

# TSUNAMI AND THE TRUE FACE OF GLOBALIZATION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

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## INTRODUCTION

Tsunami came as a blow to Indonesia. It has paralyzed the country within seconds, while the government and its people had no idea how to best deal with its consequences. Throughout three consecutive days, the province of Aceh was totally isolated from the outside world, and was not reachable by sea, air, and land. Its prolongation have taught the Indonesians two things. One, the international community was able to provide immediate humanitarian assistances. Two, Indonesia was not able to work at the same par with its foreign counterparts in the disaster recovery management.

This paper will argue that despite its humanitarian motivations, the international efforts were motivated by other reasons, ranging from strategic to economic beliefs. The idea can be traced back to their intrinsic national interests, their domestic agendas and their links to the global issues. To be specific, their possession of wealth, diplomacy, military and technology have affected their level of responses to the crisis in terms of aid, grant and man power. This is clear if we examine the commitments made by countries like the USA, Australia, Japan, and the European Union.

On the other hand, Indonesia as the victim has to cope with its limited resources, and to a certain extent has to compromise its limitations with the speed, efficiency and

effectiveness of the international aid programs. Consequently, it has raised new questions such as the challenge to the principles of sovereignty, and the Indonesian difficulties in reconstructing the areas once the international assistance come to an end.

This article will cover four sections. One, Indonesian response to the crisis and its strategy to work in tandem with the international community. Two, the motivation and support provided by the international community. Three, the domestic criticisms. Finally, the future development scenarios made by Indonesia, as a response to the newly learned tragedy.

#### THE INDONESIAN REQUESTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The impact of Tsunami came as a shock to the Indonesian government and its people. Shock, as the country had not experienced such tragedy in its history, and had to acknowledge that it had no means to professionally cope in great efficiency and effectivity, and deal with such a great devastation. More over, the fact that it did happen in Aceh had produced another shock, as Aceh was the home front of the internationally known 'Free Aceh Movement'. As the province had a long dissatisfaction with the central government who had gained revenues from the oil and gas fields in Aceh, and did not develop Aceh to become a modern province, the Tsunami effect could theoretically distance Aceh more from the central government.

The above development had encouraged the Indonesian President (Bambang Yudhoyono), following a cabinet meeting on 30 December 2004 to permit foreign military personnels to conduct humanitarian missions in Aceh, based on the already existed bond of global humanitarian solidarity. The President stated clearly to the Indonesian public, that the idea to invite them was based on an acknowledgment of their ability to work efficiently and effectively under the Indonesian government's agenda of humanitarian and social missions. Supporting the ideas, President Yudhoyono stated that the Indonesian military had also in the past involved itself into humanitarian and conflict prevention missions in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

The moment of the Tsunami was not opportune for the new Indonesian President. It happened at the end of his 100 days of leadership, as the cabinet had yet to produce a clear domestic agendas to correspond with the long economic recession. Among others, the bureaucracy had to cope with local coordinations between the provincial and the central government, which had been hampered by the loss of civilians and member of the local bureaucracies. The loss of members of the Armed Forces and the Police Forces in Aceh had also caused further difficulties, as the Indonesian government had no experience in dealing with massive disaster relief programs. Earlier on, the country experienced only local disasters in terms of earth quake and flood, which

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<sup>1</sup> Media Indonesia, 30 December 2004. *Presiden Izinkan Pasukan Asing Masuki Aceh*. [Http://www.mediaindo.co.id/berita.asp?id=54741](http://www.mediaindo.co.id/berita.asp?id=54741). Data taken on 4 May 2005.

had been handled within the provincial spectrum. As the Tsunami had reached the global attention, it had to be taken care differently, and in this case, the request for foreign help was acceptable.

#### FOREIGN AID TO INDONESIA: WITH OR WITHOUT SECURITY REASONS?

In the following section I will provide the facts of the aid provided by the civilian and military personnels of the United States of America, Australia, Japan, and the European Union to Aceh and North Sumatra Provinces from December 26, 2004 to March 2005. It is true that they helped to evacuate the victims, and distributed food and aid throughout the ruined provinces. What concerned the Indonesian public was the fact, that they resposed to the Indonesian request in such a way, that they were performing a coordinated military exercise throughout the Island of Sumatra.

To begin, the United States of America provided 14 aircrafts, specified into 3 Hercules C-130 Sky Hawk stationed in Medan, 4 Hercules C-130 stationed in Jakarta, and 7 Helicopters stationed in Banda Aceh. French at the same time sent 5 Helicopters, ie. 1 C-160 and 1 Puma series based in Medan. While Japan provided 1 Hercules C-130/35-1072 in Banda Aceh, New Zealand provided 1 Kiwi 790 in Jakarta, Germany 2 Helicopter Sea King, and Australia 4 Helicopter 205 Iroquios series. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tni.mil.id/news.php?q=dtl&id=22122004111179>. Data taken on 3 Mei 2005.

