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From Rebels to Rulers and Legislators: The Political Transformation of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia

Gunnar Stange and Roman Patock

Abstract: On 15 August 2005, when the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki, Finland, it was considered yet another uncertain attempt at putting an end to Indonesia's thirty years of conflict in its westernmost province, Aceh. After a historically unprecedented reconstruction process that followed the tsunami of December 2004 and two orderly elections in 2006/2007 and 2009, Aceh's peace process is not only still on track, but widely considered a role model for ending protracted civil wars by means of political participation and autonomy regulations. This article reviews past developments that have led to the reconfiguration of Aceh's political landscape and seeks to illustrate the most recent developments in GAM's transformation from an independence movement to an Indonesian local political party.

Keywords: Indonesia, Aceh, post-conflict, tsunami, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), Partai Aceh, DDR

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Introduction

On 15 August 2005, when the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki, Finland, it was considered yet another uncertain attempt at putting an end to Indonesia's thirty years of conflict in its westernmost province, Aceh. Nearly five years have passed since then. After a historically unprecedented reconstruction process that followed the tsunami of December 2004 and two orderly elections in 2006/2007 and 2009, Aceh's peace process is not only still on track, but widely considered a role model for ending protracted civil wars by means of political participation and autonomy regulations. Today, Aceh's governor and ten out of 23 district and municipal heads are former rebels. The Aceh Party (Partai Aceh, PA) – the political vehicle of GAM that was established in early 2008 – now holds 33 out of 69 seats in Aceh's regional parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPRA) and has the absolute majority of seats in seven district and municipal parliaments. With GAM members having gained access to official posts at the executive level as well as to Aceh's legislative assemblies, the process of GAM's political inclusion has – at least formally – been completed.

This article reviews past developments that have led to the reconfiguration of Aceh's political landscape and seeks to illustrate the most recent developments in GAM's transformation from an independence movement to an Indonesian local political party. Although GAM's political integration was accompanied by severe internal fractionation and many outbreaks of violence, this paper argues that the likelihood of another outbreak of open conflict occurring in Aceh has been largely reduced. Still, even though GAM's transformation into a legitimate political player within the Indonesian nation state appears to be final, many challenges still lie ahead regarding the further implementation of the MoU, the reintegration of former combatants and the compensation of conflict victims. The peace process is still under way. The following quote underlines the fact that a secessionist movement cannot turn into a group of flawless democrats as easily as one might wish:

We combatants are discontent and would return to the jungle any time. But we're also soldiers and therefore follow orders. Our commanders have chosen to fight on the field of politics using political weapons, so our own weapons remain silent [A moment later:] For the time being (The authors' translation; interview with a former

combatant sub-commander in Lhoksukon, North Aceh, on 16 April 2009).¹

The Long Road to Helsinki

The antecedent history of the Aceh conflict has seen the creation and instrumentalisation of three political narratives. The Acehnese people considered themselves victims of cultural and religious discrimination, Javanese neo-colonialism and economic deprivation (Lindorf Nielsen 2002: 1-12). Tracing their history back to a Golden Age in the 17th century when they were a powerful Islamic sultanate and to their long-lasting resistance against Dutch colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Acehnese felt their historical importance was being neglected when the Republic of Indonesia chose not to become an Islamic federation and the former sultanate was integrated into the province of North Sumatra. This led to an armed rebellion in the early 1950s as part of the Darul Islam movement. In Aceh, the rebellion came to an end in 1959 due to a special autonomy agreement. This was, however, gradually undermined during the 1970s with the consolidation of New Order Indonesia (1966-1998) aiming at order and stability, the creation of a single Indonesian identity, the centralisation of power on Java and the forced migration of the Javanese workforce to the country's remoter areas (*transmigrasi*) such as the interior of Aceh. Additionally, the one-sided exploitation of fossil fuels in Aceh along with environmental pollution and lacking regional development, high unemployment and general economic stagnation in the province fuelled Acehnese discontentment and led to the founding of the Free Aceh Movement and declaration of independence by Hasan di Tiro in 1976:

We the people of Aceh, Sumatra, exercising our right of self-determination, and protecting our historic right of eminent domain to our fatherland, do hereby declare ourselves free and independent from all political control of the foreign regime of Jakarta and the alien people of the island of Java. [...] The Javanese are alien and foreign people to us Acehnese Sumatrans. We have no historic, political, cultural, economic or geographic relationship with them. [...] We, the people of Aceh, Sumatra, would have no quarrel with the Javanese, if they had stayed in their own country, and if they had not tried to lord it over us. [...] Our cause is just! Our land is endowed by the Almighty with plenty and bounty (di Tiro 1976).

1 For reasons of personal protection, all the interviewees referred to in this article have been made anonymous.

The initial rebellion, comprising around 300 poorly equipped intellectuals (Sulaiman 2006: 138) was crushed instantly. Its leadership fled the country to reorganise and train their loyal forces with the help of Libya and then return to Aceh as an armed secessionist movement in the 1980s. The harsh repressive answer by the centralist Indonesian armed forces (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, ABRI) and their counter-insurgency measures against the civilian population in the so-called Military Operations Zone (Daerah Operasi Militer, DOM) in the 1990s helped to create and reinforce the fourth narrative of Aceh as a victim of military violence. This resulted in the transformation of the early, rather elitist GAM into a popular movement throughout Aceh (Lindorf Nielson 2002: 1-12).

The pressure on GAM was lifted when President Suharto, a long-term autocrat, was forced to resign in May 1998. During the subsequent reform era (*Reformasi*), GAM followed a diversified strategy. While expanding, restructuring, recruiting and rearming,² GAM agreed to peace negotiations and strove for an internationalisation of the conflict following the example of East Timor (Schulze 2004: 9, 41-44; Mißbach 2005).

