

*Policy Studies 3*

# Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons

*Rizal Sukma*



East-West Center  
Washington

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*Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons* by Rizal Sukma

ISBN 1-932728-05-8 (online version)

ISSN 547-1330 (online version)

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This publication is a product from the East-West Center Washington's Project on Internal Conflicts. For details, see pages 47-55

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# List of Acronyms

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ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia)
AGAM	Angkatan GAM (GAM's military wing)
ASNLF	Acheh-Sumatra National Liberation Front (GAM's official name)
Brimob	Brigade Mobil (Police Mobile Brigade)
COHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
DOM	Daerah Operasi Militer (Military Operations Zone)
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement)
GBPK	Gerakan Bersenjata Pengacau Keamanan (Armed Gangs of Peace Disturbers)
GPK	Gerombolan Pengacau Keamanan (Peace-Disturbing Gang)
HDC	Henry Dunant Center
Kodam	Komando Daerah Militer (Regional Military Command)
Komnas HAM	National Commission on Human Rights
Kopassus	Komando Pasukan Khusus (Army Special Forces)
Korem	Komando Resort Militer (Subregional Military Command)

Kostrad	Komando Strategis Cadangan Angkatan Darat (Army Strategic Reserve Command)
LBH-Aceh	Legal Aid Foundation of Aceh
NAD	Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (the province of Aceh as renamed by Special Autonomy Law of 2001)
NKRI	Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia)
OKPH	Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Penegakan Hukum (Operation for Restoring Security and Upholding the Law)
PDMD	Penguasa Darurat Militer Daerah (regional martial law administrator)
Polri	Kepolisian Republik Indonesia (Indonesian National Police)
PPRM	Pasukan Penindak Rusuh Massa (Riot Prevention Force)
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian Defence Force)
TPO	Tenaga Pembantu Operasi (Operational Support Resources)

# Executive Summary

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Since Indonesia's independence in August 1945, the province of Aceh on the northern tip of Sumatra island has often been described as a center of resistance against the central government in Jakarta. The first uprising—the Darul Islam rebellion—began in 1953 and ended only in 1961 after the central government promised to grant special autonomy status to Aceh. When this promise was not fulfilled, another rebellion erupted in the mid-1970s. Unlike the Darul Islam rebellion which sought to change Indonesia into an Islamic state, the rebellion in 1970s took the form of a secessionist movement led by the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; GAM). Despite its defeat in 1977 after the Indonesian military launched a security operation, another GAM-led rebellion broke out again in 1989—and again the Indonesian government responded swiftly with another military crackdown.

Rampant human rights abuses and the military's failure to apply basic principles of counterinsurgency characterized the military operation during the 1990s. Instead of winning the hearts and minds of the people, the military planted the seeds of hatred and resistance among the general population. Even though by 1992 the military had managed to undermine GAM's military strength, it continued to conduct operations in the province until the fall of Suharto's regime in May 1998. Indeed, when GAM resumed its activities in November 1998, it soon found a pool of support from large segments of the society, especially in rural areas. Despite the decision by the

post-Suharto government to grant special autonomy status for Aceh, the Acehnese continued to express their grievances over social and economic conditions in the province, which they saw as a result of the central government's excessive exploitation of natural resources and its politics of excessive centralization. And when their demands that the perpetrators of human rights abuses be brought to justice met with a culture of impunity, the resentment grew even stronger.

Political changes in Jakarta in the late 1990s put the military on the defensive and forced the government to change the security operation in Aceh from a military offensive to an operation to restore security and public order led by the police. Unlike the 1990s, the primary actor for security operations in Aceh was now the police and the military played only a supporting role. The transfer of command to the police did not, however, bring about any significant change in the style of the operation. The use of excessive force and violations of human rights by police and military personnel alike continued.

The post-Suharto period also marked the beginning of government efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict through dialogue with the rebels. After a series of peace talks facilitated by the Switzerland-based Henry Dunant Center (HDC), Jakarta and GAM reached an agreement on May 2000 to start a "humanitarian pause" in the violence to enable both sides to start finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict. The agreement did little to stop the violence, however, and officially collapsed in April 2001 when President Abdurrahman Wahid authorized another round of security operations in Aceh. Another agreement to find a political solution, the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), was signed on December 9, 2002. When COHA began to show signs of failure by April 2003, the military prepared for another showdown in Aceh. At the same time, demands and non-Acehnese public support that the government take resolute and firm action against GAM grew stronger.

The last effort to save the peace process in Tokyo, however, ended with failure on May 18, 2003. When Jakarta's demands—that GAM must recognize the Unitary Republic of Indonesia, accept the special autonomy arrangement for Aceh, and agree to immediate disarmament—were rejected by GAM representatives, COHA finally ended. The government, through Presidential Decree 28/2003, decided to impose martial law across Aceh and began what it calls Operasi Terpadu (Integrated Operation) in the province. Unlike previous military operations, the gov-

ernment this time has made it clear from the outset that the main objective of the campaign is to win the hearts and minds of the people. To achieve this purpose, the military operation is only one element together with a humanitarian operation, law enforcement, and governance.

After the first six months of Operasi Terpadu, it is not immediately clear how the problem in Aceh will be resolved. The conduct of the campaign still gives the impression that the military offensive against GAM constitutes the core component of the operation. The other three components are just additional measures to cope with the impact of the military operation on the population or to support the ongoing military offensive against the rebels. Such a military-centered operation might be able to undermine, if not eliminate, GAM's current military strength. But it is not clear how Operasi Terpadu will be able to eradicate the aspiration for independence among segments of the population. A permanent resolution to the problem of armed insurgency in Aceh will require more comprehensive measures designed not only to eradicate the armed separatist movement but also to remove the conditions that sustain the people's resentment against the central government in Jakarta and their support for independence. Clearly Operasi Terpadu is not designed to address this fundamental problem. In other words: so long as the Indonesian government continues to emphasize a military approach in its Aceh policy, it is difficult to see how the political objective of Operasi Terpadu—curbing the Acehnese aspiration for independence by winning hearts and minds of the Acehnese—can be fully attained.



# Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons

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The province of Aceh on the northern tip of Sumatra island in Indonesia has long been regarded both inside and outside Indonesia as a center of resistance to external rule and influence.<sup>1</sup> In the 1520s, Aceh waged a war of resistance against the Portuguese. From 1873 to 1913, Aceh was engaged in a war against Dutch colonial rule. After Aceh became part of the newly independent Republic of Indonesia after World War II, the province took up arms in 1953 and launched what was known as the Darul Islam rebellion against the central government in Jakarta. In the mid-1970s, another rebellion was staged against Jakarta. Unlike the 1950s rebellion, which sought to change Indonesia into an Islamic state, the uprising in the 1970s, the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; GAM), was launched with the object of seceding from the republic.<sup>2</sup> While the Darul Islam rebellion in the 1950s lasted about a decade, the 1970s rebellion was crushed by Indonesia's army within a relatively short time.

The most recent uprising in Aceh, which began in 1989, is more a continuation of the 1970s rebellion than that of the 1950s. Like the short-lived uprising in the 1970s, GAM defines complete separation from the Republic of Indonesia as its main goal. GAM, led by Teungku Hasan di Tiro, maintains that the people of Aceh represent a distinct nation with an inherent right to self-determination. Moreover, GAM views Aceh's inte-

gration into Indonesia as unlawful and imposed against the will of the Acehnese. In this context, notes an observer, GAM-led insurrections “are indeed unique in Aceh’s history of resistance, in that they are the first articulation of political opposition which asserts a secessionist rather than a regionalist goal” (Brown 1994: 156). For the government of Indonesia, therefore, the current insurgency in Aceh challenges the territorial integrity of the republic.

Although the Indonesian military managed to put down GAM’s two previous armed insurgencies within a relatively short period (1976–77 and 1990–92), this time Jakarta faces serious difficulty. In fact the conflict has escalated since the fall of Suharto’s New Order in May 1998. Unlike the 1970s and even the 1990s, popular support for the current insurgency has dramatically strengthened. In this context, many argue that current support for the rebellion derives from abuses perpetrated by Indonesian security forces during the 1990s (Robinson 1998) and the inability of post-Suharto governments to resolve the problem (Sukma 2001a; 2003). In other words: much of the blame for the escalation of conflict in Aceh has been attributed to Jakarta’s conduct of security operations in Aceh and its inability to rectify the problem. Indeed, the conduct of security operations in Aceh, despite their intended goal of resolving the conflict by defeating GAM’s armed insurgency, has aggravated the problem.

As the conflict drags on and efforts to reach a peaceful resolution through peace talks have ended with failure, frustration and impatience grow stronger—both within government circles and among the public at

***Yet the key question remains: will Operasi Terpadu resolve the Aceh problem and bring lasting peace to the province?***

large. The Megawati government has been under constant pressure from the military, political elites, and the public to take firmer measures in dealing with the problem. Thus new hopes resurfaced in May 2003 when the central government finally decided to declare martial law in Aceh and begin a new counterinsurgency campaign called Operasi Terpadu (Integrated Operation). The government declared that the political goal of Operasi Terpadu is to resolve the Aceh problem by attaining two specific objectives: to eradicate

GAM and to curb Acehnese support for independence by “winning the hearts and minds of the people.” Yet the key question remains: will Operasi Terpadu resolve the Aceh problem and bring lasting peace to the province?



This paper examines the goals, dynamics, and consequences of security operations conducted by Indonesian security forces in Aceh and assesses whether they are contributing to the resolution of the problem. The discussion is divided into four sections. The first outlines the root causes of the conflict and discusses the military operations during the period 1990–98 when Aceh was designated a Military Operations Zone (Daerah Operasi Militer; DOM). The second section examines the patterns of security operations in Aceh between the downfall of Suharto's New Order regime in May 1998 and May 2003, when the government finally decided to impose martial law and launch a full-scale military crackdown in the province. The third section explores how the current counterinsurgency operation—Operasi Terpadu—has been conducted during the first six months of martial law in the province. The fourth section looks at how Jakarta's failure to consider the wider context of the conflict undermines, and will continue to undermine, the relative gains achieved by the current military operation.

### **Military Operations in the DOM Era: To “Crush” GAM**

#### *Root Causes of the Problem*

The outbreak of GAM rebellion in 1998 was the result of a complex set of root causes that had accumulated in Aceh province since the end of the first rebellion in the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> As these root causes went unaddressed for years, they became key sources of discontent and distrust among many Acehnese. At the risk of oversimplifying, the sources of the problem can be grouped into four basic aspects: economic exploitation; centralism and uniformity; military repression; and the politics of impunity.

*Economic Exploitation.* The first source of discontent and distrust is economic in nature—resulting from the politics of excessive exploitation by the central government in Jakarta.<sup>4</sup> During the New Order period, the exploitation of Aceh's extremely rich natural resources reached an unprecedented degree. With its abundant natural resources including oil, natural gas, timber, and valuable minerals, Aceh contributed approximately 11 percent of Indonesia's national revenue.<sup>5</sup> From the liquid natural gas alone, it is estimated that in average Aceh contributed approximately \$2.6 billion a year.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile taxes and royalties from the oil and gas field contributed billions of dollars annually to central government revenues (Robinson 1998: 135).

But the New Order's exploitation of natural resources has created

problems. The expansion of industrial projects, for example, especially the natural gas plant, fertilizer, and pulp, has led to undesirable effects such as expropriation of land from small farmers without adequate compensation and serious environmental degradation (Robinson 1998: 136). Despite its abundant natural resources, Aceh is among the poorest provinces in the country. All in all, most Acehnese feel that instead of getting a fair share from Jakarta's extraction of natural resources, they suffer increasing poverty and increasingly harsh military control. Consequently, many Acehnese have come to view their homeland as being plundered, exploited, and treated unjustly by Jakarta.

