR OR FIVE LST'S, AND A SCATTERING OF SMALL CRAFT OUT TO PORTUGUESE TIMOR. THE SOVIET-FURNISHED VESSELS, HOWEVER, ARE ALL QUESTIONABLE AND THE SUBMARINE IS NOT BELIEVED TO BE OPERATIONAL. THE LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE SYSTEMS IN THE NAVY ARE PRIMITIVE, AND THERE MIGHT BE NUMEROUS UNREPARABLE BREAK-DOWNS ON ROUTE.

9. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE WOULD BE THE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL OPERATION AGAINST PORTUGUESE TIMOR, AND THESE HAVE NOT BEEN INDONESIAN STRONG-POINTS IN THE PAST.

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