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Containing spoilers: Civil-military relations and third parties in the post-Suharto Aceh peace initiatives

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain why and how the Humanitarian Pause and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia (GoI) broke down, while the Helsinki rounds succeeded in bringing about a permanent negotiated peace in Indonesia.

It develops a theoretical model based on the presence of peace spoilers and their ability to derail the process, and submits that discordant civil-military relations and a weak third party incapable of resolving credible commitment problems increase the probability of the government's armed forces emerging as a peace spoiler.

On applying the model while examining the post-Suharto peace initiatives in Aceh, it demonstrates how the weakness of the Henry Dunant Centre (HDC) and the discordant state of civil-military relations under Presidents Habibie, Wahid and Sukarnoputri led to the failure of the Humanitarian Pause and COHA while the strength and credibility of the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) and the concordant state of civil-military relations under President Yudhoyono accounted for the success of the Helsinki rounds.

Biography

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1. Introduction

The area of Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatera island in Indonesia, has witnessed conflicts for centuries. In recent times, this conflict has been epitomised by clashes since 1976 between the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia (Gol). While the conflict's intensity has fluctuated for decades, the end of President Suharto's authoritarian New Order in 1998 lent the fighting a new drive. By the early 2000s, renewed armed fighting between the state's security apparatus and the GAM had begun and started to escalate rapidly.

Several initiatives were launched to bring about a negotiated peace settlement to the conflict. With the assistance of the Geneva-based Henry Dunant Centre (HDC), both sides agreed for the first time to negotiate directly, which resulted in the Humanitarian Pause in 2000 and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in 2002. These initiatives, however, soon floundered and violence returned – culminating in the country's largest-ever military operation following a declaration of military emergency for the entire province in 2003. While the fighting was ongoing, a massive tsunami struck the area in December 2004, and less than a year later in August 2005, the Gol and GAM signed the Helsinki Agreement that ended the conflict and brought about a permanent negotiated peace in Aceh. The passing of a special Aceh Governance Law and local elections in 2006 then followed. This brought former GAM leaders into formal executive and legislative positions in the region and has since underpinned the peace that still holds until today.

Why did the 2000 Humanitarian Pause and the 2002 COHA fail while the 2005 Helsinki Agreement succeed in bringing about a permanent negotiated peace? The extant literature has attempted to provide empirical examinations and explanations regarding the historical contexts and nuances of the conflict as well as the peace initiatives.¹ They rarely, however, systematically compare the different peace initiatives to isolate a few generalisable and pertinent variables that could explain why some peace initiatives failed while others succeeded. Furthermore, as is common with any work providing 'thick descriptions' of an event, the empirical literature provides little consensus on the specific list of variables explaining why and how the Humanitarian Pause and COHA failed while the Helsinki Agreement proved successful.² Arguably, therefore, scholars seeking to draw comparative lessons and insights from the Aceh conflict might be hard-pressed to explain the success or failure of the various peace initiatives.

¹ While not an exhaustive list, some of the significant ones include: M. Morfit, 'The road to Helsinki: The Aceh Agreement and Indonesia's democratic development', *International Negotiation* 12 (2007): 111–43; A. Reid, *Verandah of violence: The background to the Aceh problem* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006); E. Aspinall, *Islam and nation: Separatist rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); H. Djalal and D.S. Djalal, *Seeking lasting peace in Aceh* (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2006); E. Aspinall and H. Crouch, *The Aceh peace process: Why it failed* (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2003); D. Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh: A personal account of the Helsinki peace process* (Jakarta: Equinox, 2006).

² Just on the Helsinki process alone, for example, some scholars focus on the critical role of Martti Ahtisaari as the third party, others on the devotion and ingenuity of Vice President Jusuf Kalla, and yet others on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's political support. See, for instance: K. Merikallio, *Making peace: Ahtisaari and Aceh* (Juva: WS Bookwell Oy, 2006); F. Ali, S. Manoarfa and B. Effendy, *Kalla dan perdamaian Aceh [Kalla and the Aceh peace process]* (Jakarta: LSPEU, 2008); A.H. Yudhoyono, 'Resolving the conflict in Aceh: The efforts of the Indonesian government to deal with the separatist threat from the Free Aceh Movement' (Master's thesis, Nanyang Technological University, 2006). Others only provide a long list of favourable or unfavourable empirical conditions.

At the risk of omitting certain nuances, this paper formulates and proposes a theoretically informed argument to explain why and how some peace initiatives fail while others succeed. It argues that the success or failure of peace initiatives depends on the presence and ability of peace spoilers to derail the process. Specifically, I am interested in explaining why and how the central government's armed forces emerge as a peace spoiler. I argue that the military will more likely become a spoiler and derail peace initiatives when two conditions are observed: (1) there is a discordant or bad state of civil-military relations within the government camp; and (2) there is a weak third-party mediator involved in the process. Conversely, when the state of civil-military relations is good or harmonious and there is a credible and strong third party, the military would be less likely to derail the peace process.

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first section develops and presents the theoretical framework. The second section provides a brief history of the most recent conflict between Aceh and Jakarta. The third section applies the theory to examine the conflict and peace initiatives in Aceh under four different post-Suharto presidents: B.J. Habibie (1998–1999), Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–2004) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–present), and explains why and how the Humanitarian Pause and COHA failed while the Helsinki Agreement succeeded. Finally, I offer some theoretical and policy conclusions.

2. The argument: Spoilers, third parties and civil-military relations

The huge literature on civil wars and insurgencies suggests that, for over half a century, internal conflicts have most often ended either with outright military victory by one side over the other, or with a negotiated settlement that preserves the belligerents physically and undertakes to ratify by contract an acceptable post-war distribution of valued resources.³ This section draws from the literature focusing on the latter, specifically on: (1) why and how civil wars came about; (2) how and under what conditions a negotiated settlement can be reached; and (3) upon reaching an agreement, how to build and sustain an enduring peace. However, this section is only concerned with self-determination conflicts between a rebel group and a central government, which are considered among the most intractable types of civil war and those that are most likely to resist a compromise settlement.⁴

Existing studies on self-determination conflicts tend to focus on: (1) the value of the secessionist area in dispute;⁵ (2) the government's rationale to deter other groups from

³ M.D. Toft, *Securing the peace: The durable settlement of civil wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

⁴ Between 1940 and 1996, governments were 70 per cent less likely to negotiate with groups seeking self-determination. See: M.G. Marshall and T.R. Gurr, *Peace and conflict: A global survey of armed conflicts, self-determination movements, and democracy* (College Park: Centre for International Development and Conflict Management, 2003); B. Walter, *Committing to peace: The successful settlement of civil wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵ This includes, for example, the highly valuable natural resources of the land, the geostrategic value of the area in terms of security function and, in some cases, the symbolic value of the nation's identity. See, for example: J. Snyder, *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); S. van Evera, *Causes of war: Power and the roots of conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

seeking secession in the future;⁶ (3) the structural incentives for parties to conceal their true aims, risks and costs as well as those relating to ‘credible commitment’ problems, where trust between the parties is very low; and (4) the indivisibility of the contentious issue itself, which often hinders a negotiated and durable peace settlement.⁷

These studies, however, are underpinned by an implicit assumption of two antagonists fighting each other while in fact self-determination conflicts are rarely a two-actor phenomena.⁸ Not only are third parties normally involved as mediators in such conflicts but also the parties involved in the conflict are rarely consistently unified or coherent. Indeed, factionalism within the rebel group and disunity within the government camp are often prevalent. This section attempts to address this gap by proposing a model to explain the disparity seen in the outcomes of some peace initiatives in separatist conflicts.

