

The Restive Margins: Comparing the Causes and Resolution of Indonesia's Regional Rebellions of Aceh and East Timor

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Abstract

This article compares and contrasts the handling of separatist movements and regional rebellions in Indonesia. As a plural society, the Indonesian state has encountered challenges from its margins almost since its birth. However, the challenges do not necessarily always come in the form of secessionism. Some regionally based rebellions also sought to change the state foundation or the way to run the state. This article examines two cases of regional rebellions throughout the nation's history, i.e., Aceh and East Timor. It contends that Indonesia's margins revolted from the combination of deprivation factors, such as ideological, economic, political, and identity, which got sidelined as Indonesia spurred on the nation-building effort. The handling of the rebellions has also been varied, with military suppression as the default approach before *Reformasi*. *Reformasi* has widened the range of choices of the state in dealing with the separatist challenges.

Keywords: *Conflict Resolutions; Regional Rebellions; Secessionist Rebellions*



A. INTRODUCTION

1. INDONESIA'S PLURAL SOCIETY, UNITARY STATE, AND FEDERALISM

Indonesia is a plural society in its truest sense. More than 300 ethnic groups, speaking 365 local languages and dialects, live in a territory of more than 17,000 islands that make up the largest archipelago in the world. Indonesia, according to Anderson (1991, pp. 120-121), is thus an "imagined community" made up of hundreds of ethnic groups that do not share common socio-cultural traits. The nation-building trajectory in Indonesia, like in many former colonized countries, is markedly different from that experienced by European countries, where the states are nations that share common socio-cultural traits distinct from one another. As probably expected, maintaining such a diverse archipelago under a single political entity has been considered a daunting task for the state. Furthermore, choosing a unitary state (negara kesatuan) also seemed to have complicated the matter for a country with an immense plurality in terms of culture, languages, customs, beliefs, and an adverse geographical condition with a sprawling archipelago.

Since the beginning, Indonesia has chosen a unitary form of government. That was partly due to the powerful appeal of nationalism as an ideology, which was a reaction toward the colonial practices of 'divide et impera' by the Dutch. For example, the Treaty of Giyanti in 1755 effectively split the Court of Mataram into the Sunanate

of Surakarta under Pakubuwono I and the Sultanate of Yogyakarta under Hamengkubuwono I. Besides that, Sukarno, the founding father of Indonesia, regarded the unitary state as the ultimate phase in the nation-building process after the ethnic, insularist, and federalist phases. He perceived that the ethnic groups and islands still had their interests in mind and were unwilling to make further sacrifices for the sake of the whole nation in those three phases. Sukarno believed that the unitary state is the ultimate phase because loyalties based on ethnic groups and islands have subsided and transferred to only one state (Rahardjo & Herdianto, 2001, pp. 70-71).

Since the unilateral proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, the government during the Sukarno era continuously faced secessionist claims of regional rebellions to change the structure and foundation of the unitary state. For example, the Darul Islam/ Tentara Islam Indonesia (Darul Islam/ Indonesia Moslem Army, abbreviated DI/TII), Republik Maluku Selatan (South Maluku Republic, abbreviated RMS), Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia/ Perjuangan Rakyat Semesta (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia/ Total People Struggle, abbreviated PRRI/Permesta), and Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party, abbreviated PKI). In general, the government dealt with the secessionists at that time by using military means to suppress the leader and sympathizer of the rebellion. The most violent suppression was the PKI because not only was PKI disbanded, but also hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of its members and sympathizers were assassinated and incarcerated. This crushing of rebellion eventually brought about a regime change in Indonesia, with the rise of General Suharto and his New Order regime to power.

The government during the Suharto era or New Order regime also faced regional rebellions by the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement, abbreviated GAM) and the East Timor resistance movement led by Frentes Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, abbreviated Fretilin). Despite the invariably military solution launched by the government, both rebellions persisted after the New Order regime ended through Reformasi in 1998. The Reformasi era opened the door to more creative and imaginative peace solutions to secessionist challenges that continuously besieged the country. In addition to the peace initiatives taken by the government to resolve the secessionist, two other significant developments have transpired since Reformasi. One is the decentralization initiative launched in the early years of Reformasi. Decentralization devolved wide-ranging authority from the central government to the district/municipality. The other is the transfer of responsibility for national security from the military to the political authority.

