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**CRIMINALS AND INSURGENTS:
THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN STATE RESPONSES TO
INTERNAL RESOURCE COMPETITORS**

by

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June 2007

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THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN STATE RESPONSES TO
INTERNAL RESOURCE COMPETITORS**

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ABSTRACT

A government facing an ethnicity based insurgency competing with it for natural resources faces different threats based upon the level of ethnic homogeneity of the insurgent elements. Where a mono-ethnic insurgent threat develops, the government faces a potential separatist movement seeking secession from the country as a means to address its grievances. The government will have no option other than counterinsurgency to manage this threat. Where a multi-ethnic insurgent threat develops, the threat of separatism may be thwarted due to the disparate nature of the insurgent elements and the tendency of these groups to compete with each other. In this scenario, the government has the ability to “criminalize” the insurgents, thereby enabling the government to justify safeguarding its resources while taking minimal steps to resolve the grievances of the communities. An examination of the approaches taken by Indonesia and Nigeria in addressing their insurgencies in Aceh and the Niger Delta respectively is illustrative of the advantages and drawbacks of these approaches. In the end it is shown that counterinsurgency is more difficult though decisive, while criminalization ultimately risks the creation of a new ethnic identity born of economic hardship, around which an ethnic nationalist movement might vie for secession.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

In order for a state to be viable, one of the main functions that state must perform is the controlling of access and distribution of state resources within its borders.¹ Access to those resources has been the cause of many civil conflicts. When faced with resource competition, a state has no choice but to defend those resources lest its viability as a state be impacted. Studies have shown that states displaying a high dependency on primary commodity exports, low per capita income, and slow economic growth are at high risk of rebellion within their borders.² Furthermore, political, organizational, and financial weakness at the level of the state government heightens this risk.³ However, just because a state displays these economic factors, does not mean it will automatically have a full-blown insurgency on its hands. Rebellions need a means to mobilize. Where ethnicity can be manipulated as a mobilizing agent, ethnically based insurgencies for control over resources can appear. Once this occurs, the state government will face a formidable threat within its own borders with which, at some level, it must contend.

This thesis will compare the differences in how state governments deal with ethnicity based insurgencies that contest government control of natural resources when the ethnic makeup of those insurgencies are mono as opposed to multi ethnic. The ethnic composition of the insurgency may be a factor that enables the insurgent leaders to adopt particular strategies in an effort to achieve the goal of greater control of natural resources and revenue. Where communities are ethnically homogenous or one ethnic group comprises a much higher percentage in those communities than others, the strategy of separatism can be pursued as a means to gain control over resources. However in

¹ Charles Tilly, *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 181.

² Paul Collier, "The Economic Causes of Civil War and Their Implications for Policy," in *Turbulent Peace*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 151.

³ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *The American Political Science Review* (February 2001), 3.

communities where there is a greater degree of ethnic heterogeneity and those ethnic communities compete with one another, the ability to coalesce an effective separatist threat may be thwarted. The result of this inability to mount a separatist movement is a level of unrest that may be destabilizing, but one that prevents the insurgency from constituting a threat to the government's hold on power in the region where the insurgency is taking place.

The strategies available to these insurgencies will in turn drive the options that the government has in seeking a resolution to the problem. Where an effective bid for separatism develops, the government has no option but to seek resolution by eliminating the insurgent threat through counter-insurgency operations. Failure to do so would potentially lead to the total loss of control of the insurgent-controlled territory, to include access to the natural resources coming from that region. However, the actions involved in prosecuting that counterinsurgency may themselves be damaging. Through government actions aimed at marginalizing the insurgent elements, potential exists for the further hardening of indigenous ethnic identities and sentiments against the government. This in turn may lead to further support for the insurgency. Care must be taken to prosecute a nuanced counterinsurgency effort, which includes economic and political concessions combined with efforts to destroy the insurgents. Failing to do so can lead to an intractable problem born out of the failure to acknowledge the saliency of ethnic homogeneity.

Governments facing ethnically heterogeneous threats wherein there is a degree of ethnic competition between insurgent elements will have the option of simply protecting their extractive capabilities in the region while criminalizing the threat. In doing so, the government will be able to continue to derive revenue from the extraction of natural resources, while avoiding the costly and potentially complicating efforts of counterinsurgency aimed at destroying the insurgents. The insurgency is unable to move beyond the stage of incipient criminality due to a lack of unified popular support. However, this is an approach that cannot be sustained indefinitely. Unless efforts are made to address the grievances of the communities that led to the insurgency, ethnic boundaries will potentially soften leading to either pan-ethnic cooperation or the creation of a new ethnic identity from which an effective separatist movement might be

mobilized. Once this occurs, the government will face an ethnically homogenous insurgency that must be addressed through counterinsurgency efforts.

Analysis of the different approaches governments take to addressing mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic resource insurgent groups will provide insights into challenges that may be faced by the U.S. government while seeking to secure reliable sources of energy, particularly fossil fuels, in the future. Understanding the opportunities and constraints that the ethnic insurgents face and, more importantly, how state governments address them may lead to policy options that enable the U.S. to better support friendly governments facing these challenges.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Nature of Ethnicity

Scholars and theorists identify three main theoretical approaches to ethnicity to explain how individuals and groups derive ethnic identity. Those approaches are primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism.

Primordialism sees ethnic identity as being given by ancestry and not changeable by the individual; the primordial ethnic identity is something that one is born into based on language, customs, religion, or race basis. These connections to culture and society are ineffable, overwhelming, and coercive.⁴ Primordialists view conflict as inevitable due to “unchanging, essential characteristics of the members of the ethnic groups.”⁵ Robert Kaplan argues that in order to understand the ethnic conflicts between Serbians and Croatians, one must go back in history to past events that shaped the ancient hatreds between them.⁶ History matters and leaves indelible impressions on the ethnic identification process.

Instrumentalism acknowledges ethnic markers but states these change over time; customs, languages, and religions can be learned and one can pass from one ethnic group

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (Chicago: Free Press, 1963), 109.

⁵ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” *International Organization* (August 23, 2000), 849.

⁶ Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 35.

to another. Individuals can choose which ethnic markers they choose to identify with based on what advantages they can achieve. Conflict is not viewed as automatic by instrumentalists; it is selected based on resource scarcity or strategic efficacy. This is well illustrated in Gil Courtemanche's discussion of changing ethnic identities amongst Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda based upon manipulating marriage lines to deliberately change one's ethnic identity.⁷ Instrumentalists also argue that group identities are subject to elite manipulation. Ethnicity is an "epi-phenomenon" that is artificially created which explains why elites are able to manipulate it; differences are accentuated based upon desired outcomes by elites.

Similar to Instrumentalism in many respects, Constructivism also argues that ethnic identities are socially constructed and that they are malleable, but that they can be created and changed in both a conscious or un-conscious manner.⁸ The meaning of ethnic categories or markers change over time and as such the ethnic labels attached to them changes in significance. Ethnic identities are constructed through changes in social and economic processes, group discourse, or the actions of individuals whether elite or popular.⁹ However these factors all interact in a highly complex manner that incorporate all of the agents of construction at both a conscious and unconscious level. Ethnic communities can find themselves "trapped in alleged tradition"¹⁰ though the original significance of that tradition or other ethnic marker may have changed over time. Of the three approaches to ethnicity, constructivism will be most relevant to my analysis. This is due primarily to the limitations of the primordialist and instrumentalist approaches.

2. Ethnic Mobilization

A number of authors provide meaningful analyses of ethnic mobilization, particularly as it relates to resource conflict, building upon the work of previous authors

⁷ Gil Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2003), 28-29.

⁸ Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 846-847.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 851-856.

¹⁰ Jeanne-Pierre Chretien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 15.

to provide a rich theoretical framework. The role of inequality is an overarching theme in all of the literature on ethnic mobilization.

Nicolas Sambanis, analyzing the impact of poverty on political violence provides important insights into the economic causes of civil war¹¹ Sambanis shows a strong correlation between several economic variables and political violence, specifically the impact of income per capita, GDP growth, educational opportunity, and income inequality on the likelihood of such violence.¹² Although he argues that poverty and economic opportunity are not the only causes of political violence (specifically insurgency), they do appear to have a strong effect on it.¹³ Sambanis does acknowledge however, that economic incentives are not the only explanations for political violence; ideology, ethnicity, coercion, and religion can all motivate participation in insurgency.¹⁴ As such, poverty mixed with ethnic cohesion provides a strong recipe for political violence.

Joanne Nagel and Susan Olzak discuss five processes that promote ethnic mobilization within states.¹⁵ Among these are ethnic responses to resource development and extraction by the state government. When a state government institutes policies of resource extraction in an exclusionary manner to the region from which the resources were extracted, ethnic mobilization is likely. They also identify the impact of diasporas as an important mobilizing factor for ethnic communities.¹⁶ Olzak goes on to discuss internal colonialism theories that state that resources are always unevenly distributed across states and that, as the state government increasingly becomes the distributor, decisions about how to parcel out development and revenue will lead to direct

¹¹ Nicholas Sambanis, *Poverty and the Organization of Political Violence* (Brookings Trade Forum 2004), 182.

¹² *Ibid.*, 185-192.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Joanne Nagel and Susan Olzak, "Ethnic Mobilization in New and Old States: An Extension of the Competition Model," *Social Problems* 30,2 (December 1982), 130-138. The five processes that these authors discuss are urbanization, increased scales of organization, expansion of secondary and tertiary economic sectors, expansion of the political sector, and the impact of supranatural organizations.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

competition for resources by ethnic groups.¹⁷ These theories see state governments as foreign bodies that are viewed as invasive and kleptocratic by the local communities.

Building further on Olzak's work, James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin argue that "the main factors influencing which countries will have civil war are not cultural or ethnic, but rather the conditions that favor insurgency."¹⁸ They provide a series of hypotheses that seek to outline when civil conflict is likely. Of these, the presence of an ethnic majority relative to ethnic minority, measures of political democracy and civil liberties, and political instability at the government center are all factors that influence the risk of civil war.¹⁹ Further potential destabilizing elements are the presence of rough terrain poorly served by roads, the distance of the governmental center from conflict area, the separation of the governmental center from the conflict area by water, and the ability of the land in the conflict area to support high value goods to finance an insurgency.²⁰

Paul Collier builds upon the work of Fearon and Laitin by identifying five risk factors that make civil conflict more likely. These are high dependence on primary commodities in national GDP, a history of previous civil war, the size and influence of diasporas, the level of economic opportunities available (to include education), and the ethnic_composition of the population or region with potential economic competitors.²¹ Collier argues that ethnic homogeneity increases the risk of conflict while high ethnic diversity should make a region safer.²² These risk factors, combined with those identified by Fearon and Laitin will all bear relevance in my analysis of how governments counter ethnicity based insurgent groups.

Once an ethnic group is mobilized to compete with the state government, what keeps it going? Chaim Kaufman discusses how conflict serves to harden ethnic identities

¹⁷ Susan Olzak, "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9 (1983), 366.

¹⁸ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War* (CA: Stanford, 2001), 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

²¹ Paul Collier, "The Economic Causes of Civil War and Their Implications for Policy," in *Turbulent Peace* ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 147-149.

²² Collier, *The Economic Causes of Civil War and Their Implications for Policy*, 149.

and creates a security dilemma that can only be solved in one of three manners: victory on the part of the ethnic community or the government, suppression, or self governance by the ethnic community through an arrangement of autonomous government.²³ Kaufmann's work appears to principally address inter-ethnic conflict, but much of what he discusses can be applied to an ethnically based insurgency against a state government. His contributions will be important in my discussion by framing the impact of government policies on helping to keep ethnic insurgencies active or leading to resolution.

"Ethnic identification is created or maintained as a basis for collective action when there are clearly competitive advantages to an ethnic identity."²⁴ In this manner, ethnic mobilization has been shown to have close links to resource competition.²⁵ Ethnic nationalism provides a means for ethnic minorities to contest a state government due to grievances arising from perceived discrimination or simple cultural incompatibility.²⁶ Ultimately, rebels and insurgents have a broader purpose in mind though whether "redressing religious, nationalist, or economic grievances or simply seeking loot."²⁷ The approach views insurgents as simply seeking loot and sees economic civil war as a form of organized crime (as opposed to motivated by differences in ideology).²⁸

Others argue along these lines as well. In his research on the subject, Paul Collier cites the economist's view that grievance is not as important as greed. Although popular discourse would have one believe that insurrections form as a result of ideological differences, some economists claim that the motivation for the conflict is not as important as the rebel organization's ability to support itself through extra-legal means.²⁹ In this

²³ Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20/4 (Spring 1996), 139.

²⁴ Nagel and Olzak, *Ethnic Mobilization in New and Old States: An Extension of the Competition Model*, 130.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁶ Fearon and Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Collier, *The Economic Causes of Civil War and Their Implications for Policy*, 144.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

manner insurgency, whether ethnically motivated or not, is organized crime. The perspective of economic civil war as organized crime will be a particularly important theoretical framework for addressing how state governments perceive the problem as well as how they approach dealing with ethnic insurgencies.

Remaining within the framework of rebellion as a criminal activity, Collier states that a typical problem that rebellion face is how to gain finances and recruit members to overcome the initial entry threshold to be able to organize effectively while not being vanquished by the government they seek to oppose.³⁰ This usually requires the rebellion to resort to extra-legal means, such a theft of natural resources and kidnapping, to get initial start-up capital. This perspective will also have implications for how the governments approach these insurgencies.

Ethnic mobilization relative to resource conflict will be important to understanding not only how, when, and why ethnic insurgent groups mobilize, but also how state governments perceive these groups and react to them. Within the context of resource conflict, both the insurgent groups and the government see one another as stealing from the other. However, how the government approaches the threat will vary.

3. Government Responses to Insurgency

Insurgency is arguably one of the hardest military challenges for any state or military force to overcome. Scholars dating back to the 19th century and including such authors as Carl Von Clausewitz and B.H. Liddell-Hart have written about this form of warfare and what is needed to overcome it. With the advent of Maoist insurgency as a form of proxy warfare during the Cold War, analysis began to focus on why some insurgencies succeed and others fail. Classic insurgencies analyzed included the British experiences in Kenya and Malaya, French and U.S. experiences in Vietnam, and the Peruvian experience with Sendero Luminoso. From these and many others, lessons have been codified for how, and how not, to fight an insurgency.

³⁰ Paul Collier, "Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44/6 (December 2000), 850.

Counter-insurgency strategies are determined by the kinds of foes a government faces and are as varied as the potential insurgent groups and their causes for fighting their government. Through the numerous prescriptions written for fighting insurgencies, several common themes can be observed. These include the requirement to “gain and maintain popular support, to have a legitimate and efficient government, a concerted effort in the political, economic, and social fields, dynamic military operations, and an enlightened leadership.”³¹ At the operational level further requirements include “civil-military understanding, good intelligence, mobility, training, and the will to win.”³² The need for constant pressure and secrecy and surprise are also key elements in addressing an insurgent threat.³³ The ultimate end-state is to separate the insurgents from their popular support base and neutralize them through social, political, economic, and military actions that reduce their grievance or killing the insurgent leadership, thereby ending the threat.

At the operational level, counter-insurgency can largely be broken down into three approaches. These are the Direct Approach, Outside-In Approach, and Inside-Out Approach.³⁴

The Direct Approach uses conventional military forces to directly engage insurgents using conventional military tactics. Typically a government using this method will dispatch its military to conduct search and destroy activities in whatever environment the insurgents are operating.³⁵ This approach is most common when an insurgency has reached a level of organization that sees it rapidly gaining support or is strong enough to be able to control areas and establish fixed bases of operation.

³¹ Baljit Singh and Ko-Wang Mei, *Theory and Practice of Modern Guerrilla Warfare*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1971), 68.

³² Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Operations: Techniques of Guerilla Warfare*, (New York: Walker and Company Publishing, 1967), 157, 168.

³³ *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2006), 1-22-1-24.

³⁴ Michael A. Bottiglieri, *How To Defeat Insurgencies: Searching for A Counter-Insurgency Strategy* (Naval Postgraduate School: Master’s Thesis, December 2000), 4.

³⁵ Bottiglieri, 4.

The Outside-In Approach is an indirect approach that seeks to counter an insurgency by attacking the peripheral edges of the insurgency and working toward the center. Examples of this include “hearts and minds campaigns,” and political or economic concessions aimed at separating the insurgency from their popular support base.³⁶ This approach is normally used when the insurgent group has strong popular support but either cannot or chooses not to establish fixed bases of operation.

The Inside-Out Approach is an indirect approach to attacking an insurgent group that seeks to destroy the insurgent leadership and then target lower levels of the insurgent group until its group coherence is lost. The assumption behind this approach is that if the group loses its leadership, the masses will no longer be inclined to fight.³⁷ This approach is used when the insurgencies’ grievances are ideological or political in nature and the leadership can be identified.

These approaches to addressing insurgency can be generically applied to both ethnic and non-ethnically based insurgencies. Although much literature has appeared that discusses how various governments and militaries have responded to both ethnic and non-ethnic rebellion, a gap appears to exist in resources that provide theoretical analysis of how governments address insurgencies aimed at wresting control over state resources when the insurgent elements are mono-ethnic as opposed to multi-ethnic. Whereas a mono-ethnically based insurgent group usually has the advantage of a “homeland” that provides the means of secession, an insurgency comprised of multi-ethnic insurgent elements has the additional dynamic of inter-ethnic rivalry which prevents a viable secession movement from being started. These characteristics present both opportunities and constraints for the government fighting against each respective type of ethnic insurgency and will be the subject of this study.

³⁶ Bottiglieri, 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

C. METHODOLOGY

1. Major Questions and Argument

My hypothesis is that a government facing a mono-ethnic insurgent threat competing with it for access to natural resources will have a greater ability to apply both direct and indirect approaches to counter-insurgency than a government facing multiple mono-ethnic insurgent elements due to the government's ability to isolate the specific ethnic community from which the insurgent group is derived. Furthermore, it may have to adopt both measures due to the threat of secession by the ethnic group. However, these approaches are oftentimes at odds and frequently entail measures that will be considered repressive by both the ethnic community and international communities, inadvertently exacerbating and extending the conflict. In contrast, a government facing an insurgency comprised of multiple mono-ethnic insurgent elements will not initially face the same threat of secession, but will nonetheless have a difficult time resolving the insurgency problem through indirect approaches due to ethnic rivalries and competing grievances related to equitable resource distribution. However, due to the smaller size of the ethnic militias and their tendency to compete with one another for the same resources, the government is better able to minimize perceptions of a problem, declaring the insurgents to be criminal elements instead of a full blown insurgency. This approach will result in different risks for that government, specifically by continuing to allow the insurgency to continue unabated and potentially allowing a larger insurgent problem to develop if ethnic entrepreneurs can construct a new ethnic identity around which to rally a more potent insurgency force.

2. Comparative Case Study

This thesis will employ a two stage research design first looking at the nature of two ethnically delimited rebellions, then examining the responses of the two state governments that faced those ethnicity based resource insurgencies.

The cases selected for this study are those of the ethnically homogenous insurgency in Aceh Indonesia and ethnically diverse insurgency in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. These cases allow for a method of difference analysis to be conducted that

controls for all critical variables except that of ethnicity. Because we can hold all of the variables in the insurgencies, minus ethnic unity, as constant, we can examine the government strategies. Variables being controlled are derived principally from Fearon and Laitin as well as Collier's risk factors identified on page six.

Although comparing insurgencies in Asia and Africa may seem unusual, in the case of these two insurgencies and the governments fighting them, they bear remarkable similarity. Both countries have colonial legacies; Indonesia received independence from Holland in 1945 while Nigeria achieved independence from Britain in 1960. Both governments of Indonesia and Nigeria are relatively democratic and, despite their problems, stable. Both governments have histories of poor civil rights that have drawn criticism and condemnation from the international community for the poor treatment of their citizenry. Both countries have a history of ethnic conflict and civil war; Indonesia suffered the loss of East Timor in 2002 and continues to suffer an ongoing ethnically based insurgency in Papua (formerly Irian Jaya). Nigeria suffered the Biafra War of 1967, which witnessed the failed attempt by the Igbo ethnic group to secede from Nigeria. Both of these conflicts have inured the populations and governments to ethnic violence.

The conflict areas themselves are also similar. Both Aceh and the Niger Delta are poorly developed with rough terrain poorly served by roads. Both areas are far from the centers of government; Aceh is located on Sumatra while Jakarta is located on Java; the Niger Delta is at the western-most part of Nigeria far from the capital in Abuja. In both cases, separation by water is a factor; as noted above, Aceh is on a separate island; the Niger Delta is comprised of a labyrinthine maze of mangrove swamps that makes vast portions of the region unreachable except by boat or aerial movement.

The grievances of the insurgent groups are very similar with one critical exception that will be discussed below. Both insurgent groups protest the poor level of economic opportunities available to their communities and ethnic groups. This specifically includes the inequitable distribution of profits derived from the petroleum products extracted from their lands, poor access to employment and education, environmental impact of

petroleum extraction by the multinational energy companies that operate in both areas and the poor quality of infrastructure and health care.

Both insurgent groups operate in areas that produce high value goods capable of supporting an insurgency. In the case of the Niger Delta, this commodity is oil, which is actively “bunkered” from pipelines and sold to external actors to fund the ongoing conflict. This is highly lucrative and enables the militia groups in the Niger Delta to be remarkably self-sufficient. In Aceh, natural resources such as drugs and timber provided much of the financing that the insurgent movement needed to remain viable. Both insurgent groups have diaspora populations that actively support their communities in the conflict areas. What funding requirements the insurgent group in Aceh could not derive from natural resources could be obtained from their diaspora as well as the ethnic community in Aceh that supports it.

The ability of the Acehnese rebels to rely on an ethnic community to support them brings us to the biggest principle difference between the insurgencies: the degree of ethnic homogeneity. As an ethnically homogeneous community, Aceh is an ethnic community that sees itself as separate from the rest of Indonesia. As such their means of seeking a solution to their grievance is different than that of the insurgents in the Niger Delta. While the insurgents in the Niger Delta demand greater access to economic opportunity and steal oil to bleed the government of revenue thereby hoping to bring them to the negotiating table, the insurgents in Aceh demanded greater access to economic opportunity through secession from Indonesia.

The insurgencies in Aceh and the Niger Delta have been fought using principally conventional troops from the Indonesian Armed Forces and Nigerian Federal Army. Both militaries have used brutally repressive tactics but the scale of the repression in Aceh exceeded that of the Niger Delta. The reason for this can be attributed to the combination of direct and indirect counter-insurgency tactics used by the Indonesian troops owing to the ethnic homogeneity of the insurgent group and population supporting it. In contrast, the Nigerian military seeks to brand the insurgents as criminals and engage with minimal force. Although military actions do take place periodically (and are executed with exceeding force and brutality), the Nigerian government response principally seeks to

safeguard its assets (oil production facilities) and negotiate an end to the “criminality” with ethnic community leaders due to the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the insurgents.