*Centralism and Uniformity.* The second source of discontent can be found in the New Order's politics of excessive centralism and uniformity and its consequences for local identity. Jakarta, obsessed with the notion of national unity (*persatuan nasional*) has imposed uniformity across the country without any regard to the nature of Indonesia as a pluralistic country. For the New Order, the creation of a single Indonesian identity became a sacred mission. The program of transmigration, for example, was meant "to gather and unite all ethnic groups into a single people, the people of Indonesia." Through this program, Jakarta believed, "the different ethnicities will gradually disappear and at the end there will be only one type of people."<sup>7</sup> In reality, the New Order government simply ignored the complaints from many outside the island of Java, including Aceh, that the transmigration program simply meant Javanization.

***With excessive control from the center, Jakarta's promise that Aceh would now enjoy its status as a "special region" had been rendered largely meaningless.***

Politically, the imposition of highly centralized rule from Jakarta inevitably destroyed local political institutions and culture with the effect of undermining Aceh's local identity. With the introduction of Javanese-style bureaucratic structure and the politics of co-optation based on rewards and sanctions, for example, the *ulamas* (religious leaders) rapidly lost their influence over the Acehnese community. Many of them were either co-opted or forced to play the role of government supporters. The new "ruling elite"—the governors, *bupatis* (regents), Acehnese technocrats, and new middle class—now willingly

"served at the center's pleasure, and were first and foremost administrators of the central will, as opposed to representatives of the specific interests of

their region” (Kell 1995: 84). With excessive control from the center, Jakarta’s promise that Aceh would now enjoy its status as a “special region” had been rendered largely meaningless.

*Military Repression.* The third cause of discontent is the politics of military repression, especially during the 1990–98 period. If the exploitation of Aceh’s vast natural resources and the New Order’s central rule strengthened Acehnese resentment against Jakarta, the use of brutal military repression since 1990 has inflicted a deep sense of trauma among Acehnese. Many Acehnese found it difficult to understand why the central government, despite its success in crushing GAM’s second rebellion by early 1992,<sup>8</sup> continued to prolong the use of heavy military repression. And when it became clear that the violation of human rights by security authorities in the province was persisting, the feeling of disgust among the Acehnese—against the military in particular and Indonesia’s rule in general—reached unprecedented levels. Indeed, due to the gross violation of human rights inflicted by the military under DOM, it has been noted that “any tolerance of Indonesian rule was almost entirely extinguished” (Barber 2000: 36).

*The Politics of Impunity.* The fourth cause is the politics of impunity. Acehnese are puzzled by, and angry at, Jakarta’s inability (or unwillingness) to provide justice to Aceh by bringing to trial those responsible for gross violation of human rights during the DOM period. The tremendous suffering caused by the military during the DOM era has left a bitter feeling against the central government among ordinary Acehnese. Indeed, the trial of the perpetrators of human rights abuses during that period constitutes the most difficult problem that needs to be addressed. So far, however, Jakarta’s ability to push for significant progress on this issue has been seriously limited. The entire truth about what actually happened during 1989–98 remains hidden. Worse, there have been no significant efforts to solve several cases of violation of human rights that took place even after the fall of Suharto’s regime in May 1998. Within this context, the ongoing problem of impunity sustains deep distrust and fear of the military among the Acehnese population.

While the root causes of the conflict in Aceh can be found within this set of four problems, it is the first two that give rise to such bitter resentment of Jakarta’s rule. The third and the fourth factors deepen the resentment. In other words: while the politics of excessive exploitation and centralization can be seen as the roots of the problem, it is the politics of

oppression and impunity that sustain them. And when this resentment erupts in the form of armed insurgency, Jakarta's response in the form of successive military operations has not been accompanied by serious efforts to address the root causes of the Acehese grievances. In fact, each military crackdown serves as a stark reminder to the Acehese that any expression of grievances—especially if they are expressed in the form of armed rebellion against Jakarta's rule—will face serious military consequences.

*The Nature of Military Operations in the 1990s*

After a relatively long pause since its defeat in 1977, GAM began to show signs of revival in 1989. It began to carry out attacks against the Indonesian police, the army, civil authorities, and suspected government informers (Kell 1995: 66–68).<sup>9</sup> One of the earliest attacks took place at the end of May 1989 when GAM fighters ambushed and killed two army officers in Tiro subdistrict (the birthplace of Hasan di Tiro) and seized their arms.<sup>10</sup> Another attack took place on September 26, 1989, and similar acts were carried out in early 1990 across three districts (*kabupatens*): North Aceh, Pidie, and East Aceh. Because these attacks were sporadic rather than sustained, it was believed that the objective was still limited to seizing guns from military personnel. Indeed, even though GAM was now supported by better-trained fighters, the movement still faced an arms shortage. Moreover, the Indonesian security forces were far superior militarily.

By the mid-1990s, however, it was clear that GAM's military activities had become a serious concern not only to the local government in Aceh but also to Indonesia's government in Jakarta for a number of reasons. First, in a relatively short period GAM had succeeded in drawing the support of village officials, serving members of the armed forces, veterans of the Darul Islam movement of the 1950s, civil servants, small traders, and schoolteachers (Kell 1995: 68–69). Second, the government was also worried about potential support from Acehese intellectuals. Third, the Indonesian security forces were clearly concerned about the threats posed by the movement to the security of vital industrial projects in the region. And, finally, Jakarta was certainly concerned about external support of the movement and GAM's close links with the Malay peninsula and the Acehese community in Malaysia. Indeed, Malaysia had become a sanctuary for GAM fighters who had fled Aceh after the 1970s rebellion was crushed by Indonesian security forces.

Whether the objective situation on the ground warranted a massive

military response, however, remains subject to debate. In retrospect, there is evidence to suggest that a systematic process of securitization immediately took place. The governor of Aceh during that period, Ibrahim Hasan, stated that “programs of development were brought to a halt and disrupted by GPK,<sup>11</sup> the people were scared, schools were closed, and other terror acts [were rampant].”<sup>12</sup> The former commander of the Regional Military Command (Kodam) that covered Aceh, Major General R. Pramono,<sup>13</sup> who was in charge of military operations from June 9, 1990, to April 1, 1993, also claimed that “the situation [in Aceh] was frightening and chilling. At 3:00 or 4:00 P.M., the streets were already empty. When I went there, GPK had already seized 27 units of ABRI’s weapons.”<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to note that according to Governor Hasan, when he asked the military to deal with the problem both Major General R. Pramono and Colonel Sofian Effendi, a local commander in Aceh, responded that they were not able to deal with GAM because there were not enough military personnel in Aceh.<sup>15</sup>

Elements of exaggeration were clearly visible in such accounts. In fact there is evidence to suggest that the security situation in Aceh was not at the brink of collapse and the capability of the military stationed in Aceh in early 1990 was still sufficient to deal with GAM activities. General Pramono himself, for example, refuted Hasan’s claim of the disruption in development programs when he stated that “development activities and activities of the society [in Aceh] continued as usual [during the early 1990s]” (Widjanarko and Samboja 1999: 128). In terms of its strength, General Pramono has put the number of GAM members in the hundreds.<sup>16</sup> Most observers agreed that GAM’s strength did not exceed 750 people (Kell 1995: 73).<sup>17</sup> Some maintained that GAM only had around 300 fighters (Dam and Budiwanti 1999: 57). Meanwhile, in the early 1990s, it was estimated that there were around 6,000 “organic” troops stationed in Aceh under two Subregional Military Commands (Korem): Korem Teuku Umar in the provincial capital of Banda Aceh and Korem Lilawangsa in Lhokseumawe, the capital of North Aceh (see Schulze 2004 for a detailed analysis).<sup>18</sup> It is indeed difficult to believe that the military in Aceh had no capacity to launch a counterinsurgency operation without having to bring in reinforcements from outside the province.

The military’s own assessment of the situation in mid-June 1990 presented a curious picture. According to General Pramono, in his press release read by the acting head of information at Kodam Bukit Barisan,

Major S. Bangun, “the strength of GPK Aceh is small, their equipment is of low quality, and they do not have adequate resources. ABRI manages to control the situation fully.”<sup>19</sup> The commander in chief, General Try Soetrisno, also stated that what happened in Aceh during May–June 1990 was just a series of purely criminal incidents perpetrated by no more than 30 people, including former military men.<sup>20</sup> The military also acknowledged that GAM had nothing to do with the previous Darul Islam rebellion, which was based on the establishment of an Islamic state. According to ABRI spokesman Brigadier General Nurhadi, “most members of this group are not from the region [Aceh].”<sup>21</sup> In early July 1990, General Soetrisno once again stated that what happened in Aceh was not a political issue and ABRI had succeeded in restoring normalcy in the province.<sup>22</sup> Despite his assessment, the central government decided to send more troops to Aceh only two days after General Soetrisno pronounced the situation to be “normal.”<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the security threat posed by GAM in mid-1990, Jakarta believed that a massive military response was indeed imperative. Responding to the request for a military solution by Governor Hasan, Jakarta deployed an estimated 6,000 troops from Java to Aceh in July

***Whatever the security threat posed by GAM in mid-1990, Jakarta believed that a massive military response was indeed imperative.***

1990, including units of ABRI's Red Beret special forces (Kapassus), bringing the total number of troops in the province to 12,000 (Sulaiman 2000: 78). Justifying the massive troop movement, General Soetrisno maintained: “Asked or not, if there are gangs of security disturbers, it is the obligation of ABRI to deal with it.”<sup>24</sup> Colonel Effendi, the military commander of Korem Lilawangsa in North Aceh, predicted that “the slightest disturbance [in North Aceh] would have a national impact.”<sup>25</sup> With the deployment of

troops from outside Aceh, the province was unofficially designated a Military Operations Area (DOM).

The new operation was placed directly under the command of Kodam Bukit Barisan in Medan, North Sumatra; Korem Lilawangsa in Lhokseumawe was given responsibility for the Field Operation Command (Komando Pelaksana Operasi; Kolakops). Three districts—North Aceh, Pidie, and East Aceh—were designated key areas of military operations. Within each district, the military set up intelligence task forces (Satuan

Tugas Khusus; Satgas), marine task forces to guard the coastline, and tactical task forces (Satuan Taktis; Sattis) to isolate and destroy GAM units. To support the operations, the military also used “operational support resources” (Tenaga Pembantu Operasi; TPO) consisting of either ordinary civilians or former GAM detainees. Starting in July 1990, a massive military operation code-named Operasi Jaring Merah (Operation Red Net) was launched with the object of crushing the rebels within six months (Sulaiman 2000: 79–80).

Despite the deployment of thousands of troops and the establishment of a military operational command, the government refused to acknowledge that it was conducting a counterinsurgency offensive aimed at defeating a separatist movement. Moreover, the government and the military did not recognize GAM as a politically motivated armed insurgency. Instead GAM was labeled a “gang of peace disturbers.” In this regard, the process of criminalization often formed the core strategy of the New Order in responding to any challenge to its rule—especially true in the case of a separatist movement. In the case of GAM, for example, military spokesman Brigadier General Nurhadi maintained in June 1990 that “the disturbance [by GAM] has no political motives whatsoever. It’s a criminal act consisting of robbery, the killing of schoolchildren, and other acts intended to create fear and disturb the people” (Sulaiman 2000: 79). Indeed it has been noted that “the TNI often resorted to the politics of criminalization in order to devalue the importance of the resistance by people who want to free themselves from injustice” (Dam and Budiwanti 1999: 59–60).