However, attempts at bringing peace to the province like the 'Humanitarian Pause' brokered by the Henry Dunant Centre (HDC) in 2000 and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in 2002 failed. Mutual distrust, a weakly mandated peace mediator (HDC), vague arrangements and the lack of international involvement ended all the peace negotiations at an early stage. Furthermore, the benefits of Aceh's 'war economy' for both conflicting parties such as illegal logging, piracy, the arms trade, extortion and smuggling were detrimental to ending the conflict. The redefinition and strengthening of the armed forces' role within Indonesia's political system during Megawati Sukarnoputri's presidency finally led to the – at least for the time being – last full-scale military campaign against GAM in May 2003

2 In 2001, approximately 3,500 to 5,000 Acehnese villages (80 per cent of the territory) were under GAM influence (Schulze 2004: 35). Many former GAM fighters made their way back to Aceh once its DOM status had officially been lifted in August 1998 and numerous illegal Acehnese immigrants were forced to leave Malaysia. Free media coverage and the revelation of atrocities committed by the armed forces resulted in the emergence of a new fighter generation of avengers (*generasi pendendam*), e.g. female combatants (*inoeng bale*) recruited from the widows and daughters of GAM martyrs (Aspinall 2003). The exact military strength of GAM's armed forces, the Tentara Neugara Aceh (TNA), remained a matter of propaganda and speculation. In 2000, the International Institute of Strategic Studies, for example, estimated there were only 50 active fighters, whereas GAM claimed to have 30,000 people under arms (Schulze 2004: 30). The Indonesian intelligence organisation BIN (Badan Intelijen Negara) estimated there were 400 to 1,000 armed followers, while independent observers acknowledged 2,000 fighters (Chalk 2001).

and the subsequent state of military emergency (*darurat militer*), which was downgraded to a civil emergency (*darurat sipil*) in May 2004 (Patock 2007).

Dialogue without force seemed to produce only gains for GAM. Force by itself was unacceptable to most Acehnese, a significant part of the political elite in Jakarta, and the international community. It brought tactical gains for the military but further misery for the Acehnese people and tended to generate more political support for GAM (ICG 2003a).

While Tentara Neugara Aceh (Aceh National Army, TNA), the military wing of GAM, was quickly forced into hiding, the joint operations of the Indonesian armed forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) and police (Polisi Republik Indonesia, Polri) failed to achieve significant results. TNA was clearly unable to defeat the approximately 56,000-strong Indonesian security forces militarily and win independence by force. On the other hand, despite the so-called integrated operation (*Operasi terpadu*) to put GAM under military pressure and a strategy of ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of civil society, the security forces were unable to crush the rebellion without turning the Acehnese population against them even more.

The stalemate between GAM and Indonesia’s armed forces was only able to be resolved when the tsunami hit Aceh’s shore in December 2004. The horrors of the natural disaster and the overwhelming presence of international aid organisations acted as a catalyst to create a mutually enticing moment (Zartman 2001: 8-18) and draw the two conflicting parties together (ICG 2005a). Moreover, the benefits of the newly emerging ‘disaster economy’ promised to surmount those of Aceh’s ‘war economy’ and therefore peace was generally deemed more desirable than conflict. Supported by the mediation of Maartii Ahtisaari and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) and after several rounds of negotiations, both parties signed the MoU in Helsinki on 15 August 2005.³

3 The first and second section of the MoU contain provisions for the long-term organisation of peace regarding political participation, economic justice, rule of law and human-rights issues. The sections that follow deal with issues concerning the immediate ceasefire such as mutual security arrangements, amnesty, reintegration of former combatants and the establishment of an international monitoring mission (Aceh Monitoring Mission, AMM) staffed by the European Union and ASEAN (CMI 2005). These regulations were formally legalised – albeit not to the full extent – in the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA) (Undang-undang pemerintahan Aceh, UU-PA) in August 2006.

Beyond Helsinki – Treading a Rugged Path to Provincial Elections in 2006

Under the observing eyes of a comparatively successful joint Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) backed by the European Union and ASEAN, the Indonesian government relocated its non-organic troops back to Java, released political prisoners and granted amnesty and reinstatement of full citizenship to those involved in GAM activities. Meanwhile, GAM handed over 840 weapons, demilitarised its nominal 3,000 fighters and disbanded its military wing, TNA, by the end of 2005. TNA was transformed into the Transitional Committee of Aceh (Komite Perahlian Aceh, KPA).⁴ While its internal military structure largely remained intact, the KPA quickly filled its role as a viable civil combatant organisation. It was able to capitalise on the post-tsunami reconstruction effort by mobilising a loyal and cheap workforce of former combatants and using its networks to successfully buy or force itself into the reconstruction business (Aspinall 2009). The distribution of reintegration funds through the channels of the KPA was another essential task of the organisation, albeit a highly controversial one. Far more people than the nominal 3,000 former fighters claimed eligibility for reintegration instalments. Thus, individual former commanders had to find individual solutions to deal with the high numbers:

We have 3,000 fighters and we have to take care of widows and children, too. So that's 3,000 times three. And if you take into consideration all the people who constitute our logistic support, intell[igence] and others, we're responsible for about 20,000 people (Nur Djuli, GAM envoy to the Helsinki peace negotiations, head of the BRA since 2007, cited in: ICG 2005b).

The Indonesian government fulfilled its promise to create an Aceh Reintegration Board (Badan Reintegrasi-Damai Aceh, BRA) facilitating the reintegration of former fighters into civilian life with financial support to former GAM combatants, conflict victims and pro-Indonesian militias.⁵ The access

4 A National Council (Majelis Nasional aka Majelis Peudong MoU) was established in October 2005 to implement the MoU and set guidelines for GAM's political strategy and maintain contact with the AMM (ICG 2006b). The armed wing Tentara Neugara Aceh, TNA, was officially disbanded on 27 December 2005 and replaced by the Transitional Committee of Aceh (Komite Peralihan Aceh, KPA) under the chairmanship of former commander Muzakkir Manaf, tasked with the socialisation of the MoU, demilitarisation and reintegration of former combatants (ICG 2005b, 2006b).