Acknowledging such importance, the Indonesian government coordinated series of humanitarian relief efforts into the following task forces. The first task force coordinated the US Helicopters to deliver food and medical personnel to the areas of Meulaboh, Calang, Teunom dan Lamno; the Australian Helicopters delivered food to Lhoong dan Panga; the French Helicopters delivered drinking water to Teunom; the Malaysian Helicopters delivered 7 reconstruction team personnel and 10 medical doctors to Meulaboh; while the Helicopters of the British transferred the victims to Meulaboh. The second task forces organized the US Helicopters to distribute food to the areas of Samatiga, Lhoong, Teunom and Lamno; supported with the Australian Helicopters distributing food stuffs to Lhook Kruet; the French Helicopters distributed mineral waters to Calang; and the Malaysian Helicopters transferred social workers and refugees to Meulaboh. The third task force authorized the US Helicopters to deliver food stuff to Meulaboh, Calang, Suak Beka, Teunom, and Lhok Kruet, as well as air lifted 9 UN personnel to Lhoong; French Helicopters air lifted hospital facilities from Medan and Banda Aceh to Meulaboh; and the Malaysian Helicopters airlifted medical equipments to Lamno. The fourth task force authorized the US Helicopters to air lift food stuff to Lhook Kruet, Pante Kuyun, Krueng Sabeh, and Lhook Guci, as well as provided petroleums to Lamno, Teunom dan Calang. French and British Helicopters airlifted medical equipments to Meulaboh and Lamno.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Aid provided by the government of Japan was stipulated into three components, ie food stuffs, non-food stuffs, and soft loan. Non-food stuffs components cover the supply of generators, mattress, water purifiers, water tank, blankets, and tents, distributed to the areas of Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, Lhok Nga, Leung Bata, and Meulaboh. Japan's medical teams had begun their work from 5 January 2005, and handled 200 patients on a daily basis. Japan's soft loan commitment was later on stipulated into rehabilitation and reconstruction programs, combined with an early warning system to monitor Tsunami in the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup>

#### DOMESTIC RESPONSES

The immediate international aid had helped the Indonesian government to raise its credibility inside its own public for quite some time. However, within a month the government had begun to receive questions from the country's Parliament on the length and possible security implications of such programmes. There were criticisms that the Indonesian military authority had no knowledge on the hidden military operations exercised by the foreign military.

In this regard, the massive sea, air and land operations jointly operated by countries like the USA and Australia had in fact, resembled to their regular bilateral military exercises in the tropical area, something of a luxurious thing since the fall of Vietnam to the Communist

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<sup>4</sup> Kompas, 12 Januari 2005. *Bantuan Jepang untuk Korban Tsunami Gratis.*

regime. Since then, public became more aware on the possible intelligence operations operated using helicopters throughout the remote and hilly areas of Aceh. Earlier on, the Indonesian authority had no knowledge on the activities of William Nessen, an American reporter, who had stayed in the tropical forests of Aceh for 4 months, and living comfortably under the protection of the Free Aceh Movement. Part of the Indonesian elites also questioned the government's neglect on the principles of the Indonesian sovereignty and integrity.

The Indonesian authority at first produced conflicting opinion, as such protestations had proved the dilemma faced by the Indonesian government. While at one stage it badly needed international assistances to deal with the massive devastations in Aceh, it had at the same time no ability to control the foreign operations inside Sumatra, as the Free Aceh Movement had made its own presence felt more in the ruined province. Considering the arm embargoes from the United States of America and its NATO allies, the Indonesian capability to operate humanitarian missions in Aceh was behind its normal standard. The Indonesian government later on issued a statement on the first week of January, that March 26 is the dead line for foreign military personnels to leave Aceh. Such dead-line was received positively by the foreign authorities, even though they stated their readiness to continue their operation beyond the dead line.

The Australian Prime Minister (John Howard) stated on 2 February 2005, that it had no problem with the expected date, as it had no other motive apart from humanitarian

purposes. The Australian government stated further its readiness to further provide logistic and medical supports, as long as it considered necessary by the Indonesian authority.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, the US Deputy Foreign Minister (Paul Wolfowitz) supported the Indonesian time frame, as it could synergize the international cooperation to speed up the reconstruction process, leading to an earlier departure of the foreign troops from Aceh. At the same time, the US government urged the Indonesian authority to maximize its role, so that it would not see further difficulties once the foreign troops were leaving their mission.<sup>6</sup>

Supporting the position taken by the US administration, the then US Ambassador to Indonesia (Lynn Pascoe) and the French Ambassador to Indonesia (Renaud Vignal) stated on January 13, 2005 that their troops will remain in Aceh and North Sumatro, as long as it is considered necessary by the Indonesian government, and would immediately leave the country on the scheduled dead line. They also acknowledged the fact, that their role was based on the request of the Indonesian government, to help the victims of the earth quake and Tsunami.<sup>7</sup>

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Data taken on 4 Mei 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Kompas, 3 Februari 2005. *Batas Waktu buat Militer Asing juga Berlaku bagi Pemerintah Indonesia*. [Http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0502/03/utama/1539105.htm](http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0502/03/utama/1539105.htm). Data taken on 3 Mei 2005.

