



## **PacNet 2B**

### **After the Tsunami Disaster: Human Security is Key**

by Eric Teo Chu Cheow

The killer tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004 was of frightening proportions: Some 160,000 people are already counted among the victims in Indonesia's Aceh Province, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Malaysia, and Maldives, in Asia alone. Although this disaster is dwarfed by the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, in which some 600,000 people perished, this tsunami is perhaps the first truly "global" catastrophe.

Half of Thailand's dead are believed to be foreigners, holidaying on its sunny beaches; besides Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were among the victims. There were considerable numbers of foreigners on the Sri Lankan coast, as well as in Maldives. Thanks to globalization, this catastrophe was a "global event," as also demonstrated by the moments of silence observed from Europe to Canada as well as the outpouring of grief and relief operations from the West, the UN, and other multinational institutions.

This disaster brings to mind five assessments of the tsunami's aftermath. Hopefully, new opportunities will emerge from this crisis, as the Chinese word *weiqi* aptly signifies.

First, the tsunami should focus us on "nontraditional" or "soft" security, as opposed to "hard" security – conflict and war, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, chemical and biological warfare – to which we are more accustomed. "Soft" security includes transborder issues that affect the environment, the spread of disease, natural calamities, and transborder social problems (like trafficking of women, children, small arms, and ammunition/bomb-making facilities) that may affect security.

The Dec. 26 tsunami-earthquake devastated a whole region; it was equal in its destructive power to an atomic bomb. In addition to the lives lost and property and wealth destroyed, security on the Indian Ocean rim was threatened, as occurs during war and conflict. A massive reconstruction effort has to be undertaken. The first fundamental lesson in assessing the tsunami aftermath is the realization that "soft" security concerns are just as important as "hard" security issues.

Second, the tsunami disaster has helped shift attention in the U.S. (though temporarily) from terrorism and toward development. Terrorism is not only a Western preoccupation. Jakarta has been battling separatists in Aceh who are accused of being terrorists; Bangkok has been at odds with Muslim terrorists in its southern provinces. Sri Lanka is battling "Tamil Tigers" along its north and east coasts and some tsunami-affected areas are under their control.

But an "obsession" with terrorism *a l'americaine* is not in the core interests of developing nations, especially when

terrorism could spring from under-development and the lack of social justice in developing countries and regions. Developed and developing nations have different priorities and agendas. Human security has a broader meaning in the developing world than the antiterror effort of Washington; the tsunami disaster brings a focus on this aspect of development, which the U.S. and the West have accepted and adopted in the tsunami's aftermath.

Third, the casualties and the humanitarian relief effort prove that natural catastrophes know no religious distinctions, unlike terrorism; the dead include Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christian faiths. The outpouring of medical and relief assistance come not only from the West, but from Japan, China, South Korea, and other ASEAN countries. Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" vanishes: death and aid know no creed or color in such global tragedies. We perish and come together as brothers and equals in the face of such a disaster! Indeed, U.S. military assistance and Western relief operations are entering areas in Aceh that have been closed to foreign scrutiny to offer timely assistance to the distressed.

Fourth, the massive aid distribution, debt moratorium, and reconstruction underscore the necessity of social redistribution in Asia. Increasing GDP alone is not sufficient to guarantee social stability and peace in this region; the quality (and not just the quantity) of growth is essential to bind societies and maintain social stability and cohesion. The massive reconstruction efforts must not miss this crucial point. Indonesia's Aceh, Sri Lanka's eastern areas, Thailand's "deep South," and India's Tamil Nadu state all urgently need developmental aid to "balance" the richer regions and provinces. Asia should use this disaster to ensure greater social and wealth redistribution within its economies, countries and regions to "guarantee" social stability.

Lastly, the relief operation has brought about a surge of goodwill and cooperation within Asia. From Singapore's humanitarian operations and China's generous offers of assistance to the funds pledged by Japan and Australia for reconstruction, Asian cooperation has risen a notch since Dec. 26. This may augur well, especially in the lead-up to the launch of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Kuala Lumpur in November. China, which is slated to host the second summit in 2006, could encourage greater regional cooperation and integration to ensure a successful EAS.