The other important aspect of the New Order’s response to rebellion in Aceh was the politics of generalization and stigmatization. There was a tendency among the military to pass indiscriminate judgment, and no attempt was made to clearly delineate the people from the rebels (Ravich 2000: 13). General R. Pramono, for example, believed that the guerrillas were “everywhere.” Asked about GAM’s numbers, he stated: “I’ve never counted. . . . Hundreds of thousands? Yes, with their followers maybe there are” (Kell 1995: 66–67). Such assertions clearly gave the impression that the majority of Acehnese might be implicated in the rebellion in one form or another. It also defies the core principle of any counterinsurgency operation: the military must separate the rebels from the people so that it can defeat the former by winning the hearts and minds of the latter.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Aceh, the military took a different approach: it tended to see all Acehnese as potential GAM members until proved otherwise.<sup>27</sup>



Indeed the politics of criminalization and generalization were in turn used to justify a harsh military crackdown and served as the basis of what was to become a brutal counterinsurgency campaign with no regard for human rights. Operations in this campaign were marked by four characteristics. First, the military employed “shock therapy”—“a campaign of terror designed to strike fear in the population and make them withdraw their support for the GAM” (Kell 1995: 74). The results of this shock therapy were devastating to the Acehnese, and “military abuses were of massive proportions during the DOM era, particularly during the first four years” (Barber 2000: 33). Thousands of Acehnese became the victims of summary execution, arbitrary arrest, torture, rape, and disappearance.<sup>28</sup> The worst part of the strategy was the dumping of unidentified corpses at roadsides and public markets, mostly shot in the head. Asked if the killings were intended as “shock therapy,” Major General R. Pramono said: “As a strategy, that’s true. But our goal is not bad. Our goal must be correct” (Robinson 1998: 142). What was initially claimed to be a normal counterinsurgency operation turned to be a brutal violation of human rights by Indonesia’s military apparatus.

Second, the military’s strategy centered on the mobilization of civilians, in the form of village militias and local vigilante units, to support the counterinsurgency operations. Tens of thousands of villagers were forced to participate in the hunt for GAM members. According to Ibrahim Hasan, the governor of Aceh, around 60,000 people were mobilized to assist ABRI’s intelligence and security operations.<sup>29</sup> The key aspect of this strategy was Operasi Pagar Betis (Operation Fence of Legs) in which “ordinary villagers were compelled to sweep through an area ahead of armed troops” (Amnesty International 1993: 12). Due to the coercion and the threats of military reprisal for disobedience, it has been reported that villagers were besieging GAM fighters without even caring whether “they are from the village or are family members.”<sup>30</sup> Colonel Syarwan Hamid, the commander of Korem Lilawangsa in Lhokseumawe, acknowledged in 1991 that “the youths are the front line. They know best who the GPK are. We then settle the matter.”<sup>31</sup> While the military often claimed this strategy as part of its *hankamrata* (total people’s war) doctrine,<sup>32</sup> it clearly disregarded the international law forbidding the direct employment of civilians in combat situations.

Third, the military operations were supported by TPOs. The most common form of this strategy was the recruitment of local people, often



but not always through coercion, to serve as the military's spies and informers.<sup>33</sup> The use of TPOs, however, led to considerable excesses. Clearly they sowed suspicion, created tensions, and generated conflicts among the Acehnese. Worse, there was reason to believe that some TPOs had used their position to settle personal scores. There is little doubt, therefore, that using civilians in intelligence and combat operations "laid the foundation for bitter conflicts among Acehnese which resurfaced in late 1998" (Robinson 1998: 154). Indeed, the beginning of the escalation of conflict and violence in the post-1998 period was marked by a series of killings of informants to the military (*cuak*).

And fourth, the military also conducted *operasi teritorial* (territorial operations) that included Operasi Bhakti in which the army administered rural development and infrastructure programs (Barber 2000: 35). This operation, intended to win the hearts of the people,<sup>34</sup> was centered in areas where GAM had a strong presence. When the project was initiated by the military at the same time as the security operation in 1990, it seemed that—at least from media reports and military pronouncements—the programs were well supported by the people.<sup>35</sup> After the fall of the New Order, however, reports emerged that villagers had often been forced to participate in these programs.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the brutality of its security operations, the military did manage to reduce the strength of GAM by 1992. Indeed by 1992, "the Indonesian forces succeeded in their primary objective of neutralizing the military threat posed by the GAM" (Kell 1995: 76). No attempt, however, was made to address the root causes of the rebellion. Instead the military maintained its presence in the province and continued to terrorize the people through its security operation. As Kell predicted in 1995: "The root causes of the latest rebellion thus remained unresolved, suggesting that in the future the Acehnese would again have no option but to seek redress of their regionalist grievances by force of arms" (p. 85). Indeed when GAM stepped up its activities after the fall of President Suharto, it found much broader support from the population. Yet the security operation remains central to the government's approach to the Aceh problem, especially in responding to the resurgence of GAM since late 1998.

### **The Post-Suharto Period (1998-2003): Military Operations and Peace Negotiations**

The collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998 put the military on the

***By 1998, many ordinary Indonesians and the civilian elite had lost faith in an institution once revered as “the people’s army.”***

defensive. Within weeks, cases of human rights abuses during the New Order period came to light. In these circumstances the military became the target of severe criticism from almost all segments of society due to its role as the main perpetrator and willing executioner of Suharto’s antidemocratic policies. By 1998, many ordinary Indonesians and the civilian elite had lost faith in an institution once revered as “the people’s army.” What happened in Aceh during 1990–98 also came to the public’s attention. As public outcry against the military strengthened, the commander in chief General Wiranto officially apologized for what happened and lifted Aceh’s status as a Military Operations Zone on August 7, 1998. He also promised an immediate withdrawal of nonorganic troops from the province. His decisions raised hopes among Acehnese that peace would soon return to the province.

Such hopes, however, soon proved to be premature. A number of provocative incidents occurred after General Wiranto’s announcement. On August 31, a stone-throwing attack on a unit of departing Kopassus troops turned into two days of rioting in Lhokseumawe, leaving a number of shops, a cottage, and the regional parliament building burned.<sup>37</sup> Then came a wave of killings of civilians suspected as *cuak* (ABRI informers during DOM). Although local military officers were quick to blame these incidents on GAM, there was a general perception in Aceh that they were orchestrated by the military itself to reverse the plan to end military operations in the province (Robinson 1998: 150). Whatever the truth behind these incidents, they “did serve to justify the redeployment of combat troops in the province, leading many Acehnese to the pessimistic conclusion that a second counterinsurgency campaign was set to begin” (p. 150). Consequently, collective anger against the central government deepened rapidly among the Acehnese society.

#### *Escalating Conflict*

It was in this context that GAM intensified its activities in November 1998. With the military very much on the defensive, both nationally and locally, GAM began to step up the insurgency through a number of attacks against military and police personnel. On November 2, for example, encouraged by a certain Ahmad Kandang (a member of GAM), hundreds

of youths in Kandang, Aceh Utara, carried out a raid, burned the Indonesian flag, and tortured two TNI members. In response, 23 people were arrested by TNI to restore order in the area, but Ahmad Kandang himself managed to escape.<sup>38</sup> On November 15, a state-owned radio station (RRI) was burned and the police arrested some 43 civilians accused of aiding the escape of Ahmad Kandang.<sup>39</sup> On December 29, Kandang's group abducted and later executed seven TNI personnel.<sup>40</sup>

These incidents were used to justify the redeployment of troops in Aceh. By early January 1999, Indonesian security forces had launched a new security device called Operasi Wibawa (Operation Authority). To support this operation, Jakarta sent to Aceh a 2,000-man Pasukan Penindak Rusuh Massa or PPRM (Riot Prevention Force) consisting of both TNI and Polri troops (Sulistiyanto 2001: 445). A number of incidents familiar to the Acehnese began to occur. On January 3, 1999, soldiers opened fire on hundreds of people protesting the police raids a day earlier—leaving 11 people dead and 32 seriously wounded, including women and children. Some 170 people were arrested in the event.<sup>41</sup> On January 9, some 40 of those arrested were brutally tortured by soldiers, leaving 4 people dead and 23 seriously wounded.<sup>42</sup> On February 3, soldiers opened fire on villagers in Idi Cut, Aceh Timur, leaving 9 people dead (their bodies were thrown in the river), 15 seriously wounded, and 51 detained.<sup>43</sup> Such incidents caused serious damage to the already tainted image of the military. Forced to end Operasi Wibawa, Jakarta replaced it with successive operations code-named Operasi Sadar Rencong (Operation Rencong Awareness) I, II, and III until the end of 2000. Between January and April 2001, another operation called Operasi Cinta Meunasah (Operation Love the Mosque) was launched.<sup>44</sup> All these successive operations were primarily meant to function as a police campaign to restore security and public order. In the words of national police chief General Roesmanhadi, the main objective was “to hunt, arrest, and crush all members of GBPK across Aceh.”<sup>45</sup>

While the continuing violations of human rights and excessive use of force by Indonesian security forces serve as a reminder of what happened during the 1990s, the official nature of security operations in Aceh changed from that of a military offensive to a campaign to restore security and public order (Operasi Keamanan dan Ketertiban Masyarakat; Kamtibmas) led by the police. Unlike the 1990s, responsibility for security operations in Aceh now rested with the police and the military played

only a supporting role. This transfer of command was a result of changes regarding the military's position within Indonesia's national politics. The much discredited image of the military now made it virtually impossible for the new government under President Habibie to resume security operations with the military at the forefront of the assault against the rebels. In this context, the handover of command to the police was meant not only to correct the excessive impact of military oppression on the Acehnese but also to create an impression that the new government was now taking a more civil approach to the problem in the province.<sup>46</sup>

The transfer of command to the police in conducting security operations in Aceh did not bring about any significant change in the style of the campaign. The use of excessive force and violations of human rights by TNI personnel continued. On May 3, a group of soldiers opened fire on thousands of villagers in Krueng Geukueh, Lhokseumawe, complaining about the behavior of patrolling troops. The incident left more than 40 people dead, some 44 seriously wounded, and many others reported missing.<sup>47</sup> In these events the military authorities quickly defended the soldiers as merely exercising self-defense and claimed they were shot at by GAM members among the crowds.<sup>48</sup>

There have also been unexplained murder sprees in which ordinary civilians and members of the national police became the main victims. In January 2000, for example, Aceh's Legal Aid Foundation (LBH-Aceh) reported 115 cases of torture, 21 summary executions, 33 arbitrary arrests, 7 disappearances, and 505 houses and shops either damaged or set on fire.<sup>49</sup> Even though both the Indonesian military/police and GAM are blamed for these atrocities (Ravich 2000: 17), the LBH-Aceh's report noted that "there is a shift in the targets of military violence now to include humanitarian aid workers, medical personnel, and journalists of print and electronic medias. This is part of a shock therapy . . . employed by the military to stop humanitarian activities undertaken by the students and the people."<sup>50</sup>

All these incidents—and the brutality of the ongoing security offensive—led many Acehnese to conclude that military operations were still underway in Aceh under the umbrella of a police-led campaign.<sup>51</sup> Despite the transfer of operational command to the police, in reality it was still a counterinsurgency operation dominated by the military. But the transfer of operational command to the police only made the overall operation worse. Indeed there was now a serious lack of coordination among security forces, especially between the police and TNI troops. Moreover, as pointed out by

the International Crisis Group (ICG): “In the absence of coherent government policy and leadership, the TNI and police were left to put together military strategies unanchored to any declared policy except a determination to prevent independence” (ICG 2001: 4). In these circumstances it is not surprising to find that security operations in Aceh were still characterized more by the use of force in defeating the rebels than by comprehensive measures to find a lasting peace through negotiated political settlement.

The nature of the security operations in Aceh became clearer in April 2001 after the issuance of Presidential Instruction (Inpres) 4 by President Abdurrahman Wahid. Inpres 4/2001 consisted of a six-point plan intended to address the problem in Aceh in a comprehensive way. The substance of the plan, however, did not provide a workable policy. As ICG noted: “It is in fact a checklist of the responsibilities of various government departments and agencies with instructions for them to prepare their own detailed plans under the general control and coordination of the vice president and the two coordinating ministers” (ICG 2001: 5). As a consequence of Inpres 4/2001, a new Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Penegakan Hukum or OKPH (Operation for Restoring Security and Upholding the Law) was launched and the overall operational command was given to the head of the National Mobile Police Brigade (Brimob), Major General Yusuf Manggabarani. This operational command, established to coordinate the actions of the police and the military in Aceh, has two field commands with equal responsibility: one under the TNI based in Lhokseumawe and the other under the police based in Banda Aceh.