5 Estimates include far more than 3,000 combatants eligible for reintegration funds. An additional 6,200 GAM supporters and approximately 3,200 fighters who sur-

to these reintegration funds varied widely between individual combatants, commanders and regions. Early on, GAM refused to release lists of names due to security concerns. At a later stage, knowledge of actual numbers became an influential resource. While some of the commanders with access to the BRA lined their own pockets, others distributed funds evenly among a much larger number of followers than the official lists actually contained. The BRA relied almost entirely on individual payments, while the approach of funding collective projects mostly failed, partially due to fraud or unaccountability (interviews with a former BRA official on 8 May 2009 and individual former TNA commanders in July 2009).

The gubernatorial and district head elections (Pilihan Kepala Daerah, or Pilkada for short) in 2006 were an important milestone for peace in Aceh. The question as to whether local political parties and independent candidates would be admitted to provincial elections, as stipulated in the MoU, was the most important one.⁶ While GAM threatened to boycott the elections if independent candidates were not allowed to run, the Indonesian parliament referred to the prevalence of national law. After much dispute and several revisions, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed the highly controversial new (autonomy) Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA) on 1 August 2006, thus accepting the establishment of local parties and independent candidates running for provincial elections.⁷ GAM circles and human-rights activists from Aceh were highly critical of the new law as it seriously watered down the MoU provisions regarding a future ‘self-government’ of Aceh (May 2008). On the other hand, scepticism remained

rendered before the MoU was signed have asserted claims along with some 6,000 victims of conflict and 6,300 pro-Indonesian armed groups with numbers still rising (ICG 2005a, 2005b, Beeck 2007). Expectations concerning the future distribution of funds are problematic given that 98 per cent of the BRA reintegration funds has already been spent (interview with a former BRA official in Banda Aceh on 8 May 2009).

- 6 In July 2004, provincial elections were scheduled for October 2005, but they were then postponed until 29 December 2005. The original regional by-law (*qanun*) stipulated the candidature of the governor, district heads and mayors independent of national parties, but it was repudiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs with reference to national law (*undang-undang*, UU). UU 31/2002 stipulates that all political parties have to be based in Jakarta and run for election nationally, while UU 32/2004 stipulates that all candidates for regional offices need to be backed by national parties (ICG 2005a: 9-10).
- 7 Independent candidates were allowed to run for election to the governor’s position if they were able to prove they had the support of at least three per cent of the population in that province or run for election as a district head or mayor if they had three per cent of the votes in that district/ municipality (Aspinall 2008: 48).

high among the Indonesian nationalists; they feared GAM might turn an early political success into a virtual referendum for independence:⁸

Whether or not GAM candidates articulated that aim [i.e. independence], that is how villagers would see it, he said, and in a free and fair election, a GAM slate could win several districts, perhaps even the governorship (Djoko Suyanto, regional commander of TNI, cited in ICG 2006a).

On the other hand, an early political success was considered important for keeping GAM on track; political disappointment could otherwise have nourished doubts as to whether the decision to lay down arms was right (ICG 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, Abubakar 2006).

However, in the run-up to the elections, GAM experienced its first fundamental split over the suitability and support of candidates for the gubernatorial election. In May 2006, the majority of votes at the All-Acehnese World Congress named Tgk. Nasruddin the official GAM candidate. He declined, however, and GAM then decided not to take part in the elections as an organisation. Nevertheless, the GAM leadership in Sweden nominated Abdullah Hasbi, a rather pale figure within GAM, who gained the support of Muzakkir Manaf, chief of security within Majelis Nasional and chairman of the KPA. His nomination raised criticism of authoritative paternalism and split the Majelis Nasional. A broad majority of the KPA members supported the independent candidacy of Irwandi Yusuf, a former TNA spokesman who successfully capitalised on the first anniversary of the MoU and his harsh criticism concerning the new LoGA as the start of an acrimonious election campaign together with Mohammad Nazar, the leader of Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh (SIRA), an umbrella organisation that had lobbied for a referendum on independence, as a candidate for the post of vice-governor.⁹ In order to calm the situation down on the ground, during a press conference in November 2006, GAM finally declared it would

8 The Information Centre for an Aceh Referendum (Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh, SIRA) was able to mobilise hundreds of thousands of protesters in Banda Aceh in November 1999 to demand a referendum on independence similar to the one in East Timor. GAM and Indonesian intelligence largely saw SIRA as another civilian branch of their independence movement, an assumption, however, that must be questioned. Sceptics feared that with the popular backing of SIRA, similar mass rallies could be mobilised and pose a threat to the MoU, especially since SIRA released a list of 16 points in which it claimed the newly signed LoGA violated arrangements in the peace agreement (Abubakar 2006).

9 ICG 2006b, Abubakar 2006. Unlike Irwandi, he did not participate in the Helsinki negotiations as he was still in jail on Java as a political prisoner at the time (Aspinall 2008: 46).

refrain from naming an official GAM candidate and remain neutral towards election candidates.

The rift between the old GAM establishment and the ‘young Turks’ saw its pre-election climax when Malik Mahmud, former ‘Prime Minister’ of GAM’s government in exile, called Irwandi off from his position as GAM’s official representative to the AMM in early October 2006. He was replaced by Zakaria Saman, the former ‘Defence Minister’ of GAM in Sweden. Given the prominence of Irwandi among KPA members¹⁰ and his good working relationship with the AMM, this show of force might have easily been interpreted as power play that purposely put the peace process at risk. Still, at this point, the AMM’s mandate was soon to expire and, as the later election results showed, Malik’s move was unable to damage Irwandi’s popularity.

Their rivalry – which was ‘getting really, really down and dirty now’ with both sides trading insults and accusations – reduced the prospect of violence, she [Sidney Jones] said. Other elements, such as the Indonesian security authorities, would have more scope to throw money and support behind one candidate and spread disinformation on others than to engage in open violence (Sidney Jones in an AFP interview, 28 September 2006, AFP 2006).

This marked the fact that GAM was no longer to be dealt with as a single block and therefore the risk of returning to open conflict diminished. Despite the centrifugal forces that had been unleashed in the run-up, the elections on 11 December 2006 went smoothly and were largely peaceful.

