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The war Indonesia denies

Documents suggest fighting in East Timor continues

By Jill Jolliffe

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When President Reagan meets leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Indonesia this week, he will be only a few hundred miles from one of the world's most hidden but bitter wars.

Bali, where the President is to arrive today, is almost next door to East Timor, the former Portuguese colony invaded by Indonesia in 1975.

The issue and the accompanying charges of massive human rights violations have clouded Indone-

sia's relations with the international community and will be the subject of debate in the UN General Assembly later this year.

[In a letter that was to be released Monday evening, 125 congressmen urged Mr. Reagan to raise allegations of rights abuses in East Timor during his meetings with Indonesian President Suharto.]

The UN does not recognize Indonesian sovereignty in Timor and considers Portugal the administering power. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar has called a midyear meeting of Portuguese and

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Indonesian representatives to try to solve the sovereignty issue, after years of backstage negotiations.

Since the 1975 invasion, an information curtain has hung over the island territory. The result is that the Indonesian view of what is happening in East Timor is known, while the East Timorese view can be gleaned only through interviews with refugees or through documents or letters smuggled out of the region.

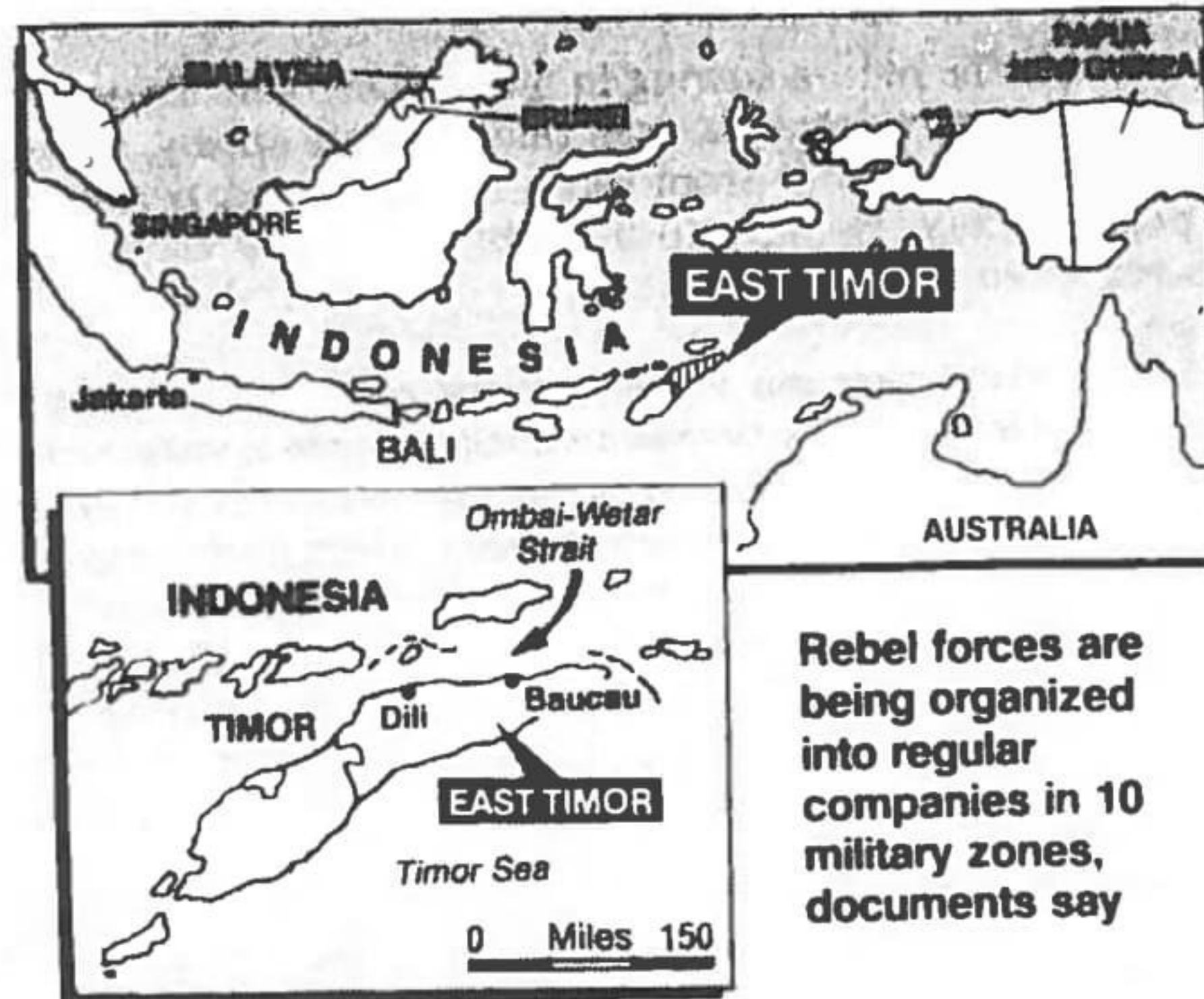
The contrast between the two accounts is profound. Indonesia has long claimed that effective resistance to its occupation is insignificant, while the East Timorese claim that a "hot" war is under way between Indonesian regulars and guerrillas from the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin).