The OKPH forces comprised four key elements (Schulze 2001: 28–30). The first element, the police, consists of two forces: the regular police, which performs standard police functions, and the police paramilitary force (Brimob), which functions as a force to counter the military wing of GAM. The second element is the army territorial forces based throughout Aceh under Korem Teuku Umar in Banda Aceh and Korem Lilawangsa in Lhokseumawe. The third element is made up of nonorganic military reinforcements drawn primarily from other army territorial commands, Kostrad, and Kopassus, including a special counterinsurgency unit called Rajawali Force. The fourth element is the navy and the air

*security operations in Aceh were still characterized more by the use of force...than by comprehensive measures to find a lasting peace*

force, especially the navy's marine corps and the air force's Paskhas (Special Forces). This structure is meant to bring all security forces in Aceh under a single command headed by a police major general. Although the official commanding role was now given to the police, it has been noted that "in practice, the police lack the training, equipment and manpower to cope with counterinsurgency operations and the real operational power lies with TNI Brigadier General Zamroni based in Lhokseumawe" (Schulze 2001: 28).

The dominance of the military was also reflected by changes in the composition of personnel involved in the security operations. Initially the number of police personnel was greater than that of the military. In late April 2001, for example, it was estimated that the TNI force in Aceh numbered 12,000 and the police force around 20,000 (Haseman 2001). By mid-2002, however, the composition had changed significantly and military personnel now outnumbered the police force. The police chief, for example, revealed that the total number of security forces in Aceh was 34,000—consisting of 21,000 TNI and 12,000 police personnel.<sup>52</sup> This number was confirmed by the coordinating minister for political and security affairs, General (retired) Susilo Bambang Yudoyono. He stated that this strength was needed to defeat GAM, which has around 3,000 combat troops on the ground with 2,000 weapons, plus 5,000 clandestine supporters.<sup>53</sup>

When President Wahid was replaced by Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri in October 2001, many speculated that she would be more inclined to resort to military means in solving the problem in Aceh. Her strong nationalist views and uncompromising stance on Indonesia's territorial integrity were often cited as two factors that would push her closer to the military's position on this issue. Megawati's government continued Wahid's policy of combining the security approach and negotiation with GAM. Moreover, the army's presence in Aceh received a significant boost when Megawati's government approved a plan to reinstate a special regional military command (Kodam) for the province in February 2002.<sup>54</sup> The government and the military argued that a special Kodam in Aceh—though strongly opposed by segments of Acehnese and also some NGOs in Jakarta—would improve the military's effectiveness in responding to the threats posed by GAM. For the critics, however, the reestablishment of Kodam in Aceh was feared to lend a legitimate pretext for the permanent presence of a large military force in the province.

The situation on the ground after the reestablishment of Kodam, however, showed no significant improvement. Armed clashes between the TNI/Polri troops and GAM rebels continued to take place. Killings and extortion by “unidentified groups” continued. And security conditions remained as tenuous as ever. Despite the presence of the new Kodam, the military was unable to end the conflict in Aceh. Nor did it manage to undermine GAM’s military strength. In fact, despite its own losses, GAM continued to inflict significant loss on the security apparatus: 75 soldiers were killed and another 136 wounded between May 2001 and April 2002.<sup>55</sup> As the conflict dragged on, the number of civilian casualties also increased.

One important aspect of the post-Suharto security operation, however, needs to be mentioned. Unlike the campaign in the 1990s, security operations after 1998 did not make extensive use of civilian militias in combat and intelligence operations. This, however, does not mean that such practices were entirely absent. During Operation Cinta Meunasah, for example, military sources acknowledged that militias had been formed in Central Aceh to fight GAM forces in the area. Lieutenant Colonel Rochana Hardiyanto maintained that the militias were part of a long-established “civilian home-defense force” and were “formed at the initiative of the local population.”<sup>56</sup> These militias were reportedly made up of Javanese migrants in the area who had become frequent targets of attack by unidentified groups. There were also unconfirmed reports that elements of the military and the police in East Aceh had forced children to act as informants.<sup>57</sup> As the military continues to deny such reports (and formal investigation has never been carried out), it is difficult to confirm the extent to which such practices continue to take place.

All in all, the results of the OKPH offensive have been mixed. During the first few months a degree of success was evident, especially in the work of Rajawali Force. These units were tasked with gathering intelligence and selective targeting of GAM strongholds in rural areas. It has been noted, for example, that these units have also taken special care in distinguishing combatants from noncombatants through professional intelligence operations (Schulze 2001: 29). But this relative success has been marred by the Brimob units’ lack of professionalism. These units have often been associated with the excessive use of force, summary executions, regular intimidation and torture of civilians accused of having links with GAM, extortion, and the burning of schools and houses. Indeed, many Acehnese think “there is no difference between present Brimob behavior and the treatment



they received during the DOM period” (Schulze 2001: 30). In other words: the efficacy and legitimacy of police-led security operations in Aceh since the fall of President Suharto remain hindered by the lack of discipline and professionalism on the part of security forces themselves.

*Military Resistance to the Peace Process*

By early 1999, then, the conflict in Aceh had escalated. The security situation in the province deteriorated rapidly as armed clashes between Indonesian security forces and GAM intensified. Violations of human rights by both sides continued unhindered. Despite the hostile climate,

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however, efforts to resolve the conflict through political dialogue began to take shape with the election of President Abdurrahman Wahid in October 1999 (see Aspinall and Crouch 2003 for a detailed analysis). Initial contacts between the Indonesian government and GAM, facilitated by a humanitarian NGO in Switzerland, the Henry Dunant Center (HDC), resulted in a first round of confidential talks between both sides on January 27, 2000. Indonesia was represented by its permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, Hasan Wirayuda, and GAM was represented by its minister of health, Zaini Abdullah. According to Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab, the first talks resulted in an agreement between the two parties to stop all forms of violence in Aceh.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the talks in Geneva, the first meeting between AGAM’s commander, Teungku Abdullah Syafi’i, and a high official of Wahid’s government, State Secretary Bondan Gunawan, took place on March 16 in the movement’s headquarters in Pidie. Given that Abdullah Syafi’i had in the past maintained a hard-line position, the meeting strengthened the hope that an agreement could indeed be achieved soon.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, even though the dialogue continued to be marked by a worsening security situation, both sides were determined to bring about concrete results. The second round of talks took place on March 24. Substantial agreement was reached at the third meeting on April 14–17, and the results of the talks were officially announced on May 4 by Indonesia’s government. On May 12, a “Joint Understanding on Humanitarian Pause for Aceh” was signed by both sides in Davos,

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Switzerland.<sup>60</sup> Rather than calling it a cease-fire agreement, both sides maintained that the primary objective of the pact was to create a pause in the violence enabling them to start finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict. Toward this end, both sides agreed that the agreement, which would be operational from June 2 to September 2, 2000, would facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance to Acehnese affected by the conflict while at the same time promoting confidence-building measures toward a peaceful solution to the conflict.<sup>61</sup>

Even though the accord presented the first opportunity to begin a peace process, reactions in Jakarta military circles have been ambiguous. On the one hand, military leaders expressed their support of the agreement and pledged that the TNI would implement the Joint Understanding consistently.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, such support might not represent the view of the entire TNI. Many officers were in fact opposed to the government's policy of negotiating with GAM and privately expressed their resentment of the "Humanitarian Pause" agreement. Senior military figures thought that making peace with pro-independence rebels was a step backward for the country. A presidential aide acknowledged: "There are factions in the TNI who are unhappy about the agreement and might sabotage it. They have all along been trying to wreck our peace efforts by using force blindly."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, government initiatives to reach a negotiated political settlement did not receive enthusiastic support from the military and police leadership. In fact, the TNI publicly showed its opposition to the president's initiative.

The agreement, in any case, did little to stop the violence. According to the human rights group Kontras, one month after implementation of the accord the scale of violence was still alarming: 60 people dead, 18 seriously wounded, 2 cases of disappearance, 7 victims of arbitrary arrest, 10 summary executions, and 40 cases of torture.<sup>64</sup> In mid-August, the government-sanctioned Independent Commission for the Investigation of Violence in Aceh came to the same conclusion: the agreement had failed to reduce violence and end conflict in Aceh. According to the commission, the Humanitarian Pause resulted in a decrease of civilian casualties but TNI casualties have increased.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the debate over who should be blamed for the ineffectiveness of the accord was inevitable. The Independent Commission, for example, claimed that the Humanitarian Pause was being used by GAM as an opportunity to consolidate its resistance against the Indonesian government. It also noted that the aspiration for independence

had grown into a collective movement.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, the findings were disputed by some human rights groups who thought the military and police were equally responsible for the failure of the peace process.<sup>67</sup>

Even when the agreement was extended to January 15, 2001, it failed to reduce, let alone stop, the violence and armed clashes in Aceh. In fact, the degree of violence during the second phase was far worse than during the first. And once again both sides blamed each other for the agreement's failure. While it is still difficult to establish the truth behind the failure of the Humanitarian Pause, the military seemed eager to renew its campaign—urging the government to declare either a military or civil emergency status in Aceh. Meanwhile, some also believed that the continued violence in Aceh “may have been provoked by the elements of the military in order to sabotage the agreement” (ICG 2000: 18). Inpres 4/2001, which authorized the OKPH offensive, was issued by President Wahid in April 2001 in the wake of the collapse of the Humanitarian Pause.

Despite its inclination to deal with GAM militarily, Megawati's government also continued to pursue a nonmilitary solution by resuming talks with GAM leaders in Sweden. A new round of peace talks began in February 2002, and eventually both sides reached a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) on December 9. There was a degree of optimism at the time that COHA would succeed for three main reasons. First, unlike the Humanitarian Pause, COHA offered a better mechanism for implementing and monitoring the agreement through the establishment of a Joint Security Committee that included peace monitoring teams from the Philippines and Thailand alongside representatives of TNI and GAM. Second, COHA provided for the establishment of “peace zones” in the province—expected to increase the incentive for peace among the warring parties. And third, there was stronger international backing: Japan, the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank promised they would provide substantial financial support for reconstruction in Aceh if the peace deal succeeded.

Indeed COHA did bring a drastic reduction of the number of people killed, which had reached approximately 100 per month before December 9, 2002. But despite the significant effect of the COHA pact on humanitarian conditions in Aceh, isolated clashes continued to take place. The old habit of denying responsibility whenever breaches of the agreement were reported continued as well. The Indonesian government became increasingly impatient with what it saw as GAM's violations of COHA. Jakarta was

particularly upset by the lack of progress in the disarmament process. The government also accused GAM of recruiting new members, strengthening its weapons stocks, committing extortion, and continuing to advocate Acehese independence. For its part, GAM accused the military of being insincere in implementing the provisions of COHA, especially regarding the obligation to relocate its troops. And when hundreds of people in Central Aceh and East Aceh attacked the Joint Security Committee offices in March 2003, the peace process received a serious blow. The military, on the order of President Megawati in April, began to prepare for a military showdown in Aceh. At the same time, demands that the government take resolute (*tegas*) and firm (*keras*) action against GAM grew stronger.

In a calculated act meant to suggest that a military solution was indeed the last resort, the Indonesian government decided to give peace one last chance when it agreed to come to Tokyo in May 2003 to negotiate with GAM's Sweden-based leadership. This last effort to save the peace process, however, ended with failure.<sup>68</sup> As predicted, Jakarta's three demands—that GAM must recognize the Unitary Republic of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia; NKRI), accept the special autonomy arrangement for Aceh, and agree to immediate disarmament—were rejected by GAM representatives. With the Tokyo meeting a dead-end, what had officially been a police-led security operation since the collapse of Suharto's New Order finally ended on May 19, 2003. The government, through Presidential Decree (Kepres) 28/2003, decided to impose martial law across Aceh and begin what it calls Operasi Terpadu (Integrated Operation) in the province.