Assessing the tsunami disaster and the relief cum-reconstruction efforts could turn this disaster into an opportunity for Asia. Human security has truly emerged as key to Asia's future stability and integration.

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## Hope for Peace in Aceh? by Tamara Renee Shie

In the immediate aftermath of the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean earthquake, politicians and commentators expressed hope that the disaster could bring nearly 30 years of fighting in Aceh to an end. The devastation and need for reconstruction provided a new opportunity for reconciliation between the Indonesian government and separatists. Building on a temporary ceasefire, Jakarta has announced renewed peace talks with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) leadership-in-exile for later this month. An opportunity for peace exists, but it is fraught with challenges.

Since 1976, GAM has fought government forces to establish an independent state. The strength of the separatist movement underscores years of broken promises of autonomy and a central government unapologetic for exploitation of Aceh's natural resources and human rights abuses at the hands of the military. More than 12,000 have died in the conflict, mostly civilians, with casualties increasing steadily since 1999.

In Dec. 2002, the two sides signed a peace accord. That agreement disintegrated in May 2003 when the government declared martial law and launched a major offensive to eradicate GAM.

In the months prior to the earthquake, the government expressed interest in pursuing a new policy toward Aceh. But Indonesia's new president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, extended the state of civil emergency for six months in November and suggested that continued military operations were necessary for security. The Indonesian military (TNI) announced it had killed another 18 members of GAM just one day before the earthquake hit.

Both the government and GAM announced temporary ceasefires three days after the earthquake. Yudhoyono opened Aceh to foreign military, aid workers, and media. More than 60 humanitarian groups from around the world and a contingent of U.S. troops have joined in relief operations.

### Consequences of conflict

The disaster has given the Indonesian government a chance to build goodwill in Aceh, but Jakarta has been criticized for its slow response. Three days passed before international aid workers and journalists were allowed into the province, losing crucial time in search and rescue operations.

Protracted conflict in Aceh has undermined relief efforts. Restrictions on foreign organizations since May 2003 slowed initial responses and hindered efforts to conduct damage assessments and communicate with the outside world. Chronic underdevelopment due to a combination of insecurity and corruption compromised the transportation infrastructure, hampering recovery and rescue efforts.

Even the grim task of tallying the dead was complicated by years of violence that compromised baseline population data. Conducted in the midst of conflict, the 2000 census collected data in only three of Aceh's 13 residencies; the 1990 census occurred during a particularly intense period of fighting. As a result, the death toll can never be fully known.

## Renewed tensions

The uneasy truce began to crumble within a week. Reports surfaced charging TNI with exploiting the situation to eliminate suspected GAM guerillas. Pro-Jakarta Islamic militant groups – some with links to terrorism and atrocities committed in East Timor – have entered Aceh with the blessing of the military, ostensibly to assist with relief efforts.

Gunfire was heard near the UN relief compound in Banda Aceh on Jan. 9. Two days later, another incident was reported 10 miles west of the capital. The government was quick to blame the rebels; GAM spokesmen denied involvement.

Jakarta then announced restrictions on the movement of foreign workers outside of Banda Aceh and Meulaboh, citing its inability to guarantee their safety. The government also set a March 26 deadline for all foreign military personnel to withdraw from Aceh, although this was later rescinded. Two additional battalions of Indonesian troops have been dispatched to Aceh.

### Peace or No?

The announcement of renewed peace negotiations is welcome, but reconstruction is likely to be caught up in a struggle for legitimacy between GAM and the central government. GAM will look to increase international awareness of its cause, while Jakarta seeks to use international aid to strengthen its political position in Aceh and to improve foreign relations, especially with the U.S. Jakarta would like to resume full military ties, which Washington severed in 1999 due to human rights violations in East Timor.

Lasting peace in Aceh faces many obstacles. A peace settlement must be coupled with proposals to address the root causes of the conflict. How far Jakarta and GAM are willing to compromise is questionable. Government reconstruction efforts are crucial, yet their implementation and the role of TNI will be under intense scrutiny. A bungled response or excessive corruption could increase public support for GAM.

President Yudhoyono will have difficulty juggling competing demands of government and military hardliners as well as GAM leadership and ordinary Acehnese. Without strong leadership, the opportunity to use relief and recovery operations to promote reconciliation will be lost.

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