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Conflict in Aceh: A Military Solution?

After a promising period of relative peace in the Indonesian province of Aceh, the ceasefire of December 2002 has collapsed and the military has begun a new offensive. This brief provides a background to the history of the conflict in Aceh and recent developments. It analyses the actions and motivations of the key players and considers future prospects for a resolution of the conflict and Australia's interests in stability in Indonesia.

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Introduction

A promising period of relative peace in the Indonesian province of Aceh has spiralled back into violent struggle. On 19 May 2003, the Indonesian security forces launched an all-out military offensive against the pro-independence Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM)), following the final collapse of a ceasefire agreement that had commenced in December 2002. President Megawati Sukarnoputri issued a decree declaring a state of emergency in the province, authorising the military to take responsibility for security and beginning an operation involving up to 50,000 troops against a few thousand GAM guerrillas.¹

The offensive marks the failure of a series of efforts by successive Indonesian governments since the fall of Soeharto in 1998 to reach a negotiated settlement to the problem of Acehnese separatism. It is also a victory for the Indonesian military (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI)), which consistently opposed any policy of conciliation towards GAM. Despite TNI's failure to defeat the separatist movement for more than twenty years, it has continued to argue that it could achieve victory if only it was allowed a free hand.

This brief provides a background analysis of the conflict in Aceh and examines the motivations of the three key players in that latest turn of events—TNI, GAM and the government of President Megawati. It discusses the question of whether GAM should be understood as part of Islamic extremism in the region and the implications of the problem of Aceh for Australia's relations with Indonesia.

The Conflict in Aceh: History Repeats Itself

The conflict in Aceh is not a recent story but originates in the politics of the long struggle against Dutch colonialism and in the distinct history of the province. Although the modern Republic of Indonesia covers the entire territory of the former Dutch East Indies whose history extends back to the 16th century, Dutch control over many parts of the archipelago was actually only quite brief. Bali, for example, was not conquered until 1906 after a long and bitter struggle.² Aceh held out for thirty years and was not colonised until the first decade of the 20th century, after which time the Dutch faced sporadic resistance right up to the time of their surrender to the Japanese in 1942.³

Aceh's sense of separation from the colonial experience of other regions, such as Java and the 'spice islands' of eastern Indonesia, reinforced a tradition of distinct identity. Aceh was one of the first regions to be converted to Islam (from the 13th century or even before) and the Kingdom of Aceh had a long history of commercial and cultural links with the Islamic world of the Middle East and India. Today it retains a deeper attachment to Islamic culture than most parts of Indonesia. During the Indonesian war of independence against the Dutch in the late 1940s, Acehnese forces played a key military role, but many Acehnese nationalists had a different, more Islamic-inspired vision of a post-independence Indonesia than the mainly secularist leaders based in Java. But despite discontent about both the lack

of autonomy for Aceh and about the non-Islamic character of Indonesia as a whole, the region became part of the unitary Republic of Indonesia in 1950.⁴

A few years after independence, opposition to the constitutional and political character of the Indonesian state began to re-emerge in Aceh, reaching a peak when President Sukarno began to ally himself with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the late 1950s. Non-Islamist leaders in Aceh were angered when the separate province of Aceh was abolished and merged into North Sumatra. From 1953, a movement to overthrow the central government developed in Aceh, linking up with the *Dar'ul Islam* rebellion, a diverse collection of insurrectionist Islamic groups throughout parts of Sumatra, Sulawesi and Java. The leaders of this rebellion 'had no intention of separating the region from Indonesia but envisaged it as an autonomous province'.⁵ By 1962, however, *Dar'ul Islam*, both within and outside Aceh, had been defeated by central government military campaigns. The movement had been politically undermined when the central government granted Aceh 'special region' (*daerah istimewa*) status in 1959, providing for local autonomy over religion, customary law and education.⁶

Aceh was free of conflict for many years, but problems started when President Soeharto's New Order regime began to intensify centralised rule from Jakarta. Islamic organisations across Indonesia were subject to suspicion or outright repression and there was little room for local political forces. Matters worsened when the discovery of large petroleum resources in northern Aceh in 1971 brought an even tighter grip over the local economy and politics by outside elements. Although the province experienced rapid economic growth from petroleum production, many Acehnese felt they received no benefit or even were worse off when they lost land and forest resources to make way for industrial, plantation and forestry developments. Newcomers from other regions of the country were seen as taking most new jobs, while generals, politicians and well-connected businessmen from Java creamed off all the profits.