This article will attempt to compare and contrast Indonesia's approaches in dealing with the different secessionist rebellions throughout the nation's history, including the rebellions that did not have secessionist aspirations but on the outlying regions. It will seek to analyse factors that have led to different policies and tactics employed to deal with the secessionist rebellion using two case studies, i.e., Aceh and

East Timor. The two cases reflect contrasting results, which are failed resolution as in the case of East Timor and peaceful resolution as in the case of Aceh. It will also analyse the efficacy and drawbacks of the unitary state structure by examining the effects of decentralization and quasi-federalist structure, which has been profound in Aceh since Reformasi. Finally, it will also study the role of the Indonesian military in managing secessionism and the effect brought by the change in that role.

2. COMPARING REGIONAL REBELLIONS TO SECESSIONISM IN ACEH AND EAST TIMOR

Aceh: Long, Bitter Conflict and Eventual Success Story in the Handling of Secessionism

Historically, Aceh was the only territory in present-day Indonesia with an active foreign policy. Aceh had established an alliance with the Ottoman Empire in the 1600s to guarantee its independence. When the Dutch started the Aceh War in 1873, Aceh requested assistance from Italy, the Ottoman, the United Kingdom, and the United States but probably only received some form of aid from the United Kingdom to modernize its army. Eventually, Aceh became the last territory conquered by the Dutch after the long Aceh War ended in 1904 (Reid, 2006). After the independence of Indonesia, the government merged Aceh with North Sumatra as one province. Rebellions erupted in Aceh against the merger policy because Acehnese saw the policy as the government's betrayal of the promise for their autonomy, to which the government responded by restoring Aceh as a province with special status or Daerah Istimewa (Special Region). However, it was not clear what Aceh entailed with the special status, even after the regime change to the New Order era.

The New Order era government implemented a centralistic approach to achieving national unity by repressing any expression of local particularities. The central government labelled those that continued to promote Islam as the group identity as an "extreme right", as opposed to the "extreme left" reserved for the communists, which hindered Aceh's local parliament from applying Islamic Syariah law in the province. The New Order era also applied a centralistic approach to national economic growth by exploiting natural resources. Aceh did not benefit much from the Arun Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) field, two large fertilizer factories, and a pulp and paper factory as the central government vetoed the local parliament's effort to redistribute 20% of the revenue. Both signified the broken promise for Acehnese autonomy because the central government did not have the significant intention to treat Aceh differently from the other provinces. The only minor intention was Aceh had the privilege to appoint senior administrative civilian officials in the province from Acehnese themselves (Aspinall, 2009, pp. 52-53).

Hasan di Tiro proclaimed the independence of Aceh-Sumatra on December 4, 1976 (Al-Chaidar, 2000, pp. 143-146). He was the grandson of Teungku Cik di Tiro, the prominent leader of the Aceh War in the 1880s, an Indonesian independence fighter against the Dutch in the 1940s, and an Indonesian delegation to the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in the 1950s. The proclamation is unique because there was no

armed struggle or political moves, such as demands, petitions, or demonstrations before it. The armed struggle started after the independence proclamation with the establishment of the Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF), which became known as the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement, abbreviated GAM). Another unique feature of the early days of the rebellion was that the proclamation was not publicly known because only in June 1977 became known to the outside world through a statement from the Indonesian authority. Indonesian security apparatus initially tended to view GAM and the proclamation as the works of some adventurous people (Drexler, 2008, pp. 86-89). In short, GAM started as quite a low-key rebellion.

In its early days, GAM was a small insurgency group of less than 100 men, making minor nuisances during the early period. By 1980, the TNI had already crushed this early group. In 1984, Hasan di Tiro and several GAM cabinet members fled to Sweden, where they established the GAM government in exile. They remained active until the signing of the Peace Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indonesian government in 2005. Many local fighters and commanders fled to neighbouring Malaysia (Sukma, 2004, p. 6). However, different from other rebel governments in exile like RMS, GAM maintained effective contact with and played a relatively more unified political leadership among the remaining rebels on the ground in Aceh. Its international network was also more effective. If the RMS maintained only a network of solidarity in the West, GAM went more by arranging military training. Eventually, in 1986, GAM successfully arranged for hundreds of guerrilla fighters to undergo training in Libya.