A failed peace initiative can be seen when the armed fighting or violence between the conflicting parties continues despite brief lull periods during negotiations or a ceasefire. In fact, ceasefires largely involve a common understanding and agreement to halt violence – they are not designed to fundamentally resolve the underlying issues, nor do they permanently govern future relations.⁹ Conversely, a successful, negotiated peace settlement involves an agreement on how the parties will explicitly regulate and resolve, once and for all, their basic ‘incompatibilities’, and typically includes provisions about the future composition of government, disarmament and demobilisation, and issues relating to justice, human rights and accountability.¹⁰

As proposed by Stephen Stedman and others, I argue that the different resolutions seen among various peace initiatives can be explained by the presence and ability of peace spoilers to derail the process.¹¹ This paper only focuses, however, on the probability of one actor – the government’s armed forces – emerging as a spoiler.¹² I submit that two variables are critical in identifying the capability and emergence of the military as a spoiler: (1) the strength and credibility of a third party to resolve any credible commitment problems; and (2) the state of civil-military relations that shapes the government’s domestic political incentives to rein in and control its armed forces. A strong and credible third party along with harmonious or concordant civil-military relations will likely prevent the rise of spoilers or minimise their destructive potential – making peace initiatives more likely to succeed. Conversely, a weak and less-credible third party along with conflictual or discordant civil-

⁶ See: B.F. Walter, *Reputation and civil war: Why separatist conflicts are so violent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); M.D. Toft, *The geography of ethnic violence: Identity, interests, and the indivisibility of territory* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁷ See, for example: P.F. Diehl, ‘What are they fighting for? The importance of issues in international conflict research’, *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 3 (1992): 333–44; J.D. Fearon, ‘Rationalist explanations for war’, *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414; J. Vasquez, ‘The tangibility of issues and global conflict: A test of Rosenau’s issue area typology’, *Journal of Peace Research* 20, no. 2 (1983): 179–92.

⁸ D.E. Cunningham, ‘Veto players and civil war duration’, *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 876–7.

⁹ Toft, *Securing the peace*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ See: S.J. Stedman, ‘Spoiler problems in peace processes’, *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 5–53. For a recent review of the extant literature on peace spoilers, see: D. Nilsson and M. Söderberg Kovacs, ‘Revisiting an elusive concept: A review of the debate on spoilers in peace processes’, *International Studies Review* 13, no. 4 (2011): 606–26.

¹² Therefore, the theory’s scope conditions do not include the probability of other government actors – such as the parliament or business elites – and/or factions within the rebel camp emerging as peace spoilers.

military relations will likely encourage the rise of peace spoilers and derail the peace process.¹³ The argument is depicted in figure 1 and further elaborated below.

Figure 1: Civil-military relations, third parties and the success of peace initiatives.

		State of civil-military relations	
		Good or concordant	Bad or discordant
Third party	Strong and credible	Weak or no spoiler (peace initiative more likely successful)	Medium or potential spoiler (peace initiative possible but shaky)
	Weak and not credible	Medium or potential spoiler (peace initiative possible but shaky)	Strong or destructive spoiler (peace initiative more likely to fail)

2.1 Spoilers in peace initiatives

Simply put, peace spoilers are leaders or groups who believe that the peace emerging from negotiations would threaten their power, worldview and interests, and subsequently use violence or other means to undermine the process.¹⁴ These actors only exist when there is a peace agreement to undermine and when they believe that the continuation of conflict would benefit them.¹⁵ Therefore, when spoilers are non-existent or weak, a peace initiative between a rebel group and the government is likely to succeed. Spoilers are weak when they no longer have the capability (military, economic or political) to undermine a peace process. When spoilers exist, but their capability is limited, the peace process rests on shaky grounds – it may or may not succeed. But when spoilers exist and have sufficient resources and capability, the peace process is likely to fail.

Eschewing a strategic interaction perspective common within the extant literature, I only focus on the rise and capability of peace spoilers within the government camp. Specifically, I argue that, in separatist conflicts, the military is potentially the most destructive peace spoiler by virtue of the coercive and other resources at its disposal as well as its close proximity to

¹³ It should be noted that civil-military relations and third-party strength as variables are necessary but not sufficient to explain the variation seen in the military's peace-spoiling presence and capability. This paper, however, adopts the minimalist conception of a causal theory – a cause raises the probability of an event. See: J. Gerring, 'Causation: A unified framework for the Social Sciences', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 17, no. 2 (2005): 163–98.

¹⁴ Stedman, 'Spoiler problems in peace processes', 5.

¹⁵ Spoilers are spoilers not because they make statements contrary to the peace process, but rather when their actions derail the peace process. See: K.M. Greenhill and S. Major, 'The perils of profiling: Civil war spoilers and the collapse of intrastate peace accords', *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2006/7): 8.

the participants of the conflict.¹⁶ When and how the military would emerge as a spoiler would be determined by the state of civil-military relations, and this I further discuss below.

2.2 Third parties in peace initiatives

Scholars have shown that peace settlements overseen by third parties are more likely to succeed than those without due to their ability to resolve credible commitment problems that are to be expected between highly mutually distrustful parties.¹⁷ Credible commitment problems refer to the need for the warring parties to be convinced that the peace established during negotiations will be maintained throughout the implementation process. The assumption here is that the warring parties would like to end the violence, but each fears that the other will renege on the peace deal. In such scenarios, a third party must create a 'dual track' strategy of making credible, yet conditional, commitments to all parties that severe punishment would follow if they fail to uphold the terms of the agreement while compliance would be amply rewarded.¹⁸

As part of this strategy, third parties often require the leaders of both camps to rein in potentially destructive spoilers in their respective camps for the agreement to be credible and ensure that sanctions and rewards will be effectively monitored and implemented. A precondition for the success of third-party strategies, however, is their political clout and credibility. A credible third party is generally observed when it (1) has an interest and stake in upholding its promise; (2) is willing to employ any means necessary, including coercive tactics or any other form of punishment and reward; (3) is able to signal unwavering resolve; and (4) has sufficient experience and political connections to earn the respect of the warring parties.¹⁹ Without these four traits, a third party is considered weak and not strong enough to resolve the credible commitment problems.

2.3 Civil-military relations in peace initiatives

In ongoing separatist conflicts, the state of the central government's civil-military relations determines whether and how the military will become a peace spoiler.²⁰ The significance of the military stems from the coercive and other resources available at its disposal as well as its critical role in influencing government decisions regarding negotiations with the rebel group. By the state of civil-military relations, I refer to the nature of interactions and power

¹⁶ T. Lee, 'Civil-military relations and negotiated settlement in insurgencies: Explaining the Southern Thailand insurgency and the 1996 Philippine-Moro National Liberation Front Peace Agreement (paper presented at the 49th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, March 2008), 10.

¹⁷ See for example: B.F. Walter, 'Critical barrier to civil war settlement', *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1991): 335–64; B.R. Posen, 'The security dilemma and ethnic conflict', *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993): 27–47; Walter, *Committing to peace*; C.A. Hartzell, 'Explaining the stability of negotiated settlements to intrastate wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 1 (1999): 3–22.

¹⁸ The discussion on credible commitment draws from: Toft, *Securing the peace*; B.F. Walter, 'Designing transitions from civil war: Demobilization, democratization, and commitments to peace', *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 127–55.

¹⁹ The first three measurements are from: Toft, *Securing the peace*, 340–1.

