

Timor Leste & Aceh: Indonesia's Step-children
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Change comes to both

Elections have brought hope and challenges in in equal measure in what used to be Indonesia's two war-torn regions.

In Timor Leste, the Fretilin revolutionary movement and the country's first president Xanana Gusmão – two symbols of the nation's great sacrifice and struggle against occupation – remain important but no longer serve as a single political asset.

In Aceh, too, where only six years ago Jakarta and rebels agreed to end the three decades of conflict, references to sacrifice and struggle provide legitimacy. But the 2005 Helsinki peace agreement, regarded as a dignified stand reflecting *keAcehan* – “Acehness”-- values, has yet to be translated into policies of justice and prosperity.

Change is likely in both areas as political elites are deeply divided, with Timor Leste anxiously looking forward to 7 July parliamentary elections and, in Aceh, the Aceh Party, the former rebels' political party, already having prevailed in the local parliament and is now ruling the province.

In Timor Leste, the division was profound as the country's two biggest parties competed fiercely for the presidency and Xanana Gusmão's CNRT-supported candidate, Gen. Taur Matan Ruak, won over Fretilin's Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres. In Aceh the split went even further as the former rebel leaders of the 1970s Zaini-Muzakir faction won the chief elections, but are challenged by a new party of the younger Irwandi faction.

A few common issues have thus emerged. “Veteranship” ('what did you do during the war?') has become a crucial asset for those who compete for power. Hence, ideals are pragmatically adjusted and demands arise to compensate for past suffering. In addition, the past guerrilla pattern of rule and command intrudes into politics. Above all, greater welfare ('what have we achieved?') is now a hot issue.

New veteran elites, called the *clandinista* in Timor Leste and the *kombatan* (combatant) commanders in Aceh, now dominate the political theatre. Given the longtime resistance in Timor Leste, myriad of groupings may justifiably also claim veteranship. 'Fretilin-the-*moviemento*' or popular movement, the standard bearer of the nation's struggle for freedom, should have long ago become a museum belonging to the nation rather fighting as a political party, one observer said.

Comparatively, Acehnese are increasingly urging that the *Wali Nanggroe*, the state guardian institution – a supreme position held by now-deceased rebel leader Tgku. Hasan di Tiro - should be above politics rather than used as an exclusive asset and legitimacy for the ruling Aceh Party But the roots are in the 1970s. Fretilin, inspired by Mozambique's Frelimo, was a revolutionary movement capable of mobilizing masses to joint struggle, whereas Aceh's rebellion, precisely because of the separatism and nationhood issues it raised, tended to be selective in its recruitment.

Hence, unlike Aceh's *kombatans*, Timor Leste's *clandinistas* were a huge and diffuse category numbering tens of thousands that included 1970s-Fretilin cadres, exiled leaders, Falintil guerrillas, *hansip* (civilian defense infiltrated into the Indonesian army), Dili urban resistance, members of the Java-Bali-based student organizations and the *estafeta's* (info disbursers); there used to be also hundreds of operational assistants, each attached to Indonesian officers while simultaneously functioning as Falintil's spies. Most of them have been recruited by political parties, absorbed into the new bureaucracy or into business.

By contrast, Aceh's rebellion might have been born out of rising business aspirations oppressed by the Suharto regime. Here things seem more clear-cut. The structure and loyalty of the former rebel army remains largely intact, the number of commanders limited, each with supporters at village level - albeit now disarmed, named KPA and put under the Aceh Party leadership.

Whether this will help to ensure rule of law and stability, however, is doubtful. As in Timor Leste, Aceh's political parties need new opening and should call for the society to re-unite. If democracy is to mature, in both cases the big parties will have to strengthen discipline and refrain from intimidation and violence.

Timor Leste, too, needs reconciliation. A poor country now enjoying an economic boom, it's bound to develop new demands and infighting among the *clandinistas* amid the urgent need for greater welfare, health, education and electricity for poor villagers.

The oil bonanza has helped stability by creating jobs, but critics, including President Jose Ramos-Horta, pointed out that Xanana Gusmao, acting like a war commander, ineffectively managed the administration. Too little has been spent to reduce pervasive poverty as corruption has grown. Gen. Taur, a man with a strong will, won the presidency largely thanks to Xanana's personal campaign. It's unclear how the general will cooperate with his former superior or eventually with his rival, Fretilin's Lu Olo. But the schism that separated Xanana from Fretilin since the mid-1980s, helped Xanana's star to rise just as Fretilin went seemingly stagnant.

Yet, as I travelled in the countryside, it's clear that both remain popular icons. Fretilin is still in people's hearts. As a grassroots movement, it bore people's pain and fought hard to earn fame and subsequently was "spoiled by history," as its founder the late Francisco Xavier do Amaral once said. Now, ironically, Fretilin finds itself in an awkward status quo as Xanana and CNRT maintain their strength. Fretilin's pain means Xanana's gain.

None of them, however, is expected to achieve more than 45 percent in July votes. Either Xanana's CNRT or Fretilin will have to work with the third biggest political party, the Democratic Party, led by a post-1970s, Indonesia-educated generation, which may hold the key to a new era. Gen. Taur will have the difficult job to seek new balance.

The experienced outgoing president Ramos-Horta, now in rivalry with Xanana, seems to offer help for Fretilin and the Democrats. Distancing himself from party politics, he told me, he is willing to join a new cabinet after July votes "depending on who and what kind of administration" in order to help advance the country.

Finally, war veterans may prevail, but not the hundreds of thousands of war victims. Justice

with prosecutorial authority has been jointly buried by Indonesia and Timor Leste, leaving the United Nations out in the cold and those guilty of crimes against humanity enjoying impunity. It's left to the international community and the civil societies to press for prosecution and support for compensation and reparation for the victims.

In Aceh, similar issues remain unresolved as the Helsinki pact, which indicates the need for a truth commission to deal with past atrocities, has not been fully implemented.

Indonesia's president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will be a special guest at the 10th anniversary of Timor Leste's redeclaration of independence on May 20. But in all likelihood it will be his rival former general Prabowo Subianto, rather than Susilo's party's presidential candidate, who could take fruitful advantage of new political realities in Timor Leste and Aceh.

In a reconciliation gesture, Prabowo has recently met with his former enemy, Gen. Lere Anan Timor, the new commander of Timor Leste military and successor of now president-elect Gen. Taur. Prabowo has also met with Muzakir Manaf, former rebel commander, now the new vice-governor of Aceh. For an Indonesian general focusing on the 2014 presidential elections, but tainted with an allegedly bad past human rights record, those rapprochements are symbolically important.

Prabowo's approach to Timor Leste may be relevant for future diplomacy, but more significant for domestic politics, it will be Aceh's votes for him in 2014 as the *quid pro quo* for his financial support, reportedly about Rp25 trillion, for the recent election of the new governor and vice-governor of Aceh.

In both Timor Leste and Aceh - basically because of Indonesia's legacy - past pain has indeed delivered gains, but only for some.

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