

CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN EASTERN INDONESIA: Resources, Ethnicity and the Military

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EASTERN INDONESIAN CONNECTIONS AND ROOTS OF THE CONFLICTS

Eastern Indonesia is a grouping of island states among which there has always been considerable movement of people and ideas. Since the fall of Suharto in May 1998, the amount of mobility in between the islands of Eastern Indonesia has increased significantly due to huge numbers of victims of conflicts seeking refuge in safer areas. Alongside increased travelling, traumas and rumours also spread quickly. As a result, communities outside of East Timor have been impacted by the independence and the pre- and post-independence violence there, the conflicts in Ambon quickly spilled over to other Malukan Islands, and Papuans have been affected by the ongoing conflicts in the Maluku.

In terms of the history of governance, in particular the post-independence Jakarta politics towards the region, Eastern Indonesia should also be seen as a whole. Throughout the region, decades of transmigration programs have shaped cultural differences that play a major role in land and resource politics. Butonese, Buginese, Makassarese and Javanese immigrants have filled manual labour and small business opportunities unpopular with 'indigenous' people. Moreover, most of these groups are similarly but to different extents caught in the midst of conflicting political interests in the country (largely involving Jakarta elites and the state's security apparatus) and domestic politics. Local communities draw their own battle lines, thereby using a spate of different symbols ranging from ethnic characteristics and traditional boundaries to religion-based labels.

Conflicts broke out in the Maluku in early 1999 partly due to existing tensions in the region, to a 'power vacuum' left by the state after the fall of Suharto and a weakening military, and partly because of instigation by vested interests within the Jakarta elites. A crucial point in understanding the sources and the dynamics of the

conflicts in the Maluku is the comprehension of the fact that tensions began to rise due to shifts in power at the centre of the state and increased concerns over access to resource as a result of decentralisation at the regional level, as well as a revival of optimism about *demokrasi* (mainly in its understanding as more equal sharing of resource exploitation benefits and more equality between different religious and ethnic groups). The security forces started playing a prominent role in the communal conflicts through religiously biased involvement in attacks, by using proxies (*preman* – ‘thugs’), selling guns and uniforms, but also by logistically supporting warring parties.

This happened at a time when the Indonesian military was under widespread criticism for its role as chief supporter and main political and economic instrument of the New Order regime of former president Suharto. Continuing the conflicts and allowing the conflicts to spill over to other areas was clearly aimed at safeguarding the military’s position in the country and its business interests. The critical focus on the military peaked again when Abdurrachman Wahid became president as he was convinced that the communal conflicts throughout the country were instigated by certain elements of the military and the elites. Wahid genuinely averted the ethnic and religious divisions among local governments and his reform policy wanted to return the army back to its barracks. However, feeding both the media and the conflicts, the military and the opposition were able to use the violent clashes as an effective attack on Wahid showing that he was not able to resolve the sectarian violence in the country.

BACK TO THE NEW ORDER

Recent developments during Megawati’s presidency indicate that the military feels increasingly confident to crack down such separatist movements as the OPM (*Operasi Papua Merdeka* – ‘Free Papua Movement’) and GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* – ‘Free Aceh Movement’). Largely, this concerns a strategy aimed at legitimising the security forces often forceful way of securing income through security deals with resource exploitation companies and its own business ventures in a variety of fields. According to official statements, the military is doing its utmost to safeguard West Papua from the alleged influence of ‘terrorists’ that conspire to break up Indonesia to get access to its outer islands natural resources. To this end, the military is increasingly relying on the methods of counterinsurgency warfare. Counterinsurgency has long been practiced in East Timor and West Papua and even though it is obvious after the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991 and numerous failed operations in West Papua, that the counterinsurgency practice is unsuitable for dealing with the kind of civilian resistance

among Papuans and East Timorese, the army still relies on it and even has strengthened its special forces, Kopassus, who now have more power and more freedom to act against opposition movements. When the elite felt threatened after Suharto's fall in 1998, Kopassus increasingly deployed militia strategy to turn the pro-independence tide throughout Indonesia. In East Timor, because the army was deceived by its own myths about the malleability of the East Timorese, it only very late realised that they would not win the referendum vote. Only in January 2000 it changed its strategy from careful persuasion, humanitarian programs and the failed isolation of resistance fighters whom the army could not identify, to building militias.