In 1989, the returnee graduates of the Libyan training then revived the rebellion by training new cadres in large numbers and consolidating the command structure by concentrating in the northern and eastern parts of Aceh, where most industries operate in Aceh (Schulze, 2004, p. 4). They also received more modern weaponry, mainly from the small arms traders in South East Asia. The explosion of widespread rebellion with the renewed vigour of training and armoury brought an unexpected turn of events for the Indonesian government, who initially thought they were dealing with irregular forces in a small-scale, low-intensity conflict. But the New Order government was also quick in responding. Military force was seemingly the only option for the New Order government to deal with rebellions. The Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Armed Forces, abbreviated TNI) launched the Operasi Jaring Merah (Operation Red Net) in July 1990, which made Aceh a Daerah Operasi Militer (Military Operation Zone, abbreviated DOM).

Unlike in the early days of GAM, the operation met stiff resistance and massive support for the rebellion from the Acehnese population. The TNI soon doubled the troops in Aceh from 6,000 to 12,000, with the 6,000 additional troops being Komando Pasukan Khusus (Special Forces Command) (Sukma, 2004, pp. 7-8). The TNI also recruited 60,000 local civilians and former GAM detainees to serve as militias with the threat of force upon their families (Sukma, 2004, pp. 10-11). The DOM period of the 1990s brought profound hatred from the Acehnese towards the Indonesian

government because around 2,000 civilians lost their lives, around 3,000 civilians suffered torture, and around 39,000 disappearances cases, according to the civil society organization forum in Aceh. In addition, there were some 7,000 cases of human rights violations documented, and at least 12 mass graves (Widjanarko & Sambodja, 1999, pp. 91-97). GAM's resurgence was relatively under control in 1992 with the end of Operasi Jaring Merah, but the DOM status of Aceh never lifted until the fall of the New Order regime in 1998.

The new Habibie administration sought to address the Aceh issue by sending an investigation team for human rights violations during DOM and ordered the withdrawal of non-organic TNI troops from Aceh to end DOM effectively. However, GAM saw the opportunity and decided to revive the rebellion. In December 1998, TNI launched Operation Satgas Wibawa but subsequently created more tension in Aceh. (Miller, 2009, pp. 18-31). Meanwhile, several Acehnese students studying in universities outside of Aceh established Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh (Aceh Referendum Information Centre, abbreviated SIPA) in February 1999 to promote the referendum. In March 1999, Habibie launched a nine-point policy to give Acehnese concrete special autonomy without any referendum. TNI also continued to build its presence in Aceh by launching Operation Sadar Rencong. Then, the Indonesian parliament passed a law no. 44/1999 on the special status of Aceh. However, SIRA and GAM rejected this initiative because the only way forward, according to them, is through a referendum (Miller, 2009, pp. 31-40). The uncertain conditions and the heightened tension continue in the new Abdurrahman Wahid administration.

In November 1999, Wahid initiated peace talks with GAM but failed because of internal division in GAM. In early 2000, facilitated by an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Henry Dunant Centre (HDC), GAM's representative di Tiro and Indonesian representative Hasan Wirayuda negotiated in Switzerland on humanitarian issues and a ceasefire. The negotiation finally produced an MoU called Joint Understanding on Humanitarian Pause for Aceh, signed on May 12, 2000 (Miller, 2009, pp. 77-80). However, the implementation of the MoU failed as the military operation continued to flush out GAM (Aspinall & Crouch, 2003, pp. 20-40). Then, the government and GAM signed a "provisional understanding" in January 2001. The government also changed the name of the Special Region of Aceh to Nangroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD). After a protracted debate between the civilian members of the cabinet and the military and members of the cabinet with military backgrounds, the NAD law passed in July 2001 (Miller, 2009, pp. 95-98). It was this situation of dual-track Aceh policy that continued to the new Megawati Sukarnoputri administration.

Megawati was known as a nationalist leader, which made her receive support from the military. In January 2002, the TNI expanded its military presence by reintroducing the Komando Daerah Militer (Regional military command, abbreviated Kodam) Iskandar Muda in Aceh, thereby increasing the number of organic troops (Davies, 2006). At the same time, Megawati continued the negotiation with GAM, assisted by the HDC. The negotiation yielded the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

(CoHA) signed in December 2002, which introduced the concept of peace zones and demilitarization to be monitored by a Joint Security Committee (JSC) comprising GAM, the government, and mutually agreed parties. Again, the TNI expressed reservations against CoHA, and both the TNI and GAM continued to build their military strength. The security situation was deteriorating, causing the JSC to cease its operation, with both sides blaming the other for the failure of CoHA. In the end, Megawati announced the imposition of martial law in Aceh in May 2003 (Sukma, 2004, pp. 21-29). This development ended the peace-building effort through negotiations that had begun four years earlier.