In each case, the development and prosecution of each insurgency will be examined. Using a constructivist approach to ethnicity, a brief background will be provided for the ethnic composition of both conflict areas. The economic factors that intensified the development of Acehnese nationalism will be examined through an analysis of *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM) and the separatist movement it launched against the Indonesian government starting in 1976. Similarly, the economic factors leading to the marginalization of the ethnic communities in the Niger Delta will be used to examine the mobilization of ethnically homogeneous youth militias operating against the Nigerian Federal Government and Multinational Oil Corporations in the Niger Delta. It will be shown that these militias are no fewer in number than their Acehnese counterparts but that the lack of ethnic unity prevents them from coalescing as a single insurgency force.

The military approaches used by the Indonesian and Nigerian governments will then be presented and analyzed with the distinctions of how the ethnic composition of the insurgent groups impact the approaches taken to addressing these insurgencies. The challenges and opportunities that are afforded the governments based on the mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic compositions of each insurgent group will be presented and compared with the operational implementation of each country’s military plans. To the degree that the links between government policy and military execution can be examined, they will. In the absence of this, operations will be analyzed based upon end-states on the ground.

In conclusion, analysis will be conducted that shows how the impact of ethnic composition on counterinsurgency operations against resource competitors actually produces counterintuitive results. The implications of these counterintuitive results will comprise the final sub-section of the thesis.

II. NIGER DELTA



Figure 1. The Niger Delta³⁸

A. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing conflict between the ethnically delimited communities of the Niger Delta and the Nigerian Federal Government provides a textbook example of an ethnicity based resource competition, but more importantly, one that is multi-ethnic in nature. Since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in 1956, access to the revenues derived from petroleum has become a source of high tension between the ethnic communities and the federal government in Abuja. This chapter will trace the evolution of the multi-ethnic insurgency from its roots as communal militias to the current insurgency manifested by ethnicity-delimited militias fighting with the Nigerian Federal Government for access to resource wealth. It will be shown that this insurgency, whose roots lie in economic

³⁸ Map taken from *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, September 28, 2006), 28.

grievances that arose following the discovery of petroleum in the region in the 1960s, has never been able to constitute a serious enough threat to challenge the government for territorial claim to the area.

Government responses will next be examined. Analysis will show that despite the challenges levied by the insurgency, the ethnically heterogeneous nature of the insurgency has allowed the government to avoid engaging in a costly counter-insurgency due to the inability of the insurgent elements to coalesce into a coherent separatist threat. This has enabled the government to adopt a response that is repressive while not conceding to the demands of the insurgents or their communal supporters. Through an approach that combines security tactics aimed at safeguarding the oil industry infrastructure while approaching the insurgent elements as criminals, the ethnic militias have been contained to a degree that prevents them from challenging the territorial integrity of the state.

Nigeria's Niger Delta region, called the "South-South," comprises the southwestern portion of the country, bordering the Gulf of Guinea. Nine states are normally associated with the South-South: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers states (see Figure 1). The Niger Delta measures over 16,000 square miles and, being roughly equal to the size of Scotland, is one of the world's largest sedimentary basins. Within this area is a rich endowment of biodiversity, including Nigeria's remaining primary forest and the world's third largest mangrove swamp. With an elevation rarely rising above 50 feet and very poor ground drainage, the Niger Delta is a forbidding area comprised of dense jungle, punctuated by a complex system of fresh and brackish water stream systems, estuaries, mudflats, tidal marshes, and coastal forests. Rainfall is plentiful and the relative humidity never drops below 80%. Travel by road is impossible in some areas with access only obtainable through waterborne travel or helicopter.³⁹

Despite this challenging terrain and climate, the Niger Delta is home to an estimated 20 million people, though census statistics are not wholly reliable. The people

³⁹ Sofiri Peterside and Patterson Ogon, *Background Paper: The Niger Delta*. www.globetrotter.berkeley.edu/GreenGovernance/papers/Nigeriabckgrd.pdf (accessed January 8, 2007).

of the Niger Delta live through a mixture of subsistence farming, fishing, and limited commercial enterprises. Although only five major linguistic categories are represented in the greater Niger Delta region, the inhabitants have developed into over 40 different ethnic groups. Over 3,000 ethno-linguistically delimited communities have taken root wherever arable land is available, in a pattern that makes discerning ethnic “homelands” challenging; the Niger Delta appears as a patchwork quilt of ethnic groups. The result is an enormously complex ethnic landscape that mottles the region and makes ethnicity-based competition common. The largest ethnic group in the region is the Ijaw with others including the Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ogoni, and a score of other smaller ethnic groups living in ethnically defined enclaves. These ethnic groups not only compete with other ethnic groups, but also amongst themselves along clan lines.⁴⁰

Among the most impoverished communities in Nigeria, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta live in a level of poverty and deprivation that is ironic given the amount of revenue that is derived from their lands. Petroleum from the Niger Delta’s provides 80% of the government’s revenue and 95% of the country’s export earnings.⁴¹ However little of this is seen by the local communities of the region. Although the oil-producing states receive a large cut of the revenue, most of it is lost to corruption and mismanagement within the state and local governments.⁴² Urban centers like Port Harcourt and Warri have experienced enormous growth in infrastructure while the outlying areas exist in primitive under-development.⁴³

Compounding this deprivation is the extreme ecological despoliation of the region, leading to a severe impact on the ability of the already impoverished people to exist by traditional subsistence means. Between 1976 and 1996, an estimated 1.8 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Niger Delta. Gas flaring, the practice of burning off

⁴⁰ *ICG Report No. 115 The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Niger Delta Unrest* (Dakar/Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 3, 2006), 26-27. This article provides several examples of this competition including community competition over political zoning, land boundaries, and access to revenues and benefits distributed by oil companies.

⁴¹ *ICG Report No. 113 Nigeria: Want in the Midst of Plenty* (Dakar/Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 19, 2006), 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

excess natural gas that is extracted in the course of oil pumping, furthers the ecological problems by creating poor atmospheric conditions and additional contamination.

Despite the grievances of the Niger Delta communities and even attempts to address them by state and federal government commissions, the problems have failed to be resolved. By any measure, the Nigerian Federal Government has not done enough to address these grievances.⁴⁴ Over the last 10 years, growing agitation amongst the Niger Delta communities has culminated in the development of civic action groups and armed militias, principally organized along ethnic lines who clamor for increased benefits from the oil revenues. (These civic action groups and militias will be addressed in detail later in this chapter.)

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ethnic competition is nothing new to this region. Over the last 300 years, the different ethnic communities of the region have competed with one another or been exploited by outsiders through the various phases of external influence. Between 1650 and 1800, these communities competed over access to the slave trade.⁴⁵ Slave raiding was a common activity that saw the different ethnic communities selling members of one another's neighboring communities to the British and other European slave trading powers.⁴⁶

Following Britain's banning of the slave trade in 1807, the focus shifted to the cultivation of palm oil, then a critical resource in Europe used in soap, candles, and as a lubricant used in the machinery of the industrial revolution.⁴⁷ The communities who had

⁴⁴ Uwem E. Ite, "Multinationals and Corporate Social Responsibility in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Nigeria," *Corporate Social-Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 11, (March 2004), 1-10. The Niger Delta is the virtual poster child for activist groups taking aim at multi-national corporations for failing to provide sufficient services and benefits to the indigenous inhabitants of regions where they operate.

⁴⁵ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12. An estimated 24 percent of West Africa's slaves were exported from the Niger Delta/Bight of Biafra region.

⁴⁶ Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen* (Colorado, Westview Press, 2000), 119-122.

⁴⁷ Martin Lynn, "The West African Palm Oil Trade" in Robin Law (ed.) *From Slave Trade to Legitimate Commerce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23-25.

previously colluded in the slave trade found new opportunities in exporting palm oil. The chiefs of the various ethnic communities established a tenuous relationship with the British National African Company, which successfully banded together the various palm oil companies in 1879.⁴⁸

This relationship provided a harbinger of the external exploitation and inter-communal competition that was to come. The chiefs who signed these treaties often did not understand that they were effectively ceding their sovereignty to the British Crown. By 1884, the British had secured thirty-seven treaties with local chiefs and maintained a fleet of twenty gunboats to punish any Africans who challenged British authority. The National African Company established its own legal system, complete with territorial administrators, court, prison system, police and secret service. The police of the National African Company looked out solely for the interests of the European traders, much in the same way that “supernumerary” police protect the multi-national oil companies today.⁴⁹ The company set out to completely monopolize the palm oil exports from the Delta and cared little for the middlemen tending the plantations. An onerous system of tariffs and licenses was put in place by the company and anyone seeking to circumvent them risked execution. Punitive raids against non-compliant Niger Delta communities were not uncommon.

This exploitation reached a boiling point in 1895 when Ijaw King William Koko took the offensive and launched an attack against a neighboring commercial company, the Royal Niger Company.⁵⁰ Fortified by their belief in the Ijaw god of war, Egbesu, over a thousand warriors painted in white chalk set out in war canoes and launched a dawn attack on the company headquarters in Akassa. The British retaliatory attack against the Ijaw kingdom at Nembe resulted in the leveling of several villages and the systematic

⁴⁸ Maier, 120.

⁴⁹ Scott Pegg, “The Cost of Doing Business. Transnational Corporations and Violence in Nigeria,” *Security Dialogue* 30 (1999), 75. The supernumerary police are a special detachment of the Nigeria Police Force who are ‘an attachment to Shell Nigeria and guard the company’s residential, office, and industrial areas... and provide escort duties in areas of high risk.’

⁵⁰ Maier, 121.

killing of several hundred people.⁵¹ Although the palm oil industry waned in the 1920s, British punitive missions against Niger Delta communities continued until well after Nigeria was composed as a colony in 1914. More than 50 women were killed in 1929 when police fired on groups of women protesting against a purported new tax aimed at their income.⁵²

In the 1950s, with the approach of Nigeria's independence, the ethnic communities of the Niger Delta argued that the British had no right to hand them over to the new nation-state.⁵³ This argument was based on the desire of traditional elites to maintain control over their own affairs and the belief that a central Nigerian authority, most likely from another ethnic group, would seek to exploit other groups to the betterment of their own. The British response, stemming from Sir Henry Willink's Commission on Minority Groups, was to reject independence for the delta communities, as well as granting them the status of a state within Nigeria.⁵⁴ But the commission recognized, in a foreshadowing of the complaints of today, that among the people of the Niger Delta lay a deep-rooted conviction that the authorities of the central government failed to grasp the complexity of their situation.⁵⁵ As a result, the Willink Commission recommended the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board, which among other things, required that no more than 50% of the revenues derived from the region could be taken from it.⁵⁶

⁵¹ ICG Report No. 115 *The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Niger Delta Unrest*, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵³ Stephen Wright, *Nigeria Struggle for Stability and Status*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 23-24.

⁵⁴ R.T. Akinyele, "States Creation in Nigeria: The Willink Report in Retrospect," *African Studies Review* 39 (September 1996), 71-94. The Willink Commission's report remains a source of controversy today. The aim of this British colonial commission was to determine the legitimacy of concerns by ethnic minorities in the then colony of Nigeria that they would be manipulated and disenfranchised by the larger ethnic groups (Hausa, Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba) once the colony achieved independence. Many Nigerians conclude that the commission largely ignored its findings and provided contradictory advice to the colonial administrators deciding how best to establish the state of Nigeria.

⁵⁵ Maier, 123.

⁵⁶ Augustine Ikelegbe, "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 14 (2005), 214.

These complexities became even more convoluted in 1956. The Niger Delta communities did not know it then, but as the Willink Commission was gathering its evidence, the future of the Delta had taken a dramatic and unexpected turn. In the Ijaw community of Oloibiri, the Shell Petroleum Company had discovered oil.⁵⁷ Like the 19th century palm oil boom that saw British colonial interests take hold of the Niger Delta, this meant that an independent Nigerian government would be loathe to loosen its control over the region. The rapid rise of petroleum revenues to dominate the Nigerian economy had a reverse effect on the region from which these resources were extracted. Much as they had feared, the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta faced massive disenfranchisement by larger ethnic groups, this time at the helm of the Nigerian Federal Government. The people of the Niger Delta would only see poverty and environmental degradation as a result of Nigeria's oil windfall.

In 1967, the Federal Government created twelve states, replacing the previously instituted regional system the government had inherited from the British at independence in 1960. This decision was made to not only soothe remaining ethnic concerns about resource distribution and political representation, but also for provide a means for implementing more effective political control through state and local governments.⁵⁸ By adopting a state structure, greater control would be afforded to state governments. This appeared to be a step toward satisfying the aspirations by the Niger Delta communities to have more control over their own resources. The distribution of oil revenues was based upon a derivation principle that sought to equitably provide access of oil revenues to all parts of the country.⁵⁹ However, the principle beneficiaries were the federal government and the oil-producing states in the Niger Delta. The economic trajectory for the Niger Delta appeared to be an optimistic one.

⁵⁷ S. Ahmad Khan, *Nigeria: The Political Economy of Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 39.

⁵⁸ Eghosa E Osaghae, "Managing Multiple Minority Problems in a Divided Society: The Nigerian Experience," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36 (March 1998), 18.

⁵⁹ S. Egite Oyovbaire, "The Politics of Revenue Allocation," *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1978), 224-249.

Between 1967 and 1970, Nigeria was wracked by Civil War. Began as a result of ethnic Igbo aspirations to establish the sovereign Republic of Biafra, a state in which the Igbo would be the ethnic majority, it was among the costliest civil conflicts the world has seen, witnessing widespread devastation and the killing of over one million Nigerians.⁶⁰ Initially included in the Igbo bid for secession, the Niger Delta was quickly reclaimed by the federal government where the majority of Niger Delta communities would support the government effort to maintain the territorial integrity of the country.⁶¹ The end of the Nigerian Civil War would see reconciliation between the federal government and the Igbo secessionists. The Nigerian Civil War would leave an indelible impression on the psyche of the country—the Nigerian government would not easily part with its territory.

Following the end of Nigerian Civil War the revenue percentages previously established by the federal government were systematically reduced from 50% to a mere 1.5% by the military government then in power.⁶² The rationale for this action was to centralize oil revenues with the federal government in order to pay for the civil war, but also to address budgetary imbalances in the states. While the southern states may have been the source of the wealth, the northern states were more populous. The derivation principle used to allocate federally controlled revenues had resulted in the failure of the northern states to receive adequate funds to run their state budgets.⁶³ Moreover, the northern states were home to the largest and most dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. In a political system that saw ethnicity as a critical variable, Nigerian elites had little choice but to account for it.

This redistribution of revenues also heralded the beginnings of economic corruption in Nigeria. This adjustment in revenue distribution also came as a result of the

⁶⁰ Theophilus O. Odetola, *Military Politics in Nigeria*, (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1978), 65-66.

⁶¹ Tekena N. Tamuno, "Patriotism and Statism in the Rivers State, Nigeria," *African Affairs* 24 (July 1972), 265-266. Most of the population in the Niger Delta states primarily supported the Nigerian Federal Government during the Nigerian Civil War or Biafra War from 1967-1970. However, this was a complex situation that did see some segments of the Niger Delta communities siding with the secessionist movement and even volunteering to fight for Biafra.

⁶² These percentages would continue to fluctuate over the next twenty-seven years, but did not raise above 3%. In 1999, the newly elected Obasanjo government allocated 13% of the oil revenues to the Niger Delta as a result of recommendations made by the Niger Delta Development Commission.

⁶³ Oyovbaire, 226-227.

increases in oil prices and production during 1973-80. These were the boom years of the Nigerian economy and the government sought to centralize control of all oil revenues in a bid to consolidate their power.⁶⁴ However this was an economy out of control. Both government expenditure and public consumption exploded, with the majority of revenues being funneled to non-oil producing states in an effort to capitalize on economic growth. Financial indiscipline and corruption became entrenched.⁶⁵ However, little of this fiscal windfall was seen in the Niger Delta. In an ironic twist, not only was the region deprived of the revenues that came from oil extracted from the Niger Delta, but the region received the lowest amount of development funding that came from the oil revenues. The rest of Nigeria, particularly the northern states from which the military leaders came, received the bulk of the federal development moneys to build infrastructure while the communities of the Niger Delta languished.⁶⁶

In 1978, General Olusegun Obasanjo, then military ruler of the country, implemented a land reform policy that transferred the ownership of all land, as well as the mineral resources contained therein, to the federal government. Implemented as a result of precipitous rise in the reliance upon petroleum revenues for the economic well-being of the country, this legislation effectively stripped the local communities and states of control over their land, resources, or the oil companies.⁶⁷ Oil had become a matter of “national security.”⁶⁸ In the years that followed, which saw Nigeria’s second attempt at democracy ended by military coup, the level of accountability and transparency of oil revenues dwindled yet further.

Throughout the years of military rule, the level of marginalization only increased in the Niger Delta. This was not due to a lack of effort on the part of the military leaders to address concerns, but instead reflected the patrimonial and ethnically defined nature of politics in Nigeria. New states were created in 1967 (and subsequently increased in

⁶⁴ Khan, 185.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ikelegbe, “The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” 214.

⁶⁷ Eboe Hutchful and Kwesi Aning, “The Political Economy of Conflict,” *West Africa’s Security Challenges* ed. Adekeye Adebajo and Ismail Rashid (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 211.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 211.

number in 1976, 1987, 1991, and 1996) as a means to provide adequate representation to the diversity of the population.⁶⁹ By 1996, thirty-six states had been created in Nigeria under the premise that smaller ethnic groups would be able to better control their affairs through local and state governments.⁷⁰ Paradoxically, the effect of the creation of new states was the reverse of what was intended. This is due to the reliance of these largely “nonviable” political entities on up to 80% of their income from the federal government.⁷¹ These state and local governments were rife with corruption, and fiscal resources that were distributed to them were absorbed in the patrimonial client networks.

Compounding this problem was the fact that politics in Nigeria are largely driven by ethnic identity. The larger ethnic groups in the states were able to dominate local politics thereby directing more of the financial resources distributed by the government into their client networks. For the ethnic minorities, this meant further marginalization and competition for increasingly scarce resources. In the Niger Delta, where the majority of the communities are ethnic minorities, this translated into still further deprivation.

The culmination of the centralization of resource distribution with the systematic creation of smaller ethnically focused states and local governments that were highly susceptible to corruption, was the hastening of economic collapse.⁷² Symptomatic of this collapse was the increase in poverty and crime throughout many parts of the country. Starting in the mid-1980s and proceeding into the 1990s, this economic decline would see crime become a rampant problem across Nigeria, including the Niger Delta. As the federal government failed to address the problem, the ethnically delimited communities began to focus on militancy as a means for their own survival.

⁶⁹ Daniel C. Bach, “Indigeneity, Ethnicity, and Federalism,” in *Transition Without End* ed. Larry Diamond, Anthony Kirk-Greene, and Oyeleye Oyediran (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 334.

⁷⁰ Along with the creation of new states came the creation of additional Local Government Areas (LGA). Between 1976 and 1996, local governments grew in number from 301 to 774.

⁷¹ Stephen Wright, *Nigeria Struggle for Stability and Status*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 51-52.

⁷² John N Paden, “Unity in Diversity: Toward Democratic Federalism,” *Crafting the New Nigeria* ed. Robert I. Rotberg (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 20-22.

C. CONTEMPORARY ETHNIC COMPETITION AND THE EMERGENCE OF INSURGENCY

Ethnic militias are actually not new to the Niger Delta or Nigeria. The roots of “armed communal self defense forces” traces back to pre-colonial times when indigenous communities maintained groups of warriors to serve as security against both internal and external threats against them.⁷³ Despite British efforts to abolish them, these militias continued to be maintained by the ethnically delimited communities. The militias gained their legitimacy and authority from the communities they supported, answering to traditional elites and serving as economic and political vanguards for the interests of the communities they represented. Following independence, the Nigerian government forbade the continued use of militias as community self-defense or vigilante forces. However, many communities continued to encourage their able-bodied men to serve as auxiliaries for the state police force in the capacity of local ethnic militias. This was due to the limited effectiveness and availability of federal police. In this capacity the communities were essentially self-monitoring, helping to apprehend criminals and maintain intra-communal resolutions.

These militias initially started out as night patrols and community watch groups aimed at curbing the rampant criminal activities that followed the rapid urbanization and economic decline as oil prices stabilized. In addition to traditional elites, local and state governments as well as police forces approved of these groups.⁷⁴ By the mid-1990s, the unrelenting wave of violent crime and heightened frustration by Nigeria’s communities with the inefficiency of state police, provided the rationale for having the militias as vigilante forces augment or even take the place of police forces. The then military government of Nigeria tacitly approved of these measures requiring that these militias be

⁷³ *Ethnic Militias and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria* (Ife-Ife Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2003), 16-18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

controlled by traditional elites.⁷⁵ The functions of these militias would change over time as economic and political marginalization led to increasingly radicalized ideas of how to overcome the these challenges.

In examining the phenomenon of ethnic insurgency in the Niger Delta, three distinct phases can be observed in its development. The transition in the first two phases roughly coincides with the 1998-1999 democratization of the Nigerian Federal Government, when General Abdulsalami Abubaker transitioned the government back to democratic rule. The reason for this year being the breakpoint in the phases of the militias' development is that democratization coupled with the years of economic deprivation resulted in the co-opting of ethnic militias by political contenders. The stakes in the ethnic political game were high and militias were actively used to support political candidates through the suppression of other political candidates (and their militias).

Prior to this time, the ethnic militias had been largely a communal phenomenon that focused on vigilante actions aimed at safeguarding their communities, though this included fighting with the federal government and other ethnic groups. In the months leading up to the 1999 elections, political aspirants armed these militias and turned them loose on civil society in an effort to win bids for election through intimidation. Following the elections, these now well-armed militants had outgrown their usefulness and were either cast off or assigned different, largely criminal roles by the newly elected political elites. This cycle again occurred in 2003. Though conclusive evidence directly linking the militias to politicians is largely anecdotal, it is a widely accepted fact that this linkage exists.⁷⁶

The latest phase in the development of the militias marks the beginnings of insurgency aimed at the Nigerian government. Beginning in late 2005 with the advent of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Joint Revolutionary

⁷⁵ R. T. Akinyele, "Ethnic Militancy and National Stability in Nigeria: A Case Study in the Oodua People's Congress," *African Affairs* 100 (October 2001), 628.

⁷⁶ Isiaka Alani Badmus, "Ethnic Militia Movements and the Crisis of Political Order in Post-Military Nigeria," *Journal of Social Science* 13 (2002), 191-198. This article offers a perspective on the linkages between ethnic militias and competition amongst Nigerian political contenders.