The regrowth of separatist feeling led to the foundation of the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM)) in 1976 by Hasan M. di Tiro, a member of the old Acehnese aristocracy.⁷ For many years GAM was fairly ineffective as a political or military force, but repressive actions by TNI gradually led more Acehnese to its banner. In 1989 GAM re-emerged with a campaign of attacks on police and military installations and government facilities.

The Soeharto government's response to the resurgence of separatist activities was to launch a military offensive. From 1989, Aceh was declared a Military Operations Zone (*Daerah Operasi Militer* (DOM)), an acronym which became synonymous with a time of violence and unrestrained and unaccountable military actions. There were allegations of atrocities and human rights abuses by both sides in the conflict. During the ten years of the declaration of a DOM, from 1989 to 1998, most estimates put the number of people killed in the conflict at around 2000— mostly civilians. Reports of intimidation, beatings, rapes and torture were numerous and an unknown number of people 'disappeared' or were otherwise unaccounted for.⁸ The population of Aceh (numbering about 4.5 million out of

Indonesia's total population of 210 million) has been left traumatised and desperate for some sort of solution.⁹

Efforts for Peace after the Fall of Soeharto

When President Soeharto resigned in May 1998, there was a general tide of sentiment that the abuses of his New Order regime should be exposed and recompense made. Soeharto's successor, President B. J. Habibie, lifted the DOM in August 1998. The new democratically elected President, Abdurrahman Wahid, called for a new approach of reconciliation and negotiation. Soon after he came to office in October 1999 he established an Independent Commission to Investigate Violence in Aceh and a number of junior officers and soldiers were convicted over some cases of killings of civilians. Both Habibie and the then Minister of Defence and head of TNI, General Wiranto, apologised for abuses committed by members of the security forces. Megawati Sukarnoputri, both as Vice President and President (from July 2001), strongly supported a new approach to the Aceh problem, once famously declaring that 'not one drop of the people's blood' should be shed in the province.¹⁰

On the Acehnese side, the end of the New Order created expectations not only that they would be freed from the heavy hand of TNI but that they would be given the opportunity to express their true feelings about the future of their province. In November 1999, a huge rally in capital of Aceh, Banda Aceh, claimed to be over a million people, called for a referendum on independence and an end to military violence.¹¹ The referendum in East Timor in August 1999 was taken up as a precedent for Aceh. The freer political environment also led to the growth of non-government organisations (NGOs), some campaigning for a referendum, and others taking up human rights, humanitarian and developmental issues in the province. Many of these entered into direct competition with GAM, whose actual support amongst the Acehnese remains unclear. Opposition to the central government and TNI is not necessarily the same as support for GAM.

The 'Humanitarian Pause' and 'Special Autonomy'

President Wahid's government undertook two important initiatives in 2000 and 2001: the 'Humanitarian Pause' of June 2000 and the passing of a law for 'Special Autonomy' for Aceh in July 2001. The Humanitarian Pause was a ceasefire, a three-month accord designed to both break the cycle of fighting and to allow the distribution of humanitarian assistance to the people of Aceh. The Pause was extended several times in different forms over the next year. The Special Autonomy law provided for the introduction of certain elements of *sharia*¹² law in local courts, increased oil and gas revenues for the province and direct election of the province's Governor and district heads in 2004.

The ceasefire, together with the Special Autonomy law, created the impression outside the province that real progress was being made. The reality on the ground, however, was that most Acehnese concluded that little had changed. Although the Humanitarian Pause initially brought a lull in fighting, both TNI and GAM seemed to regard it as little more

than an opportunity to regroup and re-arm. Outside observers and local NGOs reported that violence had returned to the pre-Pause levels by the end of 2001.¹³

Special Autonomy, at least as it was structured under the 2001 law, garnered little support because the law did not provide for immediate provincial and gubernatorial elections, thus denying the much called-for expression of Acehnese opinion. Instead, it allowed the increased resource revenue to pass into the hands of the corrupt provincial government still dominated by pro-Jakarta elements from Golkar, the old ruling party. The law did not clarify how *sharia* law would be implemented or how Special Autonomy would be implemented in conjunction with the decentralisation of government that was occurring across Indonesia. Critically, the law did not allow for the establishment of local political parties,¹⁴ thus providing no incentive for GAM to participate in a legal political process or for new non-GAM elements to emerge.¹⁵