On December 26, 2004, two months after Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono became president, an 8.7 Richter scale earthquake and tsunami struck Aceh. The disaster killed around a quarter million people and displaced over half a million. The devastation suddenly brought the realization that the Acehnese had suffered so much from lengthy conflict and natural disaster. GAM immediately declared a unilateral ceasefire following the disaster, and the Indonesian government opened up Aceh to international presence (Drexler, 2008, pp. 202-203). But a few days before the tsunami struck, Martti Ahtisaari of the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) invited the Indonesian government and GAM to return to the negotiation table. The leadership in the TNI opposed the negotiation, but Yudhoyono, a former general, was able to dampen the opposition. Vice President Jusuf Kalla, a figure from South Sulawesi, spearheaded the peace negotiation and provided an enabling environment because GAM was deeply suspicious of the Javanese. GAM also appeared more earnest in achieving results this time (Kingsbury, 2006, pp. 15-16).

GAM and the Indonesian government agreed to attend to the invitation, and the rounds of negotiation started in January 2005 in Helsinki until August 15, 2005, when both signed the MoU. The negotiation revolved around four issues (See Figure 1). In addition to the tsunami, the previous existing peace documents, i.e., Humanitarian Pause, CoHA, special autonomy law, and the NAD law, facilitate peace negotiation in Helsinki (Aspinall, 2009, pp. 209-242). What made the real difference was the international presence led by the European Commission in the process (Bhakti, 2008, p. 131). GAM and the Indonesian government had little alternative but to cooperate because the international community monitored the peace process, especially with the massive aid for post-tsunami Aceh rehabilitation and reconstruction from them. The decommissioning of GAM arms and the reduction of TNI forces, for instance, became one of the most significant achievements of the Helsinki MoU. These achievements would not be possible without the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), established by the European Commission.

Figure 1 – Four Issues of the Negotiation between GAM and the Indonesian Government in Helsinki 2005

Special autonomy	Amnesty & other measures	Security arrangement	Monitoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local political parties • Provincial elections • Auditing system • Human rights and justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amnesty • Economic compensation • Law preparation • Inclusive dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cessation of hostilities • TNI presence • Decommissioning of GAM arms • Police training and recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorisation • Mechanism

Source: Adapted from Kingsbury (2006, pp. 41-42)

An important point from the Helsinki MoU was the reintegration and rehabilitation of former GAM combatants. The government formed the Badan Reintegrasi Aceh (Aceh Reintegration Body, abbreviated BRA) to ensure general amnesty for all former GAM combatants and that they received access to economic livelihood in exchange for the surrender of arms. The difficulty of BRA’s job came from the former civilian militias formed by the TNI to fight GAM, who also requested compensation, even though the Helsinki MoU mentioned only GAM combatants (Basyar, 2008, pp. 24-73). One of the sticking points in the previous agreements was the issue of local elections and whether or not GAM was allowed to contest in it. The Indonesian government agreed to allow GAM members to contest in the election and to establish local political parties. After years of fighting, GAM has also realized that its future was through participation in the Indonesian democratic process rather than continuing to fight for independence.

Indonesia has embarked on direct gubernatorial, district heads, and mayoral elections, known in Indonesia as Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada). Yudhoyono-Kalla government pressed ahead with the plan to hold pilkada in Aceh. But to allow GAM members to participate in pilkada as independent candidates, Aceh needed a new election law because the existing election law would not allow independent candidates to run in elections. After a lengthy deliberation, the Law on Governing Aceh (LoGA) was passed in August 2006, paving the way for the historic election in Aceh. The Pilkada arranged for provincial and 19 districts and municipalities in Aceh. At the provincial level, eight pairs of candidates contested. Two former Indonesian military generals were running (Tamlicha Ali and Djali Yusuf, the former Kodam commander) and a pair of GAM and SIRA candidates (Irwandi Yusuf and Muhammad Nazar) (Santoso, 2007, pp. 36-39). But the most anticipated candidate pair was Humam Hamid and Hasbi Abdullah. Humam was an NGO activist and a national politician, while Hasbi was a former GAM functionary.