While Jakarta considers Malukuans to be able to organise themselves and play political games that would lead them to become a self-governing population that maintains control over natural resources, Papuans are still largely conceived of as being largely stuck in a sort of Stone Age-ignorance or at least less civilised as Javanese. Many policy makers and military leaders, among others, think that after a few decades of Dutch colonial politics stimulating Papuans to become anti-Indonesian they are about to become civilised Indonesian citizens supporting the advancement of the nation. The latter program, the argument runs, is not yet finished and because of that Papuans are still prone to be influenced by individuals who feel discontent and outsiders who want to destroy the unity of Indonesia. Jakarta often says that Papuans do not understand that Indonesia is in fact spending a lot of money to improve the living standards of the people. What is needed is to educate these masses to the point that they become full members of the Indonesian nation. Those opposing these ideas have to be eliminated with force if necessary.

In the Malukus, there was in fact no independence movement of any significance, but the rumours about the conspiracy of people struggling for the established of the RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* - 'South Malukan Republic') spread by retired army generals such as Rustam Kastor, were enough to convince the government and the public that the separatist movement had to be wiped out with the assistance of Laskar Jihad fighters. The Laskar Jihad received support from the military and the RMS-movement was assisted by parts of the police force as well as by Kopassus. This showed that the goal in Ambon was in fact not to eradicate the RMS supporters, but merely to continue the communal wars through stimulating fights between militias.

In Papua, the struggle is for a large part also not against the OPM but has to do with securing access to natural resources and ensuring the economic welfare of those

who depend on the exploitation of the resources. With respect to these resources, two major issues predominate: the Special Autonomy package and its difficulties, and the security forces' involvement in resource extraction.

SPECIAL AUTONOMY AND RESOURCE POLITICS

The Special Autonomy package offered by Jakarta in an attempt to curtail the demands for independence for the province of Papua lead to tensions among Papuans. The new laws are however viewed with some suspicion by most Papuans. First, they see that the laws have been generated largely without widespread dialogue in Papua itself. It was drawn on the basis of a draft, prepared by the Governor of Papua and a team of Papua-based academics that worked for him. But the draft not really socialised among the community. Secondly, there is no provision at all for any dialogue in the future leading toward any sort of referendum or any sort of negotiated resolution of the conflict between the government and the Papuan community. Financially, however generous the provisions appear to be - 80 percent of resource revenues and 70 percent of oil and gas, for instance – there is a very real fear that a lot of that money will stay in the hands of a few. Another serious problem with the Special Autonomy package is that its implementation will be difficult because the province is very poorly served in terms of trained human resources. It is not in a position to maximise the benefits from the new revenues. Overall, the promises and the likely little benefits of special autonomy will frustrate Papuans and motivate more people to attack those who are seen as a menace, i.e., the Indonesians, the immigrants, the transmigrants, the big companies, and the armed forces.

The struggle over land and natural resource rights is a key aspect of the conflict in Papua. It is not only about limited sharing of resource exploitation benefits and the lack of seeing local Papuans as stakeholders in business ventures, but much more threatening is the involvement of the armed forces in the management of natural resources. The security forces have a significant interest in the resource extraction in Papua, through direct involvement in logging, fishing, mining, and protection fees paid by resource companies. Recent incidents and the investigation reports of human rights organisation indicate clearly that in particular in the logging industry, local people get exploited and deceived by companies and the armed forces that owns the ventures or collaborate with the companies. Mining operations such as Freeport are also rather controversial because of their entanglement with elites in Jakarta and the military. In the Bintuni Bay of Papua, the impact of the exploration and the construction plans for

the exploitation of liquid natural gas by British Petroleum and Pertamina, is significant in terms of confusion and potential for conflicts. In the Bintuni Bay, as elsewhere in Papua, the fall of Suharto and weakening of the New Order powers at the regional levels, stimulated many local communities to organise themselves, most often through attempts of revitalising adat structures and establishing customary people's organisations. Due to the expectations of high monetary flows and development projects that British Petroleum might bring, there is currently an excess of authority. This poses not only a problem for local communities who do not know whom to trust and through whom to raise their voices with the company and the government; but also for the government and the company who find it increasingly difficult to effectively deal with the dispersed forms of Papuan leadership. Besides increasing the chances of local conflicts this situation also allows for outsiders and proxies of the military to mobilise local groups and build militias. In places like Sorong and Fak-fak, Laskar Jihad forces and Indonesian nationalist movements appear to be quite effective in increasing tensions and training people for violent attacks against "the enemy".

