
ACEH: HOW NOT TO WIN HEARTS AND MINDS

I. OVERVIEW

In April 2001, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister of Security and Political Affairs, gave a long interview on Aceh to *Media Indonesia*, a Jakarta newspaper. The interview appeared just after a presidential instruction had been issued authorising military action as part of a comprehensive strategy to address the Aceh problem. Yudhoyono stressed that social discontent was at the heart of any insurgency and that winning hearts and minds of the local population was the primary goal of a counterinsurgency strategy, so as to reduce local support for the separatists.¹ "Our brothers and sisters in Aceh want respect, justice, and prosperity", he said.²

Those words are worth reviewing as Aceh prepares to endure the third month of a planned six-month military emergency declared by President Megawati Soekarnoputri at midnight on 18 May 2003.³ The government appears to have no clear objectives in this war, no criteria for "success" other than control of territory and body counts, and no exit strategy.

Despite the strict controls exercised by the army (TNI) over information – the government has drastically limited access to the province,

¹ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, "Aceh Perlu Keadilan Kesejahteraan dan Keamanan", Wawancara Dengan Menko Polsoskam Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono Seputar Kebijakan Komprehensif Penyelesaian Masalah Aceh, Jakarta, April 2001, p. 30.

² Ibid, p. 4.

³ The official name of the decree authorising the emergency is "Presidential Decision No. 28/2003 on the Declaration of a Dangerous Situation and the Imposition of a Military Emergency in the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam". For background, see ICG Asia Report No. 47, *Aceh: A Fragile Peace*, 27 February 2003, and ICG Indonesia Briefing Paper, *Aceh: Why the Military Option Still Won't Work*, 9 May 2003.

particularly by foreigners⁴ – the message coming through clearly is that far from winning hearts and minds, Jakarta is managing to alienate Acehnese even further. Virtually everything it is doing now – forced participation in mass loyalty oaths, forced displacement of villagers, arrests not just of GAM fighters but of people branded "GAM sympathisers", and background checks on civil servants – are tactics used before, to disastrous effect. They do not help end separatism: they generate more support for it.⁵

The gravity of the security threat posed by GAM is not at issue. This is a guerrilla group that in addition to routine ambushes of Indonesian military and police has engaged in targeted assassinations, hostage-taking, arson, and extortion.⁶ One NGO

⁴ Presidential Decision No. 43/2003 forbids foreign tourists from going to Aceh and requires all other foreigners to get permission from the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights to travel there. Any activities by Indonesian or foreign NGOs that might run counter to the aims of the martial law administration are banned. All humanitarian assistance must be coordinated by the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare. The decision also imposes major new restrictions on the press.

⁵ All these tactics were used during an earlier counterinsurgency period known as DOM (short for *Daerah Operasi Militer*). The DOM period officially lasted from May 1990 to August 1998 but was most intense from 1990 to 1992. The military was responding then to a genuine security threat but its response was so excessive that a newly resuscitated GAM emerging in the aftermath of Soeharto's fall was able to tap into local resentment to mobilise widespread support. The present emergency is part of an "Integrated Operation" that also includes humanitarian, law enforcement, and governance components.

⁶ It is still an unanswered question as to which side is responsible for the burning of more than 500 schools across Aceh since the military emergency began. It is clear, from ICG interviews, that GAM members were responsible for some. The alleged motivation may have been to prevent the schools from being used as billets for troops, to prevent them from housing the displaced so that the humanitarian problem would get more international attention, or to ensure that they were not used to turn Acehnese children into Indonesians. But most Acehnese with whom ICG

source told ICG just before the military emergency began that if the government had avoided a military response to the collapse of the 9 December 2002 cessation of hostilities agreement, it might have been able to take advantage of growing disaffection with GAM, even in some insurgent strongholds. With the tactics being used now, support for GAM in these areas could return.

In the process, the notion of “special autonomy” for Aceh has been completely undermined. Not only is policy over everything – security, social welfare, governance – now directed from Jakarta, but also the additional revenue that Aceh was to receive from the autonomy legislation is being ploughed directly back into military operations.⁷

While international criticism of the conduct of military operations is mounting, domestic criticism remains muted. This reflects the current nationalistic mood that has led to popular support for a tough stance against threats to the country’s unity, as well as the control over information and the political manoeuvring taking place in the lead-up to the 2004 elections.⁸

All this means that the chances of returning to negotiations any time soon are slim. The military is determined to finish off the rebels, once and for all, and any non-military solutions have been put on hold.

spoke expressed scepticism that so many schools could have been burned so quickly without some level of complicity on the part of government forces.