To the surprise of most observers, Irwandi Yusuf and Muhammad Nazar won the elections to the office of governor and vice-governor with 38 per cent of the votes in the first ballot. This outcome indicated that the structural power of the local GAM support base, namely TNA/KPA, and its internal allegiance were both strong. GAM candidates ran for posts as district heads and mayors in all the districts but Singkil and were able to win six of them, even outside their traditional strongholds. The ethnically non-Acehnese-dominated districts remained in the hands of the national Golkar party (Forbes Aceh 2006; ICG 2006b). In further run-offs and delayed elections in 2007 and 2008, independent candidates affiliated with GAM were able to win four more districts (Aspinall 2008; Modus Aceh 2009).

These outcomes were a clear signal to GAM’s exile leadership in Sweden that politics was being made in Aceh and that its own influence was decreasing. They were also a sign regarding the cooperation with Indonesian

10 Although GAM had announced impartiality in the Pilkada, KPA leaders on the village level (*banglima sagoë*) particularly favoured the Irwandi-Nazar ticket (ICG 2007a: 3).

national parties. Obviously, their backing was neither needed to win the slate in Aceh nor to appease national sentiments in Jakarta. Irwandi, a figure of the younger generation within GAM, rose to prominence. He stood for the peace efforts, further implementation of the MoU and reform. All in all, as Peter Feith, head of the AMM, put it in his review of the situation in Aceh on the closure of the mission's offices right after the elections, there was good reason for optimism:

Although the memories of the failed CoHA (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement) of December 2002 are still fresh, the mood among the Acehnese is upbeat and there is a distinct optimism prevailing that this time peace has come for real and that the peace process is irreversible (Feith 2006).

From the Free Aceh Movement to the Aceh Party

As illustrated above, the successful participation of GAM-affiliated candidates in the direct elections was the first step in integrating the former independence movement into Aceh's local politics democratically. Still, this 'victory' came at a relatively high price: the friction that had surfaced within GAM before the elections split the movement's leadership into two main factions. One of these comprised most of GAM's former exile government in Sweden around GAM's erstwhile 'Prime Minister' Malik Mahmud. The most prominent figures in his entourage were Zaini Abdullah, GAM's former 'Minister of Foreign Affairs', Teuku Lampoh Awe, GAM's former 'Finance Minister', who passed away in October 2008, Zakaria Saman and Muzakkir Manaf. The second faction grouped around Aceh's new Governor, Irwandi Yusuf, and included the Mayor of Sabang, Munawar Liza Zein, the former spokesman of GAM, Sofyan Daud, and other newly elected district heads (ICG 2006b, 2007b).

Regarding the further implementation of the LoGA, Malik, a co-signer of the MoU, considered himself to be the only legitimate dialogue partner for the Indonesian Government. Irwandi's group, however, not only included outspoken critics of Malik's authoritative leadership, but it also insinuated that Malik was alienated from the current situation in Aceh due to his nearly thirty years in exile. Additionally, as the new Governor of Aceh, Irwandi became an Indonesian executive official reporting to the Minister of the Interior. He and the other GAM-affiliated mayors and district heads had to take a much more accommodative stance towards the Central Government in Jakarta.

After the AMM's mandate had ended in December 2006, the Forum for Communication and Coordination (Forum Komunikasi dan Koordinasi,

FKK) was set up by the Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs in April 2007. The FKK was supposed to serve as an Indonesian successor institution to the AMM, jointly investigating security incidents in Aceh. When the KPA left the forum early on, a new communication channel was formed, viz. the Commission on Sustainable Peace in Aceh (CoSPA). While Aceh's newly elected executive officials from GAM circles attended these meetings, Malik Mahmud preferred the so-called MoU Roundtable which had been set up by the international non-governmental organisation Interpeace through its local creation of the Indonesian Peace Institute (IPI). The MoU Roundtable is not an official body, however, and mainly comprises Jakarta officials close to Yusuf Kalla, who was not re-elected as Vice-President in the presidential elections held in June 2009. Its future relevance and influence on actual political agreements must therefore be questioned strongly.

The Pilkada had, in fact, proven the decreasing influence of Malik's group on the political manoeuvres in Aceh itself. Therefore, the opportunity to form a local political party prior to the parliamentary elections in April 2009 was very much welcomed by GAM leaders in Sweden to gain the upper hand again.¹¹ In July 2007, Malik Mahmud announced the opening of a Partai GAM office. Although the letters 'GAM' were later 'clarified' to stand for Gerakan Aceh Mandiri (Autonomous Aceh Movement), emotions ran high as both the party's acronym and the 'old' GAM flag – its official symbol – evoked memories of GAM's bid for independence. GAM leaders were quick to explain that this was not the party's intention. Nevertheless, the authorities in Jakarta considered it to be a violation of the MoU and the subsequent LoGA as well.¹² Interestingly, Malik's move to form the party caused at least as much outrage in GAM circles as it did in Jakarta, especially since it was done without the consent of a significant majority within GAM or KPA.

In the autumn of 2007, observers assumed that at least three parties with a GAM background would be formed to contest the elections (ICG 2007b: 3). These speculations did not turn out to be true, however. Even

11 Provision 1.2.1 of the MoU provides for the establishment of political parties in Aceh within a certain period: "As soon as possible and not later than one year from the signing of this MoU, GoI agrees to and will facilitate the establishment of Aceh-based political parties that meet national criteria" (CMI 2005).