Council,⁷⁷ ethnically delimited though highly organized and well-equipped militant elements began to appear. MEND acts as an umbrella organization for several Ijaw militia groups and actively challenges the Abuja government, using oil theft and kidnap tactics to fund their activities while attacking oil installations and Nigerian federal troops. Though these tactics are similar to those seen between 1999 and 2003, the frequency and lethality of their attacks as well as the skilled use of public relations in elucidating their demands clearly shows a level of organization that had not previously existed.

1. Militia Development until 1998

The year 1966, six years after the country's independence, would see the first armed ethnic uprising in the Niger Delta. Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, a former policeman of Ijaw ethnicity mustered a small contingent of 150 Ijaw peasants in a spirited but largely hopeless attempt to achieve independence for the Niger Delta communities.⁷⁸ Raising the flag of an independent "Niger Delta People's Republic" on February 23, 1966, he declared all oil contracts void and directed the oil companies to negotiate directly with him and his new administration.⁷⁹ Boro's attempt at independence was short-lived. Within 12 days of declaring independence, he and his rebellion had been subdued by federal troops.⁸⁰ Although Boro was unsuccessful, he serves today as a folk hero and icon of inspiration for Ijaws and other ethnic militants in the Niger Delta.

During the steady economic decline of the 1980s, the Niger Delta witnessed the extensive development of civil action groups whose goal was to seek a outlet for their economic grievances. These groups developed along the lines of ethnic unions during the 1950s and 1960s as a result of community efforts to pool resources to support their

⁷⁷ Ahamefula Ogbu, "Militants Serve Oil Firms 3-Day Quit Notice," *This Day*, 11, 4214 (Saturday, November 24, 2006), 1, 4. The Joint Revolutionary Council comprised MEND, the Reformed Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, and the Martyr's Brigade.

⁷⁸ Matthew Page, *Ijaw Cultural Study*, Marine Corps (Quantico: Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, 2007), 12-13.

⁷⁹ *ICG Report No. 115 The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unre: 4.*

⁸⁰ Osaghae, 18. Boro would later be killed in the Biafra War fighting on the side of the Federal Government.

communities and to address increasing political and economic marginalization.⁸¹ These civil action groups included environmental groups, civil rights groups, ethnic youth associations, and pan-ethnic civil groups.⁸² Examples of these groups include the Niger Delta Human and Environmental Rescue Organization (ND-HERO), an environmental group; Ijaw National Congress (INC), Isoko Development Union (IDU), Movement for the Survival of the Itsekiri Nationality (MOSIEN), and Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), all ethnic civil groups; the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), and Urhobu Youth Movement (UYOMO), all ethnic youth groups; and the Concerned Youths of Oil Producing States and Niger Delta Peace Project Committee, both pan-ethnic civil groups.⁸³ Many of these civil action groups had or later developed “armed wings” in the form of informal security groups or ethnic militias, particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Comprised exclusively of young men, these militias tended to be organized along ethno-linguistic lines and were exclusive of other ethnic groups. The militias focused on ensuring that other ethnic groups or communities didn’t compromise the limited economic resources available to them. However, as the level of economic marginalization increased, which included lack of employment for the majority of the youths, the militias began to adopt an ideology that saw them as repressed. Increasingly angry and frustrated with their lot in life, these militias began to look for outlets which included agitation aimed at the oil companies as well as crime.

Oil theft or “illegal bunkering” began during the late 1980s but steadily increased in its level of severity throughout the following decade.⁸⁴ These activities saw not only militias, but also whole communities becoming involved in the theft and resale of stolen oil. The multi-national oil corporations sought assistance from the state and federal

⁸¹ Osita Agbu, *Ethnic Militias and the Threat to Democracy in Post-Transition Nigeria* (Sweden: Nordiska Africanstitutet, 2004), 29.

⁸² Augustine Ikelegbe, “Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Ramifications of Civil Society for the Regional Resource Struggle,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39 (September 2001), 438-442.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 442-450.

⁸⁴ John Ghazvinian, “The Curse of Oil: Niger Delta, Nigeria, 2005,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 83 (Winter 2007), 12-16.

governments in an effort to curtail the problem. One of the results of the oil theft phenomenon has been the increase in security by the oil corporations, including the employment of “supernumerary” police and security guards. In most cases, these security personnel are deliberately hired from outside of the ethnic community in which they will be serving in order to forestall any potential for collusion between the guards and the local community.⁸⁵ As a result of these practices, inter-ethnic tensions are only exacerbated.

The descent of the Niger Delta economy, indeed the whole Nigerian economy, into further levels of decrepitude during the 1990s resulted in increased anger and inter-ethnic tensions in the Niger Delta. Among the more notable of these were the Ijaw-Itsekiri in Delta State and Ijaw-Ilaje conflicts in Ondo State from 1997-1999. During this period, hundreds died as a result of ethnic militias clashing over the distribution of oil revenues.⁸⁶ These clashes only served to enhance the already well-defined ethnic divisions of the Niger Delta.

During the 1980s and 1990s, direct confrontations with the federal government occurred but were on more limited basis than after democratization. Funds for weapons and equipment were not as available as they were following the political campaigns of 1999 and 2003. Confrontations did occur though as armed militias began to direct their frustration toward the multi-national oil corporations actively extracting petroleum from their lands. The most well publicized confrontation was that of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) that saw this small ethnic minority challenge the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida.⁸⁷ The suppression of this activist movement and movements like it resulted in a militarization of the Niger Delta, wherein extensive military garrisons were established to safeguard oil production facilities.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Kenneth Omeje, “The State, Conflict, & Evolving Politics in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Review of African Political Economy* 101 (2004), 436 and Charles Ukeje, “Youths, Violence, and the Collapse of Public Order in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” *African Development XXVT* (2001), 355. Both provide examples of the practice of employing ethnically different security personnel to safeguard oil facilities.

⁸⁶ *Ethnic Militias and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*, 46, 49-51.

⁸⁷ Hutchful and Aning, 211-212.

⁸⁸ Ikelegbe, “The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” 223-224.

These government actions were major contributors to the development of more violent militia movements such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, one of the most formidable ethnic militias in the region.⁸⁹

Intra-ethnic societal changes in the Niger Delta also impacted the rise in ethnic militancy. This phenomenon began largely in the 1990s where a breakdown in civil society between youths and their traditional elders became apparent. The term "youths" in many parts of Africa, including the Niger Delta, is a collective term that refers to anyone who is not of the chief class or in a position of traditional leadership within an ethnic community. Youths are more a social class than an indicator of chronological age; members of youth groups range in age between 20 and 45. These powerless youths lacked political and economic opportunities and grew increasingly frustrated with the seeming failure of their traditional ethnic leaders to look out for their needs.⁹⁰ A principle complaint by the disenfranchised youths was that they not only lack economic opportunities, but the traditional elites were in collusion with the government to deprive the majority of communities of their 'rightful' resources. As such, the youths of ethnic communities increasingly formed their own civil organizations and disregarded the guidance of traditional elites and elders, in their pursuit of economic and political opportunity.

By the end of the long period of military governance, the ethnic militias in the Niger Delta were well established. Controlled by a combination of communal leaders as well as "youth councils", these militias proliferated. Between economic and social conditions that encouraged youths to join these groups and the requirement for ethnically delimited communities to fight for their share of the limited resources available to them, the stage was set for these armed groups to be used as private armies of political contenders as the country strode toward democracy.

⁸⁹ Pdraig Carmody, "Transforming Globalization and Security: Africa and America Post-9/11." *Africa Today*, Vol. 52, Iss. 1, 103-104. The NDPVF is an Ijaw Militia.

⁹⁰ Mohammed Ibrahim, "An Empirical Study of Children and Youth in Organized Violence in Nigeria: Egbesu Boys, OPC, and Bakassi Boys as a Case Study," *Center for Democracy and Development* (2002), 14.

2. Evolution of Ethnic Militias, 1998-2005

With the advent of democratization efforts in 1998, long suppressed political and civil activities could again be conducted. Political and civil associations multiplied. In the competitive environment of Nigerian democratic processes, the militias became tools for local political aspirants. Since most local politics were organized along ethnic and communal lines, this resulted in the militias becoming ethnic paramilitary groups serving their political masters, who were incidentally, all of the same ethnicity. As will be seen in the next chapter, this was the opposite effect of what occurred in Aceh, where democratization and liberalization led to greater ethnic coherency under the guise of ethnic nationalism.

As previously discussed, the advent of democracy brought about the co-optation of the ethnic militias by political aspirants.⁹¹ With access to weapons and equipment through their political sponsors, the lethality and effectiveness of the militias expanded greatly. Within the Niger Delta, political competition led to pitched ethnic fighting where fighting over economic interests had already taken place. This fighting left hundreds dead and thousands displaced. In 1998, 1999, and again in 2003, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Ilaje, and Urhobo militias fought with each other and Nigerian military forces over political zoning in the City of Warri as well as access to oil company payouts to host communities from which the oil was extracted.⁹² Clashes between Ijaw and Yoruba left at least 50 dead in 1999 in a dispute over ownership of an oil field.⁹³ In some cases, intra-ethnic fighting took place as observed in militia violence perpetrated by rival Ijaw clans in 2002-2003.⁹⁴ Although the fighting ended with the state government mediating between the ethnic communities, the inter-ethnic rivalries continue to simmer. A popular theory amongst both state political leaders and several academics is that these politicians continue to use

⁹¹ Scott Calvert, "Paying the Price for Resistance; Effects of Nigerian Militants' Attacks on Oil Firms Are Felt at Home," *The Baltimore Sun* (December 18, 2006, Final Edition) , 1A.

⁹² ICG Report No. 115 *The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Niger Delta Unrest*, 14-15.

⁹³ Barry Mason, "Ethnic Conflict Escalates in Nigeria," *World Socialists* (August 17, 1999) http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/aug1999/nig-a17_prn.shtml (accessed January 11, 2007).

⁹⁴ Agbu, 29-33.

the militias in an effort to maintain political leverage. Recent years have seen the Obasanjo government instituting significant anti-corruption campaigns aimed at amending this problem.⁹⁵

At the end of each of the political seasons in 1999 and 2003, the use of ethnic militants for political purposes eased. The newly armed and still disenfranchised youths returned to patrolling the Niger Delta in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Today the array of political associations and ethnic militias in the Niger Delta is “simply mind-boggling;” an array of pseudo-political and militant groups have arisen that challenges attempts to effectively catalogue them.⁹⁶ As the political, economic, and ecological situation in the Niger Delta has continued to deteriorate, the ethnic militias have increasingly turned their efforts against the Nigerian government and their perceived colluders, the multi-national oil corporations.

Starting in the late 1990s, these efforts included the kidnapping of oil workers for ransom, the attack and occupation of oil installations located in the swamps, and the deliberate shut-down of oil production.⁹⁷ These actions were accompanied by a variety of demands ranging from more equitable distribution of employment opportunities to ransom demands for monetary payout. In all cases, the paying of ransom or adjustment of petroleum benefit distributions to specified communities has resulted in resolutions. Although oil workers and security forces have been killed in attacks on facilities, the militias have been careful to ensure that no hostages were mistreated or killed while in their custody.

Oil theft, which began in the 1980s on a minor scale, rose to an astonishingly high level. Today the practice of siphoning, transporting, and selling crude oil to international buyers is now acknowledged as the primary means by which the Niger Delta militias

⁹⁵ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 16-17. This article provides details on Obasanjo’s anti-corruption platform.

⁹⁶ Agbu, 30.

⁹⁷ According to Ikelegbe, the disruption of oil production first began in Ogoni territories in the early 90s and spread to Ijaw, Isoko, and other ethnic groups’ areas by the late 90s. Since 1997, youth militia of Ijaw, Ikwerre, Egi, Isoko, and Ilaje ethnic groups have seized and occupied several oil installations operating in their areas. See Ikelegbe’s “The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta” for more details.

have financed their activities.⁹⁸ Estimates vary on the amount of oil that is being stolen, with figures ranging between 70,000 and 300,000 barrels per day.⁹⁹ Even a loss of only 70,000 barrels per day would “generate over \$1.5 billion dollars per year—ample resources to fund arms trafficking, buy political influence, or both.”¹⁰⁰ In 2005, the practice of oil bunkering reduced Nigeria’s enormous oil output by upwards of 10-15%.¹⁰¹ Some estimates have cited the loss of revenue to be as high as 40% during periods of particularly aggressive militant action.¹⁰²

Operating with impunity throughout the complex maze of inland waterways and stream networks, the militias’ intimate knowledge of their environment has enabled them to elude the government’s limited efforts to directly interdict their activities. Despite government requests that traditional ethnic leaders reign in the militias, efforts at doing so have been largely fruitless.¹⁰³ Some of the militias operate for purely self-serving and criminal motivations. With few economic opportunities, crime has become their means of deriving income. However, increasingly the militias have been making demands for significant reform in how the government approaches development and economic growth in the Niger Delta. This has included militias from the Ijaw, Ilaje, Yoruba, Isoko, Ikwere, Ogoni, and Urhobo ethnic groups.¹⁰⁴ These groups clamor for audience with the Abuja government, seeking to initiate dialogue through violence, while intermittently fighting one another over political and economic benefits.

⁹⁸ ICG Report No. 118 *Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 8-10.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Princeton Lyman and Stephen Morrison, *Independent Task Force Report No 56. More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, January 2006), 54.

¹⁰¹ Ikelegbe, “The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” 222.

¹⁰² Craig Timberg, “In Fight Over Oil-Rich Delta, Firepower Grows Sophisticated,” *The Washington Post* (March 6, 2006 Final Edition), A10.

¹⁰³ “Why N-Delta Elders Intervention Failed,” *Vanguard*, (March 19, 2006), A2.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations With the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 22/1 (Spring 2005). This article provides greater details on the evolving youth militias. This article principally focuses the Ijaw and Isoko youth movements, but also mentions the ethnic groups included above.

3. The Rise of Insurgency 2005 to Present

In late 2005, the first in a series of umbrella organizations began to emerge that sought to organize militia activities in the Niger Delta.¹⁰⁵ The most prominent of these has been the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).¹⁰⁶ As an umbrella organization, MEND has taken the resource competition in the Niger Delta to a new level. Among other results, their activities have resulted in the first real media use of the word insurgency. Displaying a level of media awareness, coordination, and sophistication previously unseen in the conflict, MEND has succeeded in gaining international notoriety and attention for their activities by broadcasting their intentions through the use of a spokesman and then following through with their threats.¹⁰⁷ With an unprecedented amount of firepower including heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, MEND has successfully attacked both oil facilities and Nigerian security forces. Using para-military tactics including standardized tactics for riverine operations, recent MEND activities have included the seizure of foreign contractors from an oil platform located 20 km off-shore (during which a Nigerian Navy vessel was forced to retreat), an attack on a Nigerian Navy barge that resulted in the deaths of 14 military personnel,¹⁰⁸ and the attack on a Port Harcourt police station to free a jailed MEND Leader.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ The term umbrella organization is used to refer to both ethnic and pan-ethnic entities that seek to lead, manage, and coordinate the actions of the ethnic militias.

¹⁰⁶ Others include the Reformed Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (RNDPV), Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA) and The Martyr's Brigade.

¹⁰⁷ Chip Cummins, "Crude Tactics: As Oil Supplies are Stretched, Rebels, Terrorists Get New Clout; Media-Savvy Guerrillas Roil Global Oil Prices in Fight with Nigerian Government; 'Mr. Gbomo Fires off Emails,'" *The Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2006), A1. MEND's spokesman uses the pseudonym Jomo Gbomo. Actively communicating with media, oil industry, and government officials through email, he had eluded efforts to track him. Email signatures indicate he is actually in South Africa. This has given rise to a theory that he and MEND are nothing more than criminal entrepreneurs with ties to ethnic militia operating in the Niger Delta.

¹⁰⁸ Emma Amaize and Paul Bebenimibo, "Niger Delta: The Gathering Storm of War," *Vanguard Nigeria* (February 22, 2006), 1.

¹⁰⁹ "50 Nigerians Burn Police Station in Raid to Free Separatist Leader," *The New York Times* (January 29, 2007), 1.

Although claiming to unite several militia groups, MEND remains ostensibly an ethnically delimited organization. The militia that are supposedly unified under MEND are all Ijaw militias. Both the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NPDVF) and Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), which are the largest militia that MEND claims to coordinate, are comprised of insurgents of Ijaw nationality.¹¹⁰

This does not discount the danger that MEND poses to the Nigerian government. With the Ijaw being the majority ethnic population in the Niger Delta, an umbrella organization such as MEND that furthers unifies an ethnic group such as the Ijaw could indeed pose a significant threat. However, because the militias and insurgent organizations in the Niger Delta remain organized along ethnic lines, there will continue to be natural cleavages that make the most serious threat, that of an organized separatist movement, difficult to pursue. Although there is likely to be limited cross-ethnic coordination, this conflict continues to be one that is principally organized and fought unilaterally by separate ethnic groups fighting for their ethnic groups, clans, communities, or themselves. As long as it remains as such, the Nigerian Government has other options outside of full-blown counter-insurgency.

D. NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

An examination of the Nigerian Government's responses reveals that few changes have taken place in how the government has approached the insurgency in the Niger Delta, since the days of military rule in the 1980s through today. Using a consistently repressive approach to quelling communal uprisings, the overwhelming approach has been one that focused on police or military action aimed at "keeping the peace" while identifying communal agitators, particularly the militias, as criminal elements. However there are some subtle differences. In order to best analyze the government's responses to the rise of ethnic insurgency in the Niger Delta, it is useful to analyze those responses in conjunction with the developmental phases of the insurgency. In doing so, it will be shown that the Nigerian government has continually attempted to keep the insurgency suppressed but is not conducting counter-insurgency.

¹¹⁰ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 6.

Before examining these responses, it will be helpful to identify what a counter-insurgency campaign in the Niger Delta might look like. As identified in Chapter I, an effective counter-insurgency strategy requires that a government “gain and maintain popular support, have a legitimate and efficient government, make a concerted effort in the political, economic, and social fields, execute dynamic military operations, and have an enlightened leadership.”¹¹¹ Although President Obasanjo may be construed as an enlightened leader, the other elements are distinctly missing, or at very least failing to be effective, in the government responses to the Niger Delta insurgency.

1. A Hypothetical Model for Niger Delta Counter-Insurgency

What would an effective counter-insurgency strategy in the Niger Delta look like? In seeking to eliminate an insurgent force from operating in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government would have to implement a coordinated economic and political reform package in conjunction with military operations. The ultimate end state desired would be the relief of conditions that create popular support for an insurgent force, the separation of the insurgent force from its popular support base, and the systematic elimination of the insurgents themselves. This is unquestionably a daunting list of requirements for the Nigerian government to adopt. Economic and political corruption remains rampant. After years of economic and political marginalization, the ethnic communities in the Niger Delta are distrustful of the government and many see supporting the insurgents as a means of potentially seeing a change in their conditions. Lastly the terrain in which the insurgents operate well suited for the execution of guerrilla operations.

In seeking economic and political reform, the government would need to facilitate some agreement between all stakeholders concerned about what an equitable distribution of these resources would look like. In the minds of most ethnic communities where the insurgents find support, there is clearly an imbalance here. By addressing political corruption, lack of effective revenue distribution and development among the Niger Delta communities, lack of economic opportunities for these communities, and the failure of

¹¹¹ Singh and Mei, *Theory and Practice of Modern Guerrilla Warfare*, 68.

multi-national oil corporations to hold themselves accountable for ecological damage, the Nigerian government would go a long way toward removing the source of grievances that fuel the insurgency.

The systematic separation of the insurgents from their support base would dovetail off efforts made in the political and economic areas. Popular support for the federal government would grow as reforms were made and would be capitalized upon by efforts to marginalize and alienate the insurgents from their ethnic communities. Those communities that continued to be unsupportive of efforts to reduce support for the insurgents would either have to be closely monitored and interdicted or relocated altogether. In doing so, strong efforts would have to be made to compensate these populations for the hardships imposed by their forced removal.

The systematic elimination of the insurgents would require the Nigerian military to implement a combination of direct and indirect approaches that put effective pressure on the insurgent groups. In doing so, the insurgency's structure would be disrupted due to loss of support caused by the increased risk in taking part in insurgent activities, the killing and capturing of its leadership, and removal of sources of supply without which insurgent military operations could not be conducted. This would have to be implemented through a combined effort by military and civil authorities to target known or suspected groups in a way that didn't lose popular support or increase sympathy for the insurgent movement.

There is no question that a counter-insurgency operation in the Niger Delta would be difficult. The prosecution of such an operation would be costly in terms of both military and civilian casualties, not to mention the destabilizing effect on the region and country. It would most certainly not be a fast or easy operation. However, the Nigerian military would "most likely eventually win in an all-out war against the militants."¹¹² However, that all-out war has not been embarked upon. On the contrary, though military

¹¹² ICG Report No. 119 *Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment*, 10.

efforts at interdicting militants could be characterized as repressive, recent efforts have been largely aimed at reducing the militants' impact on oil extraction, while allowing them to continue to operate in the Niger Delta.

2. Nigerian Government Responses until 1998

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the predominantly military regimes acted with “directness and swiftness” to any perceived challenges to their authority.¹¹³ As will be seen in the next chapter, the same approach was applied by the autocratic regime of Suharto. Like the Indonesians in Aceh, these responses always stopped short of addressing the root causes of the challenges. Furthermore, as long as the actions taken by the ethnically delimited civil action groups and militias did not threaten the flow of oil, they were viewed as harmless and generally ignored. This laxness was not the case in Aceh, where even minor agitations led to swift government reprisals. This allowed the ethnic militias to remain as a part of the Niger Delta landscape where they alternated between communal security apparatuses, helping police to apprehend suspected criminals, and low level criminal activities aimed at improving the economic standings of the militia members and their communities. Ironically, these militias were both vigilante and criminal elements at the same time.

Beginning during the Babangida regime (1985-1993), the Nigerian government began to augment security forces employed by the multi-national oil corporations with Nigerian police (Mobile Police Forces—MPF) and military elements. This measure was taken in response to increasing communal agitation aimed at the oil companies. In 1987 and again in 1990, these security forces were used to violently suppress demonstrations in Akwa Ibom and Rivers states.¹¹⁴ In both instances, tear gas and gunfire were used to disperse the crowds that had assembled outside of Shell oil company facilities. Numerous deaths were incurred on the part of the communal protestors. The demonstrations were

¹¹³ Theophilus O. Odetola, *Military Politics in Nigeria*, (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1978), 59.