⁷ The deeply flawed Law No.18 from 2001 that granted autonomy to the province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam has been wholly superseded by the military emergency. Perhaps the legislators in Jakarta who drafted that law could actually turn that fact to advantage and plan a post-emergency consultation process with stakeholders in Aceh that could lead to an amended law with far greater legitimacy than the current one.

⁸ In early July 2003, ICG asked a member of parliament from Golkar, the former ruling party that constitutes the major opposition to President Megawati’s Indonesian Democratic Struggle Party, why no one in his party had raised questions about the government’s Aceh strategy. “We have to wait until the Supreme Court rules on our chairman’s case”, he said. The chairman and presidential aspirant, Akbar Tanjung, has been convicted of corruption and is awaiting the outcome of an appeal to the Supreme Court. An acquittal would almost certainly be less on the legal merits of the case than the result of a political deal with Megawati’s party. If senior Golkar figures speak out against Aceh policy now, any Supreme Court deal could be jeopardised.

II. DEMONSTRATIONS OF LOYALTY

Various forms of loyalty tests are being conducted across Aceh as part of the military emergency. These include pressure to display the Indonesian flag, known as the “Red and White”, the background screening of civil servants, the creation of new “Red and White” identity cards, and enforced participation at mass loyalty oaths.

A. BACKGROUND SCREENING

The background screening or “re-registration” of Aceh’s 86,680 civil servants is being conducted from 1 to 31 July 2003 in accordance with a circular dated 6 June 2003, issued by Aceh Governor Abdullah Puteh in the name of the martial law administrator, Major General Endang Suwarya.⁹ Called *litsus*, an acronym for *penelitian khusus* or special screening, it was prompted by the military’s conviction that GAM had infiltrated the civil service.¹⁰ While the government subsequently announced in late June that the screening would be extended to the entire country, a particularly intensive screening, with three additional pages to the questionnaire, is underway in Aceh.

The problem was that the term *litsus* had last been used during the Soeharto era to refer to the checking of civil servants, including teachers, for possible family ties to the banned Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Anyone found with such ties, even a distant relative, could be denied promotion or simply dismissed. Not only was the process highly discriminatory to begin with, but it was also widely abused by individuals, who for reasons of settling personal scores or removing

⁹ “67 Ribu PNS Diskrining”, *Indopos*, 11 June 2003. Initial news reports gave the number of civil servants as 67,000, but later reports gave the higher figure. See “Tujuh PNS Diperiksa Polisi”, *Indopos*, 10 July 2003.

¹⁰ Two incidents which reportedly reinforced that conviction were the 23 May 2003 arrest of civil servant Irwandi Yusuf, a lecturer in veterinary science at the state university in Banda Aceh, Universitas Syiah Kuala, who was accused of being a GAM propagandist; and the 28 May 2003 surrender in Sabang of Abdul Muthalib, who was concurrently a village head (and thus civil servant) in Jaboi and Sabang, and the governor for GAM of Sabang as a whole. See “Jalan Panjang Menuju Litsus”, *Kontras*, 18-24 June 2003, p. 11.

possible rivals, informed on fellow workers to *litsus* administrators.¹¹

Indonesian officials have gone to great lengths to say that this screening will be different from the PKI *litsus* and that no one should fear being interrogated and ostracized as before.¹² Gov. Abdullah Puteh told one reporter in an interview:

No, no, it's not at all like the screening conducted during the New Order. That was to find the extent to which an individual had been influenced by ideas of communism. This is to find the extent to which a person has been influenced by ideas of separatism.¹³

All Acehese civil servants must submit a letter swearing allegiance to the Indonesian state. They are then called to appear before panels drawn up at the province and district levels by the governor and respective *bupatis* (mayors). The panels are composed of senior civil servants whose loyalty has already been proven. Each person called before the panel is asked to respond to questions drawn up by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Civil Service Bureau that are designed to test loyalty to the state and feelings about separatism. Included are questions about family affiliations and those of friends, colleagues or acquaintances who might be linked to GAM. The team solicits information from the person's superiors before the interview, then crosschecks with others the information provided during the interview.