### **Martial Law and the Military Offensive Since May 2003: Primacy of the Military Solution**

The decision to launch a massive military crackdown had in fact been anticipated by both the government and the TNI leadership one month before the failure of peace talks in Tokyo. By April 2003, the TNI had begun to mobilize its troops in anticipation of the breakdown of negotiations. Indeed, in the weeks before the Tokyo meeting the government

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began to draw up a contingency plan for a new operation in Aceh. With the failure of peace talks in Tokyo, Operasi Terpadu was officially launched on May 19, 2003. While this operation was initially intended to last for six months, by early November 2003 the government had made it clear that it would be extended for another six months. This section assesses Operasi Terpadu, explains how it differs from previous operations, and considers whether it will contribute to a lasting resolution of the Aceh problem.

*Operasi Terpadu: Objectives, Structure, and Strategy*

Operasi Terpadu consists of four major elements: a military operation to restore security and order, a humanitarian operation, a law enforcement operation, and an operation to restore the functions of the bureaucracy. Despite the alleged comprehensiveness of the plan, it became obvious from the outset that the military campaign would be the main component of Operasi Terpadu. Presidential Decree 28/2003 provides the legal basis through which the government decided to impose martial law in Aceh while at the same time launching a full-scale military offensive against the rebels in the province. Indeed, only hours after the announcement of the presidential decree, Indonesia's military started its biggest offensive since the invasion of East Timor in 1975.

The decision to launch a massive military crackdown clearly demonstrates the belief among Indonesian officials—especially in military circles—in the primacy of a military solution to the insurgency problem. The declaration of martial law in Aceh, which sanctions the transfer of authority from the civilian governor, Abdullah Puteh, to the commander of Aceh's Kodam, Major General Endang Suwarya as the Penguasa Darurat Militer Daerah or PDMD (regional martial law administrator), makes the TNI the highest government authority in Aceh. It also ensures that overall command of the operation rests in the hands of the TNI. Within this structure, the civilian governor only serves as a *pembantu* (assistant) to the PDMD, together with the district attorney and the regional police head. Under Major General Suwarya was Major General Bambang Darmono, who served as field commander of the whole operation.<sup>69</sup>

The current military operation also differed from that of the 1990s in five other important areas. First, the operation is now carried out as a result of a clear political decision by a civilian government in the form of written presidential decree. (When President Suharto ordered the military to crush

GAM in 1990, the order was given verbally.) Second, unlike the 1990s, the current military operation is undertaken through the imposition of martial law in Aceh, which provides the TNI with a legal basis to launch a massive crackdown on GAM. Third, the government has clearly stated that Operasi Terpadu, unlike Operasi Jaring Merah in the 1990s, has the clear political objective of curbing public support for independence by winning hearts and minds. Fourth, the legitimacy of the current operation is enhanced by strong support from the parliament, all political leaders, and the non-Acehnese Indonesian public at large. And fifth, for the first time the military has allowed its operation to be covered by the media through the same method—“embedded journalism”—employed by the United States in the war against Iraq in 2003. Despite some restrictions imposed by Law 23/1959 on national emergency, the media has in principle been allowed to report what it finds and sees on the ground. The military, however, has banned the media from reporting statements from GAM leaders. It has also warned that GAM should not be “glorified” by the media and that local journalists covering the military operation in Aceh “should work within the framework of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia.”<sup>70</sup>

Despite promises made by government officials and TNI leadership that they would not repeat the mistakes made during the DOM period, the current military operation raises a number of questions, especially regarding its implementation on the ground.<sup>71</sup> While the legitimacy of the decision to launch the military operation is no longer questioned by the public, it is not immediately clear how the current approach—which centers on the elimination of GAM as an armed separatist movement—will resolve the Aceh problem. Operasi Terpadu, like the previous counterinsurgency operations, is being carried out with the main object of eliminating the rebels. Vice-president Hamzah Haz clearly stated that Operasi Terpadu aims to crush the separatist movement in Aceh.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, as the TNI commander General Endriartono Sutarto put it: “The first step is to hunt, crush, and kill members of GAM. Do not let yourself to be killed. Second, we should attract the sympathy of the people, and that should not be difficult.”<sup>73</sup> According to General Sutarto, the military strategy is to be carried out in three phases. In the first phase, during the first two months of the operation, “the military would occupy those areas claimed as GAM strongholds and drive the rebels out.”<sup>74</sup> The second phase of the operation would be directed to “separate GAM from the civilian population.”<sup>75</sup> The third phase would be directed to eliminate GAM altogether. Through

these stages, General Sutarto was convinced that within two months of the operation “GAM will cease to exist.”<sup>76</sup>

The focus on the elimination of GAM is clearly reflected in the way the operation has been carried out. Immediately after martial law went into effect, government troops mounted a direct and massive military offensive in areas suspected to be GAM strongholds. In the first evaluation of the operation after ten days, the government claimed that the operation was moving faster than expected and said the main objective of the operation’s first phase—to reclaim GAM’s strongholds within two months—had been met within two weeks.<sup>77</sup> As ICG noted, however, “the military’s criteria for success in this endeavor appear to be numbers of GAM killed, arrested, and surrendered” (ICG 2003: 6). Criticisms have also been voiced within Indonesia. General (retired) Hasnan Habib, for example, maintained that using the number of rebels killed, arrested, and surrendered as a measure of success is clearly misleading.<sup>78</sup> Such a criteria for success also leads to the problem of an exit strategy for the TNI and the government. While Presidential Decree 28/2003 authorizes the operation only for six months, its extension can be unlimited. Indeed, no one in the government or the military can guarantee that martial law will end in six months. General Sutarto hinted that the operation could last up to five years.<sup>79</sup> Major General Endang Suwarya, too, admitted that the operation could go on for years.<sup>80</sup>

While military operations are still under way, two key questions remain. First is the classic problem of how to distinguish ordinary civilians from the rebels so that civilian casualties can be minimized. Second, the military must ensure that its offensive will not add to the people’s suffering—which, in turn, would fuel a new wave of resentment against Jakarta’s rule. At the policy level, the government seems aware of the importance of the two requirements. Back in April 2001, for example, Minister Yudoyono stressed that the primary goal of a counterinsurgency operation was to reduce local support for the separatists.<sup>81</sup> Regarding the current operation, Major

***First is the classic problem of how to distinguish ordinary civilians from the rebels so that civilian casualties can be minimized.***

General Darmono acknowledged that the main task of his troops is “to win the hearts and minds of the Acehnese people.”<sup>82</sup> And General Sutarto repeatedly reminded the soldiers to avoid civilian casualties in their

attempt to crush the rebels.<sup>83</sup> By making these two requirements the parameter for the military operation, the government hopes to win the hearts and minds of the Acehnese. Indeed, the government expects that the other three components of Operasi Terpadu—humanitarian aid, law enforcement, and empowerment of local government—will contribute to the attainment of this political objective.

*After Six Months: Persistent Problems, Limited Success*

Today the impression remains that the military offensive against GAM constitutes the core component of Operasi Terpadu. The other three components are simply a backup strategy to cope with the impact of the military operation on the population or to support the ongoing military offensive against GAM. The humanitarian operation, for example, is clearly meant to ease the suffering of refugees who were forced to leave their villages after the clashes between rebels and government forces intensified.<sup>84</sup> Regarding the law enforcement component, its main focus has been to carry out legal proceedings against those who are charged with being GAM members or sympathizers. The chief of national police, General Da'i Bachtiar, explained that the law enforcement operation is meant "to arrest GAM members and undertake intelligence operations [to track] GAM members that leave Aceh."<sup>85</sup> The governance component is largely confined to the restoration of local government authority—mainly by replacing the nonfunctioning *camats* (subdistrict heads) and *keuchik* (village heads) with military officers—in areas that had previously been under GAM's control.<sup>86</sup>

Such military-centered operations might be able to decrease, if not eliminate, GAM's military strength. According to Major General Endang Suwarya, the martial law administrator, "we have also occupied their [GAM] strategic bases, destroyed their command system and facilities."<sup>87</sup> By the end of the first six months of Operasi Terpadu, the military claimed to have killed 1,106 rebels, arrested 1,544, forced 504 others to surrender, and seized 488 weapons (approximately 30 percent of GAM's estimated weaponry). With these results, the military believes that after six months of intensive campaigning it has reduced GAM's strength by 55 percent. The military also claims that only 273 out of 6,000 villages are not under the control of security forces.<sup>88</sup> During that period, however, some 395 civilians died due to the conflict and 159 others were wounded. Despite the significant reduction in GAM's military strength, the military admits that it has not made significant progress in capturing



or killing GAM's leaders. The TNI has killed or captured only 37 out of 140 GAM leaders, mostly the minor ones. The key leaders—such as Muzakkir Manaf (GAM commander), Darwis Jeunib (commander of Jeunib), Sofyan Dawood (GAM spokesman), and Ishak Daud (commander of Peurelak)—remain at large.<sup>89</sup>

Despite these gains on the military side, it is not yet clear whether Operasi Terpadu will be able to eradicate the aspiration for independence among segments of the population. A permanent solution to the problem of armed insurgency would certainly require more comprehensive measures designed not only to eradicate the root causes that give rise to separatist ideas, but also to remove the conditions—particularly bad governance and the culture of impunity—that sustain Acehese resentment against the central government in Jakarta and Acehese support for independence.<sup>90</sup> Clearly Operasi Terpadu is not designed to address this larger and more fundamental problem. Until the government puts in place a new set of policies to address the root causes of the problem—and deal with the questions of governance and impunity—there is no guarantee that another cycle of armed rebellion will not resurface in the future. In other words: so long as the Indonesian government continues to emphasize a military approach in its Aceh policy, it is difficult to see how the political objective of Operasi Terpadu—curbing the Acehese aspiration for independence by winning Acehese hearts and minds—can be fully attained.

#### *Counter-Productive Consequences*

Indeed, some measures undertaken during the implementation of Operasi Terpadu could prove counterproductive to the stated political goal. This is true for several reasons. First, the strategy employed by the military to “separate” GAM from ordinary civilians has been controversial. Long before the imposition of martial law in Aceh, Lieutenant General Sudi Silalahi, secretary to the coordinating minister for political and security affairs, Lieutenant General Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, described the plan in the following words: “First we will ask women and children to leave their houses. Then, we will ask unarmed men to do the same. The rest who stay behind must be those with arms.”<sup>91</sup> In practice, this is exactly what happened. Thousands of people were ordered to leave their villages and went to refugee camps so that the military could go after suspected GAM bases.<sup>92</sup> While this strategy is meant to avoid civilian casualties during intensified fighting between GAM and the TNI, it clearly created resent-



ment among the villagers, especially due to the inadequate conditions in the refugee camps. At the end of July, General Sutarto apologized that the forced evacuation had created unnecessary misery for the civilians.<sup>93</sup>

Second, allegations of human rights abuses by soldiers began to emerge only two weeks after the operation started and became an issue that put the TNI leadership on a collision course with Komnas HAM (the National Commission on Human Rights). Indeed, speculations came to the fore when an ad hoc commission of Komnas HAM announced that violations of human rights by the military had begun to take place.<sup>94</sup> Among the alleged abuses were the finding of a mass grave in North Aceh, the formation of armed militia groups, rapes, torture, and extrajudicial killings.<sup>95</sup> The chairman of the ad hoc commission, M. M. Billah, the most vocal critic of the military operation in Aceh, said that during the first two weeks of martial law the military had already violated the Geneva Convention and Indonesia's Human Rights Law.<sup>96</sup> Reports of rapes, torture, acts of violence, extortion, and theft carried out by security personnel, both the police and the military, also appeared in the media.<sup>97</sup> Both the military and the police strongly denied such reports. On one occasion, for example, the army chief of staff, General Ryamizard Ryacudu, threatened "to slap their [Komnas HAM] face if they speak without evidence."<sup>98</sup> As Komnas HAM continues to insist on the results of its investigation, the relationship between the human rights body and the TNI remains tense.