The Ceasefire of December 2002

The gradual disintegration of the Humanitarian Pause and the failure of efforts to revive the peace process during 2001 and 2002 came about because neither side appeared to be really committed to a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, through the mediation of the Geneva-based Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC), the parties were brought together again for a series of talks during 2002. With the assistance of three foreign 'wise men'¹⁶ a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) was signed in Geneva on 9 December 2002. The first intention of the COHA was to bring about another ceasefire, but the two parties also agreed to a framework that was designed to lead to disengagement and disarmament and to negotiation over the issues of principle at stake.

After a two-month confidence-building stage, a series of 'peace zones' was to be established, where GAM would 'begin a phased placement' of its arms and from which TNI would be 'relocated'.¹⁷ A team of monitors (50 nominated by the Indonesian government, 50 by GAM and 50 from overseas by HDC) would oversee the process. A so-called All-Inclusive Dialogue of all elements of Acehnese society would 'review' the law on Special Autonomy. Each side proved to have a different understanding of what was meant by 'review', including whether there could be discussion about the principles of either autonomy or independence. The elections in 2004 would lead to a democratically elected provincial assembly and provincial government.

Most reports indicate that the COHA was greeted with enthusiasm and relief amongst the population in Aceh and the level of violence dropped dramatically.¹⁸ By the end of January 2003 the first 'peace zone' was established and more were being planned. Many of the peace monitors had been deployed throughout the province and their reports on violations of the ceasefire placed pressure on both parties to keep to the Agreement.

By February 2003, however, Indonesian military leaders began accusing GAM of failing to meet the deadline for the 'placement' of arms and of using the ceasefire to strengthen their forces. They also said the GAM's holding rallies for independence violated the

principle of acceptance of the law on Special Autonomy. Armed clashes between the two sides began to increase again, with each side blaming the other for violations of the ceasefire. GAM was accused of recommencing their attacks on government facilities and personnel and TNI was accused of attacking alleged GAM supporters, either directly or through armed militias. In April 2003, 50 people were reportedly killed during that month alone and most of the monitors had withdrawn from the field into the provincial capital due to threats to their security.

By the end of April the situation was reaching a crisis, both on the ground in Aceh and in negotiations in Geneva. When talks planned to take place in Geneva on 28 April failed to materialise, the Indonesian government gave GAM a two-week deadline to initiate negotiations or face a renewed military offensive. The Security Coordinating Minister, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, declared that peace talks could continue only if GAM accepted the law on Special Autonomy and guaranteed to surrender its weapons. Last minute talks in Tokyo on 18 May failed to produce a compromise and the next day Megawati signed an emergency decree and TNI began an all-out operation against GAM.

Why did the Ceasefire Collapse?

The COHA of December 2002 was seen by many observers as the last chance for a peaceful resolution to the Aceh conflict. Given the gravity of what was at stake for all sides, why did they seem to treat the Agreement so lightly? What were the motivations and calculations of the three main parties, TNI, GAM and the Indonesia government, in signing the COHA and in their subsequent actions?

The Military: Reluctant Participants

Leading elements in the Indonesian military have consistently argued for a forcible solution to the problem of Aceh and were opposed to the COHA because they saw the Agreement as implicit recognition of forces which threatened the territorial integrity of Indonesia. Since independence, TNI has regarded itself as the guarantor of the country's unity and has seen what is usually called the 'security approach' as the only appropriate response to separatism, whether in Aceh, East Timor, West Papua or elsewhere. One senior officer, Lt. Gen. Kiki Syahnakri, attacked the COHA as allowing GAM a 'golden opportunity' to campaign 'nakedly and freely'. He said that unless negotiations were strengthened by 'military action and security operations' they would fail to reach a final solution.¹⁹

TNI's opposition to a negotiated settlement goes to the heart of the military's efforts to maintain a key role for itself in post-Soeharto Indonesia. The public image of TNI suffered a major blow from perceptions of human rights abuses before and during the fall of the New Order in 1998. Since that time its political power has been reduced, with the removal of its representation in parliament (to take effect after the 2004 election) and the greatly diminished role of military officers in the civil administration at all levels of government. Separation of the police from the military was also a setback for TNI because it meant that

responsibility for internal security was officially transferred from the army to the police. The President's declaration of a state of emergency, in which the military took back the internal security role in Aceh for three months, was seen as demonstrating that only TNI had the operational capability to deal with internal disturbances and to defend the unity of the nation.