Those who "pass" take a new loyalty oath. Those who do not are held accountable for their involvement in GAM or for the degree to which they have let themselves be influenced by separatist sentiment. They can face disciplinary proceedings, dismissal, or prosecution before a court.¹⁴

On 15 June, the martial law administration in Aceh announced that the background screening would be extended to local elected representatives and village heads. The announcement came after two members of district councils, a representative of the United Development Party (PPP) from Sabang and a

Golkar representative from Aceh Besar, were arrested on charges of making contributions to GAM.¹⁵ In the context of a guerrilla war, rebels can "tax" businesses, contractors, and local officials, while the same people can be targets of financial demands from the military. The Indonesian government needs to be very careful about drawing conclusions about rebel affiliation from evidence of payment.

B. NEW IDENTITY CARDS

If the screening is restricted to civil servants, including schoolteachers and university lecturers, and local representatives, all residents of Aceh without exception are required to obtain new "Red and White" identity cards, known as KTPs. The original rationale for the new cards was that GAM had stolen hundreds of the old ones, creating two problems. GAM members who had no fixed place of residence and therefore no valid cards were able to pass through army and police checkpoints using stolen cards. And ordinary villagers who had had their cards stolen were unfairly suspected of being GAM members when they were unable to produce cards on demand.

How the new cards would prevent the same problems from arising is not clear; they are presumably equally subject to loss and theft. But the process for applying for them involves a demonstration of loyalty very similar to the civil service screening. Every applicant must be declared clean of any GAM involvement by the local police. He or she must fill out a form that asks for information on family, friends, activities over the last three months, activities over the last year, and so on.¹⁶ The cards, when issued, are signed by the village head, the district police and military commanders, and the district head.

The difficulty here is not just that the information can be manipulated and misused in the current climate; it is also that there is a strong likelihood that Acehese, even in relatively secure areas, will be charged a fee for the form, despite the government's insistence that there will be no illegal

¹¹ See "Alienating the Acehese", *Jakarta Post*, 16 June 2003.

¹² "Litsus PNS di Mata Pakar dan Birokrat", *Kontras* 18-24 June, p. 10.

¹³ "Litsus PNS akan Berlangsung Simpati", *Kontras* 18-24 June, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, and "Prakiraan Pelaksanaan Litsus PNS di Aceh", *Kontras*, 18-24 June, p. 6.

¹⁵ "Now, elected representatives in Aceh also face screening", *Jakarta Post*, 16 June 2003.

¹⁶ ICG interview with Aceh resident, Jakarta, 4 July 2003.

levies.¹⁷ If this happens, it will be another strike against winning hearts and minds.

C. FORCED PARTICIPATION IN LOYALTY OATHS AND FLAG-WAVING

Across Aceh, the military emergency command is “encouraging” mass participation in the recitation of oaths of loyalty to the Indonesian state or *ikrar kesetiaan*. On 2 June, for example, 15,000 civil servants and members of the military and police in Banda Aceh were called to a ceremony involving the raising of the Indonesian flag, the first such ceremony since the end of the New Order. The ceremony involved singing of the national anthem and recitation of the text of Pancasila, the five principles enshrined in Indonesia’s constitution that the New Order used to construct something akin to a state ideology.¹⁸

Another took place on 17 June, again in Banda Aceh, attended by 10,000 youth. Gov. Abdullah Puteh, army chief of staff General Ryamizard Ryacudu, and the provincial military and police commanders were in attendance. The youth of Banda Aceh declared their loyalty to the unitary state of Indonesia and urged GAM members to return to the embrace of the motherland. They also declared their unwavering support for the Integrated Operation.¹⁹ Similar loyalty rallies were staged in Aceh Besar, Pidie, Bireun, Aceh Utara and Aceh Timur, and they continue to be a staple of nightly television news in the country.

What the government believes it is accomplishing by these ceremonies, which also took place during the DOM period²⁰, is not clear. They may resonate in Jakarta as evidence that the government is doing its job, but it is unlikely that they are engendering any enhanced sense of loyalty in Aceh. They are far more likely to remind people of everything they disliked about the Soeharto years.

Forced flag-raising has the same effect. In Peusangan subdistrict, Bireun, on 21 May, 37 houses were reportedly burned to the ground for not displaying the Indonesian flag.²¹ In early July, Gov. Puteh issued an instruction requiring all Acehnese to fly the Indonesian flag from 8 July to 1 September 2003. Residents displaying worn or tattered flags were ordered to buy new ones.²² (It would be an interesting study in local economy to know who has the franchise on flag sales.)