²⁰ This further builds on the arguments made by Terence Lee that harmonious civil-military relations would likely result in a negotiated settlement of an insurgency, while discordant civil-military relations will likely prolong the conflict. See: Lee, 'Civil-military relations and negotiated settlement in insurgencies'.

relations between the political leadership and the military leadership.²¹ Any balance or imbalance of power between the two leaderships often depends on (1) the military's political power, as determined by its influence and popularity within the political elite and the masses, as well as the degree of internal unity within the officer corps; and (2) the power of the civilian leadership, as determined by elite and public support, especially with regards to its handling of the military and other sensitive decisions.²²

While I am not concerned in this paper with the origins of the civil-military balance of power at any given time, the effects of such power relation vis-à-vis policy agreements, or the lack thereof, between the military and the political leadership regarding the separatist conflict at hand are critical. Three policy levels are particularly salient when it comes to wartime civil-military relations. First is the *strategic* level, which determines the nature of the internal or external challenges and the means through which state leaders evaluate their positions and develop political and military strategies to respond to particular separatist threats.²³ Second is the *institutional* level that focuses on the structure and organisation of command-and-control, officer-appointment and personnel policies, as well as force structure, protection and maintenance. Finally, there is the *operational* or 'force employment' level, which looks at the types, conduct and duration of missions, as well as the acceptable costs and risks of such missions.²⁴

Harmonious or concordant civil-military relations are observed when there is a convergence of expectations and policies regarding key military activities at these three levels.²⁵ This is particularly likely when the balance of power is in favour of the political leadership, which is indicated by its ability to initiate, decide and monitor strategic policies regarding the nation's threats and how and when the military is utilised while the military gets to decide the best institutional and operational policies to fully comply with and implement the government's decisions. In times of war with a rebel group, such a state of civil-military relations would rally a unified officer corps behind the government's decision. Additionally, the ability of third parties to resolve any credible commitment problems would reassure the military further that the state's interests would be taken into consideration during negotiations and that the rebel group will honour its commitment – thereby reducing the military's fear of a conflict renewal. These conditions minimise the chances of the military becoming a peace spoiler.

²¹ Civil-military political decision-making here is not unique to a particular form of government, but 'the specific channels that determines the needs and allocations of the military'. See: R.L. Schiff, 'Civil-military relations reconsidered: A theory of concordance', *Armed Forces & Society* 22, no. 1 (1995): 14.

²² See the discussion in: K. Remmer, *Military rule in Latin America* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); K. Koonings and D. Kruijt (eds), *Political armies: The military and nation building in the age of democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2002); B.W. Farcau, *The transition to democracy in Latin America: The role of the military* (Westport: Praeger, 1986); R. Brooks, 'An autocracy at war: Explaining Egypt's military effectiveness, 1967 and 1973', *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 396–430.

²³ Brooks, 'An autocracy at war', 406.

²⁴ However, as Eliot Cohen argues, these divisions between the military and political realms are part of the 'normal' theory of civil-military relations. During wartime, however, it is perfectly acceptable that the political leadership should demand more and prod the military leadership further. See: E. Cohen, *Supreme command: Soldiers, statesmen, and leadership in wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

²⁵ The key precondition of what is considered 'good' civil-military relations is often the separation of civilian and military spheres. Conversely, intense competition and rivalry between political and military leaders over military affairs is seen as 'bad' civil-military relations. See, for example: D. Avant, 'Conflicting indicators of crisis in American civil-military relations', *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 3 (1998): 381; Brooks, 'An autocracy at war', 407.

On the contrary, conflictual or discordant civil-military relations are observed when there is a divergence of expectations and policies regarding key military activities at the three policy levels mentioned above. This is particularly likely when the balance of power favours the military, allowing it to dominate the decision-making process at all three levels while defying the government's political orders, or when it is exacerbated by excessive intervention by the political leadership at the institutional and operational levels that increases internal factionalism and fear within the officer corps. Studies have also shown that, in times of crisis and war, when military influence is greater than that of civilians, the preferred policy choice is often to use force.²⁶ Arguably, then, the probability that the military would become a spoiler is higher in these conditions, especially when the political leadership sees benefits in peace but the military believes instead that it would be better off fighting, and when there is no credible third party to bridge the gap.²⁷

3. Indonesia's Aceh conflict: A brief sketch

It is not necessary here to repeat the numerous historical studies on the Aceh conflict. However, a brief background would provide a context to the peace initiatives that have followed Suharto's downfall in 1998.²⁸ First off, Aceh has long been the site of numerous instances of resistance to external authorities trying to subdue it. Among the most oft-cited story is the 30-year Aceh War (1873–1903) that saw Acehnese armed rebellion against the imposition of Dutch colonial rule.²⁹ After the Dutch, the tradition of resistance continued during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942–1945) and the country's revolutionary period (1945–1949).³⁰ After participating in the revolutionary zeal that helped Indonesia gain independence, Acehnese leaders in 1953 joined a decade-long rebellion that sought the creation of an Islamic State of Indonesia (NII).³¹ The rebellion was finally crushed in 1962 following years of complex negotiations and military operations.

After over a decade of relative stability, a new, small rebel movement of probably around 70 people known as Free Aceh came to the scene in 1976, making explicit calls for the creation of an independent state of 'Acheh-Sumatera.' This group was the nucleus of what would later be known as GAM. The political agenda of GAM differed from Aceh's previous rebels in three ways: (1) it was not led by religious figures; (2) it substantially sidelined the Islamic state issue; and (3) it sought independence from Indonesia rather than taking over the

²⁶ See, for example: S.-W. Choi and P. James, 'Civil-military structure, political communication, and the democratic peace', *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 39.

²⁷ Lee, 'Civil-military relations and negotiated settlement in insurgencies', 10.

²⁸ Key literature discussing the history and causes of the Aceh conflict includes: T. Kell, *The roots of the Acehnese rebellion, 1989–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Reid, *Verandah of violence*.

²⁹ The story of this war lives on and was used by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) as one of the sources of contention against what they perceive as 'Javanese imperialism' following in the footsteps of the Dutch. See: M.A. Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia: Jakarta's security and autonomy policies in Aceh* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

³⁰ For details on Acehnese resistance in this period, see: A. Reid, *The blood of the people: Revolution and the end of traditional rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979).

³¹ This was despite the fact that the rebels were also concerned with Jakarta's centralising tendencies and the growing power of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). See: G. Robinson, 'Rawan is as Rawan does: The origins of disorder in new order Aceh', in *Violence and the state in Suharto's Indonesia*, ed. B.R. O'G. Anderson (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2001), 215–6.

central government and turning it into an Islamic one.³² Jakarta responded swiftly with military operations and, by 1979, the movement's leader Hasan di Tiro and several others were forced to live in exile in Sweden and Malaysia.

However, as economic grievances grew in Aceh, GAM's power base never fully disappeared. After all, while Aceh accounted for 30 per cent of Indonesia's oil and gas exports by the 1980s, it was among the poorest provinces in the country.³³ Indeed, over time, economic grievances provided new recruiting pools, as Aceh continued to receive only a fraction of its total revenue contribution to Jakarta.³⁴ Furthermore, huge inequalities between mostly Javanese migrants, who benefited from the gas development, and the impoverished locals fuelled a higher level of support for GAM.³⁵ The movement then resurfaced in 1989 and, by mid-1990, GAM appeared to have largely won the sympathy of a fairly wide cross-section of the population, especially in Pidie, North Aceh and East Aceh.³⁶ Jakarta's response to the Aceh unrest during much of the 1990s, however, was largely military in nature rather than political and economic. Aceh's official Military Operations Zone (DOM) status remained until Suharto's downfall in 1998.³⁷ In any case, soon after the DOM was revoked, violence returned in 2000 and the government responded with strong military force yet again.