The result of the December 2006 election startled everyone. Irwandi-Nazar won the election in just one round by securing 38% of the votes. That is possible because the law dictates that the 25% vote threshold for candidates to win in one round. The victory of the GAM candidate proved that Indonesian rule in Aceh had been unpopular. However, Irwandi openly acknowledged that he was now a Governor of Aceh, an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia. They were inaugurated as Governor and Vice Governor of Aceh in February 2007 for a five-year term of office. GAM's ascendancy to the top position in the province was still incomplete. The Aceh parliament was still in control of the national parties, such as Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (Democrat Party). There were 12 local political parties in Aceh, but only six could contest in the legislative election after verification from the Komisi Pemilihan Umum (General Elections Commission, abbreviated KPU) (Bhakti, 2008, pp. 196-197). Then, only Partai Aceh (Aceh Party) and Partai Daulat Aceh (Aceh's Sovereign Party) could secure seats in Aceh provincial parliament.

Yet another surprise came out of the result of the presidential election held in July 2009. The candidates in the presidential election were Megawati-Prabowo, Yudhoyono-Boediono, and Kalla-Wiranto. During the campaign in Aceh, Kalla sent a strong message that the peace process in Aceh was his initiative because he was the main initiator behind the bold move to launch the Helsinki peace talk. But the Acehnese seemed to render the credit to Yudhoyono as the president during the Helsinki process. Yudhoyono received a whopping 93% of the votes in Aceh, while Kalla received a dismal 4%. Acehnese also voted for Partai Demokrat, who sent six representatives out of 13 allocated for Aceh in the national parliament. The message was clear. The Acehnese have experienced peace, stability, and autonomy post-Helsinki peace process, maintaining trust in local and former GAM leaders while preserving the national political structure. Aceh, after all, has become the only success story in Indonesia's handling of its separatist challenges thus far.

East Timor: Integration and Successful Secessionism

The Portuguese had colonized East Timor since the 18th century, not colonized by the Dutch. Mohammad Yamin promoted Portuguese Timor (as East Timor was known then) to be part of the future Indonesian state during the deliberation of the Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (Committee for Study of Indonesia's Independence Preparation, abbreviated BPUPKI) in May 1945 and Sukarno agreed with his idea (Chamberlain, 2009, pp. 5-7). However, when the proclamation of Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945, no documents defined Indonesian territory. Yamin continued to urge for the incorporation of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia. Nonetheless, President Sukarno stated that Indonesia had made no demands for including Portuguese Timor in July 1953. From the East Timorese side, there was an early desire to be part of Indonesia because the early anti-colonialists in East Timor tended to see that decolonization would not happen unless with the help of Indonesia. During the Bandung Conference in 1955, Sukarno sponsored the participation of three young East Timorese as observers but did not

give explicit indications to support the integration with Indonesia (Chamberlain, 2009, pp. 10-11).

After the Bandung conference, the anti-colonialist movement in East Timor started to make contact with the Indonesian Consulate in Dili. At first, the contact only educated the East Timorese, but the arrival of 14 Permesta rebels fleeing TNI operations in March 1958 changed the dynamics. Nazwar Jacob, the Indonesian Consul in Dili, established contacts with them, then initiated a link between the East Timor anti-colonialists and the Permesta rebels, which grew into planning rebellion. Then, a rebellion broke out in Viqueque on June 7, 1959, but the Portuguese quickly responded by force. In less than a month, the Portuguese have crushed the rebellion. In an investigation of the 1959 rebellion, the Portuguese authority concluded that Consul Jacob and the Permesta rebels acted alone without any instigation from Jakarta. Jakarta quickly replaced Consul Jacob and issued reassurance that Indonesia did not have territorial ambition for East Timor (Taylor, 1991, p. 21). The status quo between Indonesia and the Portuguese Timor remained unchanged after the 1959 rebellion.

The situation began to change in East Timor following the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in April 1974, creating a power vacuum in the colonies, including East Timor. In the imminent departure of the Portuguese colonial authority, the three largest political parties in East Timor quickly entangled in a power struggle (See Table 1) (Singh, 1996, pp. 21-25). Indonesia initially kept its stance on the 1959 status quo, as assured by Foreign Minister Adam Malik, even with the existence of Apodeti as a pro-Indonesian party. However, Indonesia would soon change its stance because of geopolitical considerations and external factors of Western powers. The Western powers seemed concerned about the growth of the influence of the leftist Fretilin because the party has ties to the Chinese Communist Party. Following a meeting between President Suharto and Australian Prime Minister (PM) Gough Whitlam in September 1974, Indonesia announced that it would actively support the Apodeti in East Timor. Then, Indonesia began a series of intelligence and covert military operations to support the Apodeti, known as Operation Komodo (Singh, 1996, pp. 27-30).

