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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Indonesian Provinces: East Timor and the  
Moluccas

East Timor

1. East Timor, the former Portuguese colony covering half the Indonesian island of Timor, was incorporated into Indonesia in August 1976 following an Indonesian invasion in December 1975. The remnants of Fretilin, the Timorese independence movement, continue to resist military pacification efforts, but they are important mainly for embarrassing Indonesia by drawing international attention to its forced absorption of the territory. [REDACTED]

2. Jakarta's interest in East Timor was sparked by Portugal's decision in 1974 to dispose of the remains of its colonial empire. Timor was an impoverished colony, somewhat larger than Connecticut and long a financial drain on Lisbon despite its limited production of coffee, sandalwood, and copra. Most of its 600,000 inhabitants were illiterate peasants living in isolated rural areas under tribal chieftains. The jungled mountains of Timor's interior are now the haunts of rebels fighting Indonesian rule. [REDACTED]

3. Indonesian leaders felt that an independent Timor would be an inherently unstable state and thus a threat to Indonesia's security. They also held an emotional belief that Timor rightfully belonged to Indonesia by virtue of geography and history. [REDACTED]

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4. Indonesia first tried to arrange the peaceful incorporation of Timor into Indonesia by engineering the victory of pro-Indonesian forces in a plebiscite on the colony's future status planned by the Portuguese. Indonesian hopes on this score were dashed when independence forces proved to be the strongest. Fighting broke out among rival Timorese groups, and pro-independence Fretilin's unilateral declaration of independence in November 1975 pushed Indonesia into an outright military assault. [redacted]

5. Although foreign opinion might have acquiesced in a quick military takeover, the drawn-out military campaign focused attention on what came to be widely seen as an Indonesian land grab. In an annual ritual embarrassing to Indonesia as one of the founders of the nonaligned movement, Fretilin supporters have tabled a yearly UN resolution questioning Indonesia's actions. [redacted]

6. Indonesia is now concentrating on reconstruction to win over the Timorese, who are ethnically and linguistically different from Indonesians. Although armed resistance continues in the hills, food shortages and alienation of the public by an increasingly brutal Fretilin leadership have reduced the rebels' military capabilities. Indonesian prospects for finally ending armed opposition were heightened by the ambush and killing of the Fretilin president this week. [redacted]

The Moluccas

7. The Molucca Islands number over 900 -- only a few of any size -- and stretch for 600 miles across the equator near the eastern end of the 3,000-mile-long Indonesian archipelago. They comprise Indonesia's Moluccas Province (Maluku in Indonesian). Known as the legendary Spice Islands during the European colonizing period, they now produce more timber than spices. Their one million inhabitants live in deprivation, even by low Indonesian standards. [redacted]

8. Moluccans are outside the mainstream of Indonesian life and are looked down upon by the dominant Javanese. This is a consequence of Moluccan receptivity to Dutch colonial rule. There was a considerable infusion of Dutch blood, and Moluccans provided the most loyal recruits for the Dutch colonial army and administration. During an upsurge in Indonesian nationalist agitation early in this century, the Moluccans were the agents of the Dutch in maintaining colonial control.

9. In 1950, shortly after the Netherlands relinquished rule over Indonesia, the Moluccans rebelled against the new government in Jakarta and set up a "Republic of the South Moluccas." The Indonesian military put down the revolt, but a Moluccan government-in-exile continues to this day in the Netherlands, where there is a Moluccan community of some 35,000. A youth wing of second-generation Moluccans in the Netherlands has been responsible for several acts of terrorism intended to gain publicity for the cause of Moluccan secession from Indonesia and to persuade the Netherlands to bring pressure on the Indonesian government. Jakarta is alert to the possibility of exile rebel attempts to bring weapons into the Moluccas.