Overall, while total estimates of the casualties of the Aceh conflict between the Gol and GAM vary, most accounts put the figure for the 1976–2005 period between 12,000–50,000 people. The actual figures perhaps lie somewhere around 30,000. There have also been reports of 625 cases of rape and torture, 781 extra-judicial killings and 163 forced disappearances in 1999, along with an estimated 5,000–7,000 torture cases and 3,266 extra-judicial executions between 1999 and 2002.³⁸

These human right abuses, perpetrated by the security forces during and after the DOM period, also expanded GAM's power base. Estimates vary, but GAM nearly trebled its fighting force between mid-1999 and mid-2001, and its supporters' control spread to about 70 per cent to 80 per cent of all the villages in Aceh. Following the continued fighting between GAM and Jakarta in the 2000s, GAM also collected taxes from the villages and roads it controlled while allegedly siphoning off a large portion of humanitarian assistance and extorting a proportion of the profits of contractors.³⁹ Thus, as a military and political force, GAM evolved into a much more formidable opponent to Jakarta.

³² For more details, see: J. Braithwhite et al., *Anomie and violence: Non-truth and reconciliation in Indonesian Peacebuilding* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2010), 353.

³³ J. Bertrand, *Nationalism and ethnic conflict in Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 170.

³⁴ Ariffadhillah, 'The recent situation in Aceh after the Joint Understanding on a Humanitarian Pause for Aceh', in *Violence in Indonesia*, ed. I. Wessel and G. Wimhofer (Hamburg: Abera, 2001), 318.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁶ Robinson, 'Rawan is as Rawan does', 217.

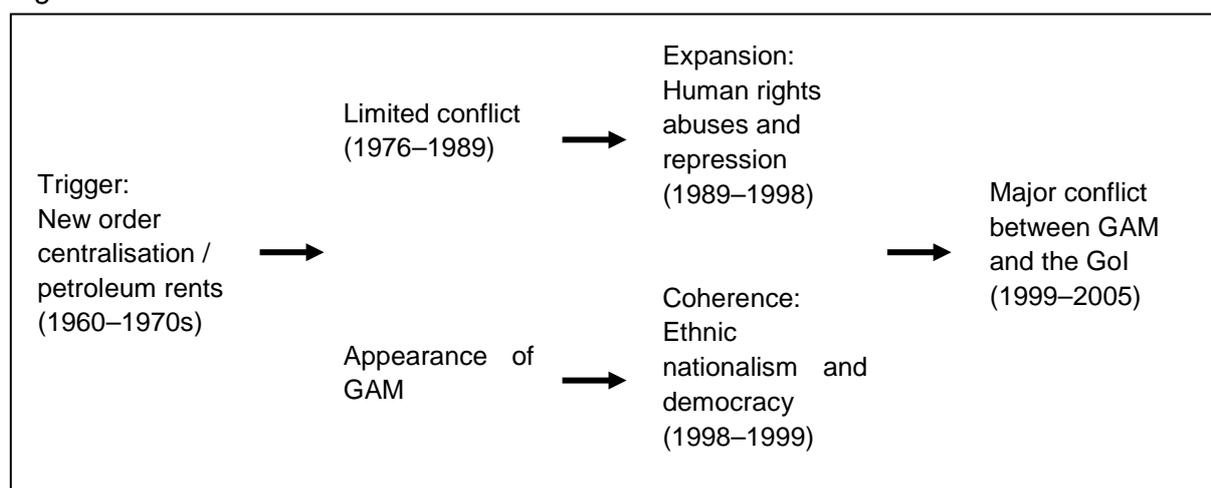
³⁷ The term 'DOM' is a misnomer because strictly speaking, DOM never existed. As an area of military (combat) operations, Aceh was under the Operational Command Red Net (KOLAKOPS JARING MERAH). See: B. Widjajanto and D. Kammen, 'The structure of military abuse', *Inside Indonesia* 62 (1999–2000), <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-62/the-structure-of-military-abuse>

³⁸ These figures are cited from: Braithwhite et al., *Anomie and violence*, 352. During the particularly dire DOM period, it was reported that military operations resulted in 3,000 widows or widowers and 16,375 orphans (1989–1998). P. Sulistiyanto, 'Whither Aceh?' *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2001): 443.

³⁹ The information in this paragraph is from: M.L. Ross, 'Resources and rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia', in *Understanding civil war: Evidence and analysis, Vol. II.*, ed. P. Collier and N. Sambanis (Washington, DC:

Given how the conflict evolved (see figure 2 below), it is not surprising that the root causes of the post-Suharto violence were complex and deep-seated. In essence, as Rizal Sukma argues, there were four basic issues at hand: (1) economic exploitation by Jakarta over Aceh's natural resources while giving very little back; (2) centralism and uniformity by Jakarta, which tried to impose its 'national values' and practices at the expense of Acehnese local identity; (3) the scale of military repression and human rights abuses over the years, especially the traumatic DOM experience; and (4) the impunity of the military and security forces who had never seen its high-ranking officers held accountable.⁴⁰

Figure 2: Evolution of the Aceh conflict.



GAM – Free Aceh Movement; Gol – Government of Indonesia.

Adapted from: S.J. Barter, 'Resources, religion, rebellion: The sources and lessons of Acehnese separatism', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 1 (2008): 53.

4. The Humanitarian Pause and COHA: Why and how they failed

The first post-Suharto government under B.J. Habibie saw an end to the DOM period in Aceh and gave it more regional autonomy than ever before under a new set of laws. However, following East Timor's independence in 1999, Aceh's grassroots democratic discourse began to demand a similar quest.⁴¹ Indeed, one scholar argued that GAM used East Timor as a blueprint, inspiration and key element in its public relations campaigns – hoping to win international sympathy for its cause.⁴² In any case, many Acehnese deemed Habibie's policies as insufficiently satisfactory. Violence soon erupted and regular, albeit manageable, conflicts between GAM and the Gol security forces returned.⁴³

World Bank, 2005), 43; K.E. Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a separatist organization* (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2004), 25-7.

⁴⁰ R. Sukma, *Security operations in Aceh: Goals, consequences, and lessons* (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2004), 3-6.

⁴¹ For details on this growing awareness of democratic norms, see: Aspinall, *Islam and nation*, 5.

⁴² K.E. Schulze, 'Insurgency and counter-insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh conflict, October 1976 – May 2004', in Reid, *Verandah of violence*, 237.

⁴³ For details on the conflict between 1998 and 2001, see: Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia*, s2 and s3.

While there was no peace initiative as such under Habibie, the new administration of his successor Abdurrahman Wahid began exploratory meetings with GAM to find a negotiated peace settlement. President Wahid eventually brought in a newly founded Swiss-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), the HDC, as a third-party mediator. The HDC's activities, both under Wahid and his successor Megawati Sukarnoputri, brought about two major peace initiatives. The first was the Humanitarian Pause (officially called the Joint Understanding for Humanitarian Pause in Aceh), which was signed in Switzerland on 12 May 2000. Three joint committees were established to monitor and verify the end of violence and the distribution of humanitarian aid under this agreement, and the first three months were promising as violence dropped.⁴⁴ By September, however, conflicts had resumed, with GAM and the Gol blaming each other for violations of the agreement. By March 2001, additional troops were dispatched and the peace talks effectively ceased by July that year.