Third, the government's policy of restricting access for national and international media, as well as for independent human rights groups and aid organizations, has made it difficult to verify the allegations of human rights abuses. Since the imposition of martial law in Aceh, the government has issued regulations restricting the presence of foreigners, including journalists, in the province.<sup>99</sup> Moreover the flow of information from local journalists has carefully been controlled by the martial law administration. These restrictions clearly raise suspicions about what is really happening in Aceh. One issue has been the number of casualties in the conflict. It is impossible to know the exact number or to identify those responsible. Although the military has rarely made public the data on civilian casualties, in mid-June the police announced that 108 civilians had been killed during the first month of the military offensive.<sup>100</sup> The TNI's response to the police figures is curious. General Sutarto flatly maintained that "the police data are always 24 hours behind ours."<sup>101</sup> When the military finally revealed in November that some 395 civilians had died due to the conflict and 159

others were wounded, it claimed they were all victims of GAM atrocities.

Fourth, the government's political goal of winning Acehnese heart and minds might not be achieved due to a number of measures taken by the martial law administration. The administration, for example, routinely organizes mass recitation of oaths of loyalty to the Indonesian state.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, there have been forced flag-raising ceremonies across the province.<sup>103</sup> In a move meant to root out GAM members and sympathizers in the civil service, the martial law administration has also undertaken background screening or special screening (*penelitian khusus*) of 86,680 civil servants in Aceh, including a loyalty test for local legislators.<sup>104</sup> Outside Aceh, especially in Jakarta and Bandung, local officials have been instructed to register Acehnese residing in their areas and monitor their activities tightly.<sup>105</sup> The requirement that Aceh residents must obtain new identity cards adds yet another burden to the population.<sup>106</sup> Such measures, which emphasize symbolism rather than substance, have been criticized because they might alienate the Acehnese further and could in fact exacerbate resentment against the central government.<sup>107</sup>

And fifth, the attitude and behavior of both officers and soldiers in Aceh have not always corresponded to the stated objective of winning hearts and minds. It is difficult to imagine how hearts and minds can be won when soldiers treat people badly. In their search for members of GAM in rural areas, for example, military personnel have often rounded up villagers and questioned them in a threatening manner. During such

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diers treat people badly.***

operations, beatings are not uncommon; indeed several soldiers were disciplined in July 2003.<sup>108</sup> Moreover there have been reports of rape during the first few weeks of Operasi Terpadu.<sup>109</sup> Worse, there is still a tendency among officers to threaten ordinary villagers that they will be accused of being GAM members or sympathizers if they do not cooperate with the security apparatus. North Aceh's military commander, Colonel A. Y. Nasution, warned: "If the community does not support the Integrated Operation . . . that means they are the same as the GAM rebels" (Aspinall 2003: 24).

Given such problems, questions remain—above all, will the elimination of GAM automatically ease resentment among the Acehnese toward the central government in Jakarta and, in effect, eradicate the aspiration of independence among segments of the populace? While two previous crackdowns

on armed separatist groups in Aceh during the mid-1970s and early 1990s did succeed in undermining the military strength of the rebels, they clearly failed to make independence seem less attractive. On the contrary, the two military crackdowns planted new seeds of resentment that gave rise to the resurgence of the rebellion and growing support for it after the fall of Suharto's government in 1998. Indeed, this time the government has tried to convince the public that the ongoing military operation in Aceh will not repeat past mistakes. While the general public outside Aceh seems persuaded by the government's promise, it is not immediately clear how the current military operation can bring lasting peace to Aceh when the wider context—the social and economic roots of the conflict, governance reforms, and impunity—has not been adequately addressed by the government.

### **Impediments to Success**

Government officials and military leaders have repeatedly asserted that the ongoing operation is meant to uphold the country's territorial integrity by ending the activities of the separatist movement and curbing Acehese support for independence through the winning of hearts and minds. While the first objective might be achievable, it is not immediately clear whether the second aim can be achieved through the current operation. Not only has the military component been far too dominant, but the government has to address the wider context of the conflict. First, the root causes of the conflict, especially the socioeconomic issues, have remained untouched. Second, reform of local governance, necessary for any counterinsurgency to succeed, has been largely absent. And third is the ongoing culture of impunity. Without addressing these three problems, it is unlikely that Operasi Terpadu—despite the government's decision to extend it for another six months—will resolve the Aceh problem permanently and bring lasting peace to the province.

#### *Persistent Socioeconomic Problems*

The resurgence of separatist conflict in Aceh follows a pattern of successive outbreaks of armed insurgency. Military crackdowns from 1976 to 1977 only restored order for a limited time before a new resurgence of armed rebellion. The defeat of GAM in 1977 was to be followed by a second GAM resurrection in 1989. This second rebellion was largely destroyed during the military operation in 1989–92 but it has reemerged since early 1999. As Aspinall (2003: 24) notes: "GAM can be remarkably resilient after military defeat." While Aspinall notes that this capac-

ity to rejuvenate has come from “a desire to exact revenge for family members who had been killed, tortured, or sexually abused by security forces earlier (p. 24), it also results from the persistent presence of social and economic problems—the result of exploitation and excessive centralization in the past—that foster collective discontent and resentment against central rule in Jakarta and, in turn, make the idea of independence more attractive.

Indeed social and economic conditions in Aceh since 1998 have not been much different from those of the 1980s and 1990s and in fact may be worse. In 1990, for example, Aceh contributed 3.6 percent to Indonesia’s gross domestic product. In 2001, this figure declined to just 2.2 percent as a result of a significant drop in the contributions from oil fields, agriculture, and the processing sectors (Panggabean 2003). Poverty is the real problem in Aceh. According to Governor Abdullah Puteh, approximately 40 percent of the province’s 4.2 million people are living under the poverty line.<sup>110</sup> This figure, a total of 1,680,000 people, shows a significant increase from only 425,600 people in 1996 and 886,809 in 1999.<sup>111</sup> Living conditions have showed no improvement over the years. It is estimated that about half of Aceh’s population still has earth or wooden floors and lacks access to safe drinking water and electricity (World Bank 2002). Despite its abundant natural resources, in 2002 Aceh was the poorest province in Sumatra and the second poorest in Indonesia.<sup>112</sup>

***Poverty is the real problem in Aceh.***

While poverty is widespread in Indonesia, discontent is particularly pervasive in Aceh compared to other provinces. Despite the government’s political and economic concessions to Aceh in 1999, when it passed a special autonomy law for the province, distrust continues. This sentiment clearly reflects distrust of the government’s commitment to Aceh in the eyes of the population (Ross 2003: 21). As discussed earlier, faith in the central government was eroded after a series of broken promises by Jakarta since the early days of independence. When concessions were followed by continuing brutality by the security apparatus in 1999–2000—as well as the unfulfilled promises of President Habibie to bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights abuses during the DOM period and the absence of development programs—it is hardly surprising that the promise of special autonomy failed to gain the public trust. More important, the failure of the special autonomy package is related to the continuing problems in local government.

*Lack of Reform*

The relative success on the military front is unlikely to be followed by the restoration of the people's trust in the central government if no governance reform is carried out. In many insurgencies, the rebels can easily solicit support from the local population by capitalizing on inefficient and corrupt local governments. For villagers, the local bureaucracy often serves as a prism through which they pass judgment on the government as a whole. For them the local government is the government. In such circumstances, corrupt and ineffective local government often hinders the attainment of Jakarta's political objective. Indeed, for a counterinsurgency operation to succeed, government reform constitutes one of the key steps in winning hearts and minds (Thompson 2002: 73).

This problem is particularly acute in Aceh, where corruption, lack of transparency, and the absence of accountability have become the norm. A survey by the Central Bank in 2001, for example, concluded that Aceh is the most corrupt province in Indonesia.<sup>113</sup> In 2001, it was reported that more than Rp 1,118 billion of humanitarian aid money was unaccounted for.<sup>114</sup> During the same year, an investigation by a local watchdog, People's Solidarity for Anticorruption, revealed that "irregularities" in the handling of development funds amounted to Rp 98.799 billion—that is, 44 percent of the total expenditure for the year.<sup>115</sup> Another NGO, the Anticorruption Society, revealed that more than 374 cases of corruption during 2001 have never been investigated.<sup>116</sup> In 2003, Acehese leaders and activists accused provincial officials of squandering some Rp 5.5 trillion on costly, corruption-tainted projects (Mapes 2003). The local government, especially Governor Abdullah Puteh himself, has been at the center of the allegations of corruption in Aceh.<sup>117</sup> Compounding the problem, local police and provincial prosecutors have declined to investigate on grounds of lack of evidence (Mapes 2003).

Moreover, no actions have been taken by the central government to resolve the problem. Public demands, both from NGOs and from community leaders, that the president should remove Governor Puteh have been largely ignored. Jakarta's typical response has been to promise that an investigation will be carried out.<sup>118</sup> Many believe that the government is reluctant to act for fear of the political fallout before the upcoming elec-

***A survey by the Central Bank...concluded that Aceh is the most corrupt province in Indonesia.***

tions in 2004, when Puteh's party (Golkar) is expected to make a strong show. Moreover, it is also believed that Jakarta's lack of political will reflects the inability or unwillingness of President Megawati to clamp down on corruption on the national level (Schulze 2003). Thus it is not difficult to understand why the Acehnese have so little faith in Jakarta's commitment to development in the province. As a local academic complained: "When you promise A, and you promise B, and you never deliver, how can you gain the trust of the people?" (Mapes 2003).

Without political will to tackle the imperative of governance reform, it difficult to see how the relative gains on the military front can be sustained. In fact, the military itself has made it clear that the overall success of Operasi Terpadu will depend on the government's policy and action on nonmilitary issues.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the negative effects of the absence of governance reform were evident by end of the first phase of the operation. Major General Endang Suwarya, the martial law administrator, has acknowledged that after six months of military activity, Operasi Terpadu has failed to arouse Acehnese resistance against GAM.<sup>120</sup> While acknowledging that "soldiers in the field used an inappropriate approach to win the people's trust," he also complained "efforts toward improving the people's welfare did not work well and law enforcement authorities failed to capture as many rebels as we had expected."<sup>121</sup> More important, the decision to extend martial law, which continues to put Aceh in the hands of military rule, was driven partly by the military's lack of faith in the civilian Governor Puteh (Schulze 2003: 14).

### *A Culture of Impunity*

Progress in addressing another root cause that sustains support for independence—the continuing problem of impunity—has also been slight. Since the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, there has been little change in the TNI's attitude on this issue. When reports about massive violations of human rights in Aceh committed by the military during 1990–98 became the focus of public attention, the military leadership in Jakarta felt threatened and began to downplay what happened in Aceh. The coordinating minister for political and security affairs, General Faisal Tanjung, for example, expressed his doubt about the existence of mass graves in Aceh.<sup>122</sup> Despite his earlier decision to lift Aceh's DOM status, the commander in chief, General Wiranto, expressed his wariness that "if ABRI is asked to be responsible for its operation in the past, the soldiers

will feel disturbed.”<sup>123</sup> A similar attitude was shown by the commander of Korem Lilawangsa, Colonel Dasiri Musnar, when he said: “The number [of victims] has been exaggerated. Does that also include victims from the Dutch colonial era?”<sup>124</sup> Such remarks angered many Acehnese leaders and strengthened doubts about the seriousness of the central government and the military to start a judicial process.

Under President Wahid, the central government failed to address the problem in a substantial way. Jakarta’s promises to prosecute those involved in the violation of human rights during the DOM period were largely unfulfilled. President Megawati, who replaced President Wahid in July 2001, faces the same problem. There are two contradicting views in this regard. First, it is feared that severe punishment of the military might invite strong resistance from them and thus create further instability in the country. There have been reports, for example, that ongoing instability in some parts of the country is related to the attempt by elements of the military to send a clear signal to the government that actions against them could backfire.<sup>125</sup> The second view maintains that it is time for Indonesia to break the circle of impunity by punishing the culprits. According to this view, such action would deter any repetition of human rights abuses by the military or the state in the future.

The military’s position on this issue is problematic. Many within the TNI—active or retired—believe that past violations of human rights by the military should be understood in the context of the political circumstances of the time.<sup>126</sup> They argue that the military did not participate in the political decisions that led to the violations of human rights. It merely carried out the decisions made by the government. Thus, they maintain, the military as an institution cannot be held responsible. Based on this logic they claim that only those who committed the actual violations, not their commanding officers, can be held accountable for their misdeeds. The implication of this position is that the investigation of human rights violations cannot touch the highest level of the military leadership. The former commander of Kostrad, Lieutenant General Djadja Suparman, for example, publicly warned that “the investigation against some generals will make soldiers angry and act wantonly.”<sup>127</sup> In other words: any investigation should confine itself to low-level officers and soldiers.