12 *Sinar Harapan* 2007. Provision 4.2 of the MoU states: "GAM undertakes to demobilise all of its 3,000 military troops. GAM members will not wear uniforms or display military insignia or symbols after the signing of this MoU" (CMI 2005). The GAM flag, which depicts a crescent and star, was also used by GAM's military wing, TNA.

though Irwandi's group had already developed the structure and statutes for a political party of its own – Partai Independen Aceh (Independent Aceh Party) – by late March 2008, Irwandi decided to go with Malik's party as he feared competing GAM parties could constitute an unforeseeable risk to the peace process (ICG 2008: 3). By the end of April 2008, Partai GAM had changed its name to Aceh Party (Partai Aceh, PA) and removed the star and crescent from its party flag after lengthy internal and public disputes (*Serambi Indonesia* 2008). Still, the authoritative mode in which Malik Mahmud had established the party was barely acceptable to Irwandi. He only joined the party under the condition that it would adhere to basic principles of internal democracy. He refrained from taking on any particular position, however. Regarding Irwandi's role within the party, a leading PA cadre at the provincial level remarked: "Irwandi Yusuf might be the governor of Aceh, but in the party, I am his superior" (authors' translation, interview in Banda Aceh on 3 June 2008). This illustrates how much GAM is still struggling with the transformation from hierarchical command structures that were crucial during the conflict to democratically acquired influential political mandates.

PA also attempted to recruit cadres and members with a non-GAM background as most of the original members were former combatants with a limited or virtually non-existent formal education and hardly any political experience. Using military vocabulary to refer to non-GAM party members, a PA cadre from the district of Aceh Besar estimated that approximately fifty per cent of the party's listed candidates were so-called 'civilians' (*orang sipil*) (interview in Banda Aceh on 10 September 2009). The executive board of PA is dominated by Malik loyalists, with Muzakkir Manaf formally heading the party. On the district level, however, the majority of party officials are KPA members who are considered to be close to Irwandi. In June 2008, the party claimed a total membership of 300,000 people, with the number still rising – a clear sign of how much PA was able to benefit from the territorial structure of KPA.

The Transformation of TNA – "Informal Reintegration"

Fragmentation was not only experienced by GAM's top leadership, but also within KPA's strata all over Aceh. The command chains of GAM and TNA had worked very effectively during the conflict and GAM was not fragmented very much compared to other insurgency movements.¹³ After the

13 Aspinall 2008: 48. In many of the conversations the authors had with former combatants between 2006 and 2009, the narrative of the "SMS war" (SMS: short text

MoU was signed, however, local commanders and sub-commanders (*panglima*)¹⁴ found themselves individually responsible for caring for the needs of their ‘former’ subordinates and their families. Formal employment was and still is hard to obtain for many former combatants as most of them lack adequate vocational skills. Moreover, the reintegration and compensation process for former combatants and conflict victims has been proceeding at a much slower pace than the tsunami reconstruction process. Additionally, reintegration schemes run by BRA and other international agencies lacked transparency and accountability as well as clear eligibility criteria and aims. They were far less well-funded than the activities related to post-tsunami reconstruction.¹⁵ This is why former rank-and-file combatants relied on the highly individualised patrimonial relationships with their former commanders rather than counting on GAM’s top leadership. This localisation of power within the KPA was boosted even further when the first GAM-affiliated district heads and mayors took office in March 2007 (interviews with former combatants in February and July 2009 in North Aceh).

Most of the new executive officials replaced heads of local government departments by their own confidants. This process went down to the village level, with many village heads being elected who were either KPA members or closely associated with the organisation. By September 2007, almost 50 per cent of Aceh’s population was being governed by GAM affiliates (ICG 2007b: 2). As the KPA had heavily supported GAM candidates or those close to the organisation through its networks all over Aceh, expectations ran high regarding rewards for the years of the independence struggle and the KPA’s efforts during the campaign period. These expectations proved at least partly true. One striking feature after the MoU was the fact that many former TNA commanders went into the construction business, either as material suppliers or construction contractors (*kontraktor*). Through these enterprises, former combatants were able to participate in Aceh’s post-disaster economy, which had flushed approximately eight billion US dollars

message) was brought up to illustrate that the command chain had functioned by means of text messages sent from Sweden to Aceh.

- 14 KPA mainly uses the territorial structure of its predecessor organisation, TNA. The territorial commanders (*panglima wilaya*) with authority over an area roughly the size of a district (*kabupaten*) are directly subordinated to the senior commander (currently Muzakkir Manaf). Each territorial commander has four regional commanders (*panglima daerah*) reporting to him. In turn, they command several *panglima sagoe* who are responsible for a differing number of villages (*gampong*) (Aspinall 2009: 11).
- 15 Compared to the funds made available for tsunami reconstruction, which exceeded the actual needs by an estimated 30 per cent, an estimated 350 million US dollars is lacking for reintegration and compensation measures (Abbas and McKeon 2009: 4).

of rehabilitation and reconstruction funds into the province.¹⁶ In this respect, KPA contractors could capitalise on the fact that leading GAM members had acquired high-ranking positions within the BRR (Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi Aceh-Nias, Aceh Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency) after the MoU was signed. The most influential person among them was Teuku Kamaruzzaman, who acquired a top position as head of BRR's executive agency, which made him second in its hierarchy. When GAM networks started to expand into the local government administrations, KPA contractors not only often knew how to place the right bid, but were also favoured when public tenders were awarded (Aspinall 2009).

Access to government funds through public construction projects, for example, is highly asymmetrical and always depends on individual actors *and* local contexts. Moreover, the above-mentioned collusive behaviour is only one of several types of illicit practices employed by KPA members.

In villages, KPA frequently outnumbers the Indonesian police force in situ and therefore the organisation often tends to regard itself as being above the law, constituting virtual shadow governments. Non-governmental organisations working on post-tsunami physical reconstruction projects, for example, reported that KPA members were demanding up to twenty per cent of the projects' overall value as security payments. Additionally, KPA construction material suppliers allegedly monopolised their position in many areas, charging several times the actual market price for key commodities such as sand and gravel. Moreover, if non-KPA contractors won public tenders for which other KPA contractors placed a bid, KPA would ask them for ten to fifteen per cent of the project's value as a security payment (Aspinall 2009). The sheer virulence of these practices, which very much resembled the 'fund-raising' behaviour of TNA during the conflict, led the International Crisis Group to the following conclusion:

The combination of ineffectual government, local KPA commanders acting as little warlords and internal disputes, many over money, is most striking along the east coast (ICG 2007b: 5).