But TNI also has direct material interests in maintaining a presence in Aceh. The official budget for TNI has never covered more than about a third of the military's real operating costs.²⁰ The remainder is made up through officers' official and unofficial involvement in private and government-owned business activities and by contributions from wealthy business people. These activities also include illegal trade, unofficial levies on local interests and sheer extortion. Regions of conflict like Aceh have regularly provided the best cover for the more lucrative (and usually corrupt and illegal) fund-raising activities. An operational posting is highly desirable for many TNI officers because it presents the best opportunities for personal enrichment. It is an open secret that TNI officers have been involved in illegal logging, drug smuggling, extortion and other illegal activities in Aceh.²¹

When progress in the COHA faltered in March 2003 and GAM stuck to its determination to push for independence rather than autonomy, TNI began to undermine the agreement by orchestrating demonstrations against the international monitors and by making preparations for renewed military action. There were a number of attacks on monitors, their vehicles and offices, attacks which were linked to anti-independence militias organised by the military.²² As the military began moving reinforcements into Aceh, with Megawati's apparent approval, it became clear that proponents of a negotiated solution were being 'overwhelmed by the demands of the military hardliners for a military offensive'.²³

In the eyes of most TNI officers, the COHA was a first step along the road to legitimacy and recognition for GAM and ultimately to a repetition of the disaster and humiliation of East Timor. For them, the last time civilian politicians were allowed to handle a problem of separatism was in East Timor in 1999, Indonesia lost a province which the military had shed its blood to defend. The resumption of military operations is thus, for the generals, a return to the 'proper way' to deal with threats to the country's territorial integrity.

GAM: The Quest for Legitimacy

While there has been a sense of separate identity amongst the Acehnese for many decades, GAM and its insurrectionary strategy for independence has only become a leading force in the province's politics in recent years. It is not entirely clear how many people actually support GAM: sentiment in favour of some sort of special status for Aceh does not always translate into support for independence or support for GAM itself. But heavy-handed repression by TNI and the corrupt reputation of its officers has been GAM's best source of recruitment. The military's pursuit of a one-track strategy of armed conflict has also had the paradoxical effect of making it impossible for non-GAM political parties or non-government organisations (NGOs), including human rights groups, to operate in Aceh.

There was a flowering of NGOs during the relatively peaceful period after the fall of Soeharto in 1998, but the resurgence of conflict has provided a cover for both TNI and GAM violence against non-aligned organisations. While the military regards any independent Acehnese activist as subversive, GAM often sees them as competitors. The polarisation of Acehnese politics has played directly into GAM's hands, helping it to pose as the only voice of the people of Aceh.

From GAM's point of view, the COHA relieved the intense pressure of TNI repression, while providing an opportunity to strengthen the movement's domestic and international legitimacy. GAM has never been a very effective military force, and while TNI has never been able to eliminate it completely, open armed confrontation has always left GAM on the defensive and confined to scattered and remote areas. GAM has also faced the problem that its ill-disciplined and factionalised membership has sometimes been indistinguishable from the bandits and stand-over men who have exploited the chaos and weakened GAM's standing.

The official leadership of GAM is a group of exiles centred around its founder, di Tiro, who have lived in Sweden for many years and taken out Swedish citizenship.²⁴ But the exile leadership is not always able to make Aceh-based supporters implement agreements the leaders make in Geneva. Some GAM groups seem to have given only half-hearted support to the COHA, while other splinter factions have carried on with their normal activities of attacking the operations of the central government, clashing with the security forces and levying 'taxes' on local and foreign businesses.

GAM's implicit strategy seems to have been to provoke an ill-disciplined TNI into atrocities which would rally the Acehnese population to its banner and bring international attention to the struggle. The military's behaviour has certainly hardened attitudes towards the central government and roused support for a referendum on independence, but GAM's factionalism and its own record of human rights abuses raises questions about whether the majority of Acehnese see it as fit to be an alternative government.