Table 1 – Three Major Parties in East Timor 1974

Full Name	Abbreviation	Stance
<i>União Democrática Timorese</i> (Timorese Democratic Union)	UDT	Pro-Colonial to Portugal
<i>Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente</i> (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor)	Fretilin	Pro-Independence and Leftist

<i>Associação Popular Democrática Timorese</i> (Timorese Popular Democratic Association)	Apodeti	Pro-Integration to Indonesia
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Source: Adapted from Singh (1996, pp. 21-25)

In January 1975, the pro-Portugal UDT changed its stance by proclaiming that it sought independence as its political goal. That had brought the UDT to a closer stance with the Fretilin. Because of that, Indonesia further intensified Operation Komodo by attempting to establish an anti-communist front among the UDT, Apodeti, and smaller parties to isolate Fretilin. In July 1975, the anti-communist front established by Indonesian support met in Jakarta. Realizing that it risked being cornered by the Jakarta-led coalition, the Fretilin launched a coup in August 1975. It unilaterally proclaimed the Democratic Republic of East Timor, followed by military action against its adversaries. Fretilin killed Secretary General of Apodeti Jose Fernando Osorio Soares and several regional party leaders (Soekanto, 1976, pp. 363-369). Realizing they could not withstand the Fretilin, the anti-communist parties (Apodeti, UDT, Klibur Oan Timor Asuwain (Association of Timorese Heroes), and Partido Trabalhista (Labor Party)) declared the Balibo Declaration on November 30, 1975, to request integration with Indonesia and assistance in fighting Fretilin.

On December 7, 1975, Indonesian forces launched Operation Seroja to invade East Timor. Operation Seroja successfully took over the capital city of East Timor Dili in a matter of days. However, the Fretilin forces fighting in the interior proved much more difficult to subdue, with some towns only being taken in April 1976. The President of Apodeti Arnaldo dos Reis Araujo and President of UDT Francisco Xavier Lopes da Cruz, the leaders of the anti-communist coalition, formed a Pemerintahan Sementara Timor Timur (Provisional Government of East Timor, abbreviated PSTT) on December 17, 1975. Then, the Indonesian government quickly employed military forces and civilian administrators. At the end of May 1976, the provisional parliament of PSTT issued a petition requesting integration with Indonesia without a referendum. The petition was formally handed over to President Suharto by the PSTT leadership in June 1976. Finally, on July 15, 1976, the Indonesian parliament passed a law approving the integration of East Timor as the 27th province of Indonesia (Noor, Moeljono, Sujanto, & Soemarno, 1977).

Araujo and da Cruz became the first Governor and Vice Governor of the East Timor province. Suharto's government applied development policies combined with a tight security approach in East Timor. The Indonesian government applied compulsory primary education and provided East Timorese students with scholarships to the universities in Indonesia. One of the most often cited examples of Indonesia's development of East Timor was the number of primary school students, which had risen from 13,501 in 1976 to 129,629 in 1987. Furthermore, East Timor has Universitas Timor Timur (University of East Timor, abbreviated Untim) in 1986. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the province has increased from USD 1,835 in 1972 to USD 140,000 in 1992 because of infrastructure development (Saldanha, 1994, pp.

186-187). Bahasa Indonesia quickly replaced the Portuguese, and the use of Tetum, the local dialect of East Timor, was still preserved. However, East Timorese still sees Indonesian rule as invasive, especially in how the military dealt with the insurgencies, and many TNI officers were also involved in business ventures in the province (Singh, 1996, pp. 245-257).