On the other hand, Edward Aspinall (2009: 4) may be right – at least from a short- and medium-term perspective – when he argues: “Corruption, in other words, may be a means to buy out potential peace spoilers”.

Still, as already indicated, a significant number of former rank-and-file TNA combatants did not have sufficient access to these networks and there-

16 It is mostly the KPA's top leaders who bid for large-scale tenders, e.g. Muzakkir Manaf's Pulo Gadeng construction company, which won one of the largest construction projects funded by the national budget and worth 2.2 million USD (Aspinall 2009: 22).

fore turned to alternative forms of ‘fund-raising’ again that were even more violent. In several conversations we had with KPA members in villages in North Aceh back in 2006, it was repeatedly mentioned that the handover of 840 weapons during the disarmament period between August and December 2005 was rather symbolic:

It is not so much the weapons still buried and rotting in secret caches all over Aceh which, in the course of time, mostly have been rendered unusable that concern me. It’s the knowledge that every Acehnese knows how to use them, one in two knows where to purchase them, one in three knows how to make unconventional weapons (*senjata rakitan*) and one in five knows how to build a bomb (The author’s translation; interview with a former GAM sub-commander in Geudong, North Aceh, on 23 July 2009).

In the first three months after December 2006, there was a significant decrease in the level of crime and violence. Nevertheless, soon after that, it became evident how much the high hopes many had placed in the election had been disappointed. As of March 2007, the level of crime increased disproportionately, with the highest number of violent incidents occurring since the tsunami (World Bank/DSF 2007a: 1). There were 588 outbreaks of violence between October 2006 and September 2008, many of which were related to armed robbery and were mostly attributed to former combatants (Barron et al. 2009: 30).

In public, KPA leaders repeatedly condemned these kinds of behaviour and even went as far as explaining that individuals committing armed robbery simply could not be KPA members because the organisation did not possess any weapons (ICG 2008: 12). Regardless of whether there is any truth to these claims, this illustrates how much the KPA has fallen apart as a former military-like organisation and that command chains now seem to be defunct in some places. Another example may illustrate that the vertical rifts within the KPA could prove much more dangerous to the peace process than the horizontal schism within GAM’s top leadership. In July 2008, five men armed with assault rifles were found entering an Islamic boarding school in Beutong, Nagan Raya district. The subsequent shootout with the police left four of the men dead. The police found a GAM flag among their belongings. Shortly after this, Irwandi Yusuf issued a statement concluding that the men belonged to The Preparatory Committee of the Free Aceh Democratic Movement (Komite Persiapan Aceh Merdeka Demokratik, KPAMD), a group that was established in January 2006. It is led by an Acehnese activist, Eddy Suheri, who also functions as its spokesman and is based in New York. The group rejects the Helsinki MoU, claiming it is the result of an undemocratic process, as expressed in their official founding

declaration (*Deklarasi*) issued on the group's website on 15 January 2006 (KPAMD 2006). However, the group rejects any links to this and other incidents attributed to them, such as a case in Sawang, North Aceh, in December 2007 when a GAM member killed the leader of another GAM faction and was killed himself later.¹⁷

Although several small groups rejecting the MoU peace process have attracted a degree of following along Aceh's east coast, according to an analysis presented in the Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update of August 2008, the actual situation of these anti-MoU groups can be described as follows:

they [i.e. the members of anti-MoU groups] are little more than a youth gang whose anger and frustration are rooted in poverty and unemployment rather than ideology (World Bank/DSF 2008).

Still, the emergence of these groups shows that disillusionment and a lack of economic and social opportunities constitute fertile grounds for those who are willing to take up arms again.

The Aceh Party and Aceh's Legislative Elections in 2009

Tensions ran high in Aceh in the run-up to the legislative elections in April 2009. There was a serious increase in the number of political murders and arson attacks that were mainly targeted against PA cadres and offices. During the campaign period from July 2008 to April 2009, the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies (CPCRS) at Banda Aceh's Syiah Kuala University documented 73 cases of violence related to the elections. 49 of these were directed against PA. These included 32 arson and grenade attacks as well as five murders (CPCRS 2009a: 1-3). Nevertheless, political violence was not entirely one-sided. Severe intimidation, much of which was attributed to PA and KPA members, was widely reported all over the province. When attending a rally staged by the local Aceh People's Party (Partai Rakyat Aceh, PRA) in the east-coast cities of Bireuen and Lhokseumawe in late March 2009, several campaigners claimed they had been seriously threatened by local KPA members beforehand and produced intimidation

17 ICG 2008: 13. Pasukan Peudeung is another 'anti-MoU' group that operates in Sawang, North Aceh. It calls itself TNA *asli* (real TNA) and claims to be carrying on GAM's struggle for independence as it considers the signing of the MoU as a deviation from GAM's original path. The members have committed several armed robberies and kidnappings (World Bank/DSF 2008).

letters as proof (interviews with PRA party members in North Aceh on 24 March 2009).

In view of the amount of political violence taking place and the ambiguous role that PA and KPA were playing in it, the national political establishment was seriously concerned about the outcome of the elections. Most notably, in military circles in Aceh, there was – and to some extent still is – a strong conviction that if PA was to control Aceh’s legislature, it would immediately move towards a referendum on independence (ICG 2008: 12). During the open campaign period from 16 March to 5 April, PA campaigners in rural areas nurtured these suspicions as a victory by PA was often portrayed as the final step before achieving independence.¹⁸ Early on, though, Muzakir Manaf urged KPA members and PA’s followers to refrain from any action that might be held against PA by competing parties.¹⁹ Moreover, during a press conference in Banda Aceh on 22 February 2009, he clearly emphasised PA/KPA’s commitment to peace and the MoU: “There is neither a mechanism for independence nor a referendum in the Helsinki MoU” (the authors’ translation, *Serambi Indonesia* 2009).