¹¹⁴ Scott Pegg, “The Cost of Doing Business.” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 30, No. 4, December 1999, 475-476.

deemed to be dangerous by the Shell oil company due to the presence of ‘armed youths’ that threatened the safety of the oil company staff and infrastructure.¹¹⁵

The Nigerian government’s response to the Ogoni uprising of the late 1980s is probably the most well-known and documented example the military government’s approach of reducing communal activism and militancy to criminality.¹¹⁶ Although MOSOP consistently claimed to use non-violent means of protest, the intimidation felt by Shell resulted in a government crackdown on the organization. In 1993, the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force (RSISTF) was formed to help suppress MOSOP.¹¹⁷ The formation of this unit followed on the heels of the May 1993 Treason and Treasonable Offense Decree which was imposed by General Babangida as a means of dealing with “ethnic autonomy” movements.¹¹⁸ The RSISTF, led by an active duty major from the Nigerian Army, used highly repressive tactics in an effort to break up MOSOP. In 1994, following the mob killings of four Ogoni leaders from a splinter faction of MOSOP that opposed the tactics of the rest of the organization, sixteen MOSOP leaders including activist leader Ken Saro-Wiwa were arrested on murder charges. Convicted as murderers, nine of these activists were sentenced to death by the Abacha regime (1993-1998) and executed in 1995. In doing so, the criminalization of the MOSOP leaders was the key to movement’s suppression.

The year 1998 saw yet another act of communal agitation that elicited a strong response aimed at restoring security in the face of “public disorder.” In a manner similar to the approach taken by the Ogoni, the Ijaw communities of the Niger Delta converged on the town of Kaiama in Bayelsa State (Isaac Boro’s hometown) to issue demands from the central government. The Kaiama Declaration of December 11, 1998 saw 5000 ethnic Ijaw youths from 500 communities, 40 clans, and 25 organizations coming together under

¹¹⁵ Pegg, 475.

¹¹⁶ Eghosa E. Osaghae, “The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State.” *African Affairs* 94/376 (July 1995), 325-344.

¹¹⁷ Omeje, 430. Omeje cites the formation of the RSISTF as a government excuse to militarize the Niger Delta in the face of growing threats to the production of oil, and thereby the fiscal health of the country.

¹¹⁸ Claude E. Welch Jr., “The Ogoni and Self-Determination: Increasing Violence in Nigeria,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33/4 (December 1995), 637-638.

the auspices of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC).¹¹⁹ The IYC declared that all oil on Ijaw land belonged to them and further demanded that both the oil companies and Nigerian military withdraw from Ijaw land. The Nigerian Federal government approached this action in the same manner as it did the actions taken by MOSOP— crackdown. Declaring that the Federal Military Government was “determined not to allow anarchy to reign in the Niger Delta, “ then head of state General Abubakar ordered a massive military deployment to the Niger Delta during the first weeks of 1999.¹²⁰ Although the militarization of the Niger Delta had started during the Babangida regime, the increase in ethnic communal agitations, particularly amongst the youth militias during the latter 1990s, resulted in a strong military and police presence aimed at curbing militant activities while safeguarding the oil infrastructure. Little would change in the years following democratization.

Although numerous, government sponsored committees were established to examine the growing agitation in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government did not implement the recommendations made by these committees. From the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) of 1962 that sought to advise the federal government of how best to alleviate poverty in the region,¹²¹ to the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Fund (OMPADEC) of 1989 which helped raise the amount of oil revenues going to the region from 1.5 to 3 percent,¹²² to the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) of the mid 1990s which sought to provide a means for the ethnic minority communities of the Niger Delta to voice their concerns,¹²³ none resulted in a change in

¹¹⁹ David J. Francis, *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace*, (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishers, 2005), 83.

¹²⁰ Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations With the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” 157-158.

¹²¹ Barrett Ejiroghene, “Nigeria: Why the Troubles in the Niger Delta,” *New African* (November 1, 2006), 41.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²³ William Reno, “The Roots of Sectarian Violence, and its Cure,” *Crafting the New Nigeria* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2004), 223.

the tactics taken by the Nigerian government to addressing the issue of ethnic militancy. Overwhelmingly, those tactics remained aimed at securing the oil infrastructure against the “criminal elements” of the Niger Delta.

3. Nigerian Government Responses 1998 to 2005

Tactics used by the Nigerian Government following democratization reflected a subtle change in approach. Although the use of military and police crackdowns continued in the midst of efforts to safeguard the security of the oil companies, the Obasanjo regime also sought to deal more directly with some of the militant elements in the Niger Delta. However, this effort to open dialogue followed the federal outlawing of such groups. By doing so, the Obasanjo regime opened political space for itself to both address the problems in the region directly with the militant groups while still being able to clamp down if required.

Following the lead up to the 1999 elections, during which time the ethnic militias grew in strength and organization, and the secessionist rhetoric issued by the Ijaw Youth Council with the Kaiama Declaration, the Nigerian government began to recognize that the problem of ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta was growing much worse than previously recognized. Five months before handing over power to a newly elected Olusegun Obasanjo, General Abubakar was quoted as saying that “the agitation is not something that has come just overnight.”¹²⁴ However, he went on to say that “the government in Abuja would not allow youth associations to challenge the authority of the state.”¹²⁵

The 1999 and 2003 interethnic fighting between Ijaw, Itsekiri, Ilaje, and Urhobu ethnic groups over the relocation of government offices and the “perceptions of oil company favoritism” resulted in the deployment of federal troops to suppress the violence.¹²⁶ Hundreds died as a result of the intervention, which also involved the re-

¹²⁴ Charles Ukeje, “Youths, Violence and the Collapse of Public Order in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” *African Development* 26/1&2 (2001), 353.

¹²⁵ Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations With the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” 157-158.

¹²⁶ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 2.

capture of oil installations seized by the militants. An estimated 40 percent of the oil industry was shut down for several weeks during the 2003 uprising with significant damage being done to oil extraction infrastructure.¹²⁷ By addressing the lawlessness of the inter-ethnic fighting with in intervention of their own military, the Nigerian government was safeguarding its own oil revenues from the inter-ethnic fighting between these “criminal elements”.

In October 1999, a group of Ijaw youths captured and murdered a group of seven Yoruba police officers from the city of Lagos. These youths, members of the “Egbesu Boys,” an Ijaw militia , then took refuge in the Ijaw town of Odi. Following the killing of the policemen, an act that received universal condemnation by the surrounding communities and citizens of Odi, President Obasanjo issued an ultimatum to Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamiyeseigha that required the perpetrators to be turned over to Nigerian Federal authorities within fourteen days for prosecution. In November 1999, two days after the deadline passed, the Nigerian Army proceeded with *Operation Hakuri II* with the aim of “protecting lives and property – particularly oil platforms, flow stations, operating rig terminals and pipelines, refineries, and power installations in the Niger Delta”.¹²⁸ The end result was the complete destruction of the town and the killing of a large number of the town’s inhabitants.¹²⁹ Following the Odi Massacre, a presidential spokesman suggested that the heavy-handed response by the Nigerian troops was a “successful model of intervention”¹³⁰ aimed at preventing “criminal elements”

¹²⁷ “Ethnic Militias Wage Battles in Nigeria, Killing 100, *The New York Times (Late Edition)*, New York (August 23, 2003), A.5.

¹²⁸ Omeje, 432-433. The remarks in parentheses were made by the Nigerian Defense Minister five days after the destruction of Odi.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 432-433. The official federal government death toll was placed at 23 while local activist groups placed the death toll at 2,483.

¹³⁰ *ICG Report No. 115 The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Delta Unrest*, 6-7. This report quotes presidential spokesman Femi Fani-Kayode as saying: “When we need to be hard, we have been very hard. We were very tough when it came to a place called Odi town where our policemen and our people were killed by these ethnic militants. And the federal government went in and literally leveled the whole place. And the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It has never happened again since that time. So I think that policy works.” President Obasanjo himself has never placed blame or apologized for the event.

from being able to operate with impunity. For his part, President Obasanjo claimed, “the deployment of soldiers to Odi was done... to maintain law and order and save lives and property.”¹³¹

In December 1999, President Obasanjo issued a blanket ban on all ethnic militias in the country.¹³² This act differed from the decree issued by General Babangida in that it specifically targeted the ethnic militias. The rationale for doing this was a need to put a stop to the proliferation of these groups that occurred without any regulation by the state or local governments, not to mention communal leaders. This action was aimed at not only curbing inter-ethnic violence, but bringing the control of law and order back into the hands of the government. In doing so, all ethnic militias throughout the country were outlawed thereby opening the way for criminalization to be better systematized as a means of dealing with the militia members. It is worth reminding the reader that prior to this time, the Nigerian government had given tacit approval for ethnic militias to be used to backstop the police in their pursuit of criminals. Now, branded a “brigands, ruffians, and thugs” by the government and many media sources, the militias themselves were the criminals. In 2002, the Nigerian Government formally ratified Obasanjo’s ban with the Prohibition of Certain Associations Act, which banned “associations or individuals or quasi-military groups” formed “for the purpose of... ethnic, tribal, cultural, or other social interests of a group.”¹³³

Following the extensive deployment of forces to the Niger Delta in 1999, the Nigerian military became more integrated in Nigerian government efforts to maintain law and order in the Niger Delta. In 2003, the Joint Task Force (JTF), codenamed “Operation Restore Hope” was formed. The formation of the JTF was a significant departure from previous efforts to control Niger Delta agitations in that it signified a permanent and much more highly organized security apparatus than had been previously in place. Headquartered at Warri in Delta State, the JTF maintains approximately 4000 Army and

¹³¹ Bronwen Manby, “Principal Human Rights Challenges,” *Crafting the New Nigeria* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2004), 191.

¹³² Tunde Babawale, “The Rise of Ethnic Militias, De-Legitimization of the State, and the Threat to Nigerian Federalism,” *West Africa Review* 3/1 (2002), 8.

¹³³ Reno, 234.

Navy personnel at various locations in the Niger Delta with the mission of curtailing petroleum theft and safeguarding oil facilities and personnel.¹³⁴ Using helicopters and gunboats to patrol the inland waterways and naval vessels to safeguard offshore infrastructure, the aim of curtailing oil theft met with success. By the end of 2004, oil theft, piracy, and vandalism of oil infrastructure was on the decline.¹³⁵ The U.S. Navy is increasingly involved in assisting with maritime security and helping the Nigerian Navy to interdict militant activity on the open ocean.¹³⁶ However, due to the lack of effort to eradicate the militias, militant activities continued.

In addition to the judicial and security efforts implemented by the Nigerian Government to counter the militias, the government actually opened limited dialogues with some of the Niger Delta militants. Between mid-2003 and late 2004, two rival Ijaw militias led by Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom engaged in a protracted turf battle around the Rivers State capital of Port Harcourt.¹³⁷ This conflict had a strong destabilizing effect on the oil industry but the task of suppressing the intra-ethnic fight exceeded the scope of the JTF's mandate while being overwhelming to local police. As such in October 2004, despite significant criticism from the military who stated that his actions legitimized militant actions, President Obasanjo met with the "rascally" leaders of both groups in Abuja in order to seek an ending of the conflict.¹³⁸ In both cases, the militia leaders were granted amnesty from arrest. Following a meeting during which Obasanjo pledged to "crush them" if they didn't accept, an agreement that included the "disbandment and disarmament of all militia groups" was agreed upon.¹³⁹ The militias were to receive payment for all weapons they turned in to federal authorities.¹⁴⁰ Asari continued his agitations following his return to the Niger Delta and was ultimately arrested for treason

¹³⁴ Ikelgbe. "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," 223-224.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹³⁶ Cummins, A1.

¹³⁷ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 3-5.

¹³⁸ Jason Pini, "The Rebel Who Outfoxed Obasanjo," *New African* 434 (November 2004), 30.

¹³⁹ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Pini, 30.

in 2005. He remains in Abuja where he awaits trial for his criminal charges. His release from custody is one of the continuing demands that MEND levies on the Nigerian Government. Again, criminalizing the threat is used as a means to reduce it.

Like the military regimes before it, the Obasanjo government launched several legislative initiatives in an effort to address the problem of resource control. In 2002, the Special Committee on Oil Producing Areas, a “government constituted panel of Nigerian military officers and police chiefs, international oil company executives, and senior government officials” was convened to examine how to best address the problem.¹⁴¹ Recommendations from this committee included sweeping reforms aimed at both providing greater access to revenues and developing the area. However, little progress has been made in adopting the committee’s proposals. Implementing these recommendations would require the repealing of legislation that distributes the oil wealth to the rest of the country. Influential politicians from the northern part of the country, who are from the historically dominant ethnic groups of the Hausa and Fulani, carefully guard this legislation.¹⁴² As long as the northern ethnic groups maintain a powerful hold on the government, hopes are slim that this legislation will change.

4. Nigerian Government Responses 2005 to Present

The rise of MEND and other umbrella organizations in the Niger Delta has not caused a significant change in perception or tactics being implemented by the Nigerian Government. Still focused on oil theft and the militant activities associated with it as a form of rampant criminality, little credence is given to the insurgent organization. No direct negotiations have taken place between Nigerian Government officials and MEND leaders. Although the Nigerian government does not discount the agitation and restiveness that is growing in the Niger Delta, the perspective adopted by the Abuja

¹⁴¹ *ICG Report No. 118 Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 12-14. This report provides details of the Special Committee on Oil Producing Areas as well as a history of how revenues were historically distributed by the Federal government.

¹⁴² *ICG Report No. 119 Nigeria’s Faltering Federal Experiment*, 7.

government sees the seemingly coalescing insurgent activities as nothing more than criminality aimed at gaining money and power for the militia groups and their supporters.¹⁴³

In February 2005, the JTF attacked five Ijaw villages in what a JTF spokesman claimed was an operation aimed at interdicting oil smuggling.¹⁴⁴ During the course of this operation, both ground attack and aerial bombardment were used in an effort to destroy several oil bunkering barges that were sighted at the villages. Enraged Ijaw youths engaged the federal troops, resulting in an estimated 15 dead and numerous wounded. The JTF spokesman indicated that the actions of these youth indicated their complicity in criminal activities.¹⁴⁵ Following these attacks, each of the communities requested MEND to support them in their efforts to combat the JTF.

Brigadier General Alfred Ilogho, the Nigerian commander of the Joint Task Force, the Nigerian government's joint military police agency charged with safeguarding the Niger Delta, claims that umbrella organizations such as MEND are nothing more than criminal fronts. "Anyone can sit down in his bedroom, concoct a name and send out several e-mails across the globe" Ilogho says of MEND's supposed spokesman Jomo Gbomo.¹⁴⁶ Although limited efforts are made to patrol the Niger Delta's complex system of waterways, these patrols are focused in areas where oil production is taking place and are aimed at both preventing attacks by insurgents on oil facilities and interdicting petroleum theft. Interviews conducted with four Nigerian officers by the author at the Jaji Infantry Training Corps Center in November 2006 revealed that the Nigerian military's perception of their mission in the Niger Delta is to interdict criminal elements who seek to steal oil and kidnap oil workers for ransom.¹⁴⁷ All of the officers interviewed, who

¹⁴³ Calvert, 1A. In this article, a Nigerian government official claimed that the Abuja government sees MEND as a group of "oil-bunkering thugs" who do not care about improving conditions in the Niger Delta, but are instead after ransoms and the right to continue stealing oil.

¹⁴⁴ Amaize and Bebenimibo, "Niger Delta: The Gathering Storm of War," 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Calvert, 1A.

¹⁴⁷ These interviews were obtained during a November 6-10, 2006 ACOTA training event at the Nigerian Infantry Training Corps Center at Jaji Nigeria.

comprised two colonels, one lieutenant colonel, and one major, had served in the Niger Delta as part of the JTF. None of the officers stated that an insurgency is ongoing—instead each of them stated that the problem revolves around criminal youth elements that are stealing oil and participating in piracy.

E. SUMMARY

Defending and attempting to deter attacks against oil facilities, coupled with occasional crackdowns on ethnic communities, does not constitute a counter-insurgency effort, if the aim of the government is to neutralize the insurgent elements. Yet an insurgency does exist in the Niger Delta, one that is stripping the government of resources and compromising the internal security of the state. Criminality is widely recognized as one of the first tactics used to provide “start-up capital” for an insurgency. Instead of seeking to remove the source of support for the insurgency (the ethnic populations) or striving to meet the demands of the ethnically delimited insurgent groups, the Nigerian Federal Government has chosen a tactic of safeguarding its assets while further marginalizing the insurgents from the population through the process of criminalization. What enables the government to do this is the lack of cohesion on the part of the insurgents that prevents them from causing intolerable economic damage or becoming a nationalistic cause that threatens the cohesion of the country. What prevents that nationalism is the ethnically diverse nature of the insurgent elements.

Despite the strong rhetoric coming from the Niger Delta militias, it is highly questionable whether they possess the level of coordination necessary to bring petroleum production in the Niger Delta to halt.¹⁴⁸ There is little question that even un-coordinated militias would constitute a “serious multi-pronged security threat,”¹⁴⁹ but the fact that the nature of Nigeria’s ethnic politics and communal competition for resources prevents them

¹⁴⁸ Calvert, 1A.

¹⁴⁹ Dino Mahtani, “Nigeria’s military focuses on defending oil hubs. Security strategists concede that their forces cannot hope to engage Niger Delta militants in a full-scale crackdown,” *Financial Times London* (October 11, 2006), 9.

from coalescing into a single unified threat means that Nigeria does not have to address them as a threat to state cohesion. For now the militias are simply costly nuisances that Abuja can keep on a low simmer.

Why the Nigerian Federal Government does not do more for the Niger Delta communities is a question that exceeds the scope of this thesis. The bottom line is that as of now, they do not have to. As long as the ethnic cleavages that prevent the militias from forming a single unified insurgent threat still exist, the ethnic communities of the Niger Delta will not constitute a threat serious enough to jeopardize the government's power in Abuja or provide a credible threat of separatism. The militia members can simply be branded as criminals and, due to the inter-ethnic and in some cases intra-ethnic rivalry, hunted and brought in to custody or driven into the swamps. Either way, their activities can be minimized or curtailed.

The real danger for the Nigerian Government lies in the potential for the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta to bridge the existing ethnic and generational/class gaps to form a pan-ethnic or even single Niger Delta ethnic identity born out of the shared struggle of the communities against the central government. The appearance of pan-ethnic civil groups in the Niger Delta points to the growing willingness of communities to come together in the face of perceived hardships.¹⁵⁰ As Fearon and Laitin have argued, violence and social deprivation are powerful catalysts for the creation of new social and even ethnic identity.¹⁵¹ If a new Niger Delta ethnic identity were to form, Nigeria would potentially face an alarming problem as the communities of the region united in a separatist bid for a solution to their economic problems. These issues will be analyzed at length in Chapter IV.

As will be seen in the next chapter, the communities of Aceh Indonesia were united by their shared hardships fighting perceived external threats. The result was a hardened homogeneous ethnic identity that provided a means for mobilizing a large

¹⁵⁰ Ikelegbe, "Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Ramifications of Civil Society for a Regional Resource Struggle," 443-450.

¹⁵¹ Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 846-847.

portion of the local populace around a nationalistic idea of separatism. This resulted in a threat that the state could not ignore and created an internal security situation that the Indonesian Government had few options outside of classic counter-insurgency to address.

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III. ACEH



Figure 2. Map of Aceh¹⁵²

¹⁵² Map taken from *ICG Asia Briefing No. 61 Indonesia: How GAM Won in Aceh*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 22, 2007): 34.

A. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the Niger Delta, the insurgency that wracked the province of Aceh in Indonesia until August 2005, represents a conflict wherein elements of an ethnically homogeneous community competed with the central government for control of revenues derived from natural resources and for an end to the ethnic disenfranchisement in their communities. Following the discovery of oil and natural gas in 1971, the province saw the development of a separatist movement aimed at establishing an independent, sovereign country. Although the factors that had led to an ethnic separatist movement are complex and multi-fold, the desire for control over Aceh's natural resources is both a leading and enabling cause that made separation from Indonesia a possibility.

The province of Aceh is situated on the northwestern portion of Sumatra in the Indonesian archipelago (See Figure 2). Comprised of the districts of Aceh Selatan, Aceh Singkil, Aceh Tenggara, Aceh Timur, Gayo Lues, Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Tengah, Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh Utara, Pidie, Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya, Aceh Barat, Bireuen, and Nagan Raya, the province covers an area greater than 96,500 square miles and is located some 1050 miles from Indonesia's capital of Jakarta. It is geographically isolated and has long been an area difficult for outsiders to control. According to World Bank and Indonesian Government statistics, 69% of Aceh is covered by rain forest, with the coastal areas giving way to coastal swamps and mangrove forests, ideal terrain for the prosecution of an insurgency.¹⁵³

With a population of 4.4 million (roughly 2 percent of the country's total population of 240 million), the Acehnese are widely viewed as ethnically homogeneous.¹⁵⁴ Aceh is actually comprised of several linguistically distinct groups-

¹⁵³ Leslie McCulloch, *Aceh: Then and Now*, (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2005), 10.

¹⁵⁴ Edward Aspinall, "Modernity, History, and Ethnicity: Indonesian and Acehnese Nationalism in Conflict" in *Autonomy and Disintegration in Indonesia* ed by Damien Kingsbury and Harry Aveling. (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 139.

*suku*¹⁵⁵- with over 85-90% being linguistically and ethnically *suku* Aceh.¹⁵⁶ The largest indigenous minority is that of the Gayo, comprising roughly 5% of the population.¹⁵⁷ Other *suku* include the Alas, Tamiang, Bulolehee, Singkil, Kluet, Anuek Jamee, and Simeulu.¹⁵⁸ Throughout history, migrations from China and Southern India as well as importations by the Dutch have also come to Aceh, through mostly commercial dealings during the past 1000 years.¹⁵⁹ In contrast with the Niger Delta, the *suku* inhabit well defined homelands that are geographically separate from other *suku*, though they actively interact with other groups. These minority groups have largely been integrated in the larger Acehnese population through Islam, subordination by the Acehnese sultanate, socio-economic ties, and shared deprivation.¹⁶⁰ This differs with the Niger Delta where, though they now share the same kind of deprivation, the ethnic groups have long histories of competing with one another that remain salient today. The last minority group, comprising the largest overall minority, is Javanese; this group comprises the latest addition and is the least ethnically integrated due to contemporary political problems with the Government of Indonesia on Java.

Though several of these groups speak different languages and have different cultural traits, their identities have coalesced and they all now consider themselves Acehnese. The main exception are the Javanese who were imported through deliberate efforts to both relieve overcrowding on Java, as well as a desire to “Indonesianize” areas outside of Java.¹⁶¹ Of particular relevance to this thesis, is the fact that the ethnic construct used by the separatist movement for what it means to be ethnically Acehnese is

¹⁵⁵ *Suku* is the Indonesian word for ethnic group.