Under President Sukarnoputri, the COHA was signed in December 2002. This ceasefire agreement had four main focuses: security, humanitarian aid, reconstruction and civilian reform; which included the end of hostilities, storage of GAM weapons in joint security committee (JSC)-supervised warehouses, relocation of security forces, and establishment of peace zones.⁴⁵ The COHA was initially promising, as violence abated significantly⁴⁶ and negotiations to reach a final settlement continued. Old tensions resurfaced, however, when by February 2003, the planned storage of GAM weapons did not materialise and the security forces were not relocated to GAM's satisfaction. Violence towards civilians returned, the peace zones proved to be ineffective and there were few sanctions imposed amid these violations. Security disturbances were also on the rise and widespread during the COHA.⁴⁷

The Gol stepped up its responses, which were multi-pronged and included security restoration operations (such as tactical assaults, ambushes and major patrols) and law enforcement operations (such as investigation and pre-trials).⁴⁸ As violence between the parties returned and negotiations were deadlocked, the COHA was abandoned. The final nail in the coffin was when the Gol announced a military emergency status for Aceh, and the control of the province and its governing entities came under its purview.

So, why did the Humanitarian Pause and COHA fail and violence between the Gol and GAM return? This section argues that the HDC's lack of political clout and credibility, as well as the discordant or bad state of civil-military relations under Habibie, Wahid and Sukarnoputri allowed the Indonesian Defense Forces (TNI) to emerge as peace spoilers.

⁴⁴ Only 69 civilians and 14 security forces were killed during this period, as opposed to the 300 dead in the preceding four months. Djalal and Djalal, *Seeking lasting peace in Aceh*, 52.

⁴⁵ For details of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), see: K.E. Schulze, 'Ceasefire or more?' *The World Today* (January 2003), 24.

⁴⁶ Only 12 civilians were killed compared to the 87 in the previous two months. See: Djalal and Djalal, *Seeking lasting peace in Aceh*, 62.

⁴⁷ See the geographical distribution in Aceh of security disturbances – and their different types – during the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in: I. Gindarsah, 'Penyebab defisit keamanan di Aceh pada masa implementasi COHA dan pemberlakuan keadaan darurat militer 1' [Causes of security deficits in Aceh during the implementation of the COHA and Military Emergency 1] (Master's thesis, University of Indonesia, 2009), 41.

⁴⁸ There were 39 security responses by the Government of Indonesia (GoI) during the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) period. For more details, including the types of responses in different areas, see: Gindarsah, 'Penyebab defisit keamanan di Aceh'.

4.1 Presence and strength of the HDC

The HDC was the main third party in the formulation process and implementation of both the Humanitarian Pause and COHA. Established in 1999, the HDC was an independent organisation comprising humanitarian officials formerly associated with the International Committee of the Red Cross and various UN agencies. The HDC chose Aceh because of its 'long-running and bloody war, its strategic position astride Southeast Asian sea-lanes, and the possibility of working with GAM's exile leadership'.⁴⁹ Martin Griffiths, HDC's director and former UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, and Louisa Chan-Boegli, a physician who had previously worked for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were at the centre of HDC's project in Aceh.⁵⁰ The HDC initially received financial support from the Norwegian government, amounting to USD2.7 million by the end of 2002.⁵¹ The funds seemed to be commensurate with the HDC's small staff, which would shape its organisational culture and approach to Aceh in their flexible and improvisational way of doing things,⁵² although this circumstance would also spell out its institutional weaknesses.

The HDC also brought in outside experts to participate in various informal problem-solving workshops, consultative meetings and other forms of third-party-assisted dialogues.⁵³ The first team consisted of Lord Eric Avebury, a member of the British House of Lords and trustee of Hasan di Tiro; Hurst Hannum, Professor of International Law at Tufts University; and William Ury, a negotiation specialist from Harvard Law School. The second team, more popularly known as the 'Wise Men', consisted of Retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, former Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, former Yugoslav Ambassador to Indonesia Budimir Loncar and, later, former Swedish diplomat Bengt Soderbergh. These men were brought in to boost the HDC's international gravitas and provide 'reality checking' for the Gol and GAM. However, since they represented no international body and were devoid of political resources to bear pressure on GAM or the Gol, these men were not able to fully assist HDC in solving the credible commitment problems it encountered.

The HDC's initial small size was also a mismatch to the evolution of its expected role between 2000 and 2003. It was a facilitator during the initial phases, a mediator during most of its involvement, and a third-party guarantor during the COHA implementation (together with the JSC).⁵⁴ During its initial role, the HDC was positioning itself as a facilitator and therefore could function even as a tiny team consisting of a few Geneva- and Jakarta-based staff. This role changed during the Humanitarian Pause, as the HDC first established an office in Banda Aceh and attempted to guide the implementation of the ceasefire. Yet, by 2002, while working intensively out of Banda Aceh, the HDC had no ongoing presence in Jakarta. It was under such circumstances that the COHA came about and the need to expand HDC's office became urgent if it was to help monitor its implementation. As such, in December 2002 and January 2003, HDC's staffing and managerial requirements expanded while simultaneously trying to start the all-inclusive dialogue (AID) envisioned under the

⁴⁹ K. Huber, *The HDC in Aceh: Promises and pitfalls of NGO mediation and implementation* (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2004), 20.

⁵⁰ K. Leary, 'Critical moments as relational moments: The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia', *Negotiation Journal* 20, no. 2 (2004): 315.

⁵¹ With the start of the Humanitarian Pause, Norway openly provided some USD1.3 million in additional assistance for monitoring and humanitarian purposes. See, Huber, *The HDC in Aceh*, 21.

⁵² Leary, 'Critical moments as relational moments', 316.

⁵³ Huber, *The HDC in Aceh*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

COHA.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, these highly demanding tasks continued to overwhelm the organisation.

Much of the progress achieved by the HDC rested not only on its capacity to develop close and collaborative relationships with the belligerents but also on its strength and ability to convince GAM and the Gol that the peace agreements were enforceable. Even in 2001, when the HDC decided to try to influence the parties more overtly, it only used forms of indirect leverage by enlisting the United States of America, Japan and others to pledge funds while Thailand and the Philippines were asked to send unarmed military observers to monitor the accord.⁵⁶ These additions to the HDC's role, however, rather than strengthening its credibility, actually created the impression in Jakarta and Aceh that the group was beginning to spread thin and that it had no independent political or economic capital to solve the credible commitment problems involved. Also, donor countries actually sidestepped direct responsibility and stake in the peace process, as they believed that they were already supporting HDC's panel of experts.⁵⁷ The fact that the HDC had no serious prior expertise on Indonesia and made no serious attempts at establishing or developing any direct lines of communication with the military's senior commanders made things even more difficult.⁵⁸ This failure to get the TNI on board early in the process reinforced divisions within Indonesia's civil-military relations that would later haunt these peace efforts.

4.2 Civil-military relations under Habibie

Civil-military relations were relatively concordant at the beginning of Habibie's term – largely because the TNI was under tremendous public scrutiny in a new democratic regime and as the high command was busy trying to reunite an institution that was plagued by factionalism. Consequently, the military under General Wiranto forged an 'alliance of convenience' with Habibie, who was equally weak, being Suharto's protégé with no real power base. Under the deal, Wiranto would support Habibie's political manoeuvres to legitimise his presidency and strengthen his power base while leaving all strategic decisions regarding the military to Wiranto.⁵⁹ As such, when it came to Aceh policy, there were trade-offs made by the political and military leaderships.

In Aceh, the military initially supported Habibie's policy of ending DOM, withdrawing thousands of non-organic troops from the region and granting political amnesty to GAM prisoners.⁶⁰ As the election in June 1999 drew closer, however, and as violence in Aceh escalated, the military regained the upper hand with regards to Aceh policymaking. First, Habibie assigned generals Syarwan Hamid (who headed North Aceh military operations during DOM) as Home Affairs Minister and Feisal Tanjung (who had been an Indonesian Armed Forces [ABRI] Commander during DOM) as Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, followed by several others who commanded or were previously stationed in Aceh to key strategic and advisory positions.⁶¹ This hardened the government's security approach in Aceh at the strategic and operational levels, which at the time was crucial as

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fn. no. 42.