One of the standard tactics of militias in East Timor in July and August 1999 was to threaten families that if they did not plant an Indonesian flag outside their house, the house would be burned. Along the road in Liquisa district, just outside the capital, Dili, in the weeks before the 30 August referendum, one could see makeshift flags on spindly poles in front of many houses along the road, interspersed with the occasional charred ruin of what had once been a home. It helped turn the Indonesian flag into a symbol of repression, not of patriotism, and the same is likely to be happening in Aceh.

III. FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The number of people displaced by the conflict is constantly shifting. Some people are allowed to go home as others are ordered to leave so that the military can go after suspected GAM bases. Official figures stood at some 40,000 as of mid-July.

Despite Rp.400 billion (some U.S.\$48 million) allocated for the so-called humanitarian component of the Integrated Operation, including for camps to be prepared for people deliberately displaced to protect them from hostilities, the preparations have been woefully inadequate.²³

Local journalists have covered the plight of thousands of displaced in Bireun district who found themselves in a camp in Cot Gapu, Bireun, with inadequate drinking water and sanitation. When as many as 300 people per day were falling ill,

¹⁷ “67 Ribu PNS Diskrining”, *Indopos*, 11 June 2003.

¹⁸ “Jalan Panjang Menuju Litsus”, *Kontras*, 18-24 June 2003. The five principles of Pancasila are belief in one God, humanitarianism, Indonesian unity, representative democracy, and social justice.

¹⁹ “Pemuda Aceh Berikrar Setia kepada NKRI”, *Kontras*, 11-17 June 2003.

²⁰ See fn. 5 above.

²¹ “Tumbal Terakhir Pemberontakan Aceh”, *Kompas*, 10 July 2003.

²² “Bendera Merah Putih”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 14 July 2003.

²³ “Acehnese tell of forced evacuations”, *Jakarta Post*, 19 June 2003.

medical services in the area could simply not respond to the need.²⁴

The story from North Aceh district is similar. On 30 June, villagers from Seumirah, Alue Papeun and Alue Dua in Nisam subdistrict were suddenly told to evacuate to Cot Murong. The army sent in fifteen large trucks and ten smaller pick-ups to move 4,500 people. Some 50 more trucks came the following day. The local government had been preparing for large-scale displacement but apparently had not been given notice of this particular evacuation, and the facilities needed were simply not in place. Drinking water was again a major problem.²⁵

Conditions in the camps are enough to make the people displaced to them angry and resentful. But reports beginning to come out about what they find when they finally are allowed to return home make the situation even worse. The respected Jakarta radio station Elshinta conducted an interview with a farmer who had been permitted back after 25 days in a camp. He and his neighbours found everything gone: their livestock, their televisions, in some cases, their furniture.

Similar reports have come from people from Bireun displaced to the Cot Gapu camp who were allowed to return home. Who took their belongings? The answer is not clear but it is certain that the villagers will blame the military. It was they who ordered the evacuation, and it was they who publicly promised to guard homes so that there would be no looting.²⁶

IV. INDONESIA'S GUANTANAMO

If the *litsus* seems like a throwback to the anti-communist actions of the Soeharto period, the plans of the government to turn Pulau Nasi, an island five miles off the coast of Banda Aceh, into a penal colony have reminded many Indonesians of Buru. That is the island in the central Moluccas on which thousands of suspected PKI members were imprisoned without trial, some for up to twelve

years. Indonesian officials have repeatedly had to reject suggestions that it is the model for Aceh.²⁷

But the government plans to build an internment camp for up to 1,000 detainees on Pulau Nasi, the island which is also known as having Aceh's most fertile marijuana fields. Like suspected PKI supporters, who were divided into Groups A, B, and C, depending on their involvement in the party, the Aceh detainees are to be divided into "serious, average, and less serious", depending on the nature of their links to GAM.²⁸ They will be housed, according to army sources, in barrack-like structures constructed over a twenty-hectare complex. (Like all developments related to the military operation, it is worth asking who will get the contracts for construction and services.) For the first six months, the detainees will be provided food; thereafter, they will be expected to produce their own, as was the case on Buru.²⁹

The government has chosen Pulau Nasi because it wants to isolate suspected GAM members from the rest of the population. But here the appropriate comparison may be not to Buru but to Atauro, the island off the coast of Dili, East Timor, used as a penal colony between 1980 and 1982 for suspected independence supporters. Being forced to live in camps on Atauro generated solidarity among the detainees that strengthened the resistance movement in later years.

The government says that it intends to bring all those detained as suspected GAM members to trial; as of 14 July, some 340 were under arrest. But how long will they be detained before trials begin, and when will they have access to lawyers? It would be in the interests of the Indonesian government to begin to review these cases as soon as possible, to release those against whom there is insufficient evidence for a trial, and to allow all the others access to legal counsel.