¹⁵⁶ M. Isa Sulaiman, “From Autonomy to Periphery: A Critical Evaluation of the Acehnese Nationalist Movement,” in *Verandah of Violence* ed. by Anthony Reid (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 123.

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Reid, introduction to *Verandah of Violence*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁵⁸ McCulloch. *Aceh: Then and Now*, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Reid, 5.

¹⁶⁰ Sulaiman, 123.

¹⁶¹ Reid, 5.

that a person must be from a family that is from the territory of Aceh, be a Muslim, and be from one of the nine *suku* that comprise Aceh's population.¹⁶²

The economic mainstay for Aceh's indigenous population is mainly farming, forestry, and fishing. Up to 80% of the population is dependent upon subsistence agriculture.¹⁶³ Coffee farming in the Gayo Highlands is a notably profitable form of commercial agriculture, but most agriculture is at the subsistence level. Although Aceh had historically been a major trading center in the 17th and 18th centuries, this role withered through the course of the 19th century. However, Aceh holds abundant natural resources, including large natural gas reserves, oil, timber, and mineral deposits. The advent of petroleum production in the mid-1970s brought new possibilities for economic growth for the province. A large, consolidated industrial complex was built at Lhokseumawe along the northeastern coast, which incorporated not only petroleum and petrochemical production, but also timber processing and fertilizer production.¹⁶⁴ Aceh had become the engine of primary resource revenue for Indonesia.

Today, despite the fact that it produces a third of the natural resource revenues that fuel Indonesia's gross domestic product, Aceh is an impoverished area with many of the same infrastructure problems evident in the Niger Delta.¹⁶⁵ Medical services, schools, clean drinking water, serviceable roads, and electricity are limited throughout much of the province. After the initial construction efforts at Lhokseumawe (ZILS) were completed in the mid-1970s, employment opportunities for indigenous Acehnese fell due

¹⁶² Kirsten E. Schulze, *Policy Study 2: The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*. (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), 7.

¹⁶³ McCulloch, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Tim Kell, *The Roots of Acehnese Rebellion 1989-1992* (New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1995), 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ Geoffrey Robinson, "Rawan is as Rawan Does: The Origins of Disorder in New Order Aceh," *Indonesia*, 66 (October 1998), 135.

to the practice of importing skilled labor from outside of the province.¹⁶⁶ Instead of seeing poverty decrease, it actually grew by an estimated 239% between 1980 and 2002.¹⁶⁷

Between 1976 and 2005, the economic conditions in Aceh resulted in an ethnically delimited insurgency whose aim was the secession of Aceh from the state of Indonesia. Although the reasons for the emergence of the Free Aceh Movement or *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM) included resentment aimed at Jakarta for harsh policies and the desire to establish an Islamic state, these motivations were really means for elite mobilization of greater popular support. It was only after the discovery of petroleum that GAM first appeared. Although GAM's founding leader Hasan di Tiro cited divine inspiration as the reason for the timing of GAM's emergence, the fact that he had personally lost out on a lucrative petroleum contract bid in Aceh just prior to launching GAM, as well as early rhetoric that focuses on control of Aceh's resources, makes this claim suspect.¹⁶⁸ Although ideology clearly played an important role in providing a platform for mass-level mobilization by elites, the underlying reason can be attributed to control of resources.¹⁶⁹

Unlike the Niger Delta where ethnic diversity has seemingly prevented the insurgency from developing beyond what the Nigerian government calls "criminal enterprises" into a separatist threat, the insurgency in Aceh presented a significant territorial challenge that the Indonesian government had to address through both military and political means. GAM proved to be a tough, cohesive opponent that derived wide

¹⁶⁶ Kell, 16-21.

¹⁶⁷ Graham Brown, *Horizontal Inequalities, Ethnic Separatism, and Violent Conflict: The Case of Aceh Indonesia*, (New York: Human Development Report Office, 2005), 3.

¹⁶⁸ William Nessen, "Sentiments Made Visible: The Rise and Reasons of Aceh's National Liberation Movement," in *Verandah of Violence* ed. by Anthony Reid. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 186.

¹⁶⁹ Some sources claim that resentment had been rising in Aceh for some time. The brutal treatment of the Acehnese population during the *Darul Islam* Rebellion and broken promises for the implementation of Aceh as an autonomous region are evidence cited by some academic sources that the emergence of GAM was the culmination of years of frustration and anger. While these reasons undoubtedly provided motivation for many of the insurgents, it took elite leadership with a vision for how Aceh could be economically viable to ignite the rebellion. This vision could likely not have been realized before the discovery of natural gas.

popular support from the Acehese population. Although the economic grievances that led to the unrest are similar between the two country's insurgencies, the means of mobilizing support are different. Understanding how the leadership of GAM mobilized the insurgency in Aceh to a level that required counterinsurgency operations and a negotiated settlement on the part of the Government of Indonesia requires an examination of Aceh's history as a mobilizing agent for ethnic resource competition through separatism.

B. HISTORY AND ACEHNESE SELF-PERCEPTION

Aceh has long been a hotspot of conflict and unrest. Since before the beginning of the Acehese Sultanate in the sixteenth century, warfare and communal rivalries were commonplace.¹⁷⁰ This was due in large part to the positioning of Aceh along one of the oldest and busiest trade routes in the world. However, the rise of the Acehese sultanate, which existed in varying degrees of effectiveness from 1514 until 1873, and the onset of the Dutch-Aceh War, provides among the most important sources of Acehese independence-mindedness. The sultanate of Aceh, which reached the zenith of its power from 1607-1636, was at one time a powerful commercial empire in the region, with the heartland of the empire being centered along the northeastern coast of the province.¹⁷¹ Touting a sophisticated history that includes successful resistance against European colonial powers, as well as an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, the people of Aceh view their history as a sovereign state as a significant component of their self-perception. This history of both glory and resistance has provided a powerful touchstone through which Acehese elites rally support.

The short-lived "golden age" of the Acehese Sultanate provided the foundation of the Acehese self-perception as the "*Serambi Mekkah*" or "Verandah of Mecca."¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ E. Edward McKinnon, "Indian and Indonesian Elements in Early Northern Sumatra," in *Verandah of Violence*, ed. by Anthony Reid. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 30.

¹⁷¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 142.

¹⁷² Peter G. Riddell, "Aceh in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: "*Serambi Mekkah*" and Identity," in *Verandah of Violence*. ed by Anthony Reid. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 43.

During this period, the Sultanate's most celebrated leader, Iskandar Muda, implemented a legal system in Aceh based upon *shari'a* law. This Acehnese system was at variance in several ways with Qur'anic injunctions and incorporated local traditional practices known as *hukum adat*.¹⁷³ In some ways the Acehnese system imposed harsher punishments than those required by *shari'a*. This helped to create a perception among the Acehnese that they were more devout than other Islamic communities in the region and helped fuse the second important source of Acehnese independence— Islam itself.

Islam has been an integral part of the Acehnese self-perception for over 700 years, with the first direct evidence of a Muslim presence in Aceh coming from Muslim tombstones dating to the twelfth century on the eastern coast of Aceh. As a cultural system, Islam has provided the Acehnese with a powerful mobilizing agent that has created a potent level of cohesion in the Acehnese population.¹⁷⁴ While the glories of the Acehnese Sultanate have faded to only memory, the relevance and mobilizing power of Islam has remained potent.

The final component of Aceh's history that provides a vehicle for mobilization relates directly to the two aforementioned factors of previous sovereignty and Islam, is Aceh's violent struggle for self-determination. Beginning with the Dutch-Aceh War of 1873-1913, extending through the fight for Indonesian independence from 1945-1949, and ending with the *Darul Islam* rebellion of 1953-1962, Aceh is an area that has seemingly witnessed long periods of unrest and violence. During the Dutch-Aceh War alone, an estimated 70,000 Acehnese lost their lives.¹⁷⁵ Although the Acehnese fought alongside the Javanese for Indonesian independence, their actions did not necessarily reflect strong support for Indonesia so much as a desire to get rid of the Dutch. When it became apparent that the vision of an Islamic state that the Acehnese *ulama*¹⁷⁶ had hoped

¹⁷³ Riddell, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Clifford Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 4th Edition ed. by William Lessa et al., (London: Tavistock Publications, 1979), 79.

¹⁷⁵ Teuku Ibrahim Alfian, "Aceh and the Holy War," in *Verandah of Violence* ed by Anthony Reid. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 111.

¹⁷⁶ *Ulama* are Moslem scholars and community leaders who have long held political influence in Aceh.

for would not be realized in Indonesia, the Acehnese joined the Javanese-led rebellion in an effort to push that vision toward fruition. The end result of these conflicts has been a solidifying of the Acehnese ethnic identity through the shared hardships that the population faced. This problem of ethnic hardening was further exacerbated from the 1970s to mid-1990s as a result of Government of Indonesia policies and the manner in which the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI) or Indonesian Defense Force conducted counter-insurgency operations in an effort to combat GAM.

These three components of Acehnese social identity combined with the economic grievances form the means by which the leadership of GAM derived support from the population in their push for the creation of an independent Aceh. The militias and community leaders of the Niger Delta use similar means to mobilize support from their own ethnic communities. The difference in Aceh is that the greater ethnic homogeneity of the population and long history of struggle for a common vision of self-determination allowed a unity of effort to develop that is absent in the ethnically pluralistic Niger Delta.

C. GERAKAN ACEH MERDEKA

First emerging in October 1976, GAM consisted of only 70 guerrilla fighters from *suku* Aceh. The insurgency centered in the northern and eastern parts of the province where Indonesian economic development was taking place.¹⁷⁷ This area is inhabited by predominantly *suku* Aceh and enabled GAM's leadership to capitalize on the commonality of ethno-linguistic traits to build a support base. During this early part of the first phase of the insurgency, GAM was comprised of mostly educated intellectuals, led by Hasan Di Tiro, the descendent of a prominent *ulama* family and grandson of a notable figure in the Dutch-Aceh War.¹⁷⁸ Di Tiro had previously served as member of the Indonesian delegation to the United Nations until defecting to the side of the rebels in the *Darul Islam* (DI) uprising of the 1950s. In supporting the DI rebellion, he appointed

¹⁷⁷ Nessen, 186.

¹⁷⁸ Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 30.

himself as *Darul Islam* “ambassador” to the UN until the rebellion was concluded.¹⁷⁹ Thereafter, Di Tiro remained in New York, going into business for himself until the year he decided to form GAM.

Initially known as the Aceh-Merdeka (AM),¹⁸⁰ the separatist movement did not deviate from its intended goal of removing the perceived Javanese colonial yoke from Aceh until a negotiated settlement was reached in 2005. Claiming that Indonesia is not a natural entity to which Aceh agreed to be a part, Di Tiro and his fellow GAM leaders had concluded that the outcome of the 1945-1949 war for Indonesian independence should have seen Aceh reverting to the sovereign status that was stripped from it in 1873.¹⁸¹ Control of Aceh’s abundant natural resources has always been a rallying cry and has included comparisons between Aceh and the oil-rich Brunei Darussalam,¹⁸² as well as Di Tiro’s claim that he desires to “take control of Aceh’s wealth in natural gas which he argued ‘exceeds the property of Kuwait’ and use it to bring development to Aceh’s people.”¹⁸³

The evolution of GAM can be broken down into two fairly distinct phases. The first phase took place between 1976 and 1998 and was distinguished by the insurgency movement seeking to muster popular support in the face of a brutal military campaign that suppressed the movement and effectively prevented it from spreading outside the northern and eastern districts. Essentially in survival mode, the ethnic homogeneity of the movement combined with both economic deprivation and military repression aimed at the Acehnese population enabled the movement’s leaders to keep the embers of insurgency alive. The second phase began in 1998 with the advent of democratization in Indonesia and lasted through the conclusion of the conflict. This phase was characterized

¹⁷⁹ Kell, 61.

¹⁸⁰ Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 4.

¹⁸¹ Kell, 63.

¹⁸² Finngeir Hiorth, “Free Aceh: An Impossible Dream?,” *Asiaweek*, (April 12, 1991), 193.

¹⁸³ Kell, 64.

by an increase in popular support for the insurgency which saw the movement's numbers increase while simultaneously seeing popularity for the movement growing in areas that were not exclusively comprised of *suku* Aceh.

1. GAM During the New Order Regime

From its inception, GAM was comprised of a military wing and civilian government. The civilian administrative structures were modeled after GAM's interpretation of the governing structures that existed during the time of the Sultanate. This "parallel" government was created to provide a separate governing identity for Aceh that would provide a means of galvanizing greater Acehnese support, replace the existing Government of Indonesia governing structures, provide a platform for negotiating with the Jakarta government, and provide a means for garnering international support.¹⁸⁴ This civilian structure divided Aceh into administrative areas to facilitate control: province, district, sub-district, community, and village respectively. The GAM government sought to carry out such functions as tax collection and the issuance of marriage and birth certificates.¹⁸⁵ This system took a longer time to mature than the military wing, but when it was effectively implemented after 1998, it created serious problems for Indonesian efforts to maintain control of the province.¹⁸⁶

GAM's military strategy focused on five targets in Aceh-Indonesian security forces, the petroleum industry, ethnically Javanese migrants, the state education system, and Indonesian political structures.¹⁸⁷ In adopting this military strategy, GAM's aim was to weaken Jakarta's hold on the province, creating a situation requiring greater levels of violence on the part of the security forces, thereby drawing more Acehnese to GAM

¹⁸⁴ Kirsten E. Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," in *Verandah of Violence* ed by Anthony Reid (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 236-241.

¹⁸⁵ Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 226.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 230-236.

while compelling the international community to intervene.¹⁸⁸ This strategy was rudimentary in the early years of the rebellion but, after receiving training in Libya during the 1980s, it was approached with much greater precision.

Early efforts by GAM to expand their influence took place in areas that were ethnically homogeneous, that is coming from the same *suku*.¹⁸⁹ This facilitated recruitment and enabled the movement to gain momentum. This is a point that requires emphasis. Throughout the first 26 years of the conflict, the insurgency was focused in areas that predominantly inhabited by *suku* Aceh. The majority of insurgent members shared the same ethno-linguistic background which defined GAM as an ethnically Acehnese group. It was only after 1999 that GAM's success in expanding the territory under its control took the movement into areas that saw the ethnic diversification of the movement beyond *suku* Aceh. While this "dilution" of ethno-linguistic background did lead to some problems,¹⁹⁰ the self-perception of all members of the insurgency was that of Acehnese. The poor economic conditions in Aceh combined with GAM's criteria for what it meant to be Acehnese, enabled recruitment and maintained the ethnic homogeneity of the movement.

Initially, GAM met with limited success in rallying popular support due to the secular nature of its message.¹⁹¹ According to Tim Kell, the key to gaining popular support in Aceh lay in the *ulama*. Although some were sympathetic to the idea of founding an independent Acehnese state, the lack of Islam in its ideology hindered an open endorsement by the religious leaders.¹⁹² The Declaration of Independence of Aceh-Sumatra, released on December 4, 1976, made no mention of Islam but instead focused on the Javanese "colonial" efforts to subjugate the Acehnese people and steal "Aceh's

¹⁸⁸ Schulze, 229.

¹⁸⁹ Schulze. *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ The principal problem encountered was criminalization due to the nationalistic appeal constructed around *suku* Aceh having limited appeal to other ethnic groups.

¹⁹¹ The incorporation of demands for an Islamic state were included in subsequent efforts to rally support. The aim of incorporating the message of an Islamic state was to foster support from Acehnese *ulama* who have long been key to the rallying of popular support.

¹⁹² Kell, 65-66.

natural wealth.¹⁹³ This resulted in widespread sympathy for the movement but little in the way of actual support. By 1979, the movement's leadership, having failed to rally an adequate popular base was on the run. Following an Indonesian counterinsurgency campaign, the majority of GAM's leaders were dead, incarcerated, or exiled. Di Tiro fled to Sweden where he formed a government in exile.¹⁹⁴

In the intervening years between the time when GAM's leadership had gone into exile and its reemergence in 1989, economic conditions in Aceh continued to deteriorate. GAM had been driven underground but was by no means dead. Not only did recruitment remain active, but also after 1986 Libya agreed to provide paramilitary training to new GAM recruits. Financial support continued from the Acehnese diaspora, which facilitated the purchasing of military equipment and limited weapons.¹⁹⁵ During this period, recruitment expanded to incorporate more of the unemployed, uneducated, and otherwise disenfranchised.¹⁹⁶ GAM continued to disseminate an ideology of separatism that not only incorporated the condemnation of Javanese resource exploitation, but also included the vilification of the TNI and Javanese migrants as enemies of the Acehnese people.¹⁹⁷ For their part, Di Tiro and his fellow GAM leaders remained abroad in Sweden, untouchable by the Indonesian government, but very much in touch with affairs on the ground in Aceh. The political hierarchy remained intact, with GAM's political cells and field commanders in Aceh looking for and responding to guidance from their exiled Acehnese government.

GAM re-emerged in 1989 and, despite significant pressure from the TNI, remained a potent and viable ethnically-based insurgency. When it remerged in 1989, GAM's popularity had risen due to TNI abuses in the pursuance of the insurgency's suppression, as well as the continued economic disenfranchisement of the population. Attacks aimed at military, political, and civilian targets became more serious. Using a

¹⁹³ Kell, 64.

¹⁹⁴ Robinson, 130-131.

¹⁹⁵ Kirsten E. Schulze, "The Struggle for an Independent Aceh: The Ideology, Capacity, and Strategy of GAM," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2003), 245.

¹⁹⁶ Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Kell, 70-72.

strategy that included guerrilla warfare, the infiltration of GAM loyalists into existing government structures, and attempts at political negotiation with both the Government of Indonesia and international actors, GAM sought to make Aceh ungovernable while bringing international support to their cause.¹⁹⁸

GAM leaders were able to establish insurgent areas of operation by capitalizing on the lack of civil authority in rural areas.¹⁹⁹ GAM was further able to garner support through dissenting members of the Indonesian armed forces who actually supported the movement. The insurgents were able to operate in many of these rural areas with virtual impunity, recruiting more members and taking increasingly bolder military actions against government agencies. Popular support from a wide range of sources within Acehnese society grew quickly and without the apparent knowledge of Indonesian government and military leaders who were responsible for overseeing the province.²⁰⁰ The result was that by 1989, the movement had become a significant problem, seeming to come from out of nowhere to challenge the authority of the Indonesian government.

The ensuing crack-down by the TNI was brutal but effective. Although GAM was accused of atrocities, the scope and range of brutality inflicted on the Acehnese populace was far greater at the hands of the Indonesian military. By 1993, the insurgency had been effectively suppressed again with GAM members going into hiding or fleeing the country to neighboring Malaysia. However the harsh methods used by the TNI to achieve this result served to instill further outrage in the Acehnese community. The Acehnese came to see themselves as not only suffering economic marginalization at the hands of Jakarta, but also victimization at the hands of the military. Estimates vary, but most indicate that several thousand Acehnese civilians were killed by the TNI between 1989 and 1993, in an effort by the TNI to separate the movement from their popular support. Acehnese human rights groups would later find eleven mass graves containing up to 1,600 corpses

¹⁹⁸ Kirsten E. Schulze. "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 226. During the early 1990s, Di Tiro lobbied the United Nations for an independent Aceh. His efforts garnered the attention of international human rights agencies but no support from the United Nations.

¹⁹⁹ Kell, 68.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

of Acehese civilians and GAM suspects killed by the TNI.²⁰¹ Although the movement would cease to effectively function by 1993, the outrage had led to a hardening of Acehese sentiments that would simmer and eventually burst into a major popular uprising following the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998.

2. GAM in the Post-Suharto Period

The year 1998 signified the end of the first phase of the GAM insurgency. After that year, Indonesian political liberalization, which included the significant reduction in numbers of TNI deployed to Aceh, enabled GAM to both increase the scope of its influence in Aceh as well as bring an international dimension to the conflict. With the collapse of the Suharto regime and an end to the oppressive military campaign that the government had implemented to suppress GAM, the ethnic independence movement saw its popularity expand greatly.²⁰² This was caused not only by the continuing economic disenfranchisement and TNI abuses of the Acehese population, but also by the UN supervised referendum in East Timor that led to the separation of that province from Indonesia. GAM now had a model to follow, as well as a boost in motivation that helped them to believe that a sovereign Aceh might actually be possible.²⁰³ This led to an increase in efforts to internationalize the conflict and an intensification of GAM's military strategy aimed at undermining the Indonesian government in Aceh. This phase of the conflict was characterized by a sharp increase in the scale and intensity of violence in Aceh. By mid-1999, GAM controlled more of Aceh than ever before and the conflict intensified as more Acehese rallied to the cause of national sovereignty.

²⁰¹ Michael Richardson, "Indonesia Troops Exit Aceh Amid Rage Over Alleged Army Abuses," *International Herald Tribune*. (August 21, 1998), http://www.ihf.com/articles/1998/08/21/indo.t_1.php, 1, (accessed February 3, 2007).

²⁰² Edward Aspinall and Harold Crouch, *Policy Study 1, The Aceh Peace Process: Why It Failed* (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2003), 4-6. In 1998, President Habibie ended the *Daerah Operasi Militer* (DOM), following which a large portion of the TNI who had been used to maintain order were withdrawn.

²⁰³ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 237. In seeking international intervention, GAM sought to "blueprint" East Timor wherein TNI excesses led to international, specifically UN, pressure to allow a referendum that would determine the level of popular support by East Timorese for remaining as a part of Indonesia. The referendum resulted in an overwhelming vote for independence, which in the fallout of the East Asian financial crisis and international demands for humanitarian reform following the fall of the Suharto regime, saw Jakarta capitulating to pressure to grant East Timor sovereignty.

By 2000, GAM had achieved its goal of internationalization with the first in a series of direct negotiations with the Government of Indonesia, hosted by an international non-governmental organization (NGO).²⁰⁴ GAM “saw negotiations as an opportunity to expose internationally the abuses that were taking place in Aceh.”²⁰⁵ However, the seeds of distrust in the TNI that had been sown in GAM and the Acehnese population resulted in little effort being made toward reaching a compromise. The differences between GAM and the Government of Indonesia had become intractable—although resource access lay at the heart of their grievances, systematic abuse by the TNI over the course of the previous twenty plus years had created such a level of distrust that GAM was unwilling to relent on its demands for independence. Through the course of three organized cease fires, and despite offers of special autonomy, that would have granted access to 70% of natural resource revenues, GAM remained resolute in its demand for full independence.²⁰⁶ Capitalizing on its growing popularity, GAM redoubled its recruiting efforts and sought to intensify the viciousness of the conflict, in the hopes of provoking international intervention.