⁵⁹ M. Mietzner, *The politics of military reform in post-Suharto Indonesia: Elite conflict, nationalism, and institutional resistance* (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2006), 11–12.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia*, 14.

⁶¹ Ibid., 15–16.

part of Wiranto's strategy to restore unity within the officer corps. Second, with the East Timor debacle haunting him, Habibie's effort to extend an olive branch to GAM was bound to fail without the support of the political elite.

In November 1998, a Council for the Enforcement of Security and Law (DPKSH) was formed to advise the government on security matters. This marked the start of a shift in authority over Aceh, as Wiranto was in charge of its daily operations. By December 1998, *Operasi Satgas Wibawa*, the military's latest post-DOM operations began in North and East Aceh. By February 1999, tens of civilians had been killed and GAM was gaining strength as violence and repression returned to Aceh. *Operasi Sadar Rencong* (I and II) replaced *Operasi Satgas Wibawa* as the DPKSH stepped up security operations in Aceh.⁶² By the end of Habibie's tenure, conflict between GAM and the Gol had reached new heights as distrust grew and over 70,000 Acehnese were displaced. Under these conditions, peace efforts were out of the question.

4.3 Civil-military relations under Wahid

When Wahid was elected following Indonesia's first-ever democratic elections since 1955, many had hoped for peace at a time when Jakarta had almost lost its governing authority in Aceh and GAM was filling the power vacuum. However, Wahid frequently failed to consult his ministers with regard to Aceh policy, especially during the first 10 months in power, and relied instead on his own inner circle of family and friends.⁶³ This gradually weakened his political support and shifted the civil-military balance of power in favour of the TNI when it came to matters of decision-making on Aceh strategic policy. That Wahid's vice-president Megawati Sukarnoputri had publicly favoured a strong security option for Aceh worsened the state of civil-military relations. Wahid's erratic behaviour, controversial statements and cabinet reshuffles further undermined his popularity with the masses.

Recognising that the tide was turning, Wahid chose to appease the military by appointing several active and retired generals to his cabinet.⁶⁴ However, even in brief moments where he felt he had a small window of having the upper hand in this dynamic, he immediately interfered with the military's chain of command and institutional promotion policies – moves that were already upsetting the officer corps since his first month in office when he personally replaced 25 high-ranking officers.⁶⁵ As Wiranto still had close links with many key officers, Wahid proceeded to further promote his own clique of officers. He also began pursuing more drastic military reforms that threatened the personal and institutional interests of the officer corps. These actions exacerbated internal factionalism and threatened the military's institutional cohesion.⁶⁶

As civil-military relations grew increasingly discordant with such policies, Wahid's position on Aceh became less coherent. He made confusing statements on the referendum, tried to buy off GAM officers and sent a high-ranking state official to start a dialogue at a time when the

⁶² This included the creating of a 'Mass Riots Repression Force' and the issuing of 'shoot on the spot' orders.

⁶³ Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia*, 60.

⁶⁴ Djalal and Djalal, *Seeking lasting peace in Aceh*, 54.

⁶⁵ For a full listing of these positions and replacements, see: S. Rinakit, *The Indonesian military after the new order* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 135–6.

⁶⁶ T.S. Hafidz, 'Fading away: The political role of the army in Indonesia's transition to democracy 1998–2001' (IDSS Monograph, no. 8, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2006), 156.

military was stepping up operations.⁶⁷ In spite of such circumstances, since the HDC had already been given the go-ahead earlier in his tenure, its activities led to the Humanitarian Pause. The deal was, however, shaky not only because the HDC lacked political strength and organisational clout but also due to the discordant state of civil-military relations at the time that led to military efforts aimed at spoiling the peace process as a way of fighting off Wahid's policies.

A key manifestation of this spoiling behaviour is seen in the manner in which the TNI escalated its campaign even as peace talks were ongoing.⁶⁸ With regard to Aceh, the TNI had two basic motives for wanting to repress GAM and not seeking a peaceful settlement.⁶⁹ Economically, Aceh (along with other troubled provinces such as Papua) was seen as a key source of wealth for some high-ranking officers, especially from the locally based commands. Politically, the top brass in Jakarta were also concerned that other separatist movements would be encouraged if Aceh was not decisively dealt with. More importantly, however, the TNI did not have the luxury of time to achieve operational victory in a prolonged counter-insurgency campaign.⁷⁰

As security conditions in Aceh worsened, with violations of the truce agreement going either unpunished or unaccounted for, Wahid was eventually forced to sign a written statement ordering the military and police to use any force necessary.⁷¹ By 2001, the TNI had consolidated its hold over Aceh policy and the balance of civil-military relations was almost completely in favour of the military, as Wahid's political and popular support crumbled. Repressive security actions soon went into full swing in February 2001 through *Operasi Cinta Meunasah*. By the time Wahid was eventually impeached and Sukarnoputri took over in July 2001, there were more security forces in Aceh than at any other time since Suharto's downfall. This effectively ended the first of the HDC's peace initiatives.

4.4 Civil-military relations under Sukarnoputri

Good personal rapport between Sukarnoputri and the TNI as well as the latter's need to restore its unity following Wahid's tenure initially provided her with the momentum to support the HDC's ongoing work.⁷² She made statements supporting TNI's activities for safeguarding the nation, including their operations in Aceh, and appointed generals into her cabinet while leaving the TNI to initiate and implement its own reforms. Sukarnoputri also chose a military-friendly defence minister and kept silent during the many controversial cases that involved the military. In a 2002 military reshuffle, she oversaw the rise of 'security-first' generals under

⁶⁷ For more details on Wahid's approach on Aceh, see: Walter, *Reputation and civil war*, 160.

⁶⁸ This move was apparently supported by many within the officer corps, including Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Ryamrizard Ryacudu and Zamroni, although the apparent 'alliance' among these competing generals was more a sign of common displeasure with Wahid than with the government's Aceh policy *per se*.

⁶⁹ Walter, *Reputation and civil war*, 161–2.

⁷⁰ The author's private discussions with numerous officers stationed in Jakarta at the time suggested that the Indonesian Defense Forces (TNI) was beginning to worry about demoralisation and fatigue in the initial years following Suharto's downfall, as soldiers were deployed in almost every troubled province simultaneously while facing mockery and ridicule.

⁷¹ Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia*, 74.

⁷² The good rapport stemmed from her staunch nationalist stance and her party's close relationship with the Indonesian Defense Forces (TNI) (which had as many as 150 retired generals as party members). See: Rinakit, *The Indonesian military after the new order*, 213.

Endriartono Sutarto and Ryamrizard Ryacudu. Scholars would later credit Ryacudu as the key spoiler of the Aceh peace process between 2002 and 2003.⁷³

Sukarnoputri was, nevertheless, still in charge of strategic decisions regarding the Aceh conflict, which primarily focused on a ‘dual track’ approach of launching security operations while engaging GAM in limited negotiations led by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was her Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs. This concordant state of civil-military relations, however, did not last long as GAM was increasing its strength amid ongoing HDC-facilitated negotiations (table 1). As security preparations were building up and the COHA was unravelling, with the HDC being unable to solve the credible commitment problems involved, the TNI began to regain the upper hand. The TNI soon decided that Aceh would be constituted as a separate Regional Military Command and, by mid-2002, nearly 32,000 personnel were posted there.⁷⁴

Table 1: Geographical spread of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in the early 2000s.

