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By EW/NARA Date 7-1-02SECRET  
NCV/II-6  
July 10, 1969INDONESIABackground - The West Irian QuestionSummary

The future of the western half of the primitive island of New Guinea poses problems to which there are no satisfying answers. We believe that the difficult task of ascertaining the desires of the population regarding Indonesian sovereignty, which is now under way, is being appropriately handled by the Indonesians and the United Nations.

U. S. Position

United States involvement in the "Act of Free Choice" can be of no real help to any of the parties concerned. We will withhold comment until the "Act" is completed and the UN Secretary General has made his report to the United Nations.

DiscussionThe Dutch-Indonesian Agreement

Negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands, under the auspices of the UN Secretary General and with the mediation of Ellsworth Bunker, resulted in a 1962 Agreement under which sovereignty over West Irian passed to Indonesia subject to verification of the desires of the inhabitants before the end of 1969. Indonesia was charged with the execution of this "Act of Free Choice" with the "assistance and participation of the United Nations Representative and his staff."

The Situation in West Irian

This is one of the most primitive areas of the world. Although there is some sentiment for independence among the coastal townspeople, there is no awareness of the problems this would entail. For most Irianese, whose horizons do not extend beyond their immediate neighbors and kin, such political issues have no meaning. There was active tribal dissidence against Indonesian rule in one part of West Irian last year but this has subsided. Some violence

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has occurred more recently in other scattered areas but this has often had no direct connection with the independence issue, and the seriousness of these incidents has been exaggerated in the U. S. press. Exile proponents of Papuan independence have accelerated their efforts to magnify such incidents to attract foreign attention as the "Act of Free Choice" approaches a conclusion.

### The "Act of Free Choice"

As organized by the Indonesians, the "Act of Free Choice" is to consist of "consultations" with representative councils established in the eight districts of the territory. These councils, which are each composed of from 75 to 125 delegates or one for approximately every 800 persons in the population, are to be consulted separately during the period of July 10 to August 5 on whether they wish West Irian to remain within the Indonesian Republic. United Nations Representatives have observed the formation of many of these councils and have attended or will attend each of the "consultations."

Indonesia should have no difficulty in winning an endorsement from these councils for continued Indonesian sovereignty over West Irian.

While the "Act of Free Choice" will disappoint those who hoped for greater participation of the population, it appears to be within the terms of the 1962 Agreement and not unsuited to the level of political awareness of the population.

### The United States Role

The "Act of Free Choice" poses domestic and external political problems for both Indonesia and the Netherlands, some of which would be diminished were the United States to enter the picture. Our role in 1962, however, does not make us the guarantor of the agreement's implementation and our involvement could in no way contribute to an outcome acceptable to all.

We are encouraged by Indonesia's commitment to fulfill its obligation to hold the "Act of Free Choice" and we note that a competent representative (Mr. Ortiz Sanz) of the UN Secretary

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General is on the scene in contact with both the local inhabitants and the Indonesian Government. We will await with interest the UN report on the carrying out of the treaty commitment and will withhold official comment until that time.

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S/S-S JAN 20 1969 <i>mb</i>

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