On the world stage, GAM has almost completely failed to internationalise the issue. Ideas that Aceh could become the focus of world opinion like East Timor have foundered on the reality that the province has always been internationally recognised as a legitimate part of Indonesia. Unlike East Timor, the UN has never questioned Indonesian rule and the independence movement has never had the sympathy of a foreign government (as East Timor did with Portugal) nor the support of popular opinion in a neighbouring country (such as Australia), or in the West in general.²⁵ Since the US declaration of its 'War on Terror', GAM's image has also struggled to distinguish itself from Islamic extremism and terrorism.

Is GAM an Islamic Extremist Organisation?

Although GAM's image has suffered from being associated with Islamic fundamentalism, it would be a mistake to think of the organisation as part of an international extremist

movement. GAM is one expression of a long tradition of Acehese regional identity which has led to recurrent outbreaks of opposition to central government policies. And because Islam plays a key role in Aceh's distinct self-identity, any Acehese separatist movement is certain to have an Islamic character, just as Catholicism became a rallying point for pro-independence East Timorese. Political movements in Aceh have always maintained an uneasy balance between regional and religious sentiment. GAM's push for independence is motivated by more than religion, in the same way as the Timorese would surely have revolted against Indonesian rule even if they were Muslims.

GAM has no history of association with foreign Islamic fundamentalist movements and there is no evidence of links with Southeast Asian Islamic terrorist networks such as Jema'ah Islamiyah, let alone Al Qaeda.²⁶ There are reports that GAM has rebuffed efforts by JI to build links with it.²⁷ Some GAM operatives did receive training in Libya in the 1980s and 1990s, but the connection was opportunist on GAM's part and has not been maintained.²⁸ It should not be forgotten that the largest Islamic extremist group in Indonesia, Laskar Jihad, has close links with TNI, GAM's arch-enemy.

Equally, GAM's alleged Islamic zeal has won it no sympathy from mainstream Islamic religious leaders in Indonesia. Leaders of the mass Islamic organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, along with independent Islamic figures, have united in their condemnation of GAM for threatening the unity and integrity of Indonesia. There is also no sign that support for Jakarta's war against GAM is any less popular amongst Muslims than other religious groups.

Megawati's Government: Looking to the Next Election?

When President Megawati Sukarnoputri signed the decree of 19 May 2003 declaring a state of emergency in Aceh, many commentators saw the move as part of her efforts to build popular support in the lead up to Indonesia's national elections in April 2004. Recent constitutional amendments will, for the first time, allow Indonesians to choose their President in a direct popular election, rather than the previous system of indirect election through an electoral college dominated by the parliament.²⁹

All indications show that there is little or no popular sympathy for Acehese separatism and that support for operations by the security forces is strong, despite awareness of TNI's appalling human rights record. Megawati was almost certainly prepared to reverse her previous stand and allow a return to the old 'security approach' because it might boost her image as a strong leader and defender of national unity. But Megawati's unleashing of the military is symptomatic of problems within her administration that are deeper than mere political opportunism.

The efforts to find a peaceful solution in Aceh failed to get beyond the initial stage of a ceasefire because they did not tackle the wider issues of how to address the grievances of the Acehese and re-integrate the province into the mainstream of national political life. Beyond an immediate end to insecurity and fear of extortion, intimidation or death at the

hands of TNI, GAM or militias, the people of Aceh want recognition of past abuses and a serious attempt to bring justice to the perpetrators. There is also widespread suffering from loss of employment and economic opportunity, the collapse of government services and shortages of basic items like food, clothing and medicine, all of which has been brought about by over a decade of conflict. Finally, there is the long-standing feeling that the unique history and culture of Aceh has been suppressed by successive regimes in Jakarta and that the resources of the province have been exploited for the exclusive benefit of non-Acehnese. Meaningful (as distinct from token) autonomy is widely seen as the only way for Aceh to exist within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia.

Neither the Wahid nor the Megawati administrations appear to have had the capacity to develop longer-term policy strategies or the persistence to see existing efforts to completion. The most promising initiative, the law on Special Autonomy for Aceh, had little effect on the reality of life in Aceh because, as mentioned above, it did not supplant the old Jakarta-centric power elites and provided few avenues through which non-GAM forces could build a political alternative based on acceptance of autonomy within Indonesia. Most national leaders apparently thought that the mere passing of the law would satisfy all reasonable demands. In the face of constant military opposition and GAM's insistence of raising the question of independence, the government caved into the force which has the most to gain by continued conflict, the army, and reverted to the strategy that has demonstrably failed since the 1980s.