District	GAM membership in August 2002		GAM strength in April 2003	
	Members	Weapons	Members	Weapons
Aceh Besar	231	94	323	209
Pidie	649	266	2,365	420
North Aceh	1,157	706	1,331	889
East Aceh	939	410	826	346
West Aceh	426	182	472	113
South Aceh	130	76	89	74
Central Aceh	92	83	86	79
Southeast Aceh	25	5	25	4

GAM – Free Aceh Movement.

Adapted from: K.E. Schulze, The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a separatist organization (Washington, DC: The East-West Center, 2004), 18.

The shifting balance of power in favour of the TNI, the continued strength of conservative generals close to Sukarnoputri, the inability and diminishing credibility of the HDC, and the worsening conditions on the ground all culminated in the military emergency (martial law) in 2003 and the TNI’s largest operation in Indonesian history. Before the military could completely crush GAM, however, Sukarnoputri was defeated in Indonesia’s first-ever direct presidential elections in 2004 that saw the rise of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla.

5. The Helsinki rounds: Why and how they succeeded

With the COHA unravelling, President Sukarnoputri, under the express and direct urging of the TNI and the political elite, declared martial law in Aceh. As the fighting between a stronger GAM and a reinforced TNI-Indonesian National Police (Polri) continued, violence

⁷³ Aspinall and Crouch, *The Aceh peace process*, 24.

⁷⁴ D. Kingsbury, *Power politics and the Indonesian military* (London: Routledge, 2003), 227.

and security disturbances increased dramatically, both in numbers and geographical scope.⁷⁵ Under the military emergency, security operations were stepped up.⁷⁶ Although figures vary, the number of security forces (military and police) in Aceh was claimed to be around 55,000–60,000, with some sources putting it at around 58,000 just before the 2004 tsunami.⁷⁷ As security operations went underway, the prospects of peace dimmed.⁷⁸

It was under such circumstances that the Indian Ocean tsunami struck on 26 December 2004. Many observers cite its devastating impact as a key factor behind the success of the 2005 Helsinki Agreement.⁷⁹ Contrary to such belief, in reality, secret contacts between GAM and the Gol had begun before the tsunami struck. By mid-December 2004, concrete plans were already well underway.⁸⁰ Under the auspices of the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), an NGO led by former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, the negotiators met on 27 January 2005 for the first of what would eventually be five rounds of negotiations (table 2).⁸¹

Table 2: The Helsinki rounds between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia (Gol) facilitated by the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI).

Rounds	Key milestones
Round 1 27–29 January 2005	An effort to restore communications and dialogue between GAM and the Gol.
Round 2 21–23 February 2005	More ambitious and was focused on exploring the possibility of a comprehensive solution within the framework of the Indonesian state.
Round 3 12–16 April 2005	CMI announcement specifically cited that the question of monitoring any peace agreement by ‘regional bodies’ was being considered.
Round 4 26–31 May 2005	Significant progress made when the CMI was asked to prepare draft documents that might serve as a basis for an agreement.
Round 5 12–17 July 2005	A joint Gol and GAM press statement that both sides had initialed an agreement and a full MoU would be signed in August.

CMI – Crisis Management Initiative; GAM – Free Aceh Movement; Gol – Government of Indonesia; MoU – memorandum of understanding.

Source: M. Morfit, ‘The road to Helsinki: The Aceh Agreement and Indonesia’s democratic development’, *International Negotiation* 12 (2007): 116.

⁷⁵ For details of the types of security disturbances and their geographical distribution, see: Gindarsah, ‘Penyebab defisit keamanan di Aceh’.

⁷⁶ In total, there were 230 security responses by the Government of Indonesia (GoI) during the military emergency period. See: Gindarsah, ‘Penyebab defisit keamanan di Aceh’.

⁷⁷ Figures cited are from: Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh*, xii.

⁷⁸ For details of basic military strategy and operations, see: M.N. Davies, *Indonesia’s war over Aceh: Last stand on Mecca’s porch* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁹ See, for example: K. Beardsley and B. McQuinn, ‘Rebel groups as predatory organizations: The political effects of the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 624–45; C. Pandya, ‘Private authority and disaster relief: The cases of post-tsunami Aceh and Nias’, *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006): 298–308.

⁸⁰ Morfit, ‘The road to Helsinki’, 117.

⁸¹ For the most detailed accounts of the Helsinki rounds, see: Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh*; H. Awaludin, *Peace in Aceh: Notes on the peace process between the Republic of Indonesia and the Aceh freedom movement in Helsinki* (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

The Helsinki Agreement, signed in July 2005, successfully outlined a permanent solution to the longstanding conflict: Aceh was to remain a 'special autonomy' province under the Indonesian state with increased political and economic rights; the security forces would be withdrawn; local political parties would emerge; and an international monitoring mission under the European Union (EU) – the Aceh Monitoring Mission, or AMM – would supervise its demobilisation and disarmament.

Why were the Helsinki rounds successful in bringing about a permanent negotiated peace settlement in Aceh? The forthcoming section argues that while the tsunami might have played a cataclysmic role, the underlying reasons were related to the ability of Yudhoyono and Kalla to stabilise civil-military relations and prevent the TNI from becoming peace spoilers, as well as the strong commanding role played by Ahtisaari as a third-party mediator during the negotiations.

5.1 Presence and strength of the CMI

Ahtisaari and the CMI played a pivotal third-party role in the Helsinki rounds. Ahtisaari came into the picture through the initiative of a private Finnish citizen, Juha Christensen, who had previously lived in Makassar, the hometown of Vice President Kalla, in the 1990s.⁸² Despite the CMI's relatively young age (founded in 2000), both Jakarta and GAM credited Ahtisaari's skills as an experienced diplomat, shrewd politician and forceful personality for pushing them past difficult moments. For GAM, he brought international stature and gravitas that the HDC lacked, which forced sceptical GAM leaders to hear him out. From Jakarta's perspective, Ahtisaari was welcomed for his awareness of the government's sensitivities on the issue of independence and because he was fully backed by the EU and UN. His ability to persuade GAM to abandon independence sealed his standing for the Gol.

The credibility of the CMI was further enhanced by Ahtisaari's ability to establish and enforce basic procedures governing the negotiations.⁸³ First, the flow of information to the press was carefully controlled. Second, unlike previous efforts by the HDC to negotiate the Humanitarian Pause and COHA, the Helsinki rounds were to be conducted as direct talks between GAM and the Gol. Third, Ahtisaari insisted, 'Nothing is agreed until everything was agreed.' Ahtisaari forcefully enforced these rules, as he was keen to keep the discussions focused. He was also able to draw on an exceptionally wide personal network to bring outside resources, expertise and political weight to the proceedings.

While he and the CMI had the financial and logistical support of the Finnish government, his personal connections in the EU and UN helped him a great deal in convincing the Gol and GAM to, for instance, establish the AMM as well as concur on other 'sticks and carrots' throughout the Helsinki rounds. Most importantly, he was prepared to browbeat the delegation and risk his own political capital when he felt that the progress of the negotiations was threatened (including challenging Jakarta on reports of human rights abuses in May 2005).⁸⁴ In short, he was strong and credible in promising incentives and pointing out possible damages to both parties – thereby convincing them to rein in the spoilers in their

⁸² Christensen also provided logistical and financial support during key points of the initial process. See: Morfit, 'The road to Helsinki', 137.

⁸³ Morfit, 'The road to Helsinki', 116.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 137–8.

respective camps. In a nutshell, the CMI under Ahtisaari was able to solve the credible commitment problems plaguing the issue at hand.