The forced integration led to Resistência Nacional dos Estudantes de Timor Leste (East Timor Student National Resistance, abbreviated Renetil) in 1988. Renetil joined the Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere (National Council of Maubere Resistance, abbreviated CNRM) alongside Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste (The Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor, abbreviated Falintil) and diplomatic front of Jose Ramos Horta. In November 1991, TNI troops opened fire at the anti-integration demonstrators in Santa Cruz, killing at least 250. The Santa Cruz incident created many difficulties for the Indonesian diplomatic effort to win recognition of East Timor's integration (Suter, 1997, pp. 14-18). In January 1995, another incident occurred in Liquica, in which the TNI murdered innocent unarmed civilians in an attempt to flush out Falintil troops. The National Commission of Human Rights established a task force to investigate this incident, which eventually led to the trial and dismissal of several TNI officers and soldiers (Singh, 1996, pp. 185-191). Despite the growing difficulties for the Indonesian government, it was business as usual in East Timor until the fall of President Suharto.

The resignation of President Suharto in May 1998 and the ascendancy of Vice President B.J. Habibie to the presidency changed how Indonesia viewed its secessionist problem by offering possible solutions for the East Timor question through the United Nations. That was due to the misjudgment that the problem with East Timor was essentially a foreign policy problem rather than a common problem of identity formation in Indonesia's margins, stemming from the failure of economic development with stringent security approaches. In June 1998, President Habibie offered a set of initiatives to address the East Timor question. These included the release of Xanana Gusmao (arrested by the Indonesian government in 1992), the reduction of TNI presence in the province, and the application of special autonomy status. That was the first time that the concept of special autonomy was offered as a potential solution to secessionist challenges and marked a significant departure from the policies of previous presidents.

Despite that, Gusmao rejected the offer of special autonomy because he insisted on holding a popular referendum to decide East Timor's future. As a compromise, Gusmao suggested setting up a timetable in which the special autonomy was to be applied, but at the end of 5-10 years, East Timorese called a referendum (Siswomihardjo, 1999, pp. 64-65). Not only Gusmao, Horta and the Dili Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo also proposed a similar suggestion (Dunn, 2003, p. 341). Habibie was quite disappointed with the rejection and suggested an immediate referendum without implementing special autonomy because Indonesian resources were in poor condition due to the economic crisis. Before deciding on that suggestion, Habibie consulted with Australian PM John Howard, who insisted that the time was right for

Indonesia to get things fixed in East Timor and that Indonesia should not miss the opportunity. Habibie had also consulted with local TNI commanders to seek advice on the potential outcome, in which the TNI believed the majority of East Timorese would opt to remain within Indonesia, with a special autonomy status.

Then, Indonesia requested the United Nations (UN) to arrange the referendum in May 1999. UN formed UNAMET (United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor) to hold the referendum on August 30, 1999. On September 4, 1999, the result showed that around 22% voted for special autonomy, and 78% voted for independence. The announcement met with violence from the pro-integration militias, reportedly formed upon the instigation of the TNI a few months before the referendum (Kingsbury, 2000). The international community, led by Australia, requested that an international peacekeeping force be sent to East Timor to stop the violence. Indonesia initially rejected this request vehemently, but it soon became apparent that even the TNI could no longer control the acts of the militia. The Indonesian government eventually invited the UN Peacekeeping Force on September 12, 1999. UN Security Council then quickly formed the International Force for East Timor (Interfet), which consisted of 22 countries, the largest contingent of which were the Australians.

As a follow-up to the referendum, the UN Security Council formed the United Nations Temporary Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to govern the territory until the preparation for its formal independence was deemed ready. Then, UNTAET transferred the power formally to the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste on May 20, 2002. In Indonesia, Habibie's referendum policy met with outrage. It became the main factor that led to the no-confidence vote for President Habibie's accountability speech in front of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (People's Consultative Assembly, abbreviated MPR) in October 1999. The vote led to Habibie would no longer run for office. But before that, Habibie pleaded with the MPR to pass the decree to acknowledge the result of the East Timor referendum, citing that Indonesia's credibility as a nation was at stake. The MPR eventually passed a decree no. V/1999 provided the legal ground for ending Indonesia's rule in East Timor.

East Timor's forced integration with Indonesia marked a departure from the concept of the Indonesian nation-state and its nation-building. It did that in two ways. First, it marked a breaking away from the notion of the geographic space of Indonesia as the former Netherlands East Indies. Second, the separation of East Timor from Indonesia in 2002 following the referendum in 1999, in which most of the population opted for independence, also marked a departure from the concept of Indonesian unity. Indonesia had been dealing with secessionist challenges since its independence, but it had safely through these challenges intact. Therefore, the East Timor independence was unprecedented and served as a wake-up call for the Indonesian state to the problems in its margins. But it seemed that the East Timor debacle had also strengthened the resolve for the state not to traverse a similar path again, which gave way to many possible solutions to addressing secessionist challenges. Therefore, the separation of the territory might be the first and the last that Indonesia has.