Four factors might explain why large-scale violence did not occur despite the many violent assaults against PA and partly defunct command chains. Firstly, many of the assaults were most probably not committed by actual ‘parties’ opposing GAM, but were due to internal rivalry over much sought-after nominations for candidacy. In one interview, for example, a PA cadre, using the rather euphemistic expression of “taken for a ride” (“*membawa jalan-jalan*”), reported that Jahja Teungku Muadz, the Secretary-General of PA, had been abducted for a couple of hours by a group of PA members from the district of Aceh Besar to build up political pressure (interview in Aceh Besar on 10 September 2008).

Secondly, PA led a single-issue campaign that solely focussed on the promise to strive for full implementation of the MoU. The prospect of finally gaining access to Aceh’s legislation and, thus, being in a position to pro-actively push for this ultimate goal increased the cohesion within KPA and PA. The same was true for the symbolic language applied in the party’s

18 Separatist sentiment was fuelled once more when Hasan di Tiro, founder and formal leader of GAM, visited Aceh for the first time in October 2008, almost thirty years after going into exile in the late 1970s. There were even stickers circulating which stated that independence was finally in reach on account of Tiro’s presence.

19 *Harian Aceh* 2008. In an interview with the Acehnese daily *Harian Aceh*, Muzakir Manaf explained: “Kita dirikan partai ini untuk membawa aspirasi rakyat bukan untuk memaksa keinginan orang lain.” (“We established this party to carry the aspirations of the people, not to put other people under pressure”; authors’ translation) (*Harian Aceh* 2008).

campaign. Most of the other parties featured highly individualised campaign strategies, focussing much more on individual candidates than on the party as a whole. PA, on the other hand, did everything to convey an image of tightly closed ranks. Aceh was virtually covered in PA flags throughout the campaign, most prominently along the east coast, and billboards in every sub-district introduced all of PA's candidates – often dressed in traditional Acehese attire – at one go. Furthermore, PA presented itself as being the only legitimate local party among all its competitors. All over the province, charts circulated by PA claimed that the other local parties only existed by the grace of the Central Government as they had no co-signers of the MoU in their ranks. This view was explicitly underlined by a leading PA cadre on the provincial level in May 2008 (interview in Banda Aceh on 3 June 2008). PA also successfully capitalised on the fact that it was not part of the Indonesian party establishment, which had become highly discredited in the eyes of many Acehese due to rampant corruption and inefficiency throughout the conflict years. To this end, the party held open ceremonies in which the candidates had to take oaths, committing themselves to act in the best interests of the Acehese people and to participate wholeheartedly in the bid for full implementation of the MoU as future legislators. The violation of these pledges through any form of corruption would lead to the loss of their parliamentary mandate and ultimately to exclusion from the party (interviews with KPA members in North and East Aceh in July 2009).

Why do we need so many local parties? Why don't the people understand that PA is their best representative? If parliamentary politics is like debating over food, why do we need parties advocating meat and fish when everybody knows Acehese like rice best? PA will provide rice. I am afraid that with all the debate, in the end, we will not even have rice (Interview with a PA candidate in Lhokseumawe on 15 July 2009).

Thirdly, many of the assault cases against PA saw no investigative progress and were attributed to unknown perpetrators (*orang tak dikenal*, OTK). The poor performance of Aceh's police force in this respect nourished fears within PA that much of the violence was actually being caused by the Indonesian security apparatus. In mid-February, General Adityawarman, a West Sumatran who had earned a reputation for his investigative efficiency as a police commander in Maluku, was appointed the new chief of police for Aceh. Some significant investigative breakthroughs regarding 16 unsolved cases were made soon after his appointment. Nine suspects believed to be part of the so-called Abdul Razak group, comprising a number of dissatisfied former combatants opposing the peace process, were arrested for arson attacks, for example (CPCRS 2009a: 2). This investigative success not only

helped to increase public confidence in Aceh's police force, but also eased the tensions and deep distrust that had been building up in GAM circles prior to the elections.

Fourthly, the PA campaign was probably the largest 'investment' of its kind ever seen in Aceh, both in a material and immaterial sense, since it was visible throughout the whole province. In terms of campaign financing, PA was in a much better position than the GAM-affiliated candidates back in 2006. The access to public funds through construction projects, for example, as described above, constituted a clear competitive advantage compared to other local and national parties. Along the west coast, businesses linked to KPA reportedly contributed up to 20 per cent of their profits to PA's campaigning activities (ICG 2009: 3).

In the legislative elections on 9 April 2009, voters were called to vote for district, provincial and national legislatures. 44 parties had successfully registered for the elections in Aceh and six out of ten local parties that had been formed after August 2006 passed the requirements to run in the elections.

Besides PA, the more prominent contesters were the following:²⁰ Partai SIRA (Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh, Independent Voice of Aceh's People), which was expected to garner the second-largest number of votes after PA (*Harian Aceh* 2009). The SIRA and GAM networks had worked together very efficiently during the Pilkada campaign of 2006. Consequently, GAM considered the establishment of the party an act of treason. Throughout 2008, rumours spread all over Aceh that many former SIRA activists had joined PA out of discontentment over the establishment of Partai SIRA. On the other hand, Partai SIRA officials claimed to have received many disappointed GAM supporters into their ranks (interview with a cadre from Partai SIRA's provincial board in Banda Aceh on 8 August 2008).

The third local party that observers expected to gain a considerable vote was the Aceh People's Party (Partai Rakyat Aceh, PRA). It had been established as the first local party in August 2006 under the leadership of the former human-rights activist and student leader Aguswandi. The party's followership was especially strong in urban areas and in Aceh's central highlands, which are more ethnically diverse. The party developed a distinct agenda comprising the demand for free education and health care, Aceh's full control over its own natural resources, and gender equality. Its leader,

20 After the LoGA (Undang-Undang 11/2006) had been issued in August 2006, the Constitutional Court of Indonesia ruled that independent candidates would also be allowed to contest elections in other parts of the country. It is still unclear whether local parties will also be permitted to form in other parts of the country (*Tempo Interaktif* 2007).