This resolution would only change following a protracted TNI counterinsurgency campaign in 2003-2004, and the catastrophic devastation of the 26 December 2004 tsunami.²⁰⁷ Despite both of these setbacks to the insurgency, Acehnese ethnic cohesion remained strong. In actuality, the tactics used by the TNI in many cases only served to solidify that cohesion. In August 2005, GAM agreed to the terms laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement. This was done to allow for the unimpeded flow of much needed aid to the devastated province that had lost so much on account of the tsunami. Although failing in its aims of achieving Acehnese independence, in agreeing to the

²⁰⁴ This particular NGO was The Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

²⁰⁵ Aspinall and Crouch, 12.

²⁰⁶ Rodd McGibbon, *Policy Study 10, Secessionist Challenges in Aceh and Papua: Is Special Autonomy the Solution?* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), 87. As part of the *Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam* (NAD) Law of 2001, 70% of gas and oil revenues would be allocated to the province, however these would decrease to 50% after 25 years. 80% of revenues from timber, fishing, and mining would go to the province.

²⁰⁷ There is considerable conjecture about the degree of impact of the Indonesian counterinsurgency campaign of 2003-2004 and the tsunami of December 26, 2004. This is addressed at the end of the chapter.

terms outlined in this document, GAM had succeeded in not only guaranteeing an unconstrained 70% access of the province's natural resource wealth to the Acehnese people, but also set itself on the path toward becoming a viable political party in Aceh's political framework.²⁰⁸ This would be an acceptable path to self determination that had not previously been available.

D. INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO GAM

Although GAM used Acehnese ethnic homogeneity to build popular support, the Indonesian Government did not adopt a response that directly sought to counter this ethnic variable. Although the Indonesian importation of migrants and certain military tactics sought to drive cleavages into Acehnese popular unity, the main point that makes the Indonesian response to Aceh differ from the Nigerian response to the Niger Delta is that the Indonesian Government had no other choice than to conduct counter-insurgency operations aimed at destroying GAM. Criminalizing the problem would not yield the same results as it does in the Niger Delta. GAM had too strong of a support base due to the successful infusion of ethnic nationalism into the Acehnese population. However, analysis of the Indonesian Government responses to GAM provides interesting distinctions related to how ethnically homogenous insurgencies coalesce and the manner in which they can force a government to react.

Government responses to GAM can largely be broken down into two periods that correspond with the phases of the insurgency. Those periods are the New Order period during which Suharto ruled Indonesia and the period following his fall from power. Interestingly, the former phase was a direct reason as to why the latter phase was different. The New Order period was characterized by a ruthless impunity on the part of the TNI that reflected their status in the Suharto regime. During his time as president, Suharto refused to negotiate with any of the separatist movements in the country. To do so would have legitimized them and their separatist causes. Instead, the TNI were allowed to operate in a manner virtually unconstrained by central government guidelines

²⁰⁸ See sections 1.2 and 1.3 of the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement, http://www.thejakartapost.com/RI_GAM_MOU.pdf, (accessed February 16, 2007).

with the aim of applying a military solution that would suppress the insurgencies. While these movements were mostly suppressed, they hardly disappeared and, moreover, were able to capitalize on enormous popular anger aimed at the government and military once reforms did take place.

1. Counter-Insurgency under the New Order Government

Since the beginning of GAM's insurgency in 1976, the aim of the Government of Indonesia has been to crush the rebellion through counter-insurgency efforts while simultaneously safeguarding its economic interests in Aceh. The counter-insurgency tactics used by the TNI were characterized by the use of force aimed at separating GAM from their support base. "Shock therapy" tactics included the use of arbitrary arrest and detention, the restriction of civilian movement, forced re-locations of people from remote to more easily accessible areas, physical and sexual assault, and extra judicial killings.²⁰⁹ The latter behaviors were particularly damaging to TNI credibility and effectiveness, failing completely to separate GAM from the rest of the Acehnese populace. TNI leadership, tending to view all Acehnese as potential collaborators, encouraged their troops to act with impunity. These actions inadvertently led to a stronger support base for GAM through the further hardening of the Acehnese ethnic identity.

Operational tactics reflected a "blunt force" approach and included efforts by the TNI to use indigenous Acehnese against one another in an effort to identify, cordon, and even attack GAM elements. While not unique to combating ethnically delimited insurgencies, the tactics used by the TNI sought to separate GAM from its support base by first sowing communal discord. A tactic known as *pagar betis* or 'fence of legs' was frequently used in conducting cordon and search operations through GAM strongholds.²¹⁰ This tactic required indigenous villagers to act as a clearing and cordon element in advance of TNI forces to flush GAM members out of areas in which they were

²⁰⁹ Robinson, 140-143. This article provides good examples of TNI tactics during the *DOM* period.

²¹⁰ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 256.

operating.²¹¹ Highly effective yet controversial, due to the risks and casualties sustained by non-combatant civilians, tactics such as *pagar betis* were successful in not only reducing the presence of GAM insurgents in particular areas, but also reducing ethnic cohesion due to the requirement for civilians to betray friends and even relatives. The latter effect was deliberate, but the eventually policy backfired, as the lasting impact was to spur the growing hatred and distrust of the TNI and Government of Indonesia among the residents of Aceh.

Throughout the New Order period, the TNI deployed personnel to Aceh who were both ethnically different from the Acehnese as well as unaccustomed to the level of Acehnese devotion to Islam. In many cases this lack of preparedness for the depth of Acehnese Islamic devotion was compounded by either indifference or overtly hostility to their religious commitment. This resulted in further cultural strains and alienation between the Acehnese and the military. Capitalized upon by GAM as further evidence of Aceh being subjected to a colonial occupation, the result was a hardening of the Acehnese ethnic identity that became all the more exclusive of outsiders.

Military counterinsurgency tactics and lack of cultural empathy were not the only source of popular grievance with the Government of Indonesia. The policy of bringing migrant labor to Aceh was also damaging. This policy had begun in the 1950s and continued through the New Order period. Migrants were brought from Java as part of a government effort to not only provide economic opportunities and relieve over-population problems for the Javanese, but also to “Indonesianize” the periphery of the archipelago. This policy was deliberately aimed at better homogenizing Indonesian society through the infusion of other ethnic groups into outlying communities. It was expected that the dilution of ethnic homogeneity would make it easier for Indonesian nationalism to take hold. However this policy, like *pagar betis*, also backfired. Most importantly, the policy created resource competition between the indigenous Acehnese and the imported Javanese. Imported Javanese had generally greater levels of training and were employed in the lucrative industrial sector at Lhokseumawe, thereby denying

²¹¹ David Kilcullen, “Globalization and the Development of Indonesian Counterinsurgency Tactics,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17/1 (March 2006), 50.

employment opportunities to Acehnese.²¹² The result was to be the development of inter-ethnic fighting between the two groups and another means for GAM to mobilize ethnic Acehnese to their cause.²¹³ What did not appear to be accounted for was the manner in which this policy would marginalize the Acehnese thereby adding to their discontent.

At no time during the New Order period were political negotiations between the exiled GAM leadership and Government of Indonesia conducted. This contrasts with the Niger Delta, where the Nigerian Federal Government sought to facilitate negotiations with ethnic insurgent leaders in an effort to reduce their impact on the country's economy, though these insurgent leaders were still branded as criminals. As a result of Jakarta's unwillingness to negotiate, the economic causes of the Aceh rebellion were never addressed and the perception of Javanese encroachment and exploitation only increased. The answer to the problem of Acehnese separatism was one that focused exclusively on military occupation resulting in an exceedingly traumatic period for the Acehnese populace; between 1000 and 3000 persons were killed and upwards of 1400 'disappeared.'²¹⁴ Although GAM was suppressed, it was hardly extinguished. Sympathy for the movement and its message of independence became the lasting legacies of the New Order period.

Interestingly, during the New Order period, the Indonesian government frequently refused to even acknowledge that it was conducting a counter-insurgency campaign in Aceh.²¹⁵ The government instead claimed that the TNI had been deployed to interdict a "gang of peace disturbers" that were nothing more than a criminal element. Criminalizing the problem and denying the political aims of the people resisting them was a tactic that enabled the TNI to act with more impunity and conduct operations without regard for the

²¹² The fact that most Acehnese did not possess the level of skill and training to hold these jobs is not as relevant as the fact that they nonetheless perceived that the majority of employment opportunities were being furnished to outsiders.

²¹³ Kell, 16-21. This article provides a detailed description of the impact of Javanese immigration on both the economic conditions in Aceh as well as the rise of ethnic competition capitalized upon by GAM.

²¹⁴ Schulze, "The Struggle for an Independent Aceh: The Ideology, Capacity, and Strategy of GAM," 245.

²¹⁵ Rizal Sukma, *Policy Study 3, Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons*. (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), 9.

impact on civil-military relations. However, in reality the insurgency had moved beyond incipient criminality to a level of increased popular support. Furthermore, the government was conducting counterinsurgency operations aimed at eliminating the movement. This is interesting since it is similar to the rhetoric being used by Nigerian Federal Government facing the ethnic insurgency in the Niger Delta. The result has been a hardening of sentiments against the Nigerian Federal Government and their military forces. The same result also occurred in Aceh, but the means for mobilizing a unified, region-wide reaction was possible due to the ethnic unity of the Acehnese.

2. Indonesian Government Responses to GAM after the New Order

Indonesian responses to GAM after the New Order period reflected a requirement to deal with the effects of over two decades of repression against the Acehnese populace. Ethnic nationalism had hardened significantly over the course of this period. The unified ethnic perception of the Acehnese would have been a strong obstacle for the Indonesian government to overcome even if the tactics used by the TNI had not been so brutal. However, the damage had been done. Where at one time, the marginalization of the insurgency movement from the greater population or even the possibility of negotiations with GAM might have been possible, these were opportunities lost by the time the New Order regime ended. The government now faced an ethnically united community that was intractable in its opposition to the Indonesian presence.

The year 1998 constituted a turning point in the Aceh conflict. Following this year, the conflict entered a new phase wherein the TNI was no longer able to operate with unobserved impunity. The Asian financial crisis and subsequent overthrow of Suharto had left Indonesia in an economically and socially fragile state. Both domestic and international communities demanded that the Government of Indonesia reform with particular emphasis on military reform. Whereas previously, the Indonesian military had been comprised of both the military and police forces (including the national paramilitary police — *Brigade Mobil*; BRIMOB), after 1998, the two were separated.²¹⁶ This reformation set the stage for the greater professionalization of the TNI. This

²¹⁶ McGibbon, 14.

professionalization would include the adoption of more refined counterinsurgency tactics that didn't aim to alienate the Acehese populace and further entrench ethnic opposition to the Indonesian presence in the province.

The secession of East Timor in 1999 also impacted the government's response to Aceh. In Aceh, the years of oppressive military tactics and potential for international intervention fueled resurgence in ethnic violence that the Government of Indonesia would require a change in tactics to counter. No longer could counter-insurgency only be about simple military suppression. Now the Government of Indonesia would have to directly deal with the Acehese people and the separatist movement.

As a result of international and domestic demands for liberalization, President B.J. Habibie ended the military occupation of Aceh in 1998.²¹⁷ Following an apology for the trauma suffered by the Acehese people by General Wiranto, Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, all TNI that were not home-stationed in the province were re-deployed.²¹⁸ However, an almost immediate escalation in violence occurred, aimed at the remaining TNI forces, Javanese transmigrants, and industrial infrastructure at Lhokseumawe. GAM, realizing that the military was on the political defensive, tapped into the years of collective Acehese anger and frustration to successfully escalate the conflict.²¹⁹

As a result of this escalation, by January 1999 the government redeployed an estimated 2000 TNI were back to Aceh to initiate security operations.²²⁰ Owing to the weakening of the military's stature due to their record human rights abuses, the nature of Indonesian military operations in Aceh changed. There was now a greater concern with creating the appearance that the military was subordinate to police in the maintenance of order. As such, instead of counter-insurgency by the TNI, the emphasis was placed on

²¹⁷ The military occupation of Aceh during the New Order government was referred to as the *Daerah Operasi Militer (DOM)* or Military Operations Area Period.

²¹⁸ Schulze, "The Struggle for an Independent Aceh: The Ideology, Capacity, and Strategy of GAM," 264.

²¹⁹ Sukma, *Policy Study 3 Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons*, 12. Such violence included the attacks, kidnappings, and executions of TNI members as well as organized violence aimed at state run agencies.

²²⁰ Aspinall and Crouch, 13.

security and law and order under the paramilitary police, *Brigade Mobil* (BRIMOB).²²¹ This was done in an attempt to lessen Acehnese anger at the TNI and Government of Indonesia. In reality however, significant numbers of TNI remained. The atrocities also continued; the BRIMOB were no more accountable for their actions than the TNI and, owing to BRIMOB's military roots, the tactics used by both were similar. Both the security forces and GAM engaged in murder and violent criminal operations, in most cases to try to discredit the other while Aceh's civilians remained in the middle. Despite Indonesian efforts to mitigate the problems between the military and Acehnese, the Acehnese ethnic identity continued to harden.

With the escalation of the conflict and realization that a military solution alone would no longer work, the Government of Indonesia agreed to participate in formal negotiations with GAM. Indonesia's Ambassador to the UN, Hassan Wirajuda met with Hasan Di Tiro in Geneva Switzerland on 27 January 2000.²²² These talks led to the first in a series of cease-fires between the belligerent forces in May of that year. This cease-fire is often referred to as the Humanitarian Pause and was implemented in an effort to establish common ground between the central government and the separatist movement. The hardened ethnic identity of the Acehnese and recognition by the Government of Indonesia that force alone wouldn't work had given GAM the opportunity to engage in a dialogue that had not previously been possible.

Before the Humanitarian Pause was even implemented, the Government of Indonesia had been preparing a comprehensive "special autonomy" law aimed at undermining popular Acehnese support for GAM, by addressing some of the Acehnese grievances.²²³ Much of the work done on this plan was performed by Acehnese leaders from the provincial government and was done with the aim of providing GAM with a venue through which it could end its insurrection.²²⁴ This law, which would become known as Law 18/2001, the Special Autonomy Law for Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam

²²¹ Aspinall and Crouch, 13-14.

²²² Ibid., 11. This first cease-fire became known as the Humanitarian Pause.

²²³ Ibid., 14.

²²⁴ Ibid., 16.

(NAD Law) was deliberated for several months by the Government of Indonesia before being passed into law. Like the legislative efforts at alleviating poverty in the Niger Delta, the NAD law was an effort to reduce popular anger against the government and thereby weaken support for the insurgency.

By late February 2001, the Humanitarian Pause had broken down.²²⁵ Never fully implemented by either side, both belligerents blamed one another for the failure to maintain agreed upon terms. For their part, GAM claimed that the Government of Indonesia had not suspended operations. Furthermore, GAM remained committed to the idea of a separate sovereign Aceh. Senior elements of the TNI were opposed to negotiations, which they saw as a legitimizing the Acehese insurrection. They therefore continued to conduct limited security operations, which invariably led to armed confrontations between TNI and GAM elements. The TNI claimed that GAM was using the cease-fire to recruit and re-equip. GAM was also accused of failing to cease insurgent operations, to include a serious breach— an attack by GAM on the natural gas production facilities operated by ExxonMobil.²²⁶ This caused the first-ever shutdown of ExxonMobil Operations in Aceh, resulting in an impact on the already struggling Indonesian economy— whereas MEND has only been able to threaten this kind of action in the Niger Delta, GAM was able to actually make it happen. This gas production shutdown provided a significant reason for to the re-initiation of new counter-insurgency operations in Aceh by President Abdurrahman Wahid in May 2001.²²⁷

The Government of Indonesia seemed to hope that political liberalization and a reduction in military presence in Aceh would lead to a reduction in the insurgency, but the opposite occurred.²²⁸ Even with the opening of direct political negotiations between the Government of Indonesia and GAM in January 2000, the drive to achieve

²²⁵ ICG Report No. 17 *Aceh: Why Military Force Won't Bring Lasting Peace*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, June 12, 2001), 1.

²²⁶ Konrad Huber, *Policy Study 9, The HDC in Aceh: Promises and Pitfalls in NGO Mediation and Implementation*. (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), 24.

²²⁷ Jeremy Schanck, "The Acehese Resistance Movement and Exxon Mobil," *ICE Case Studies, Number 85* (May 2001), 3.

²²⁸ ICG *Indonesia Briefing Aceh: Escalating Tension*. (Banda Aceh/Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, December 7, 2000), 7-8.

independence only intensified. This can be attributed to the perception by GAM that it was making progress in the conflict, not only as evidenced by its growing popular support amongst the Acehnese, but also due to the advent of negotiations with the central government. GAM sought to further increase its support base by attacking Indonesian targets in the hopes of eliciting a harsh response by the TNI on the local populace. As a result of GAM's intensification of the conflict, by April 2001, the Government of Indonesia began to re-focus on the military option and counter-insurgency as a means of keeping Aceh within its orbit while minimizing the economic impact of GAM.

The first new counter-insurgency campaign was codenamed *Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Penegakan Hukum* (OKPH) or Operation for Restoring Security and Upholding the Law.²²⁹ The OKPH was executed by a TNI with a greater level of professionalization and sophistication and reflected more of a "classic" counter-insurgency style.²³⁰ In addition to the police elements under whom operational control would rest, OKPH saw the return of unconventional warfare units including *Kopassus*.²³¹ Although ostensibly a police operation, by mid-2002 the number of military on the ground in Aceh actually outnumbered the police by more than two-to-one.²³² The purpose of this operation was to reduce the overall strength of the insurgency movement and shrink the territorial control of GAM through a combination of pressure on GAM's military arm, while simultaneously drawing more Acehnese away from the movement through the economic incentives of the soon-to-be ratified NAD Law.²³³ Additionally, the Government of Indonesia sought to leverage GAM into resuming the stalled peace talks while setting the conditions for the implementation of special autonomy.²³⁴ In

²²⁹ Sukma, *Policy Study 3, Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons*: 15.

²³⁰ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 245-247.

²³¹ *Kopassus* (Komando Pasukan Khusus) are Indonesian Special Forces troops used for unconventional warfare and direct action operations.

²³² Sukma, *Policy Study 3, Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons*, 15-16. OKPH was under the operational command of a National Mobile Police Brigade with support coming from two TNI field commands in Aceh.

²³³ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 250-251.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

effect, Jakarta sought to soften Acehese economic grievances that had enabled the Acehese ethnic identity to become so hardened against the Indonesians. This would thereby weaken popular support for GAM.

On August 9 2001, newly elected President Megawati Sukarnoputri signed the long awaited NAD legislation into law. This unilateral action by Jakarta to bait GAM into accepting conditions that would end the conflict provided several concessions that GAM had sought. Granting the Acehese “unprecedented powers of self-governance and control over natural resources,”²³⁵ this plan allowed the Acehese to retain 80% of petroleum and natural gas revenues (as opposed to 15% in other provinces with the exception of Papua) and provided Aceh with the right to implement *shari’a* law and govern themselves more in accordance with Islamic norms.²³⁶ However, the continued presence of security forces in Aceh caused GAM to see this as a plan to undermine them while affording the TNI with the continued ability to inflict harm on the Acehese people and further siphon off Acehese resources.²³⁷ Furthermore, GAM was specifically excluded from participating in the political processes of Aceh.²³⁸ GAM denounced the law and continued their calls for independence, much in the same way that MEND has denounced Nigerian legislation. The OKPH operation continued.

The OKPH operation resulted in some significant progress for the Government of Indonesia. The GAM Commander in Chief in Aceh, Abdullah Syafi’i was killed in January 2002 and several other lower level GAM commanders were also eliminated during this time. In addition to targeting leadership using an inside-out approach, the TNI employed an outside-in approach that targeted GAM members of all ranks. Those GAM members captured were frequently subjected to “re-education” aimed at replacing ideas

²³⁵ Michelle A. Miller, “What’s Special About Special Autonomy in Aceh?” in *Verandah of Violence*. ed by Anthony Reid. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 301.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 302-303.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

²³⁸ Aspinall and Crouch, 25-26.

of Acehese nationalism with those of Indonesian nationalism. Furthermore, vocational skills training were provided in an effort to win the hearts and minds of the disenfranchised elements of Aceh's population.²³⁹

However, the OKPH operations were ultimately unsuccessful in quelling the insurgency due to the failure to effectively integrate the military operations between TNI and police elements. Atrocities still occurred, many of which were perpetrated by GAM members themselves on their fellow Acehese in an effort to keep hardened ethnic sentiments intact. Furthermore, OKPH operations were conducted in a manner disconnected from an overarching political strategy. Although the NAD legislation was passed while OKPH operations were ongoing, little effort was made to effectively link the military and political elements in a manner that put effective pressure on GAM.²⁴⁰ This potential economic incentive failed to be capitalized upon in a manner that might have reduced Acehese anger at the government. While the efforts at political and military integration were significantly better than previous operations, GAM's resiliency, capitalizing on their ability to translate years of repression into ethnic animosity against the "Javanese occupiers," enabled the movement to continue in strength. However, the lessons learned by the TNI and Indonesian Government were significant and applied to good effect the following year.

Although GAM did not accept the NAD law as a sufficient enticement to suspend hostilities, the Government of Indonesia nonetheless viewed their "generous" concessions as a means to separate the insurgency from their base of support. By continuing to apply military pressure on the insurgency, it was expected that the insurgents would eventually "accept reality" and re-engage in negotiations with the Government of Indonesia. After internationalizing the talks through the recruitment of a team of "wise men"²⁴¹ of

²³⁹ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 251.

²⁴⁰ *ICG Indonesia Briefing Aceh: A Slim Chance for Peace*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 27, 2002), 12-15.

²⁴¹ Retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, former Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, and former Yugoslav ambassador to Indonesia, Bengt Soderberg.

significant international stature, an enticement that the Government of Indonesia knew would be appealing to GAM, peace talks resumed in February 2002 in Geneva Switzerland.²⁴²

This latest round of negotiations began haltingly. Although GAM representatives stated that the NAD law provided a “starting point” for negotiations, they continued to claim that no action short of independence would be acceptable.²⁴³ These statements led to frustration on the side of the Government of Indonesia and an intensification of military action in Aceh. Government leaders gave GAM until the end of the month of Ramadan (December 6, 2002), to continue serious negotiations before resorting to “the intensification of operations to restore security and the unity of the Indonesian state.”²⁴⁴ In an effort to soften GAM’s stance, arrangements were made for a group of Acehnese civil society leaders, including prominent *ulama*, to meet with the GAM leadership. According to the civil leaders, it was the Acehnese themselves who were suffering the most from GAM’s intractable position; if GAM was perceived as obstructing a peace agreement, the loss of popular support would likely follow.²⁴⁵ This was a calculated move on the part of Jakarta to make GAM believe that its popular support was weakening. Ultimately the level of ethnically derived popular support for GAM had grown too strong and this move by Jakarta was seen for what it was.