B. CONCLUSION

Indonesia has been facing challenges in its existence since almost the very beginning. The challenges coming from its margins were closely related to the essential concept of Indonesia itself. As a post-colonial society, with the utmost level of plurality in its makeup and the extensive expanse of the archipelago that presented yet another geographical challenge, Indonesia has struggled in its nation-building, which has continuously challenged to define and redefine itself. The concept of nationalism, embodied in the idea of a modern nation-state, was also continuously challenged by counter-narratives of ethno-nationalism that lived among the diverse ethnic and religious groups of the archipelago, especially from the minorities living in the outer islands (outside of Java). However, regional rebellions occurred in the areas considered central parts of Indonesia, including Java and some of the Sumatra islands, where many early republican leaders hailed from. However, these rebellions were not secessionist. Instead, they aimed at providing a counter-ideological narrative to the concept of Indonesia as a secular, unitary state.

It was evident from the result and discussion that the two cases of regional rebellions in Indonesia discussed above have secessionist motivations (See Table 2). They stemmed from a combination of factors, i.e., identity differences in terms of race and ethnicity (in the case of East Timor) and cases of different colonial histories (Aceh Sultanate and Portuguese Timor), lack of participation of local people in the economic development in their regions, especially in cases where vast natural resources exploitation was involved (especially in the case of Aceh); in all cases, military suppression and stigmatization of the whole society as rebels that yielded human rights violations became the aggravating factor in deepening the resentment and solidifying the resolve to secede. In terms of objective, the secessionist rebellions sought to create an independent, separate state from the Republic of Indonesia.

Table 2 – Comparing Regional Rebellions

	Aceh	East Timor
Length/ Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aceh-Sumatra proclaimed independence in 1976. • Links with the former DI/TII rebels but insignificant. • GAM rebellion continued until the signing of the Helsinki MoU in 2005, leading to the renunciation of separatist objectives in exchange for the full participation of former GAM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fretilin unilaterally proclaimed East Timor's independence in 1975. • The political adversaries reacted by asking Indonesia to intervene. • Backed by the Western nations, Indonesia invaded in 1975. • East Timor integrated into Indonesia in 1976.

	members in the political process in the province.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rebellion continued led by CNRT until the referendum in 1999, which led to independence in 2002.
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aceh was the last territory to be subjugated by the Dutch, which brought out a distinct identity and proud heritage compared to the rest of Indonesia. Fully supported the independence of Indonesia but felt betrayed by RI leaders who initially promised autonomy. Exploitation of natural resources without Acehnese participation Human rights violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different colonial history from the rest of Indonesia brought out different national identities. Forceful integration by Indonesia. Lack of international recognition for the integration. Human rights violations.
Demand/ Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially, the realization of special autonomy status When this was not forthcoming, a separate Acehnese state Eventually, GAM favored a special autonomy status with full political participation of former rebels Investigation into human rights violations, coupled with rehabilitation for former combatants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular consultation/ referendum on the desire of the East Timorese. A separate East Timor state. Investigation into human rights violations.
Exile Government	Yes, in Sweden, with a splinter group based in Malaysia.	No, fighters remained in the territory, but active political campaign networks in Australia, Europe, North America, and Africa.
Method of Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily, the use of force during the New Order period, especially in protecting the economic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily use of force during the New Order period, leading to human rights violations.

	<p>interests of the central government, led to human rights violations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No negotiations with GAM during the New Order. • After <i>Reformasi</i>, some mediated peace negotiations with GAM. • Different approaches by civilian and military leaderships led to incoherent, sometimes competing policies that broke down the early negotiated peace settlement. • After the tsunami, a renewed effort at negotiation brought about the Helsinki MoU. • In addition to the application of special autonomy, allowing former rebels to participate fully in politics in the province. • A former GAM Governor now leads the province, with the majority of local parliament held by members of a local party set up by former rebels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No negotiations with CNRT, even after <i>Reformasi</i>. • After <i>Reformasi</i>, under international pressure, a referendum was held in East Timor under UN auspices, in which the majority decided to secede from Indonesia.
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Source: Developed by the Authors

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