This rather gloomy assessment reflects the fact that progress in many urgent areas of governmental reform has been disappointingly slow since the end of the Soeharto regime. The Megawati government has been unwilling to confront vested interests, including a corrupt and dysfunctional legal and judicial system and a civil service that is driven by patronage and corruption, to the detriment of the delivery of basic services like education, health and infrastructure. In the case of Aceh, this weakness in both policy formation and implementation meant that a version of regional autonomy, while well motivated in principle, failed in practice because the apparatus of state could not actually deliver the promised benefits. Because of a failure to bring about a complete withdrawal of the military from civilian politics, the government was susceptible to pressure from the TNI and was afraid to confront the issue of past TNI abuses in Aceh. With attempted negotiations not producing immediate results, the military was again being permitted to dominate policy on the problem of Aceh.

Implications for Australia

Public opinion in Australia has registered very little awareness of the issue of Aceh, especially when compared to the intense interest in East Timor or even West Papua. There is no sense of historical connection with the people of the province and no history of Australia involvement in the politics of the province. There has been no discernible movement of refugees from Aceh to Australia and geographical separation minimises the likelihood that this might occur in the future.

This also reflects the general paucity of international attention on Aceh. No foreign government has expressed any strong interest or concern about events in the province and the governments of the Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) have expressed understanding or support for Jakarta's campaign to defeat the rebels. This is partly due to the traditional ASEAN policy of non-intervention in other members' affairs, but especially because many ASEAN governments themselves face some kind of separatist movement. Only international human rights groups such as Ammesty International³⁰ and Human Rights Watch³¹ have an extended history of observation of the conflict.

For these reasons, the Australian government has not come under any great domestic pressure to take up the Aceh issue, or to express opposition to the actions of the military. The government's reaction to the military offensive on 19 May 2003 was muted. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer and the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, both expressed hopes for a return to negotiations, but emphasised that the matter was an internal Indonesian affair.³² Mr Downer also singled out for condemnation the 'violence perpetrated by the separatist movement'.³³ The Opposition called for UN intervention in the conflict and the minor parties made comparisons with East Timor.³⁴ But with such positions receiving little response amongst the public, the government's subsequent statements became even more supportive of the Indonesian government. While attending an ASEAN meeting in Cambodia, Mr Downer defended the Indonesian military against foreign criticism, attacked 'terrible acts of violence' by GAM and praised Indonesia for allowing journalists and human rights groups into the province.³⁵

Australia's leverage over the Indonesian Government on internal issues, especially one involving separatism, is virtually zero, as a result of continuing resentment in Jakarta about Australia's role in East Timor. Perceptions of Australian government triumphalism after the intervention in East Timor remain especially galling to Indonesian leaders.³⁶ In the words of Dr Harold Crouch of the Australian National University, 'The UN and Australia are mud in Indonesia's eyes because of East Timor'.³⁷ In any case, the Australian government's desire to maintain close cooperation with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries in the fight against terrorism particularly limits the government's capacity to take any action which the Indonesian government would interpret as internal interference or as undermining its struggle against violent groups within its borders.

Although the Australian Government has little or no room to influence events in Aceh, the issue is of serious concern to Australia's interests. In addition to human rights and humanitarian concerns, Jakarta's handling of the matter reveals ongoing weaknesses within the Megawati administration. The bolstering of the military's political position is a blow against reform and symptomatic of the administration's incapacity to overcome the vested interests that profit from the status quo. This is not only dangerous for Indonesia's future as a stable democracy, but it also threatens its economic prospects by deterring domestic and international investment. As a close neighbour and economic partner, Australia has a direct interest in Indonesia's emergence from its continuing political and economic crisis.

The conflict in Aceh is both a part of that crisis and ill-handling by the Indonesian Government is exacerbating the crisis still further.

Conclusion: Future Prospects

The collapse of the COHA and the return of open armed in Aceh could be seen as a product of failures of judgement on both sides. On the government side, despite the singular efforts of the Security Affairs Coordinating Minister, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the Cabinet as a whole failed to consider the wider issues involved in a peace plan, especially the time and delicate handling that would need to be invested in it. On the other hand, GAM overplayed its hand by expecting that a ceasefire would bring favourable international attention to its cause, by blatantly using the ceasefire to bolster its political and military strength and by a mixture of intransigence and prevarication in negotiations. The situation was made doubly difficult, of course, because the Indonesian military openly opposed the plans of the civilian government, lobbied for an end to the negotiations within the highest levels of government and provoked confrontations on the ground within Aceh.