On December 9, 2002, following further international interest that spurred GAM to concede to negotiations, the Cessation of Hostilities Framework Agreement (COHA) was signed.²⁴⁶ This respite from the violence was short-lived however. Due to issues largely stemming from the requirement to demilitarize, compounded by perceived violations of the ceasefire agreement, and differences in agreement on how to conduct

²⁴² Aspinall and Crouch, 27-28.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32. This international support was the Preparatory Meeting on Peace and Reconstruction in Aceh, which was held on 3 December in Tokyo and sponsored by Japan, the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank. During this meeting the sponsoring countries agreed to support reconstruction efforts if an agreement were signed.

elections, the COHA began to unravel within weeks of it being signed. Furthermore, residual anger amongst the Acehnese and ethnic animosities against the Javanese migrants still remained. Talks resumed in April 2003 in an effort to salvage the deteriorating situation. However, this time the government had hardened its position. Demanding that GAM fully accept the tenets of special autonomy as outlined in the NAD law, together with the requirement that GAM demobilize its military force, the Government of Indonesia gave GAM no room for further negotiation. This was in essence a demand for GAM to surrender. The talks collapsed and President Megawati Sukarnoputri signed a military emergency declaration in May 2003, declaring martial law in Aceh. Although the decision had been made for a primarily military solution in Aceh, confidential negotiations continued.²⁴⁷

By May 18, 2003 TNI and police strength in Aceh had been reinforced to levels not seen since during the New Order period. Military strength had increased to 30,000 with police augmentees numbering 12,000.²⁴⁸ On May 19, 2003 *Operasi Terpadu* (Integrated Operation) was officially launched. This operation was the most comprehensive counter-insurgency effort undertaken by the Government of Indonesia in their efforts to eradicate GAM and the largest military operation launched by the TNI since the 1975 invasion of East Timor. Over the course of the next year and a half, the Indonesian government would implement a campaign to overcome Acehnese ethnic separatism through a combination of economic and political incentives combined with a massive, albeit more professional, effort to subdue the insurgency.

Operasi Terpadu marked the culmination of Government of Indonesia's efforts to subdue GAM. Including a four part approach to bringing order to Aceh, *Operasi Terpadu* sought to make up for some of the tactical and operational shortcomings of the OKPH operation. These included greater efforts by the TNI to establish a cordon around Aceh to seal off GAM from logistical re-supply, as well as a greater focus on occupying areas that

²⁴⁷ *Asia Briefing No. 40 Aceh: A New Chance for Peace*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 15, 2005), 2-4.

²⁴⁸ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 245.

had been cleared of insurgents.²⁴⁹ Many of the same tactics and procedures used in the preceding counter-insurgency campaign were used during *Operasi Terpadu*. Overall, the scope of the operation was much larger and more thorough than OKPH operation. *Operasi Terpadu* implemented both direct and indirect approaches that saw the TNI conducting military operations to eradicate GAM, law enforcement operations to reduce the economy of conflict that had taken hold over the course of the conflict, humanitarian aid that focused on winning the hearts and minds of the Acehnese populace, and the restoration of local governance through direct military oversight.²⁵⁰

Military operations included extensive cordon and sweep operations that effectively pushed GAM away from population centers. Unlike previous attempts at using indigenous forces to push GAM into the hinterland, *Operasi Terpadu* made exclusive use of police and military personnel. No militias or indigenous persons were forcibly employed in operations as had been done during the New Order years. This had the effect of minimizing the impact on Acehnese civilians thereby minimizing further ethnic animosity against the Javanese migrants and TNI. Although Acehnese militias were formed, they were employed as local security elements, akin to a neighborhood watch program. Using indigenous personnel as intelligence sources and employing extensive patrolling to locate GAM strongholds, the TNI systematically hunted the insurgents during *Operasi Terpadu*, resulting in an estimated kill/capture rate greater than the pre-operation estimates of GAM's size.²⁵¹

Several of the coercive methods that had long been employed in Aceh remained. The TNI continued to use terror tactics to instill fear in the Acehnese population as a means to isolate GAM. Although military actions tended to be more precise in their targeting of GAM personnel, the practice of random killings still remained. During *Operasi Terpadu*, the TNI specifically targeted the families of GAM members in order to garner information through surveillance and physical manipulation as well as an effort to

²⁴⁹ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 247.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 247.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 251. General Sutarto estimated that over 1,963 GAM were killed, 2,100 were captured, and 1,276 surrendered, for a total of 5,339. Pre-operational estimates placed GAM's strength at 5,251.

leverage the GAM members to cease their actions. This resulted in many of the families of GAM members being subjected to disenfranchisement on the part of their communities. In several cases, GAM family members were killed or disappeared.²⁵²

The TNI also sought to replace the growing Acehese nationalism with support for the Indonesian state. During the period when martial law was in effect, the TNI organized rallies and ceremonies where Acehese citizens were compelled to swear allegiance to the Indonesian state. These actions were designed to enforce loyalty to the Indonesian state while distancing the participants from GAM and the notion of Acehese independence. Although many officials boasted of a growing sense of Indonesian nationalism in Aceh, most academic sources dismiss these actions as coerced and not sincere on the part of the recipients of this treatment. These efforts at overcoming ethnic nationalism were almost universally viewed as unsuccessful, and only further served to alienate the Acehese.

From the political side, the TNI moved quickly to assert their influence and authority over local Acehese governance. Officials suspected of maintaining ties with GAM or even looking the other way on insurgent activities, were invariably replaced by TNI. This was particularly the case at the village level where local governance had ceased to function.²⁵³ The parallel government was systematically tracked and dismantled, resulting in both a drop in revenue for the movement as well a reduction in social support. With the parallel government disintegrating, the movement was reduced to guerrilla actions, which were increasingly difficult outside of the rural areas. Although ethnic animosities and Acehese nationalism may have remained in the populace, the ability to express them was muted.

At the national level, particularly after President Megawati's term in office expired, secret negotiations continued with GAM in an effort to maintain some kind of dialogue. Newly elected Indonesian Vice President Yusuf Kalla doggedly pursued a

²⁵² Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 252-253.

²⁵³ McGibbon, 50-51.

means to re-establish meaningful discourse with the exiled leadership in Sweden. Even before the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004, peace talks were already being planned.²⁵⁴

3. Final Political Settlement

Few contest that the imposition of martial law and *Operasi Terpadu* significantly impacted the ability of GAM to operate in Aceh. GAM had seen its numbers suffer serious attrition and the reduction in compulsory participation by indigenous Acehnese in TNI counterinsurgency efforts prevented further ethnic alienation. The parallel government had been dismantled and “services” offered by the GAM political wing were disrupted. There is no question that GAM had been driven to the hinterland, suffered heavy casualties, and been separated from its base of support. However, the true extent of the damage inflicted on the ethnic insurgency remains a matter of conjecture. The overwhelming impact of the tsunami fundamentally altered the social, political, and military landscape of Aceh, making it difficult to assess the level of damage inflicted on GAM. The Acehnese people and GAM ultimately had to subsume their struggle for a sovereign Aceh to the more immediate task of recovery from the effects of the tidal wave. The counterfactual question remains whether GAM would have been able to muster ethnic nationalism again as they did in 1989 and 1998 and return to insurgent activities.

Following the tsunami, GAM declared an immediate, unilateral ceasefire. This gesture was not initially reciprocated by the TNI, but current President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono immediately sent a government negotiating team to Helsinki, Sweden to re-initiate peace talks.²⁵⁵ This was an opportunity to extend the hand of goodwill from Jakarta in a manner that would reduce ethnic animosities and hard sentiments against Indonesian rule. In January 2005, less than a month after the tsunami, a new round of negotiations had begun between GAM and the Indonesian Government. Despite initial trepidations on the part of GAM’s leadership, these talks led to a negotiated end to

²⁵⁴ Michael Morfit, *Staying on the Road to Helsinki: Why the Aceh Agreement Was Possible in August 2005*, conference notes for “Building Permanent Peace in Aceh: One Year After the Helsinki Accord,” (August 2006), 9.

²⁵⁵ ICG Asia Briefing No. 40 *Aceh: A New Chance for Peace*, 4.

hostilities in Aceh that did not see the province seceding from the country. Ultimately, for the sake of rebuilding Aceh after the tsunami, both sides agreed to reach a resolution that would enable relief efforts to more effectively help the stricken province. The Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (MOU) was signed on August 15, 2005, effectively bringing an end to the Aceh Conflict.

As of today the process of demobilizing GAM and establishing an autonomous Aceh continues. Indications appear favorable that the MOU reached on August 15, 2005 will remain in effect. Elections were held in Aceh on December 11, 2006 and saw GAM participating not as an insurgent spoiler but as a budding political party.²⁵⁶ Contrary to what many expected, the election saw the GAM candidates for provincial governor win by an overwhelming margin (38.2%) as well as carrying strong showings in areas that were not even ethnically *suku* Aceh.²⁵⁷ The Acehnese ethnic identity that had supported the insurgency through almost thirty years of conflict now succeeded in bringing GAM to power. With GAM now positioned as the rising governing elites for the province with significantly greater control over their natural resource wealth, the former insurgents have seemingly struck a deal with Jakarta that will see them operating within the governing framework of an autonomous Aceh under the sovereign control of Indonesia.

E. SUMMARY

The ethnic homogeneity of Aceh was a variable that significantly impacted the course of the conflict from both the side of the insurgency as well as the government. In the case of GAM, the leadership succeeded in capitalizing on the relative homogeneity and shared historical experience of the populace in the province to develop a nationalist drive for independence that was effective. With a population facing severe economic degradation and marginalization, inter-ethnic competition from an imported source, and

²⁵⁶ *ICG Asia Briefing No. 57 Aceh's Local Elections: The Role of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, November 29, 2006). 2-16. This report provides further details on the transition of GAM from an insurgent group to a political party.

²⁵⁷ *ICG Asia Briefing No. 61 Indonesia: How GAM Won in Aceh*. (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 22, 2007): 2.

systematic abuses by what were portrayed as an occupying military force, manipulating common ethnic heritage was not difficult. Those ethnic minorities, who were not part of the 85-90% *suku* Aceh majority, could still be mobilized in the nationalist drive for independence by manipulating the mobilizing power of Aceh's history as a former sovereign entity and the unifying ties of Acehnese Islam. From these vehicles of communal mobilization, a nationalistic appeal and separatist movement was able to grow and thrive.

Although the rhetoric used by GAM's leadership employed several means to mobilize popular support, this conflict was ultimately about resource access. Had Aceh not been so economically deprived in the face of such rich natural resource holdings, it is questionable whether an insurgency would ever have arisen there. History, linguistic commonality, and shared culture do not provide strong mobilizing agents unless there is material benefit to be gained. Ultimately, it was the fact that so many of Aceh's indigenous inhabitants were ethnically from the same stock and shared a common history that GAM's leaders, as ethnic entrepreneurs, were able to manipulate a large enough number of the masses to mount a drive for independence.

Jakarta on the other hand was impacted by Acehnese ethnic homogeneity through the ability of GAM to form a separatist movement ideologically supported by ethnic nationalism. This ethnic nationalism led Jakarta to having no other option than to pursue a counter-insurgency program aimed at reducing support for GAM while systematically seeking to destroy its insurgent members. Interestingly, by using brutal military tactics aimed at instilling fear in the populace as a means of separating the insurgents from their support base, while importing Javanese migrants in an effort to dilute the Acehnese population, the indigenous population only grew more cohesive and supported the insurgency. Ultimately, the Government of Indonesia had to take a comprehensive approach that incorporated military actions with political and economic concessions into an integrated counter-insurgency plan that would reduce ethnic tensions, address the root causes of the insurgency, and keep the province within Indonesia's territorial control.

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IV. ANALYSIS

A. THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN INSURGENCY DEVELOPMENT

In seeking to analyze how governments address insurgencies where ethnic composition is a critical component to how those insurgencies organize, it is perhaps best to start by analyzing the factors that influence the ethnic hetero- or homogeneity of the communities in which the insurgencies formed. In the cases of the Niger Delta and Aceh, the ethnic compositions of the regions are actually similar. Both have ethnic groups that comprise a majority, with several smaller ethnic groups living in the same region. The Ijaw comprise the dominant ethnic group in the Niger Delta, while the *suku* Aceh comprise the dominant ethnic group in Aceh. Both regions share similar histories of oppression and encroachment by outside influences; the British and other African ethnic groups in the case of the Niger Delta, and several European colonial powers and the Indonesians in the case of Aceh. Yet one region sees continued ethnic fragmentation while the other region was able to coalesce to form an ethnically-based bid for separatism. Why was *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM) able to unite and mobilize Aceh under a cause of ethnic nationalism, while the Niger Delta militias have not? The answer to this question lies in four factors.

First, the Niger Delta has always been a hotbed of ethnic competition with few unifying variables bringing the ethnic communities together. Linguistic and cultural differences have remained pronounced and salient. Although some groups share common cultural and religious features others, most notably the Ijaw with their god Egbesu, are exclusive. From pre-colonial days of the slave trade through the period of the palm oil trade, the ethnic communities in the Niger Delta have competed with each other, sometimes even at the intra-ethnic level. Today, the potentially unifying variable of economic deprivation is relatively new. Development has never taken place in the Niger Delta, and it is only within the last several decades that the ecological impact of oil extraction combined with the perceived imbalance in revenue distribution by the central government, and degenerating nature of the Nigerian economy has truly become an issue for the local communities. At the local level, the engrained patterns of inter-ethnic

competition have remained active. It has only been in the last 15-20 years that some measure of success has been achieved in establishing pan-ethnic groups that can clamor for their rights. Until 1999, those groups were largely suppressed by a distant military government. As such, the Niger Delta communities have had a shorter amount of time than Aceh to see pan-ethnic movements or newly constructed ethnic identities take root.

By comparison, Aceh has a long, shared history of unity under the Acehnese sultanate. The strength and importance of this history should not be discounted. The level of devotion to Islam, particularly the form of Islam practiced in Aceh, and the permeation of the socio-political components of that religion is enduring and powerful. The different *suku* unified under Islam that comprise the Acehnese population have a long history of living and working together spanning hundreds of years. Moreover, these same communities have a long history of shared hardship at the hands of outsiders. Starting in 1873, they have essentially been in conflict with “colonizing powers” for their rights of self-determination. These factors made the development of ethnic nationalism by Hasan di Tiro, inclusive of all *suku*, something that the ethnic entrepreneur could accomplish.

The second is the nature of the political systems in the two regions. In the case of the Niger Delta, politics is inextricably tied to ethnicity and patrimonial client systems. Politicians in the Niger Delta tend to seek access to political power for the furtherance of their respective ethnic group’s agendas.²⁵⁸ At the local and community levels, this again can even transcend ethnic ties, which results in intra-ethnic competition. The result is that a single unified political force that can rally support for an insurgency has difficulty taking root. Although some politicians in the Niger Delta may even support insurgent groups, the impact of ethnicity on politics there means that the insurgent groups themselves have little by way of reliable political backing beyond a local level and are unable to unify behind a single agenda, much less a separatist movement.

In contrast, ethnic politics in Aceh lacks this dynamic of zero-sum competition. Different ethnic minorities are accustomed to commercial and political interactions

²⁵⁸ *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 3rd ed., ed. by Naomi Chazan, Peter Lewis, et al., (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 1999), 329-330. This book provides a detailed description of African patrimonial governance.

between their leaders in a manner that, while aimed at bettering their constituents, is not done in a manner that impedes the progress of the groups. In this environment of relative political harmony, GAM's leadership was able to find support that grew as the level of economic stagnation worsened in the province. GAM's leadership was able to start with the idea of separatism and have its attraction grow in appeal as the situation in Aceh grew worse.

The third factor dovetails with the previous one and is the nature of how the insurgencies started. The insurgency in Aceh started as a unified idea for the establishment of an independent state, one that had actually existed previously as a sovereign entity. This idea of seeking independence preceded the existence of the militant elements and enabled Hasan di Tiro and his cadre to form an insurgent group with focus and direction where one had not previously existed.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, the movement started and was waged for the first 22 years in districts of Aceh where the population was almost exclusively *suku* Aceh. In contrast, the employment of militias in the Niger Delta for security and inter-ethnic competition had existed long before the problems of economic deprivation began. As previously discussed, these militias served the communities of which they were a part. This fact made it difficult for these groups to coalesce. This began to change, particularly amongst the Ijaw, by the late 1990s. However, as the 2003 Ijaw-Itsekiri fighting and 2004 turf war between Ijaw elements around Port Harcourt attests, there are still significant communal and ethnic divisions that have not been overcome.

The final factor is the impact of the government actions themselves in their respective efforts to reduce the insurgencies. These actions will be examined further in this chapter.

As such, these four factors created conditions that enabled GAM to mobilize an ethnically homogenous and unified insurgency effort that solely focused on loosening the political and economic grip of the Indonesian government on its region. Conversely, the

²⁵⁹ Though not covered in the thesis, another insurgency actually had taken place in Aceh before the birth of GAM. That insurgency, known as the *Darul Islam* (DI) rebellion was fought between Islamic devotees and the newly independent secular government of Sukarno. Unlike GAM, the DI rebellion did not seek Aceh's secession from Indonesia, but instead sought the implementation of Islamic government.

Niger Delta militias can only muster support at the level of single ethnic and communal groups, thereby preventing the insurgency from moving beyond the incipient stage of criminality. These different sets of conditions in turn affected the strategies that the insurgencies were able to employ, and the manner in which they were able to bring pressure to bear on their state governments.

B. INSURGENT STRATEGIES COMPARED

An examination of the military strategy employed by GAM relative to those of the Niger Delta militias is important for understanding how an ethnically homogeneous insurgent group poses a greater threat to a state government than an insurgency comprised of ethnically diverse elements. GAM was able to muster ethnic nationalism within the province aimed at driving out the Indonesian government and reestablishing the previously existing Aceh sultanate. In contrast, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the other ethnic militias of the Niger Delta have only been able to issue demands for Nigerian withdrawal and amendments to current revenue disbursement policies, which are not backed by levels of force sufficient to require the government to deal with them. These threats have thus far not been significant enough to cause a change in the strategy of criminalization by the Nigerian government. This disparity in capability between the insurgencies is directly related to the level of ethnic cohesion each enjoys and has negative implications for the operational potential of the Niger Delta militias. Interestingly, with the exception of GAM's targeting of the state education system, parallels can be observed in the operational targeting employed by both insurgencies. However, as will be shown, the reasons and desired end states of targeting these specific areas differ based on strategies available.

The targeting of Indonesian security forces by GAM is similar to the actions taken by the ethnic militias in the Niger Delta, in that this is the targeting of "occupation forces" that are viewed as foreign, exploitative, and abusive of the respective ethnic communities. However, in the Niger Delta most of the military action taken against security forces is conducted in the furtherance of oil theft or attacks on oil infrastructure. Only recently have attacks on military targets by organizations such as MEND been

conducted for reasons not linked to petroleum theft, and these actions have been more the result of targets of opportunity than deliberate attacks. In Aceh, GAM targeted military and police personnel in a more deliberate and methodical manner to foment insecurity and demonstrate the inability of the Indonesian government to control the area.²⁶⁰

Both insurgent groups actively target the petroleum industry in their areas. In Aceh, the LNG industry's infrastructure and personnel are attacked for the same reasons that they're attacked in the Niger Delta; the petro-industry is perceived as stealing resources without adequately compensating the local communities. Both perceive the oil companies to be "co-conspirators" with the state governments to deprive the communities of revenue. Although some of the Niger Delta militias state that they intend to shut down oil production, at this time they are incapable of doing so; most militant actions reflect a local focus that lack an effective level of coordination sufficient enough to critically impact the Nigerian government. Moreover, actions are not aimed at permanently crippling oil production thereby forcing the government to deal with the insurgents. Most actions are against petroleum personnel in the Niger Delta and include kidnappings with ransom demands for their release. As of this writing, no hostages have been killed by Niger Delta militia groups. At the high end of conflict, local militias seize oil facilities, but the Nigerian military quickly intercedes to evict them. With adequate financial payouts from the oil corporations, most of the Niger Delta communities have been willing to allow petroleum extraction to recommence.²⁶¹

This is not the case in Aceh where attacks against petroleum workers were more violent, and the shutdown of oil production was sought as a means of impacting the Indonesian economy. A GAM spokesman was quoted in 2002 as saying: "The general principle is that the government of the State of Aceh prohibits all activities that lead to the exploration of its natural resources by foreign powers, especially if such exploration is the source of revenue for the enemy Indonesia. The Hague and Geneva Laws recognize the right of warring parties to eliminate the economic facilities of the enemy that can be

²⁶⁰ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 236.

²⁶¹ Bronwyn Manby, "The Role and Responsibility of Oil Multinationals in Nigeria," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 53/1 (Fall 1999), 287-289.

used to strengthen the muscle of the military.”²⁶² As previously mentioned, Exxon Mobil was forced to shut down all production and refining operations in Aceh in 2001, as a result of concern for the safety of its employees. GAM’s targeting of the oil industry was therefore part of an overarching strategy to push Jakarta toward allowing secession.

Although direct inter-ethnic competition appears in both conflicts, the reasons for it taking place in the Niger Delta are fundamentally different from those in Aceh. Whereas inter-ethnic competition in the Niger Delta takes the form of ethnic communities competing for economic advantages (due to the adjustment of political boundaries, claims to distributed oil revenue, and the development funding), the ethnic competition in Aceh was aimed at the systematic removal of one ethnic group by another. In the case of Aceh, GAM sought to intimidate Javanese migrants into leaving the province, claiming that they were part of the “colonial legacy” of Indonesian occupation, as well as active collaborators with the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI) against GAM.²⁶³

This controversial effort at “ethnic cleansing” by GAM was not only designed to send a message to the Jakarta government, but also to mobilize support from the Acehnese population.²⁶⁴ In pursuing this strategy, GAM actively sought to intimidate ethnic Javanese through violence, extortion, and terror tactics. Between 2000 and 2002 alone, an estimated 50,000 Javanese migrants had fled Aceh.²⁶⁵ Although efforts by different ethnic groups to forcibly evict another have taken place in the Niger Delta, these actions were not used as part of a larger strategy aimed at the Nigerian Federal Government.

Militarily, GAM also sought to target local government structures in an effort to both cripple Jakarta’s influence in Aceh, and recruit as many politicians and civil servants

²⁶² Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 39.

²⁶³ Schulze, “Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004,” 234-236.