²⁴ "Enak tak Enak di Pengungsian", *Kontras*, 18-24 June 2003.

²⁵ "Pengungsi pun Membludak", *Kontras*, 25 June-1 July 2003, p. 5.

²⁶ "TNI Kepung Markas Muzakkir Manaf", *Kontras*, 25 June-1 July 2003, pp. 4-5.

²⁷ See, for example, "'Bukan Seperti Memperlakukan Tahanan PKI", *Forum Keadilan*, No.7, 22 June 2003.

²⁸ "P Nasi Jadi Kamp Tawanan", *Indopos*, 9 June 2003.

²⁹ ICG interview in Jakarta, 4 July 2003.

V. INDICATORS OF SUCCESS AND LACK OF AN EXIT STRATEGY

The military's stated objective is to crush GAM and restore security. "When security and the territorial integrity of our nation are guaranteed, then we will lift the military emergency", said Gen. Suwarya on 14 July.³⁰

But the military's criteria for success in this endeavour appear to be numbers of GAM killed, arrested, and surrendered. Body counts did not win the war for the Americans in Vietnam, and they will not here. They do not measure the degree to which the military's own conduct is spawning a new generation of separatists.

There are serious questions to begin with about the accuracy of the statistics, since there is no opportunity for independent verification as to whether those killed were really GAM, and what the true numbers of civilian and military casualties are.³¹ At times, the TNI seems to assume that anyone its forces kill is by definition GAM, while police statistics regularly show the death toll almost evenly divided between GAM and civilians, with slightly more civilians killed than rebels. On 23 June, for example, the police announced that 124 civilians and 109 GAM members had been killed.³²

At the beginning of military operations, the TNI estimated GAM's forces at 5,325 armed regulars.³³ But if it is going to include as GAM members – as it does in its casualty, arrest, and surrender figures – children used as scouts, farmers participating in night patrols in GAM strongholds, and anyone who has ever made a payment to GAM, the force strength would have to be calculated in the hundreds of thousands. The more loosely it applies the label "GAM" with all the grave consequences

for the individuals so labelled, the more support for GAM it is going to generate.

The TNI in one area of Bireun asked the local village heads and local army personnel about residents who might be GAM. They then marked the houses of every person so identified in black paint with the words, "This is a GAM house".³⁴ Of course no one who lived there dared go back. But that process involves blaming everyone in a family for the activities of one member; it assumes that the data received is accurate with no personal score-settling involved; and it creates hostility toward the TNI.

If body counts are not a reliable indicator of success, what is? The question is whether one defines success in terms of security or a lessening of hostility toward the Indonesian government. Both are important. Security indicators, however, should include not just constraints on GAM's ability to operate – although those are meaningful – but also the number of children back at school, the number of public transport vehicles on the road, and the level of economic activity in rural Aceh. Reducing hostility toward the Indonesian government may be impossible to measure, but it is critical in the long run, and the entire operation underway at present seems almost designed to produce the opposite results.

That leads directly to the problem of the TNI's exit strategy for Aceh. There isn't one. The duration of the original military emergency was to be six months. The former regional military commander of Aceh boasted that GAM would be finished off in two.³⁵ His successor, Gen. Suwarya, said in mid-July that it could take years.³⁶ As the emergency enters its third month, not a single major commander has been captured. And despite TNI claims to control his stronghold, the GAM commander in North Aceh, Sofyan Dawood, as of mid-July was still estimated to have 800 men and 500 arms under his control.³⁷ If the military emergency is to last until the top leaders are all

³⁰ "TNI: Operasi di Aceh Tetap Diteruskan", *Koran Tempo*, 15 July 2003.

³¹ The Indonesian military has always significantly underreported its own casualty figures in conflict areas.

³² "Versi Mabes Polri: 124 Sipil dan 109 GAM Tewas", *detik.com*, 23 June 2003.

³³ "Persebaran Kekuatan GAM", *Kontras*, 21-27 May 2003. The division of GAM fighters among districts was said to be Pidie, 2,385; Bireuen, 75; Simeulue, 25; Aceh Utara, 1,316; Aceh Timur, 827; Aceh Selatan, 89; Aceh Barat, 222; Aceh Tenggara, 25; Aceh Besar, 275; and Aceh Tengah, 86.

³⁴ "TNI Menuding GAM Sandera 39 Warga Sipil", *Kompas*, 15 July 2003.