Aguswandi, is an outspoken critic of PA's claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Acehnese due to its undemocratic and authoritative nature (interviews with party leaders in Banda Aceh and Lhokseumawe between August 2008 and April 2009).²¹

The final election results showed that PA won the election to the Acehnese Provincial Parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPRA) in a landslide victory, gaining a total of 33 seats (or 48 per cent). The Aceh Sovereignty Party (Partai Daulat Aceh, PDA) was the only other local party that managed to win any representation in the DPRA, gaining just one seat (1.5 per cent).²² PA also won the absolute majority (between 52 and 75 per cent of seats in seven districts: Pidie, Pidie Jaya, Bireuen, Aceh Utara, Lhokseumawe, Aceh Timur, and Aceh Jaya, most of which were former GAM strongholds. PA emerged as the biggest single parliamentary group in nine further districts (where it won between 20 and 36 per cent of the seats). Most of the votes went to national parties in the seven remaining districts, but these votes were scattered across the large field of parties (CPCRS 2009a: 4-5).

Partai Demokrat (PD), the party of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, came in second with a total of ten seats (14.5 per cent) in the DPRA. During the campaign, PA officials had repeatedly denied the existence of an informal coalition with PD. Nonetheless, PA campaigners advised their electorate to vote for PA on the district and provincial level and for PD on the national level as Yudhoyono's commitment to the peace process made this combination the 'sustainable peace vote'. Therefore, PD might have been considered the best option for those who wanted to counterbalance the future influence of PA by voting for a national party.²³ Yudhoyono was also re-elected in the Indonesian presidential elections held on 8 July 2009. Not surprisingly, he won 93 per cent of the public vote in Aceh, the clearest victory of all in the Indonesian provinces (CPCRS 2009b: 2-3).

Of all the national parties that had contested the elections in Aceh, only the party of the so-called Functional Groups (Golongan Karya, Golkar) was able to maintain its results from the 2004 elections, winning eight seats (11.5

21 The three other local parties that contested the elections were the United Aceh Party (Partai Bersatu Aceh, PBA), the Safe and Prosperous Aceh Party (PA Aman Sejahtera, PAAS) and the Aceh Sovereignty Party (Partai Daulat Aceh, PDA). For a short overview of the parties' profiles, see: ICG 2008: 2-5.

22 As all the other local parties failed to reach the threshold of either five per cent of the seats in the regional parliament or five per cent in half the district parliaments, they will not be allowed to contest the next elections in 2014.

23 Regarding the national parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, DPR-RI), PD was the clear winner, gaining six out of 13 seats reserved for the Province of Aceh (CPCRS 2009a: 4-5).

per cent). Apart from its prominence in urban areas and a well-established territorial network, it probably benefited from the merits that its chairman and Vice-President, Yusuf Kalla, had earned when brokering the peace negotiations between the Indonesian parliament and GAM (CPCRS 2009a: 4-5, 9). In the presidential elections, though, Kalla only gained four per cent of the vote. On the one hand, his running mate for the vice-presidency, Wiranto, is highly unpopular in Aceh. He was the last chief of the armed forces ABRI under Suharto and is held responsible for atrocities committed by ABRI in Aceh during the DOM era. On the other hand, Kalla's chances in the presidential elections were considered to be marginal from the very beginning. Although committed to the peace process, this made him the second-best solution at an early stage.

To the Islamic parties that had dominated Aceh's legislatures for decades, the election results must have seemed like falling into a bottomless abyss. The National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN) gained five seats (7 per cent) and The Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) and United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP) won four seats (6 per cent) respectively.²⁴ As aspects of Islamic law had been progressively implemented in Aceh since 1999, the Islamic parties generally seemed to have difficulty capitalising on a distinct religious agenda.

Quo Vadis Aceh? Is Sustainable Peace at Hand?

The election results were the indisputable proof that the Acehnese desired a new political beginning all along the line. The political configuration of Aceh's parliaments both on the regional and district level saw a historic reshuffle. Apart from PA's much 'convincing' and well-orchestrated election machinery, it was the patterns that had developed during Aceh's conflict that were probably the most important factors to affect the election outcome. Many Acehnese had become alienated towards Aceh's political establishment and its bureaucracy as these were held responsible for the massive relative deprivation Aceh had experienced since the mid-1970s and regarded as a kleptocracy as corruption had excessively 'flourished' in Aceh during the conflict period:

24 The rest of the seats were split up between the United Justice Party (Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia, PKPI), the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB), the Patriot Party (Partai Patriot) and the Crescent Star Party (Partai Bulan Bintang, PBB), with each party just winning a single seat (1.5 per cent) (CPCRS 2009a: 9).

I believe a focus by Jakarta on establishing responsive and accountable local government in the immediate aftermath of Suharto's resignation might have put a significant damper on the growth of these [separatist] movements.²⁵

The findings of the interviews conducted in Aceh's rural areas along the east coast strongly suggest that intimidation by KPA and PA had a much stronger impact on the election outcome than in the elections of 2006/2007. Yet one should avoid the pitfall of attributing PA's electoral success solely to these behavioural patterns. All in all, compared to other local parties, PA successfully managed to portray itself as the only suitable dialogue partner for the Indonesian Government to further negotiate the future implementation of the LoGA. Without feasible implementation regulations and adjustments to the law, Aceh faces the risk of ending up as just one of the 32 other Indonesian provinces without the self-government so much desired, which essentially represents the spirit of the MoU. Still, due to the lack of political experience on the part of most of the newly elected PA legislators, many experts working on good-governance issues in Aceh are deeply concerned about the capacity of Aceh's future parliaments at the district and provincial levels to work on issues as sensitive as the LoGA implementation process (interview with an international good-governance advisor in Banda Aceh on 5 June 2008).

At first glance, Aceh seems to have arrived back in the Indonesian nation state. Due to its formal transformation and internal restructuring, its political contesting and setting of new agendas, GAM and its organisational substructures such as KPA and PA have proven to be set for lasting peace. With the election successes between 2006 and 2009, the institutional manifestation of the former secessionist movement's top leaders is reason to assume that the way back to open conflict is not an option – at least not for the time being. Nevertheless, Aceh's new legislature will have to face some extraordinarily complex challenges lying ahead in coming years.

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