5.2 State of civil-military relations under Yudhoyono

Yudhoyono took office in 2004, inheriting a messy Aceh, with the military dominating policymaking under martial law. In fact, several powerful active and retired generals – such as Wiranto and Ryacudu – who had opposed Yudhoyono’s reconciliation-oriented approach on Aceh, were still around at the time.⁸⁵ Once he managed to put his cabinet together, however, Yudhoyono announced his intention to bring peace to Aceh, especially after his close trusted supporters and military classmates such as A.S. Widodo, M. Maaruf and Djoko Santoso took up key positions in it. Yudhoyono’s huge political mandate as Indonesia’s first-ever directly elected president, his strong cabinet support and his ability to pay attention to the TNI’s institutional interests allowed him to regain control of strategic policymaking by slowly, but decisively, sidelining hard-line officers such as Ryacudu.

Kalla was also particularly attentive to the ‘financial needs’ of the TNI. The budget for troop withdrawal was set at IDR526 billion (USD58.4 million).⁸⁶ Funds were also allocated during the post-tsunami reconstruction effort, including IDR400 billion (USD44 million) for new military housing and facilities, even as the Parliament approved an additional IDR225 billion (USD25 billion) in 2007 for non-combat activities.⁸⁷ Indonesia also soon became the second biggest recipient of US military aid. The official defence budget was gradually raised, from around USD2.2 billion in 2000 to up to nearly USD4.5 billion in 2010, and military salaries were enhanced by 15 per cent. Yudhoyono also allowed the military to increasingly send officers to various posts in defence and intelligence-related agencies while the number of high-ranking posts was increased as the territorial structure expanded.⁸⁸ In essence, Yudhoyono did not meddle in institutional issues (leaving them instead to be handled by his confidante Djoko Santoso) and he accommodated the TNI’s key interests.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, the sidelining of Ryacudu and other hard-line officers was meant to be a signal for others within the officer corps that disloyalty to the government would be severely punished.⁹⁰ This ability to create a balanced ‘stick and carrot’ approach while regaining strategic control over policymaking on Aceh but leaving institutional and operational issues to the TNI underpinned the concordant state of civil-military relations under Yudhoyono. This allowed Yudhoyono and Kalla to continue supporting the strong role of Ahtisaari as a mediator and prevent the military from emerging as a peace spoiler in the latest negotiations.

⁸⁵ M. Mietzner, *Military politics, Islam, and the state in Indonesia: From turbulent transition to democratic consolidation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 294. Nevertheless, it should be noted that immediately upon assuming office, Yudhoyono did not change the repressive Aceh approach that had been in place since May 2003. See: Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia*, 151.

⁸⁶ Mietzner, *The politics of military reform in post-Suharto Indonesia*, 51.

⁸⁷ Mietzner, *Military politics, Islam, and the state in Indonesia*, 301.

⁸⁸ In September 2006, the army established a new Sub-Regional Military Command in the Riau Islands, and in December 2007, they announced plans to establish another Korem (territorial district command) in Flores. Recently, the army also created a Regional Command in Kalimantan and a Strategic Reserve Division in Papua.

⁸⁹ However, once the dust had settled and the Helsinki peace appeared to be holding, Yudhoyono did begin to meddle a little more deeply into promotion policies, gradually installing his loyalists. See: The editors, ‘Current data on the Indonesian military elite, September 2005 – March 2008’, *Indonesia* 85 (2008): 79–122.

⁹⁰ Mietzner, *Military politics, Islam, and the state in Indonesia*, 300.

In the final empirical analysis, however, one cannot completely discount two other factors that may have contributed to a favourable environment for peace. The first was the shifting GAM-TNI balance of power. While the TNI did not successfully eliminate GAM, their operations did have a significant impact – supposedly reducing GAM’s size by 9,593 men even as several senior commanders were killed or captured.⁹¹ Many of GAM’s bases were also increasingly taken over. This pre-tsunami situation may have prompted a change in the attitude of GAM’s field commanders. The second factor was the tsunami that provided a sense of urgency among the parties to negotiate a final peace agreement. The tsunami also opened the ‘strategic battle space’ by allowing in thousands of relief workers and international donors – all of whom had a stake in encouraging peace.⁹² That being said, the tsunami and the changing balance of military power in the region by themselves, while being crucial, may not be reason sufficient enough to explain the success of the Helsinki rounds.

6. Summary and implications

Our analysis has shown how the state of civil-military relations and the strength of the third party significantly influenced the presence of peace spoilers and the success or failure of the post-Suharto peace initiatives on Aceh. Under Habibie, there was no third party-initiated peace initiative and the state of civil-military relations, while initially concordant, eventually went sour, giving the TNI control and domination over the strategic, institutional and operational aspects of Aceh policymaking. Meanwhile, under Wahid and Sukarnoputri, there were initial phases of concordant civil-military relations that allowed the HDC enough political space to initiate a peace process with GAM. However, the HDC-led Humanitarian Pause and COHA failed to bring a permanent negotiated peace because civil-military relations under these leaders also went sour eventually.

Under Wahid, this was particularly damaging, as his deep interference in institutional and operational matters further divided the officer corps and led to open public conflicts among the elite. Sukarnoputri, on the other hand, was too close to the military and had allowed the rise of conservative generals. This too led to a discordant civil-military relation as the TNI regained strategic control over Aceh policymaking. Also, although the government delegation in the negotiations leading to the Humanitarian Pause and COHA included both senior diplomats and military officials, the security forces as a whole never fully embraced the agreements. Senior parliamentary leaders even vocally criticised these peace efforts. Although fully cognisant of these fissures, the HDC was able to redress them only in part.⁹³ Here, the third party’s lack of political credibility and strength to solve the credible commitment problems involved, and to create an enforceable peace, culminated in the martial law of May 2003.

Under Yudhoyono, while the tsunami as a cataclysm played a role, it was his ability to stabilise civil-military relations by paying attention to the TNI’s institutional interests while effectively sidelining hard-line officers and regaining control of strategic policymaking with the strong and coherent political support of Kalla and the cabinet that seemed to matter more. Also, the strong commanding role played by Ahtisaari as the third party helped solve

⁹¹ See: Aspinall, *Islam and nation*, 230.

⁹² Psychologically, it was also shown that the arrival of thousands of Javanese to assist their countrymen might have changed the perception of the ordinary Acehnese. See: Djalal and Djalal, *Seeking lasting peace in Aceh*.

⁹³ Huber, *The HDC in Aceh*, 31.

the credible commitment problems, leading to the successful conclusion of the Helsinki rounds. This combination of concordant civil-military relations and strong third-party rounds created the conditions necessary for a negotiated permanent peace between GAM and the Gol.

Despite the ability of the proposed theoretical model to explain why the Humanitarian Pause and COHA failed while the Helsinki rounds succeeded in bringing peace to Aceh, more comparative research is required. The Aceh case presented in this paper is more a plausibility probe of the theory's internal validity than its generalisability (i.e., external validity). Furthermore, as the model only focuses on the military as a peace spoiler from the government camp, we have practically ignored the other key player in the conflicts, namely the rebel group, and whether there may have been factions within this camp that might have also acted as spoilers. While the logic underpinning the civil-military model may be extended to explain the ability of a rebel's armed faction to derail a peace process, further research is needed to establish this association. Finally, it might also be worthwhile to theoretically explore the different conditions under which third-party mediators could be more credible in solving credible commitment problems as well as when and how other external actors could support the role and mandate of the third-party mediator.

From a policy perspective, the analysis presented suggests that without bringing the military (or relevant security actors) properly into the peace process – using a 'stick and carrot' approach, for example – and without the presence of a credible and strong third party, an enforceable permanent solution to a secessionist conflict is extremely difficult. It has also been shown that certain 'external shocks' – such as the tsunami – may often be necessary to open the conflict space to speed up the peace process. These arguments drawn from the Aceh conflict will hopefully shine light on similar cases in other parts of the world.