It seems that the Indonesian military has learned some lessons from East Timor in the sense that it realises that attacking the independence movement would lead to even greater resistance and, at the same time, increase the chance of incidents of human rights violations that would anger the outside world. Papua should not become a second East Timor damaging the reputation of the Indonesian military. The preferred option now seems to be establishing militias, feeding frustrations and existing sentiments to ensure that tensions remain high and conflicts erupt so that the presence of a high number of troops is legitimate. Also, by ensuring that the process of implementation Special Autonomy does not run smoothly the business interests of the elites will not be threatened. Nonetheless, the armed forces continue to be involved directly in such incidents as the killing of the Papuan leader Theys Hiyo Eluay in November 2002 and the recent killing of Freeport personnel attacks on police posts, the burning of university compounds, the instigation of ethnic and religious clashes. The failure of the Indonesia government to investigate and bring to justice perpetrators of violations is perpetuating the situation in which concentrated illegitimate violence continues to be used.

The dialogue that started in 1999 between President Habibie and one hundred representatives from all the districts of Papua then the promising, but eventually very confusing, meetings of Papuans with Wahid, indicate that Jakarta's understanding of the reason for Papuans to opt for an independent state was growing. But since the fall

of Wahid, the old New Order ideologies and presumptions seem to be taking hold again by those who develop current strategies to deal with Papuans. The Megawati government is trying to put the lid back on sectarian, racial, communal, and separatist tensions through a combination of military force and inducements to regional elites. But, in fact, the above positive tendencies supported by a growing number of other critical politicians and academics have largely failed to influence the mainstream thinking of the generals and of the many other local and Jakarta elites whose thinking is blinkered by vested economic and political interests. Old thinking about highly centralistic states has made them oblivious to the good that flows from a pluralist and inclusivist approach to nation-building.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

There is a critical need for independent human rights monitors to investigate further the full range of human rights violations in Papua since 1963. Such investigations ought to be conducted with a view toward criminal and civil prosecution of those responsible and consideration of various concrete options for compensation for victims. If this is done in a serious manner that Papuans will feel that justice is being done and that their dignity as human beings is recognised.

Further study and action are required to determine how best the indigenous peoples of Papua can assert their land claims, given that their traditional property rights have been violated but apparently never extinguished. Additional inquiry could usefully explore how traditional land rights were not extinguished by the Dutch, through the Act of Free Choice, or by Indonesia, and also which fora might be available to the Papuans to assert their unextinguished traditional title.

All companies should end their financial support for the Indonesian military and police personnel stationed in its working areas. The companies should develop clear rules governing the use of and/or engagement with state security forces that include an effective prohibition against hiring security personnel who have been responsible for human rights violations. Companies should ensure that all company security arrangements are designed and implemented to protect human rights and to be consistent with international standards for law enforcement. Any security personnel employed or under contract should receive adequate training, including training in international human rights and law enforcement standards. There should also be a clearly established procedure to ensure that all complaints about security procedures or personnel are promptly and independently investigated.

All commercial ventures should limit their operations in ways that would effectively protect the human rights of local communities and the cultural and environmental surroundings of the area. Company decision-making should be bound by a transparent and honest assessment of the impact of operations. These assessments should always involve the participation of local community representatives, appropriate NGOs, and academic experts, and should adhere to "best practice" processes outlined in international human rights instruments.

Decisions about operations should respect the results of genuine consultation processes with the local communities. Such consultation should follow a process satisfactory to and designed in cooperation with representatives of other affected local communities. Companies should demonstrate a genuine "political will" to improve its consultation process with local communities by hiring well-qualified and trained staff in its community affairs department and giving that department a real say in the company's overall operations in the area.

The Indonesian military presence in Papua has been a significant factor in the serious human rights violations that have taken place in the area. In order to prevent future atrocities, the Government of Indonesia should undertake critical reforms of the military including (1) instituting meaningful civilian control over the armed forces; (2) effectively changing the mandate to defending the country's borders rather than providing internal security; (3) making the military budget transparent; and (4) ending impunity for those responsible for past human rights violations.

Government programs and policies should be focused on sustainable development and respect for the rights of local groups and other indigenous peoples who are or could be affected by mining in Papua. Respected local community leaders-including women, farmers, fisher folk, students and other key sectors of society-should play a central role in dialogue about appropriate programs and policies.