Although TNI has won a political victory within the Indonesian state and has regained responsibility for defeating separatism in Aceh, most observers consider there is little chance that the military will be any more successful now than it has been in the past. GAM has been forced into a military retreat and appears to be suffering significant casualties. But like all guerrilla movements, it is successful so long as it is not completely eliminated. GAM is relying on the assumption that the conflict will cause civilian deaths and that the Acehnese population will blame TNI for both these deaths and for the tension and disruption to normal life brought by the military campaign. And TNI appears to be vindicating this assumption with vigour. The cycle of violence in Aceh since 1989 has progressively turned the people of Aceh against the central government and the current situation can only intensify this.

The only realistic scenario under which the current military offensive might succeed is if it were combined with a strategy of undermining the political position of GAM through a restoration of government services within the province and one allowing the people of Aceh to develop alternatives to GAM. A two-track strategy of this kind would require TNI to keep its forces under tight discipline and to facilitate humanitarian relief. It would only work if there were elections for a new provincial administration in the near future and the law on Special Autonomy was redrafted with strong Acehnese involvement.

Unfortunately, however, there is no indication that either TNI or the central government sees the physical retreat of GAM as an opportunity to supplant the movement politically. A mentality of regarding assertions of regional identity as a threat to national unity tends to cast suspicion on any independent Acehnese organisation and on the people of the province as a whole. Special Autonomy as defined by Jakarta is unlikely to win credibility within Aceh and Jakarta is unwilling to trust Aceh to develop its own formula for

autonomy within the Republic of Indonesia. In any case, the corruption and administrative incapacity of the Indonesian state apparatus, at both the national and provincial level, would weaken any effort to re-establish effective government. The relapse into the 'security approach' appears to be born of a sense of exasperation and resignation amongst the civilian politicians. The fact that it appears to be popular with the Indonesian electorate makes it doubly tempting. But the reality is that attempts to enforce a military solution will probably bring nothing but an extended cycle of violence.

Endnotes

1. Estimates for the military strength of GAM vary from 1000–2000 to up to 5000.
2. The recent image of Bali as a relaxed and friendly tropical paradise is in stark contrast to the Dutch picture of the Balinese as vicious, blood-thirsty warriors which dates from their long struggle to suppress Balinese resistance to Dutch domination. Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, Periplus, Hong Kong, 1996.
3. The independence of the Kingdom of Aceh was protected by the 1824 Treaty of London, under which Britain and the Netherlands divided their spheres of influence in the Indies. The Netherlands began its long and violent campaign to subdue Aceh in 1873, after Britain had signed a new treaty with the Dutch in order to forestall an increase in US influence in the region.
4. In 1949, the Dutch were briefly able to negotiate a settlement which created a federal Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RUSI), which gave a degree of autonomy to various parts of the archipelago. This arrangement lasted less than a year, with President Sukarno declaring the centralised, unitary Republic of Indonesia in 1950.
5. Grayson Lloyd, 'Indonesia's Future Prospects: Separatism, Decentralisation and the Survival of the Unitary State', *Current Issues Brief no. 17*, Parliamentary Library, 1999–2000.
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/CIB/1999-2000/2000cib17.htm#demands>
6. Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, *The Republican Revolt: A Study of the Acehnese Rebellion*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1985.
7. Di Tiro's original organisation founded in 1976 was called the Aceh-Sumatra Liberation Front (ASNLF). The ASNLF was quickly crushed by the military, but was revived several years later in the form of GAM.
8. Human Rights Watch, *Indonesia: The War in Aceh*, August 2001, Vol. 13, No. 4 (C), p. 8.
9. Hasballah Saad, 'Generations of Acehnese born amid war' *Jakarta Post*, 13 May 2003. International Crisis Group (ICG), *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, 27 February 2003, p. 10.
10. *Kompas*, 30 July 1999.
11. The total population of Aceh is 4.5 million.
12. Islamic law.
13. ICG, *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, op. cit., p. 2.