²⁶⁴ This is according to Hasan di Tiro’s own writings in 1977 that saw the Javanese as “neo-colonialists” who both sympathized and collaborated with Government of Indonesia efforts to steal Acehnese resources, but also presented direct economic competition with ethnic Acehnese who were losing jobs to Javanese.

²⁶⁵ Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, 39.

as possible into GAM's parallel government. Any political or civil leader who levied criticism against GAM made him a target. Threats, kidnapping, and murder were all used to intimidate local government officials. These efforts were largely successful: In May 2003 when martial law was declared in Aceh, "99 out of 228 districts and 4,750 out of 5,947 villages did not have a functioning local government."²⁶⁶ Furthermore, GAM spokesmen estimated that upwards of 70% of Acehnese citizens used the GAM government offices than those of the state.²⁶⁷

In contrast, the targeting of political officials by ethnic militias in the Niger Delta has not caused a noticeable impact on the ability of state or local government agencies to function. Although ethnic militias actively target political officials for assassination, these actions are not done in an effort to undermine the central government. As noted in the previous chapter, ethnic militias principally fight for their ethnic communities and are regularly co-opted by political aspirants and incumbents, who are usually from the same ethnic group. These politicians frequently use the militias as "firepower" to intimidate their opposition, particularly during election periods. These actions reflect a larger "struggle for hegemonic positions" by political figures in their pursuit of access to better rent-seeking opportunities.²⁶⁸ In this environment, the ethnically delimited militias are prevented from constituting a political force of their own and do not threaten the Nigerian government. Even if an ethnic militia is able to muster enough support to operate autonomously of the local politicians, there will always be the threat of other militias, serving as quasi-armies for standing political leaders, who would most likely oppose them.

C. ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Understanding that the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and Aceh levied different kinds of challenges on the central governments, it becomes clear that Indonesia didn't

²⁶⁶ Schulze, "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency: Strategy and the Aceh Conflict, October 1976-May 2004," 231.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁶⁸ Ruben Eberlein, "On the road to the state's perdition? Authority and sovereignty in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44/4 (2006), 591.

have an option to conduct counter-insurgency. Nigeria on the other hand is losing oil revenue, but not in a sufficient quantity to threaten the government's hold on power. Furthermore the government is not in danger of losing territory to a new sovereign state. For Indonesia, due to the goal of secession, and strategies used by GAM, it is unlikely that security operations and criminalizing the threat alone would have worked in Aceh. The safeguarding of Indonesia's economic resources in the province would have resulted in a rise in negative popular sentiments that would have eventually threatened the economic interests themselves, not to mention the entrenchment of secessionist elements within Acehnese society. Unlike the Nigerian government in the Niger Delta, where resources can be safeguarded militarily while separatist potentials are limited by the inability of the ethnic groups to coalesce, the Government of Indonesia had no other choice than to address the threat through counter-insurgency or concede to allow the province a slow decline toward independence. Although the options for the two governments differed, there are still interesting similarities and divergences in the government strategies that merit examination and lead to some surprising implications.

1. Similarities and Differences

Despite the differences that the two governments took in approaching their insurgency problems, there are similarities in their strategies. Both sought to outlaw the movements; Suharto's New Order regime outlawed GAM in 1977 and unleashed the TNI to doggedly pursue the movement until it was suppressed in 1982. In Nigeria, the military government outlawed subversive activities, while the Obasanjo government outlawed ethnic militias altogether. Both governments sought to stronghold and safeguard the areas of economic importance to them in the regions, and implemented harsh reprisals on communities that were thought to be supporting or harboring insurgent elements. Last, both governments sought to implement legislative reforms that offered greater resource access to the communities as a means to reduce popular unrest. These actions failed to effectively quell the insurgencies and allowed the conditions that led to the restiveness to remain in place. However, the strategies employed by the insurgent groups as a result of

the opportunities and constraints imposed by their respective levels of ethnic homogeneity led to important differences in government response that are outlined hereafter.

Although the similarities are important, it is through analysis of the differences in how the governments addressed the insurgencies that an understanding of how ethnic composition is important in insurgency and counter-insurgency can be determined. Unlike Nigeria, the Indonesian government deliberately imported another ethnic group in an effort to dilute the ethnic composition of the Acehese population, while bringing in elements of Indonesian society that would hopefully instill loyalty to Jakarta. This plan resulted in the unintended consequence of providing a means for mobilizing support for GAM. While there is little question that this policy resulted in Jakarta gaining some loyal supporters in Aceh, particularly among the Javanese transplants, the negative effect clearly provided fuel for the GAM perspective of Indonesia as a colonizing power.

However, had the Indonesian government not adopted this policy of transmigration, which had been in effect since the 1950s and produced two generations of Javanese transplants in Aceh that supported the government, it is probable that the Acehese would have viewed the TNI and Jakarta-backed local government as even more of an intrusive element. The simple fact is that GAM managed to manipulate the presence of the Javanese migrants and present their presence in a manner that marginalized the group, before the intended effect of ethnic dilution had fully taken place.

In contrast, the Nigerian government has made no effort to transplant large numbers of other ethnic groups into the Niger Delta. Not only is this practice not necessary given the diffuse nature of the existing ethnic composition of the region, but to do so would actually create an “external pathogen” that might cause the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta to coalesce. The antagonism that the hiring practices of multi-national oil corporations for their supernumerary police, wherein personnel from other ethnic communities are brought in to conduct security, provides a glimpse of that ethnic coalescing on a smaller scale. Leaving the ethnic communities to squabble amongst themselves for resource access in a manner similar to what they have done for hundreds of years actually serves to keep the homogenizing of a single ethnic identity from

occurring. Although the government does intervene in inter- and intra- ethnic conflicts in the Niger Delta, they usually only do so when the impact of that fighting affects oil production.

Another important difference between the Indonesian and Nigerian approaches to their insurgencies is the fact that the TNI attempted to militarily destroy GAM. Unlike the Niger Delta where the military seeks to simply safeguard the resources, the TNI made a concerted effort, albeit in an unrefined manner during the first phase of government efforts, to eradicate the movement. This effort by the TNI saw terror tactics being used and deliberate attempts to engineer intra-communal conflict as a means to separate the insurgency from its popular support base. As a result of these TNI efforts, sentiments against the TNI and government of Indonesia, as well as Acehnese ethnic nationalism, only hardened. The fact that this took place in the absence of effective Indonesian government efforts to address the economic and political causes that led to the separatist movement in the first place only exacerbated the problem. The result was continuous pressure being felt by the Acehnese population, wherein the counter-insurgency measures taken by the TNI were actually part of the problem. This kept the seeds of insurgency alive and led to the insurgency worsening in the late 1990s. Had the Indonesian government employed efforts to alleviate poverty and economic decline in conjunction with those military measures, it is likely that the counter-insurgency measures taken by the TNI would not have been as damaging.

Conversely, the Nigerian government does not seek to eradicate the insurgency through the use of the military or police. While the militias are outlawed, military and police operations in the Niger Delta are aimed at interdicting oil theft and smuggling, while safeguarding petroleum processing facilities and oil company cantonment areas. Military and police brutality has certainly taken place in the Niger Delta as the death toll of the Odi massacre attests; however, operations such as these are retaliatory in nature and do not reflect an effort to systematically hunt and destroy the insurgents. Where insurgents or militia elements are observed conducting operations, they are engaged. Yet there is little effort made to uncover their operating bases or systematically separate the

insurgents from the populations that support them. If communities are moved, it is to prevent them from interfering with petroleum extraction.

Sustained terror tactics such as rape, torture, disappearances, and extra-judicial killings, for the purpose of reducing support for the insurgency, are not conducted by the military or police in the Niger Delta. Criminality of this nature is a feature of the region, particularly inter-ethnic violence, but it is not conducted or fomented by agents of the state government in the same deliberate manner that it was in Aceh. The TNI sought to use fear as a means to paralyze support for the insurgency. It failed and only created greater distrust for them by the Acehnese population. Additionally, operations that seek to employ indigenous communities against themselves for the purpose of betraying militia members are not conducted in the Niger Delta. If the government uses militias for anything, it is to fight one another for political gains though not to eliminate one another.

Unlike in Aceh, the lack of these two tactics prevents sweeping and sustained damage to the Niger Delta communities, thereby limiting the level of anger and fear aimed at the government. This keeps the frustration and anger aimed at the Nigerian government focused on its failure to provide economic relief, not from the inflicting of atrocities on the population. Although the Nigerian military are loathed and feared, with the possible exception of the youth elements, the Niger Delta communities still support their local governments. This is unlike Aceh, where civil support for local governance broke down and shifted to support GAM's parallel government, as a result of TNI abuses and frustration over perceived Jakarta collusion in the atrocities.

D. SUMMARY

The difference in levels of ethnic homogeneity and harmony between the Acehnese and Niger Delta communities resulted in different strategies and operational methods being employed by the main insurgent elements toward fundamentally different end states. In both cases, the insurgencies focused on inflicting severe enough damage to their state governments' interests in the regions in which they operated, to result in the governments complying with the demands of the insurgent leaders. However, the ability of GAM to muster a separatist movement based upon ethnic nationalism resulted in a

different desired end state and correspondingly different means to achieve it—fundamentally undermining the Indonesian social, political, and economic presence in Aceh while seeking to raise the level of violence to a level that resulted in international intervention.

In contrast, the militias of the Niger Delta, including MEND, were and remain unable to raise a unified effort. These militias face the added challenge of having to fight amongst themselves, principally for access to the same revenues that they demand from the state government, in addition to fighting the military and supernumerary police of the oil companies. These inter-ethnic rivalries divide their efforts and prevent any degree of operational synergy from taking place. This results in uncoordinated efforts to oust the Nigerian presence or force the government to concede more revenue.

The actions of the Indonesian and Nigerian governments were also impacted by the level of ethnic homogeneity of the communities in their respective conflict areas of Aceh and the Niger Delta. The ethnic nationalism and resultant separatist bid by the Acehnese resulted in the Jakarta government having to seek to eliminate the insurgency. Furthermore, policies and tactics intended to divide the communities and separate the insurgent elements from them actually resulted in both ethnic and communal hardening due to the success of GAM in using both to their advantage. In the end, as *Operasi Terpadu* showed, the only option was an integrated counterinsurgency campaign that drove GAM away from the populace thus enabling the TNI to regain control of the territory, while still conducting negotiations with the insurgency's leadership with the aim of ending the conflict.

The Niger Delta's ethnic heterogeneity and disunity result in the Nigerian government having another option. That is to simply protect the economic interests of the state and declare the insurgent elements to be criminals seeking to better themselves at the expense of other elements of Nigerian society. This enables the Nigerian government to both refuse to negotiate over the demands levied by the militias, while employing brutal tactics aimed at communities in collusion with "criminal elements." This brutality is just enough to instill fear in the Niger Delta communities but stops short of pushing them toward the formation of a new ethnic identity born of state-inflicted violence.

Furthermore, keeping the region undeveloped and poor keeps the ethnically divided communities fighting over the limited economic opportunities that are available. In doing so, the Nigerian government successfully implements a divide and rule strategy using the communities' own ethnic cleavages against them, thus avoiding the dilemma of how to divide an ethnically homogeneous community as was faced by the Indonesian government.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT: FIGHTING SMART OR PROLONGING THE INEVITABLE?

Is Nigeria fighting smart or simply avoiding an inevitable counter-insurgency? By not pursuing efforts to systemically destroy the insurgency, the government is avoiding the Indonesian dilemma that caused Aceh to become such a problem from 1998 through 2005. By strong-pointing the petroleum production areas against “criminal elements” and identifying and treating the insurgency as “criminal enterprises,” the Nigerian government both justifies the presence of the military in the Niger Delta while providing a rationale for the limited military operations needed to safeguard oil production. Operation Restore Hope, as its name seems to imply, claims to be providing a positive presence in the Niger Delta aimed at reducing criminality. By attacking known or suspected oil bunkering sites, such as those Ijaw communities attacked in February 2005, the JTF claims to be deterring criminal activity which should open the way for greater economic opportunity in the region. Brigadier General Ilogho, Commanding General of the JTF, indicates that he has “adopted a strategy of dialogue” that seeks to reduce tensions between the communities and the government, while enabling his troops to conduct that mission.²⁶⁹

However, unless changes are made in the way Nigeria approaches the economic malaise in the Niger Delta, the ethnically delimited communities there have few options outside of “criminality”. Unemployment remains high with few options for gaining income outside of oil bunkering, putting many of these communities on a trajectory that will inevitably see them engaged by the Nigerian military. Although Ilogho stated that the government seeks “long-standing solutions to the problems on the ground,”²⁷⁰ the poverty and environmental despoliation remains a severe problem. Although the JTF are not conducting counter-insurgency aimed at ridding the Niger Delta of ethnic militias, the efforts of the Nigerian military to interdict these communities’ few economic options has

²⁶⁹ Calvert, 1A.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 1A.

the potential to have the same effect. Over time, the frustration at the Nigerian government for the lack of economic development may be coupled with resentment due to military interdiction in the communities' only potential economic option to such a level that the communities begin to see one another as the same. When this occurs, ethnic markers that had previously been salient may begin to break down. The seeds of a new historical narrative could be emplaced enabling the leaders of movements like MEND to cross the ethnic divides that had previously been insurmountable, to coalesce a new ethnic identity in a bid for greater access to the Niger Delta's resources.

If the Nigerian government were to commence counter-insurgency operations now, it is likely that they would embark on a campaign that would see this ethnic coalescing accelerate. The Niger Delta's exceedingly difficult terrain would necessitate measures to control the population within it. As outlined in the hypothetical model in Chapter II, one of the tasks the Nigerian military would have to undertake would be to separate the ethnic insurgents from their supporting populations. In doing so, the military would invariably have three options: destroy those communities; place occupation forces on the ground to monitor and interdict insurgent activities in those communities; or force migrate those communities out of the conflict area in order to deny the insurgents the ability to gain support.

All of these options would create additional hardships that would potentially see previously separated communities coming together against the common external threat. Destroying the communities would clearly not be an option for reasons so obvious they need not be addressed. Occupation forces, even if managed in a highly refined manner, would still result in local resentment against an external occupier. If this resentment did not occur immediately, it would not take much for an insurgent group to instill it in a manner similar to the way that GAM did with the TNI in Aceh. This resentment might well lead to increased militant action aimed specifically at the occupation forces, thereby inviting further government reprisals. As the military clamp down continued, the saliency of ethnic boundaries might be reduced in the face of an external threat, thereby leading to a willingness of ethnic communities to band together. The worst case scenario for the government would be the coalescing of a new ethnic identity. From this increased

willingness to work together or new sense of ethnic identity might grow an ethnic nationalist movement that would be able to muster a significant separatist threat.

Forced migration would result in displaced communities that would have to be dealt with in one of two ways. The first would be the creating of refugee camps outside of the conflict area, wherein displaced communities could be quarantined and monitored. The second would be the movement of displaced communities into areas already occupied by previously resident indigenous communities, potentially from another ethnic group, where they could be controlled and monitored. Either of these migration options would open the door for further ethnic coalescing or, at a minimum, pan-ethnic collusion, geared toward coordinated efforts to interdict the government's policies. While engineered inter-ethnic competition or even forced efforts to "re-program" these populations to be loyal to the government, as was done in Aceh, might be put in place in an effort to forestall this ethnic coalescing, the forging of a new ethnic identity in the face of the governmental oppressor would be probable. Based on these factors, engaging in counter-insurgency without first implementing economic reforms in the Niger Delta is a recipe for a much greater problem.

Economic reforms in the Niger Delta might translate into reducing corruption. If Nigeria succeeds in addressing the epidemic levels of corruption in the government that prevent petroleum revenues from being properly channeled toward development in the Niger Delta, the government will set the conditions to allow counter-insurgency to be adopted without risking the creation of a new ethnic identity that pushes the region toward secession. This is not to say that a purely military counter-insurgency strategy would be able to be adopted. Far from solely a military strategy, this strategy would seek to enable development to act as the catalyst for negating the reasons for insurgency. Where jobs, education, and infrastructure could be brought in, the grievances would be eliminated. With the grievances eliminated, the insurgents' demands would be met. Any remaining "insurgent" elements would truly be criminals, and any state and civil actions to eliminate them, would gradually cease to have support and a viable means to operate.

B. MIGHT GAM BE A MODEL FOR MEND?

Whether or not MEND or a similar umbrella organization in the Niger Delta might be able to use GAM as an effective model for insurgency is a question that this thesis does not seek to address. However, it will be touched on briefly here. As discussed the Niger Delta and Aceh bear some significant similarities. Although GAM failed to succeed in achieving independence for Aceh, they did succeed in securing access to greater resource wealth for the Acehnese people. This goal is similar to what groups like MEND claim to seek. Both regions have ethnic communities isolated from the rest of the country that were systematically disenfranchised by government policies. Both view the presence of the state government as oppressive and intrusive. Additionally, the trajectory of the Niger Delta insurgency's development within the majority ethnic group of the region first, as was done in Aceh, appears to be taking place.

However, whether MEND leaders can span the ethnic divides both within the Ijaw communities and the other ethnic groups remains unknown. The Ijaw comprise the largest of the ethnic communities in the Niger Delta, though as the 2003 to 2004 turf wars between rival Ijaw militias attests, there are divisions even within single ethnic groups. If the Ijaw were able to unite under a common purpose of opposing the Nigerian government, a critical first step toward ethnic coalescing would have taken place. Other ethnic groups might be convinced to join the insurgent effort under a unified Ijaw plan, either under the guise of a Niger Delta ethnic identity, or as a pan-ethnic effort geared toward achieving each ethnic groups' ambitions.

Several factors not considered during the course of this writing comprise areas for further research would have to be examined to determine if a separatist movement would be able to be effectively mounted by an insurgent group such as MEND. These factors include the impact of local government manipulations of ethnic militias relative to the ability of those ethnic militias to organize in a pan-ethnic manner. Nigerian neo-patrimonial governance and its side effect — political and economic corruption — would also have to be factored in. Additionally, the growing divide between youths and

traditional elites, as well as the urban/rural bifurcation in Nigeria²⁷¹ are factors that will likely need to be considered. Lastly, Nigeria as an ethnically plural society with other ethnic competition issues outside of the Niger Delta would also have to be considered.

At a glance, based upon the state of current ethnic divisions in the Niger Delta, it is unlikely that a movement like GAM would be able to take hold. Based upon this conclusion, it is unlikely that the Nigerian Government will have to pursue an integrated counter-insurgency campaign any time soon. Continuing to criminalize the ethnic militias that steal oil, while managing the ethnic cleavages in the communities in such a way that they prevent the unification of a single ethnic identity capable of cultivating a sense of Niger Delta ethnic nationalism, appears to be an option whose only drawbacks are the continued discontent of communities, the hemorrhaging of potential oil revenue, and international disapproval mostly at the level of non-government organizations. However, it is probably safe to say that the criminalization course of action cannot be pursued indefinitely. Economic disenfranchisement is itself a potential mobilization path for a new Niger Delta ethnic identity that is capable of transcending the existing ethnic cleavages. If a charismatic and influential leader like Hasan di Tiro were to rise from within the Niger Delta with a convincing narrative for why the Niger Delta has always been and needs to be separate and distinct from Nigeria, the sustained economic marginalization coupled with the potential for shared perceptions of that marginalization by ethnic communities at the hands of a distant disinterested state government might be enough to push the region to attempt to secede. The Nigerian government would do well to seek political and economic reforms now so as to avoid such opportunities by ethnic entrepreneurs that might lead to another Biafra or situation similar to Aceh.

If the government is to pursue a counter-insurgency course of action, it should ensure that the campaign is largely one focused on political and economic reform. As shown by the Indonesian experience in Aceh, military forces occupying the area being contested for resource control have a strongly polarizing effect in bringing ethnic communities together against an external threat. Failure to implement a counter-

²⁷¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996). This book provides a thorough understanding of the bifurcation of the African State.

insurgency campaign that is mostly focused on reforms with military efforts focused on continuing to secure oil infrastructure while interdicting oil theft will likely result in the hastening of ethnic coalescing or pan-ethnic resistance that could evolve into a bid for separatism. While it is questionable whether such a movement would succeed in mustering sufficient support for seceding from Nigeria, the prospect of a coordinated insurgency conducted by a community of unified Niger Delta ethnic groups would be a disaster scenario that would invariably cause a negative impact to the Nigerian economy to such a degree, that the disintegration of Nigeria might well be possible.

C. CONCLUSION

An examination of the ethnic insurgencies in Aceh and the Niger Delta reveals that the ethnic composition of the communities is a critical variable that influenced the trajectory of those ethnically-derived movements. As has been shown, ethnic composition is both highly malleable and determinative of the options available to insurgent groups. The malleability of ethnicity as shown in these insurgencies means that insurgents have the ability to change their options based upon how ethnic entrepreneurs manipulate ethnic markers and historical narratives. Skillful manipulation of these components of ethnic identity enable insurgent leaders to potentially open their options for gaining popular support and directing their insurgent efforts. Where ethnic barriers can be reduced, resulting in a homogeneous effect, separatism becomes an option that places the insurgent group in a much better position to leverage greater access to resources.

An analysis of the government responses by Indonesia and Nigeria reveals that while the ethnic composition of an insurgency may indeed be a determinant of whether a government will have the option of avoiding a counter-insurgency campaign, the government's actions both before and during the conduct of that campaign will potentially influence the manner in which ethnicity remains a mobilizing agent for the insurgent leaders. In both cases, it has been shown that military actions absent political and economic reforms will invariably lead to greater ethnic cohesion within the ethnically delimited communities. This was empirically observed in Aceh while hypothetically outlined for the Niger Delta.

In situations where grievances derive from communities that are ethnically homogeneous and cohesive, the government faces the potential of a separatist threat that can likely only be eliminated by an integrated counter-insurgency consisting of political, economic, and military actions. Failure to implement these political and economic concessions in the face of military actions alone will invariably lead to the hardening of ethnic cohesion and sentiments against the government, culminating in a strengthening of ethnic nationalism and greater degree of support for the insurgent movement.

Where grievances emanate from communities that are divided and ethnically heterogeneous, counter-insurgency can be avoided through efforts to criminalize the movement, thereby making it difficult for the movement to maintain legitimacy and receive universal popular support within the area it is operating. However, this tactic can only be used as a temporary measure. Though the insurgent groups may be marginalized, the ethnic communities will still remain under economic pressure thereby opening the potential for shared hardship to derive new ethnic identities. Unless active steps are taken by the state to keep ethnic divisions active, the coalescing of a new ethnic identity under the guise of government neglect and marginalization is possible. Once this occurs, the government will have no other options than those of a state facing an ethnically unified threat capable of pushing for secession: a coordinated counter-insurgency that seeks to both alleviate the conditions that led to the grievances, while systematically hunting the insurgent elements.

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