***In other words: any investigation should confine itself to low-level officers and soldiers.***



The case of Aceh provides a perfect example of the ongoing culture of impunity within the military. So far there has been no significant progress in addressing this problem. When the brutality of the armed forces was made public after the fall of President Suharto, Komnas HAM revealed that there had been some 7,000 human rights violations in Aceh during the DOM period.<sup>128</sup> But except for the inquiry conducted by Komnas HAM, the government did not initiate serious investigation about what really happened in Aceh during that period. Under heavy pressure, President Habibie did set up a special commission, the Komisi Independen Untuk Tindak Kekerasan Aceh (KIUTKA), to investigate human rights violations in the province. This commission, however, recommended the prosecution of only five cases—none of them during the DOM period (Human Rights Watch 2002: 8). Of these cases, the Wahid government promised that all five would soon be brought to court.

How the five major cases were dealt with reveals that perpetrators of human rights abuses in Aceh indeed enjoy a high degree of impunity. Only one case finally came to court. And the result of the trial was widely seen as disappointing. The trial of several officers involved in the brutal killing of more than 50 people in an Islamic boarding school in Aceh only strengthened people's pessimism when the key officer responsible for the operation, an army lieutenant colonel, was declared missing by the TNI leadership—thus thwarting the possibility of bringing other high-ranking officers to justice. The only ones convicted were low-level officers. Although the court sentenced them to eight to ten years of imprisonment, this case failed to win public confidence in the military's commitment to hold its personnel accountable for abuses. After President Wahid was replaced by President Megawati, the plan to bring the other four cases to court simply disappeared without explanation.

Doubts over the current military operation in Aceh should be understood in the context of this poor record of military accountability and the ongoing culture of impunity. For their part, both the government and the military seem to have realized that the problem might undermine the legitimacy of the operation in Aceh. To allay such doubts, the government has from the beginning carefully set the military operation within a wider framework of an integrated operation that encompasses legal, political, and humanitarian elements. Yet the attitude of the government and the TNI is still characterized by a degree of ambiguity. There have been a number of mixed signals. First, as mentioned earlier, the TNI has made it



clear that the media is free to report any cases of human rights violations by TNI personnel on the ground. But it also made it clear that the military reserved the right to sue the media if such reports are unfounded. Second, for reasons not entirely clear except for security considerations, the government issued a decree to “regulate” and “restrict” the activities of international NGOs in Aceh—including those organizations active in providing humanitarian assistance to civilian casualties and foreign journalists. Jakarta insists that such assistance should be channeled through the government. Third, despite promises to investigate and despite a few trials of soldiers accused of having committed rape, unlawful violence, and theft,<sup>129</sup> the military remains engaged in the habit of denial when violations of human rights are reported by the media.<sup>130</sup> In such circumstances, it is understandable why there has been a lingering fear among pro-democracy forces that the rights of civilians could well have been violated during the conduct of military operations.

The most striking example of how the culture of impunity prevails during the current operation was displayed in October 2003 when a military tribunal acquitted twelve soldiers charged with physically assaulting some 50 residents of two villages in North Aceh during a hunt for members of GAM in late August. Despite their confessions, the court martial released the twelve soldiers of all charges simply because the victims could not identify exactly who committed the assaults.<sup>131</sup> This case might be a minor one, but it sends a clear message that it is not easy for the law to reach the military. Worse, the government’s restrictions on the activities of journalists, as well as humanitarian and rights activists, make it virtually impossible to conduct an impartial assessment of human rights violations in the province. Moreover, the military’s views on human rights indicate that this problem will continue to taint the government’s attempt to resolve the Aceh problem. Major General Endang Suwarya, for example, admits that the TNI still regards Komnas HAM as a “threat” and many soldiers are worried that they will become the subject of investigation by the commission after they retire.<sup>132</sup>

### **Lessons**

This paper has examined the purpose, dynamics, and consequences of security operations in Aceh since 1990. Despite the fact that the problem in Aceh is political and an armed insurgency, the security operation often deviated from the principles of counterinsurgency—especially during the

*Instead of winning  
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period of DOM (1990–98) when the military conducted Operation Red Net to eliminate the rebels. Instead of winning Acehnese hearts and minds, the military planted seeds of hatred among the general population through its brutal suppression and excessive use of force. Indeed, the human rights abuses committed by military personnel during this period have deepened Acehnese resentment against the central government. The counterinsurgency operation in Aceh in the 1990s also shows that a prolonged military offensive easily led to abuses that perpetuated, rather than eradicated, the aspiration for independence.

Part of the problem was the absence of a clear exit strategy after the military objective of the mission was accomplished. Military gains were not followed by reconstruction measures that would have restored normalcy in the province and improved living conditions. During the DOM period, the military had actually managed to restore order and by 1992 had undermined the military strength of the rebels. But on the pretext that the province was not entirely secure, Operation Red Net continued until 1998. Aceh's status as a military operations zone was not lifted until the fall of Suharto's regime. Not only were there hardly any significant improvements in the social and economic conditions of the province, but the state's hegemonic presence in Aceh, in the form of military ascendancy, had reinforced public resentment against the state itself, especially against the military. Nor have public perceptions that Aceh has been the victim of excessive exploitation by the central government been adequately addressed by Jakarta. When the resentment gained new momentum with the collapse of the military-backed Suharto regime, it soon resurfaced in the form of armed insurgency.

The latest military operation, which began on May 19, 2003, risks the same fate. Attainment of the political objective of Operasi Terpadu—curbing Acehnese support for independence and resolving the Aceh problem—is only possible when the government succeeds in winning the hearts and minds of the people—and this requires a clear military exit strategy and socio-economic reconstruction. The mistake of military operations in the 1990s, which continued indefinitely, should not be repeated. Once the military objective of Operasi Terpadu is achieved, civilian authority should be restored in Aceh. A prolonged military operation, while it might deal a

further blow to GAM's military strength, might also prolong resentment toward central rule from Jakarta. Although Operasi Terpadu might be able to undermine the military strength of the rebels, it is not sufficient to resolve the problem of Aceh. Despite the government's good intentions, the current operation is unlikely to meet its ultimate goal of resolving the Aceh problem once and for all.

A comprehensive resolution of Aceh's insurgency problem requires more than just a military offensive designed to crush GAM. It also requires the creation of conditions that would make the idea of independence unattractive to the population at large. Past experience shows that a military operation without a clear exit strategy is bound to prompt yet another cycle of rebellion. This exit strategy should entail not only a comprehensive plan for immediate rehabilitation and reconstruction but also long-term policy packages aimed at initiating local governance reform, developing Aceh's economy, restoring a sense of justice among the Acehnese, and promoting democracy in the province. Only then can we expect the cycle of rebellion and violence in Aceh to end.



# Endnotes

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1. In 2001 the Province of Aceh was officially renamed Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD).
2. GAM is known formally as the Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF).
3. This section is drawn primarily from Sukma (2001b).
4. For a detailed discussion of the economic sources of Acehnese discontent see Kell (1995: 13–28).
5. *Merdeka*, January 11, 1999.
6. *Republika*, January 12, 1999.
7. Statements by the Indonesian minister of transmigration, Martono; cited in Barber (2000: 25).
8. The second GAM rebellion began in 1989. For a detailed account of the phases of GAM rebellion see Sukma (2001a).
9. *Editor*, April 15 and June 3, 1989.
10. *Editor*, June 3, 1990.
11. GPK is the abbreviation for Gerombolan Pengacau Keamanan (Peace-Disturbing Gang), a label used by the central government for GAM.
12. Interview with Ibrahim Hasan in “Semua Orang Menyalahkan Saya,” *Republika*, August 12, 1998.
13. Not to be confused with Major General Joko Pramono, R. Pramono’s predecessor as commander of Kodam Bukit Barisan.
14. Interview with R. Pramono in Widjanarko and Samboja (1999: 126–27).
15. Interview with Ibrahim Hasan, *Republika*, August 12, 1998.
16. *Editor*, August 18, 1990, p. 29.

17. See also the statement by Governor Hasan in *Editor*, July 13, 1991.
18. The term “organic” refers to soldiers permanently stationed in a particular region as troops deployed under a regional military command. For the estimated strength see Kell (1995: 74).
19. *Kompas*, June 20, 1990.
20. *Suara Pembaruan*, July 4, 1990; *Jakarta Post*, July 5, 1990.
21. *Tempo*, June 30, 1990.
22. *Kompas*, July 10, 1990.
23. *Jakarta Post*, July 12, 1990.
24. Quoted by Ibrahim Hasan, interview, *Republika*, August 12, 1998.
25. *Jakarta Post*, May 14, 1990.
26. For this principle see Thompson (2002), especially chap. 5.
27. Many Acehese told me that during the DOM period, TNI troops often shouted “Are you GAM? Are you GAM? Yes, you are GAM!” at villagers and commoners when they were conducting security checks. See also *Tajuk*, August 20, 1998, p.19, and Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*.
28. For a comprehensive account on how such brutality was carried out see Al-Chaidar (1998: 107–87).
29. *Editor*, July 20, 1991, p. 28. For a detailed account of this tactic used by Indonesia’s military see Robinson (1998: 143–45).
30. *Pelita*, June 12, 1991, quoted in Kell (1995: 75).
31. *Kompas*, July 11, 1991.
32. See the statement by Colonel Syarwan Hamid, commander of Korem Lilawangsa, *Kompas*, July 11, 1991.
33. For an account of this strategy see Robinson (1998: 143–45).
34. *Angkatan Bersenjata*, September 3–4, 1991.
35. *Angkatan Bersenjata*, March 18, 1992; see also *Kompas*, July 11, 1991, and *Merdeka*, August 21, 1991.
36. Pers. comm., Lhokseumawe, September 1999.
37. *Serambi Indonesia*, September 1–3, 1998; see also *Forum Keadilan*, September 21, 1998.
38. *Serambi Indonesia*, November 3–4, 1998.
39. *Serambi Indonesia*, November 16, 1998.
40. *Serambi Indonesia*, December 30–31, 1998.
41. *Serambi Indonesia*, January 4, 1999. According to the military, the soldiers were forced to return fire because some people in the crowd shot first. See *Serambi Indonesia*, January 5, 1999.
42. *D&R*, January 18–23, 1999; *Serambi Indonesia*, January 10–11, 1999.
43. *Serambi Indonesia*, February 4–5, 1999; see also *Gatra*, February 13, 1999.
44. *The Age*, July 13, 2001, internet edition, at [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au).

45. *Waspada*, August 5, 1999. GBPK, which stands for Gerakan Bersenjata Pengacau Keamanan (Armed Gangs of Peace Disturbers), was the term used to describe GAM in the post-1998 period.
46. "Kondisi Aceh Pasca Ulang Tahun GAM: Tidak Semakin Baik," *Jurnal Pasar Modal Indonesia*, January 2000, p. 56.
47. *Serambi Indonesia*, May 4–6, 1999.
48. See *Panji Masyarakat*, May 12, 1999; *D&R*, May 10–15, 1999.
49. See [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com), February 1, 2000.
50. Found at [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com).
51. *Asasi*, February 2000, pp. 1–6.
52. *Kompas*, July 18, 2002.
53. *Jakarta Post*, July 19, 2001.
54. A similar plan proposed by the military in September 1999 was rejected by President Habibie.
55. *Koran Tempo*, May 2, 2002.
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57. <http://story.news.yahoo.com>; accessed on June 6, 2002.
58. *Jakarta Post*, March 8, 2000.
59. *Forum Keadilan*, March 26, 2000.
60. *Jakarta Post*, May 13, 2000.
61. See "Joint Understanding on Humanitarian Pause for Aceh," Articles 1 and 4.
62. See the statements by the TNI commander, Admiral Widodo, and the Army chief of staff, General Tyasno Sudarto, in *Jakarta Post*, May 12, 2000.
63. *Straits Times*, May 5, 2000.
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66. *Ibid.*
67. *Detak*, August 29–September 4, 2000.
68. For an account of this episode see Aspinall and Crouch (2003).
69. Major General Darmono was replaced by Brigadier General George Toisutta on November 19, 2003, when Operasi Terpadu was extended for another six months.
70. *Jakarta Post*, May 24, 2003.
71. See, for example, *Tempo*, June 1, 2003, p. 23.
72. *Suara Pembaruan*, May 8, 2003.
73. *Sinar Harapan*, May 20, 2003.
74. *Media Indonesia*, May 29, 2003.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Republika*, May 28, 2003.