At the time of the invasion, both sides agreed on one point: Thousands of Timorese were killed in the first months. In February 1976, an Indonesian spokesman said 60,000 people out of a population of 650,000 had been killed in fighting. Months later, a Roman Catholic Church source said 100,000 was probably more accurate. Other sources have set even higher figures.

Analysts say Indonesia feared that a successful independent government in a small state in the midst of its far-flung island territory would set an example for parts of the country beset by secessionist rumblings.

East Timor is also strategically located. The United States enjoys the right of passage for its nuclear submarines through the Ombai-Wetar Strait, a deep-water passage from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean which runs north of Dili, the capital. According to a paper published in 1977 by the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies, the Ombai-Wetar Strait ranks, after Gibraltar, as the second-most-important strait in the world to US defense interests.

For more than a decade, Indonesia has denied reports



Rebel forces are being organized into regular companies in 10 military zones, documents say

that it faces substantial resistance from the East Timorese. But this was challenged by photos and tape recordings smuggled out by guerrillas which showed that a cease-fire was negotiated between Fretilin commander Jose Gusmao Xanana and the then Indonesian commander in Timor, Colonel Purwanto, in May 1983.

The cease-fire provided a respite from eight years of war. In the worst years, between 1976 and 1979, letters to Timorese exiles in Lisbon told of the death by starvation of hundreds of people who were forced to trek through the mountains to flee bombardment and who were deprived of their traditional food sources.

One refugee who now lives in Lisbon, a Mr. Neo-Bere, recalls that time as the worst period of his life. He says he saw napalm dropped in the Eastern Mount Matebian district in early 1979, delivered by Bronco OV-10 aircraft. Broncos were sold to Indonesia by the US government after the 1975 invasion. The cease-fire broke down

on both sides. Indonesia publicly denied the negotiations had occurred. In August 1983, Fretilin supporters killed 16 Indonesian military engineers at Kraras, on the south coast. A new Indonesian offensive began.

Refugees arriving here told of waves of troops and arms moving through Dili. According to latest reports, the campaign that began then is still in full force.

A new batch of documents from Fretilin commander Xanana arrived here last month. If authentic, they point to a continuing conflict, denied by Indonesia.

In 1983, the guerrillas had sent a captured Indonesian military document abroad. It was later passed along to the human rights organization Amnesty International which declared it authentic after examination by experts. It was a counterinsurgency manual which gave a detailed picture of the resistance's strength, far more extensive than Indonesia publicly claimed, as well as instructions to Indonesian soldiers on the use of torture.

The latest Indonesian documents, including a map smeared in places with duplicating ink, may prove more difficult to authenticate, but is internally consistent with the previous document. It shows Fretilin's forces as being organized into regular companies operating in 10 military zones in the central and eastern districts, with no activity around Dili or in the border area.

Read with the notes accompanying it, the document suggests that the most wanted of the guerrillas are still fighting. Moreover, against Indonesian claims that the resistance consists of a few hundred ragged bandits who are being killed off, there are new names in the leadership, including veterans from the first phase of the war who have rejoined the guerrillas after having surrendered to the Indonesians in 1979.