14. Under Indonesia's 1999 electoral laws, political parties cannot contest either national or provincial elections unless they are organised at a national level, with members and branches in a majority of provinces. This provision was specifically designed to prevent the emergence of provincial and regional parties which, it was feared, would fan separatist sentiment.
15. ICG, *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, op. cit., p. 4.
16. Former Thai foreign minister, Surin Pitsuwan, retired US General, Anthony Zinni, and former Yugoslav foreign minister and ambassador to Indonesia, Budimir Loncar.
17. ICG, *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, op. cit., pp. 8–10.
18. ICG, *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, op. cit., p. 10.
19. *Kompas*, 25 February 2003, cited by Edward Aspinall & Harold Crouch, 'The Peace Process in Aceh', Paper presented to the East-West Center, 30 April 2003. The author would like to express appreciation to Dr Aspinall and Dr Crouch for allowing access to this draft paper.
20. R. William Liddle, 'Indonesia's army remains a closed corporate group', *Jakarta Post*, 3 May 2003. Bob Lowry, 'Indonesian Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia-TNI)', *Research Paper*, no. 23, Parliamentary Library 1998–99.
21. 'Trade your M–16 for 16M[illion]', *Van Zorge Report on Indonesia*, vol. V, no. 8, 6 June 2003, p. 11.
22. Aspinall & Crouch, 'The Peace Process in Aceh', op. cit., p. 28.
23. Aspinall & Crouch, 'The Peace Process in Aceh', op. cit., p. 30.
24. The protection accorded the GAM leadership by Sweden has been a *cause celebre* in the Indonesian media, with government and parliamentary figures attacking the Swedish government and even calling for a withdrawal of diplomatic relations. The Swedish government's response is that the GAM members have not committed any crime under Swedish law and have the same rights as all Swedish citizens.
25. Unlike Aceh, East Timor was never part of the colonial empire of the Dutch East Indies which comprised the territory of the independent Republic of Indonesia. The eastern half of the island of Timor was colonised by Portugal and three hundred years of Portuguese occupation implanted cultural, linguistic and religious traditions that were distinct from the experience of the Dutch-held territories. The Republic of Indonesia, of which Aceh was a part, was formed in 1949–50, but East Timor remained a Portuguese territory until the latter's departure in 1975. The enforced incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia in 1976, after the invasion of 1975, was never recognised by the UN. Australia was one of the few countries that extended *de jure* recognition, although the incorporation was implicitly recognised by most countries with which Indonesia had major economic or diplomatic dealings.
26. Chris Wilson, 'Indonesia and Transnational Terrorism' *Current Issues Brief*, no. 6, Parliamentary Library, 2001–02.
27. Sidney Jones, International Crisis Group, 'Update on Aceh' USINDO Open Forum, 11 June 2003
28. The regime in Libya could not be described as Islamist and it has provided training to a wide range of nationalist and separatist groups, including the Irish Republican Army.

29. For an analysis of the previous electoral system and the politics of Megawati's election as President see: Stephen Sherlock, 'Indonesia's Dangerous Transition: The Politics of Recovery and Democratisation' *Research Paper no. 18*, Parliamentary Library, 1998–99.
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/1998-99/99rp18.htm>
Stephen Sherlock, 'Indonesia's New President: Continuity, Change and the Problems Ahead', *Current Issues Brief*, no. 10, Parliamentary Library, 1999–2000.
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/CIB/1999-2000/2000cib10.htm>
Stephen Sherlock, 'Indonesia's New Government: Stability at Last?', *Current Issues Brief*, no. 4, Parliamentary Library, 2001–02, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/CIB/2001-02/02cib04.pdf>
30. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-idn/news>
31. <http://www.hrw.org/asia/indonesia.php>
32. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 May 2003, p. 9; *Canberra Times*, 21 May 2003, p. 2; *The Age*, 21 May 2003, p. 13.
33. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 May 2003, p. 9.
34. *Canberra Times*, 20 May 2003, p. 2.
35. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 2003, p. 11; *The Age*, 20 June 2003, p. 13. In fact, the Indonesian government has introduced strict controls over the entry of journalists and human rights observers into the province. The government has also emulated the US by controlling media coverage by 'embedding' journalists amongst operational military forces. Following a TNI attack on a German tourist couple, resulting in the death of one and the injury of the other, all tourists have been banned from entering Aceh.
36. Anthony Milner, 'Balancing "Asia" against Australian Values', in James Cotton & John Ravenhill, *The National Interest in a Global Era*, OUP, 2001.
37. *The Australian*, 21 May 2003, p. 7.