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### Viewing cable 06LISBON1014, PORTUGUESE VIEWS ON EAST TIMOR AND DEPLOYMENT PLANS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2016  
TAGS: PREL MOPS TT PO  
SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE VIEWS ON EAST TIMOR AND DEPLOYMENT PLANS

Classified By: Political/Economic Counselor Matt Harrington for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Portuguese interlocutors from the Defense Ministry, Foreign Ministry, and Republican National Guard (GNR) have confirmed Portugal's plans to help East Timor stabilize, although not under the auspices of the Australia-led Joint Task Force. Both the Portuguese Defense Minister's Advisor and the Australian Ambassador in Lisbon noted that Portugal and Australia agree on remaining neutral in the conflict but differ in their views regarding the appropriate response. The Government of Portugal (GOP) seeks to support East Timor by using bilateral channels and by providing personnel directly under the control of the Timorese government pending a UN mission. Once the UN mission is in place, the GOP believes it should focus on institution building and conflict resolution to avoid future violence. The GNR contingent's arrival in Dili has been delayed, reportedly due to Indonesia's denial of overflight clearance, but is expected to depart Lisbon on June 2. End Summary.

Insistence on a Separate Command Structure

¶2. (C) MFA Deputy Foreign Minister Joao Gomes Cravinho told the DCM on June 2 that the Portuguese GNR forces will work directly under the East Timor command structure due to a standing protocol with East Timor which precludes Portugal from operating under another nation's command. He added that operational commanders are likely to come to an agreement once the GNR forces are on the ground, but noted that the GNR's mission of reestablishing civil order differs significantly from the Australian-led Task Force's military mission.

¶3. (C) In a separate conversation, Director of Asia and Oceanic Affairs Jorge Silva Lopes told Pol/Econ Officer that the GNR are going to report through a Portuguese Commander directly to the Timorese President and Prime Minister once they arrived, in accordance with a May 25 MOU between Portugal and East Timor. When asked about potential coordination problems arising from the dual President and PM command structure, Lopes claimed he did not foresee any problems of conflicting requests from the offices. He similarly downplayed questions about coordination with the Australian-controlled forces. While the Portuguese government respects the Australian role, it has no plans to put the GNR under Australia's command, according to Lopes.

¶4. (C) In a June 1 phone call with the Ambassador, Australia's Ambassador in Lisbon, Greg Polson, said coordination arrangements for the GNR company headed to Dili are still being discussed between Canberra and Lisbon. He thought the situation would work out fine on the ground where it was a question of agreeing which foreign contingents would

have responsibility for which areas. He added that the GNR would have mostly a police role, responsible primarily for crowd control, which was different from that played by the military contingents deployed by Australia, Malaysia, and New Zealand. He offered his view that, ultimately, the GOP would insist that the GNR operate autonomously, but that practical considerations on the ground would lead them to close coordination with the Australian and other forces.

#### GNR's Deployment and Mission Plans

¶5. (S) After a brief delay in the GNR's departure due to lack of Indonesian overflight approval, the 120-man force is slated to leave on June 2, 2100 local time for Dili on two rented aircraft. Once there, the GNR plans to have its force in East Timor for at least one year, rotating troops every four months. In contradiction to the dual President/PM command structure Lopes outlined on June 1, the GNR Deputy Chief of Staff told DAO Officer on June 2 that their Detachment Commander will receive orders directly from President Gusmao. Only in his absence, they will take orders from Prime Minister Alkatiri and will be responsible to the Portuguese Ambassador.

¶6. (S) The first phase of the deployment will be focused on establishing peace and order in and around Dili, or in an area designated by President Gusmao, and the second phase of their mission will focus on training the local police force. The Portuguese GNR has had an advance team in Timor for some time and has already developed a plan for the Portuguese mission. The GNR Commander will present this plan to Gusmao for final authorization.

#### After the Storm - Rebuilding East Timor

¶7. (C) The Defense Minister's diplomatic advisor, Paulo Lourenco, outlined his perspective on the need for a long-term solution in East Timor to the DCM in a June 1 conversation but noted that his Ministry did not have the lead role in determining policy on this issue. Lourenco insisted that the problem is far greater than PM Alkatiri. The country's ethnic tensions have never been addressed, he said, and the UN drawdown occurred too soon and too quickly, so East Timor and the international community are now paying the price for past shortsightedness. It is essential that an international force under UN mandate be deployed for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, the GNR would liaise with local security forces in protecting public order. President Gusmao, according to Lourenco, is a strong leader fully capable of managing the current crisis.

¶8. (C) Lourenco expressed his view that Australia's motivation in intervening in East Timor is to preserve regional stability and to demonstrate its influence in that part of the world. He also thought Australia was concerned that the radical Muslim community in Indonesia might have an unhelpful influence on the Timorese population (Comment: which struck us as odd, since we believe an overwhelming majority of East Timor's population is Roman Catholic. End Comment).

¶9. (C) Deputy FM Cravinho echoed Lourenco's concerns about rebuilding and reported to the DCM that, although Portugal believes the immediate crisis will end soon, the more important mission will be responding to the ongoing societal rift. He believes that the UN should rethink its mission in East Timor and begin to address the conflict and support institution-building efforts. To that end, he mentioned that commissions that focused on strengthening societal entities would help more than continued security missions.

#### Australian View from Lisbon

¶10. (C) Ambassador Hoffman asked Australian Ambassador Polson whether the Portuguese were backing Prime Minister Alkatiri and whether the GOP was at odds with Canberra. "I wouldn't say at odds," Polson replied. Portugal and Australia, he said, approach East Timor from two very different perspectives. Portugal's approach is shaped by emotional, historical, and linguistic connections, while Australia's policy is grounded in geo-strategic concerns, such as a desire to avoid instability and consequent refugee flows in the region. Some of the Portuguese leadership, Polson continued, very clearly supports Alkatiri. The GOP, Polson believes, wants all three senior E. Timorese leaders -- the President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister -- to stay, but he wagered that no one in the GOP would be willing to call for Alkatiri to step down.

#### Comment

¶11. (C) We have heard a consistent message from all of our Portuguese interlocutors that the GOP has no intention of placing the GNR contingent under Australian command and control, due partly, we suspect, to historical bad blood

between the two countries in East Timor, and to a conviction that they know the ground better given their longstanding historical connections to the country. That said, both our Portuguese contacts and the Australian Ambassador in Lisbon were confident that this arrangement would not pose major problems, both because military commanders on the ground would coordinate effectively, and because the Portuguese forces would have a very different mission (maintenance of public order, primarily) from the other international contingents.

¶12. (C) We have heard no indication from our GOP contacts that Portugal has taken or intends to take sides in the internal power struggle in East Timor. Our interlocutors at all levels, from the Prime Minister down, have rigorously pushed for a new UN mandate as soon as possible. A new and sustained UN effort is critical, from the GOP perspective, to conducting the kind of long-term institution-building that will, inter alia, reduce the possibility of continued political factionalism.  
Hoffman