The maps, apparently drawn by Fretilin in January, suggest that Indonesian activity is focused in the east, where the strategy since 1983 has been to build a cordon across the width of the island (south from Baucau) to contain the guerrillas.

OPINION

The Indonesia Reagan won't recognize

By Barbara Koepfel

CHARLES Dickens was mistaken. Had he understood something of geopolitics, he would have known that sows' ears are transformed into silk purses all the time, everywhere. It's all in the labeling.

Where military bases, oil, profits, and the like are at stake, the Reagan administration's standard for civilized behavior is flexible: When our foes behave poorly, say, by denying press freedom or civil liberties, they are loudly condemned. Allies, however, are measured by a different stick.

Take Indonesia, for example. President Reagan is making his predictable pronouncements about "winds of freedom," friendship, cooperation. Images we can relate to.

Reality, however, stirs a different set.

Since General Suharto seized power in 1966, his grip has been fierce; his reign, bloody. In the first six months, Army and religious groups linked to the government committed wide-scale massacres.

A former Indonesian vice-president put the figure at half a million killed, but Amnesty International says the number is twice as high.

The targets, members of the then-legal Communist Party and those suspected of sympathizing with it, were simply wiped out. Thousands more fortunate were jailed, and to this day are persecuted. The United States, fighting its own war against communism in Vietnam, applauded.

Then came East Timor. After the Portuguese left their former colony, in 1975, the Indonesians invaded. During the next few years the nationalists paid dearly for demanding independence. Suffering direct attack or aerial burning of crops that led to famine and starvation, the population of 600,000 was decimated.

Conservative estimates place the deaths at 100,000, but others give a far higher estimate, and today, nearly a decade later, there are only 450,000 people in East Timor.

For Suharto, the use of repression is routine. In 1984, when thousands of Jakartans rioted, the general simply



General
Suharto

TOM HUGHES

(once, an entire editorial board) for covering that which displeases.

The press knows well the taboo topics, but, taking no chances, officials call the papers daily to advise on what can and can't be reported.

For those that disobey, punishment is certain — closure or, at the least, financial loss: The government cancels its ads and pressures businesses to do the same. Finally, all radio and television are state controlled.

The foreign press has also been attacked. When five Australian television newsmen tried to cover the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, they were murdered by security forces.

More recently, expulsion seems the preferred tactic. In the last few weeks, two US reporters with the Far Eastern Economic Review, 11 Australian journalists, and Barbara Crossette of the New York Times were all denied visas to cover the Reagan visit. Their crime, it seems, was reporting on corruption, military matters, or local dissatisfaction. Or, in the case of the Australians, it was guilt by association (with Jenkins's piece on corruption).

Despite such doing, the general has been well rewarded.

In the last 10 years, the US has granted him nearly \$2 billion in military and economic aid. From the World Bank, theoretically nonpolitical (despite recent US blocking of funding to Nicaragua), Indonesia landed more than \$4 billion in loans the last three years alone.

Where was the outcry from the US public, the press, or Congress during the last 19 years? Where was the pressure before the current visit, demanding that the President denounce the abuses he passionately decries elsewhere and used to justify American military strikes? Is Suharto's terror any the less terrifying?

With South Africa, Washington was finally moved to press for change because a growing constituency refused to let the matter rest. Lacking such support in the US, Indonesians (who make up the world's fifth most populous country) can expect only more of the same.

Barbara Koepfel is executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, in New York.

called out the tanks, leaving more than 100 dead.

Big-time corruption, the sort practiced by the Marcos and Duvalier families and their friends, is another item that could have concerned President Reagan, particularly since revelations about the fortunes of two former dictators and US allies are front-page stuff almost daily. But again, the issue did not mar the Reagan visit.

In fact, the general has not done badly: Estimates by David Jenkins, the foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, credit Suharto and cronies with accumulating some \$2 billion to \$3 billion since taking power.

A free press, high on the Reagan list of requirements when judging governments democratic or devilish, has been getting little presidential attention. Yet censorship is endemic and total.

In the 1970s, at least 11 major dailies were closed; and since that time, numerous journalists have been fired