³⁵ "GAM Akan Lumpuh dalam Dua Bulan", *Tempo*, 15 June 2003.

³⁶ "Army sees Aceh war lasting up to 10 years", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 July 2003.

³⁷ "TNI Klaim Kuasai Basis GAM Terbesar", *Koran Tempo*, 10 July 2003.

behind bars or dead, the cost to Indonesia in terms of a strengthened desire for independence on the part of an alienated population in Aceh will be exorbitant.

Whether or not the Indonesian government returns to the negotiating table in the near future, it is absolutely essential that it have an exit strategy that it can convey to the Acehnese public. The signals sent thus far suggest a long stay, and that would be disastrous. On 14 July, Gov. Puteh installed thirteen military officers as “temporary” heads of what he said were “non-functioning” sub-districts (*kecamatan*). The officers had one week’s training, and they will stay in their new posts until the emergency is over.³⁸

The problem, as the Habibie government found when it ended the DOM status for Aceh in August 1998, is that it is easier to install military officers in Aceh than to pull them back. Aceh is simply too lucrative a place for military officers who rely so heavily on non-budgetary sources of income. Just as it becomes more important than ever to hold these officials accountable for their financial practices, however, controls over access to Aceh and over the media have made any independent auditing virtually impossible.

VI. RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS?

There is virtually no possibility that there will be a return to negotiations between the Indonesian government and GAM any time soon. The level of public and elite resentment against the “internationalisation” of the conflict through the use of outside mediators and against the legitimacy that negotiations gave to GAM remains high. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and a few retired army officers talk about the purpose of the operations being to force GAM back to the negotiating table. But their voices are largely drowned out by those who put the emphasis on crushing the insurgency. The TNI is determined to put a major dent in GAM’s military capacity and political support structure. Unless or until their own under-reported casualties reach unacceptable levels, public support for the operations diminishes, or the political and economic costs become too high, there

are not going to be serious moves toward talking with GAM.

If negotiations do eventually become possible, they are unlikely to take place under the auspices of the past facilitator of talks, the non-governmental, Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, known in Aceh by its former name, the Henri Dunant Centre or HDC. The role of mediator will almost certainly have to be played by a government, not an NGO. Japan may be the leading candidate, with the U.S. in a supporting role, although there are reportedly differences within the Japanese Foreign Ministry about how active it should be.

It is difficult, however, to see how the Megawati government will return to the table with the GAM leaders in Sweden, whom it has been trying to brand as terrorists. If space for a dialogue emerges after the conflict lessens, the government may insist on involving Muzakir Manaf, the GAM military commander. Given the arrests of GAM’s entire Aceh-based delegation within hours after the emergency was declared, the rebels’ acceptance of such an arrangement seems unlikely unless the security of the negotiators can be guaranteed. The Indonesian government is also likely to insist on absolute acceptance of Indonesian sovereignty over Aceh as the prerequisite for dialogue. That, as well, will make resumption of negotiations more difficult.

But even if the prospects for renewed dialogue seem grim at the moment, governments and donors most concerned about Aceh are quietly trying to put in place the foundations for talks so that when the political atmosphere improves, the opportunity can be seized. And despite the strong nationalistic reaction among politicians and parliamentarians to expressions of international disapproval and concern over the conduct of operations in Aceh, most Acehnese believe such expressions are crucial. They provide, for the moment, the critical ballast to the one-sided flow of information from the military, and even if resented, they at least are being heard.

³⁸ “13 Pama TNI Duduki Jabatan Camat di NAD”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 15 July 2003.

VII. THE WAY OUT

In the short term, the urgent need is for a clearly-defined exit strategy. This might include several steps:

- declaring an end to offensive operations;
- formally ending the military emergency, if possible, before the six months envisaged in Presidential Instruction No.28;
- restoring full civilian control over Aceh, including in the subdistricts where military officers have been appointed as caretakers;
- allowing “normal” administrative and economic functions to resume, while beginning a process of engaging Acehnese resident in Aceh in a dialogue about revising, improving, and strengthening special autonomy; and
- gradually reducing troop strength.

The Indonesian government will have to determine the sequence and timing of these steps, but announcement of a timetable, as soon as possible, in a way that is open to public discussion and debate, is essential.

Ultimately, the Indonesian government needs to design a strategy for Aceh that builds on the three pillars cited by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono: respect, justice, and prosperity.

Jakarta/Brussels, 23 July 2003

APPENDIX A

MAP OF INDONESIA