77. *Jakarta Post*, May 28, 2003.
78. *Kompas*, June 19, 2003.
79. *Suara Pembaruan*, July 7, 2003.
80. *Suara Karya*, July 14, 2003.
81. *Media Indonesia*, April 10, 2001.
82. *Kompas*, June 16, 2003.
83. *Kompas*, May 20, 2003.
84. *Republika*, May 29, 2003; *Media Indonesia*, May 29, 2003.
85. *Republika*, May 29, 2003.
86. *Gatra*, June 7, 2003.
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94. *Media Indonesia*, June 3, 2003.
95. *Jakarta Post*, June 25, 2003.
96. *Tempo*, June 9–15, 2003, p. 38.
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98. *Tempo*, June 9–15, 2003, p. 36.
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100. GAM is also known to have committed violations of human rights against civilians. See Schulze (2004).
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103. *Media Indonesia*, June 24, 2003; *Kompas*, July 10, 2003.
104. *Indopos*, June 11, 2003; *Jakarta Post*, June 16, 2003.
105. *Kompas*, June 24, 2003; *Jakarta Post*, June 16, 2003.
106. *Jakarta Post*, July 28, 2003.
107. *Jakarta Post*, June 11, 2003.
108. *Gatra*, July 19, 2003.
109. Ibid.



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111. *Jakarta Post Online*, [www.thejakartapost.com/special/0s\\_7\\_facts.asp](http://www.thejakartapost.com/special/0s_7_facts.asp).
112. *Sinar Harapan*, March 31, 2003.
113. *Sinar Harapan*, March 31, 2003.
114. *Sinar Harapan*, May 1, 2003.
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116. *Ibid.*
117. For a detailed report on the allegations see *Sinar Harapan*, March 31 and May 1, 2003.
118. See, for example, the promise by the coordinating minister for political security affairs, Lieutenant General (ret.) Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, in *Jakarta Post*, October 3, 2003.
119. *Kompas*, October 24, 2003.
120. *Koran Tempo*, November 20, 2003.
121. *Jakarta Post*, November 22, 2003.
122. *Kompas*, August 26, 1998. Feisal Tanjung was ABRI's commander in chief during 1993–98.
123. *Kompas*, September 14, 1998; see also *Ummat*, September 28, 1998.
124. *Gatra*, August 22, 1998.
125. See, for example, the report by *D&R*, January 24–30, 2000.
126. See, for example, various statements by General Wiranto in *Jakarta Post*, August 22, 1998, and October 5, 1999.
127. *Media Indonesia*, December 15, 1999.
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129. In some cases, the soldiers did receive sentences; see *Jakarta Post*, June 10 and July 8, 2003.
130. See, for example, *Koran Tempo*, May 29, 2003.
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## Project Information



## **The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia**

### **Project Rationale, Purpose and Outline**

Project Director: Muthiah Alagappa  
 Principal Researchers: Edward Aspinall (Aceh)  
 Danilyn Rutherford (Papua)  
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#### *Rationale*

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'état, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan, Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries; although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in these countries as well as in Vietnam continue to confront problems of political legitimacy that could become acute; and radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. And the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia (as elsewhere) can be traced to three issues—national identity, political legitimacy (the title to rule), and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and the transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over the legitimacy of political system has declined in Asia. However, political legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time and the legitimacy of the remaining communist and authoritarian systems are likely to confront challenges in due course. The project deals with internal conflicts arising from the process of

constructing national identity with specific focus on conflicts rooted in the relationship of minority communities to the nation-state. Here too many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities but several states including some major ones still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

### *Purpose*

The project investigates the dynamics and management of five key internal conflicts in Asia—Aceh and Papua in Indonesia, the Moro conflict in southern Philippines, and the conflicts pertaining to Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Specifically it investigates the following:

1. Why (on what basis), how (in what form), and when does group differentiation and political consciousness emerge?
2. What are the specific issues of contention in such conflicts? Are these of the instrumental or cognitive type? If both, what is the relationship between them? Have the issues of contention altered over time? Are the conflicts likely to undergo further redefinition?
3. When, why, and under what circumstances can such contentions lead to violent conflict? Under what circumstances have they not led to violent conflict?
4. How can the conflicts be managed, settled, and eventually resolved? What are policy choices? Do options such as national self-determination, autonomy, federalism, electoral design, and consociationalism exhaust the list of choices available to meet the aspirations of minority communities? Are there innovative ways of thinking about identity and sovereignty that can meet the aspirations of the minority communities without creating new sovereign nation-states?
5. What is the role of the regional and international communities in the protection of minority communities?
6. How and when does a policy choice become relevant?



### *Design*

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher each, the study groups comprise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, the United States, and Australia. For composition of study groups please see the participants list.

All five-study groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C. from September 29 through October 3, 2002. Over a period of four days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the five conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting five research monograph length studies (one per conflict) and twenty policy papers (four per conflict) were commissioned.

Study groups met separately for the second meeting. The Aceh and Papua study group meetings were held in Bali on June 16-17, the Southern Philippines study group met in Manila on June 23, and the Tibet and Xinjiang study groups were held in Honolulu from August 20 through 22, 2003. These meetings reviewed recent developments relating to the conflicts, critically reviewed the first drafts of the policy papers prepared for the project, reviewed the book proposals by the principal researchers, and identified new topics for research.

The third meeting of all study groups has been scheduled from February 28 through March 2, 2004 in Washington D.C.

### *Publications*

The project will result in five research monographs (book length studies) and about twenty policy papers.

*Research Monographs.* To be authored by the principal researchers, these monographs present a book-length study of the key issues pertaining to each of the five conflicts. Subject to satisfactory peer review, the monographs will appear in the East-West Center Washington series *Asian Security*, and the East-West Center series *Contemporary Issues in the Asia Pacific*, both published by the Stanford University Press.

*Policy Papers.* The policy papers provide a detailed study of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 10,000 to 25,000-word essays will be published in the EWC Washington Policy Studies series, and be circulated widely to key personnel and institutions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, United States, and other relevant countries.

#### *Public Forums*

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Two public forums were organized in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, discussed the Aceh and Papua conflicts. The second forum, cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, the Asia Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and the Sigur Center of the George Washington University, discussed the Tibet and Xinjiang conflicts.

Public forums were also organized in Jakarta and Manila in conjunction with the second study group meetings. The Jakarta public forum on Aceh and Papua, cosponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, and the Southern Philippines public forum cosponsored by the Policy Center of the Asian Institute of Management, attracted persons from government, media, think tanks, activist groups, diplomatic community and the public.

#### *Funding Support*

This project is supported with a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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## Background of the Aceh Conflict

Aceh is the site of one of Asia's longest-running internal conflicts. Since 1976, Indonesian sovereignty over the territory has been contested by an armed insurgency led by the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). A range of local grievances—especially those concerning allocation of natural resource revenues and human rights abuses—have contributed to the conflict.

Aceh, with an estimated population of about 4.2 million, is Indonesia's westernmost province. Almost all Acehnese are Muslims, and they have a reputation for Islamic piety. Most of the population is employed in agriculture, though Aceh is also rich in natural resources, especially natural gas and oil. ExxonMobil Indonesia, which operates in the Arun gasfields, is a major contributor to national revenues.

Unlike East Timor, which had been a Portuguese colony, but like other parts of Indonesia, Aceh was part of the Dutch East Indies prior to World War II. It came into the Dutch colonial empire relatively late, however. For centuries the Acehnese sultanate had been a powerful Islamic state, reaching its apogee during the seventeenth century. The Dutch launched an assault in 1873, but only managed to subdue the territory (arguably never completely) after three decades of bitter warfare.

Aceh's leaders, many of whom were *ulama* (religious scholars), mostly supported the struggle for Indonesian independence in 1945-49. Many, however, soon became disillusioned with the central government. In 1953 they launched a revolt as part of the Darul Islam (Abode of Islam) movement which joined several regional Islamic rebellions in a struggle to form an Indonesian Islamic state. The rebellion in Aceh was eventually resolved by negotiations leading to the province's nominal recognition as a "special territory."

The current separatist conflict began in 1976 when Hasan di Tiro, a supporter of Darul Islam living in the United States, returned to Aceh to form GAM and make a "redeclaration" of Acehnese independence. Initially the movement was small and Indonesian security forces soon defeated it. In 1989, a more serious outbreak of rebellion by GAM resulted in a brutal counterinsurgency operation claiming several thousand civilian lives.

In late 1998, following the resignation of President Suharto and the collapse of his authoritarian regime, conflict erupted on an even greater

scale. A large student-led protest movement called for a referendum on independence similar to that granted in 1999 for East Timor. The GAM insurgency reemerged—greatly expanding the range of its operations and attacking security forces and other targets. By mid-1999, large parts of the territory were under the movement's control.

The Indonesian government responded with a mix of concessions and military action. Negotiations between the government and GAM produced two cease-fires, in June 2000 and December 2002, although neither held. In 2001, the national parliament passed a Special Autonomy Law giving Aceh considerable authority to manage its own affairs and a greater share of its natural resource revenues. Security operations continued, however, and the death toll in fighting and among civilians was considerable. Eventually, in May 2003, the peace process broke down, a "military emergency" was declared, and security forces launched a large-scale offensive.

# Map of Aceh, Indonesia



● Provincial Capital

● Other Towns

~ District Boundaries

Note: Simeulue, Sabang, Lhokseumawe, and Langsa all have district status.

Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply official endorsement or recognition by the UN.

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A Publication of the East-West Center Washington

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## About this Issue

This paper examines the purpose, consequences, and lessons to be drawn from the security operations conducted by Indonesian forces in Aceh since 1990. As the vested interests of the TNI and its emphasis on a military solution have contributed to an escalation of the conflict, it argues that the military requires an exit strategy to be followed by socio-economic reconstruction. The paper is divided into four sections. The first outlines the root causes of the conflict and discusses military operations during the period 1990–98 when Aceh was designated a Military Operations Area (Daerah Operasi Militer; DOM). Security operations in Aceh between the downfall of Suharto's New Order regime in May 1998 and May 2003, when the government finally decided to impose martial law and launch a full-scale military crackdown in the province are explored in the second section. The third explores the conduct of the counterinsurgency operation during the first six months of martial law in the province. The final section looks at how the government's failure to consider the wider context of the conflict undermines the relative gains achieved on the military front. While security operations during the 1990s contributed to the aggravation of the problem—due primarily to the failure of Indonesia's military to protect human rights—the military operation since May 2003 will not end the conflict in Aceh if the government fails to undertake non-military measures to address the root causes of the problem in the province.

## About the Author

Dr. Rizal Sukma is Director of Studies at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta. Dr. Sukma received his Ph.D. in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

## Previous and Forthcoming Issues:

Policy Studies 1 *The Aceh Peace Process: Why it Failed*  
Edward Aspinall, University of Sydney  
Harold Crouch, Australian National University

Policy Studies 2 *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*  
Dr. Kirsten E. Schulze, London School of Economics

*“Beijing’s Tibet Policy: Securing Sovereignty and Legitimacy”*  
Dr. Allen Carlson, Cornell University

*“The Papua Conflict: Jakarta’s Perceptions and Policies”*  
Dr. Richard Chauvel, Victoria University, Melbourne  
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*“Southern Philippines and the International War Against Terror”*  
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