<sup>6</sup> [Http://www.dephan.go.id/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=6401](http://www.dephan.go.id/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=6401). Title: Pahami Pembatasan Militer Asing di Aceh. Data taken on 4 May 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Kompas, 14 January 2005. *AS dan Perancis Pahami Keputusan Indonesia*.

<http://www.kompas.com/kompas%2Dcetak/0501/14/utama/1499672.htm>. Data taken on 4 May 2005.



As the dead line was getting closer, the Indonesian government had then received conflicting comments from inside the country. Critical comments came from the Head of Indonesian Intelligence Agency (Syamsir Siregar), who stated clearly that foreign militaries came to Indonesia with their hidden agenda. Among others, producing a detailed naval and air map of the Sumatra Island and the Strait of Malaka, which could enabled them to conduct future military operations. This comment was made during the Special Working Session of the Indonesian Parliament on 20 January, 2005. The message came as a blow to the credibility of the government, as Syamsir Siregar proved that the Americans had been idealizing to control the Strait of Malaka, and such a humanitarian mission had enabled them to do so. Phrased into Indonesian word, Syamsir Siregar's opinion was very clear to me: "Alangkah bodohnya Amerika Serikat itu kalau tidak punya kepentingan lain. Mereka sejak dulu menginginkan Selat Malaka dikontrol orang-orang mereka. Sekarang ada kesempatan, jadi pasti digunakan, sekaligus untuk mengetahui Selat Malaka secara utuh".<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the same comment was also expressed by a prominent member of the Indonesian Parliament, Permadi from the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P). Accordingly, Permadi criticized the truth of the American military establishment, as they pictured an antagonistic role: acting as a Santa Claus in Aceh, but bombing the hospitals throughout its war to topple Saddam Hussein. In support to

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<sup>8</sup> Kompas, 22 January 2005. Pasukan Asing Punya Agenda Tersembunyi. [Http://www.kompas.com/kompas%2Dcetak/0501/22/geliat/1512185.htm](http://www.kompas.com/kompas%2Dcetak/0501/22/geliat/1512185.htm). Data taken on 4 May 2005.

this, the prominent Parliamentarian form Partai Keadilan Sosial (PKS), Soeripto stated that Indonesia should be thankful to the American mission in Aceh, but it should also remain alert, as the Americans had idealized its military role of securing its vessels in the Malaka Strait, in tandem with its operations in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the above mentioned criticisms, the Deputy Commander of the Indonesian Relief Efforts in Aceh, Brigadier General Heryadi highlighted the positive aspect of the foreign military missions in Aceh, as they had been working under a close cooperation with the Indonesian Armed Forces. This comment was in line with the previously held position of the Indonesian Armed Forces Commander, General Endriartono Sutarto, who had calmed the Indonesians against their suspicions on the military might and personnel of the foreign military missions in Aceh. Supporting the arguments, both senior officers restated their past statements made on 11 January 2005, that foreign missions always work in tandem with the Indonesian Military, who accompanied them in their whole missions. Again, they stated clearly the inability of the Indonesian government to handle the circumstances already happening in Aceh, as the end of foreign missions in Aceh could bring more casualties to the people. General Sutarto highlighted a fact, that foreign missions were unarmed in their operations, and relied heavily on the protection of the Indonesian forces.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Tempo Interaktif, 11 January 2005. *Panglima TNI Minta Masyarakat tidak Curigai Militer Asing di Aceh*. <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/nasional/2005/01/11/brk,20050111-26,id.html>. Data taken on 3 May 2005.

A balanced opinion among others, came from Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, representing the position taken by the Indonesian Science Institute. In his opinion, the Americans would have no need to intervene in the Indonesian domestic affairs, as its satellite technology has been spying on every detail of the continents of the world. The US' ground facilities stationed in Australia under the Joint Military Communication Facilities, ie in Nurrungar, West Coast Naval Base, atau di Pine Gap, are capable of monitoring any military movements throughout the whole Asian region.<sup>11</sup>

For Ikrar, the operation in Aceh had in fact provided them with a new experience in conducting disaster relief programs, and this is a valuable experience not only for countries like the USA and Australia, but also for a country like Singapore. Against the criticisms on the challenge of Indonesian sovereignty, Ikrar highlighted the fact that as Aceh was in an emergency status, with the limited capacities of Indonesia to conduct an efficient and effective missions, a request for foreign military operations was acceptable. In this regard, Ikrar was confident that foreign military operations in Aceh has been conducted under a tight Indonesian supervision. Among others, they had to comply to the regime of restricted fly zone.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ikrar Nusa Bhakti. 'Xenofobia'. <http://www.lipi.go.id/www/www.cgi?baca&1105541521>. Data taken on 3 May 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### LESSONS FOR THE INDONESIANS

In my opinion, the Tsunami tragedy had taught the Indonesians valuable lessons. Firstly, it should have had in mind a clear design on how best to deal with the disaster situations, provided with a clear dialog with the people of the country. Two, foreign involvement in the process should have been based on a detailed agendas, providing guidelines to conduct military or non military operations. Thirdly, imperfections in the domestic management should have taught the Indonesian authority to improve its disaster relief missions throughout Indonesia. (The writer lectures at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Padjadjaran in Bandung).