



INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT

POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLES IN ACEH

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CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Background.....	2
III.	Zaini Abdullah vs Muzakir Manaf.....	2
	A. Impact of the 2014 Elections	3
	B. Battles in the Provincial Legislature (DPRA)	5
	C. The Budget Battle	5
IV.	Efforts to Reunify GAM.....	6
V.	Rejuvenation of Partai Aceh	8
VI.	Islamic Law	9
VII.	Relations with Jakarta.....	10
VIII.	Conclusion	10

I. INTRODUCTION

Political dynamics within the top ranks of the former rebel Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) suggest that a generational transfer of power is underway. The old diaspora elite, led from abroad by Malik Mahmud until the 2005 Helsinki peace agreement, is losing influence. Authority derived from long-term service to the movement and closeness to its late founder, Hasan Tiro, is being replaced by authority derived from control of local resources and political institutions.

By this measure, Muzakir Manaf, the former GAM guerrilla commander, who is simultaneously vice-governor, CEO of a business conglomerate and head of the Aceh Party (Partai Aceh), GAM's main political vehicle for winning local elections, is the most powerful person in Aceh. His willingness to defer to his old political superiors in the struggle appears to be coming to an end. This is particularly apparent in his ongoing rift with Gov. Zaini Abdullah.

Distancing itself from the old guard could weaken Partai Aceh in several ways. Its claim to be the party of peace because of its role in the Helsinki pact could lose force with the electorate. There would be fewer positives to balance against its rent-seeking and sometimes thuggish tactics. It could be more prone to splinters, especially as ex-combatants resentful of Muzakir's authoritarian tendencies opt out or are expelled from the party. It could have less access to top officials in Jakarta, where the main link was between Jusuf Kalla and Malik as a result of the peace process.

Partai Aceh strategists close to Muzakir, however, are trying to strengthen the political base through two methods. One is rejuvenation, relying less on ex-combatants for political office since as a group they have performed poorly, and more on younger, better educated cadres. The second is reaching out to conservative clerics by promising to strengthen the role of Islam in everyday life. This may be at odds with the largely secular outlook of many top GAM leaders but it is seen as important to shoring up GAM's grassroots constituency.

Three other factors could affect how the party evolves. One is the political ambition of former governor Irwandi Yusuf, newly reconciled with Muzakir after a bitter electoral fight in 2012. He sees a political partnership with Muzakir under the Partai Aceh banner as the best way of uniting GAM and ensuring that Jakarta delivers on the unfulfilled promises of Helsinki. Muzakir supporters are not so sure.

The second is whether national parties continue to eat into Partai Aceh's strength, as they did in the 2014 election. The new party Nasdem in particular has some popular elected legislators with ambitions to run for executive office; they might be able to capture some district and municipal posts in 2017. Civil society activists are also interested in trying to groom their own cadres to enter the political arena.

The third is how Jakarta reacts. Throughout the Yudhoyono administration, the president was personally engaged in trying to keep Partai Aceh and the old guard on side in the interest of strengthening the peace. President Jokowi is likely to be less focused on Aceh, and his conservative security advisers are more likely to favour a weak and divided GAM than one united behind a new generation of leaders.

The 2017 election for governor and district heads will be a chance to assess Partai Aceh's ability to survive the founding generation. Its candidate for governor will likely win. The question is whether the percentage of victory will be more or less than in 2012, when the ticket of Zaini-Muzakir won 54 per cent of the vote after a campaign marked by violence and intimidation. A reconciliation ticket with Muzakir and Irwandi could send those numbers soaring, but few think it will transpire, especially since both want to be governor. A less than 50 per cent performance, even if still secures the governorship, could be a harbinger of a further decline for the party in the 2019 legislative elections.

II. BACKGROUND

Since the Helsinki peace agreement in 2005 that ended an almost three-decade insurgency, GAM in Aceh has been led by former officials of its “government in exile” in Sweden: Malik Mahmud, former “prime minister”; Zaini Abdullah, former “foreign minister”; and Zakaria Saman, formerly responsible for arms purchases and logistic support from abroad, mostly Thailand. The relative unity of this troika with the guerrilla commanders in Aceh was one factor that made the peace possible. Muzakir Manaf, as military commander from early 2002, left the political decision-making and peace negotiations to the diaspora leaders, just as they had left military operations to him.

Not every GAM leader who had lived through the conflict at home was as accommodating, and friction quickly developed between the troika, who returned to Aceh, and dissident “young Turks” with political ambitions who felt the returning exiles were out of touch. Chief among the latter was Irwandi Yusuf, who served as GAM’s propaganda chief for the latter years of the conflict. In the first post-Helsinki election in 2006, he challenged the troika’s choice for governor, ran himself as an independent, and won. Relations between them never recovered.

The old diaspora elite formed Partai Aceh in 2008 with a view to contesting local legislative elections the next year. The troika became the party’s senior advisers, known as the *Tuha Peuet*, and Muzakir became the party chair, adding to several other roles he had, including head of the organisation of ex-combatants, known as the Aceh Transition Committee (Komite Peralihan Aceh, KPA). The KPA, whose structure almost exactly mirrored that of the old GAM army, became the party’s get-out-the-vote machine, fund-raiser and security arm.

Governor Irwandi did not formally join Partai Aceh but supported it, and it won huge victories in 2009 at the provincial and district levels. He had hoped that support would lead to Partai Aceh backing him for a second term for governor, but the troika wanted its own people in charge. They tried to thwart Irwandi running as an independent (non-party) candidate and pressured Jakarta to delay the elections until his first term was over and he could no longer use his office resources to support a campaign. They eventually named Zaini and Muzakir as candidates and trounced Irwandi and his obscure running mate in the delayed polls, making full use of the KPA but also benefiting from Irwandi’s own lack of organisation. Irwandi’s relationship with Muzakir, which up until this point had survived the troika’s hostility, seemed well and truly broken.

For the 2014 legislative elections, Irwandi formed his own party, Partai Nasional Aceh (PNA), but it was no match for the Partai Aceh’s machine, and it only won three seats to Partai Aceh’s 29 in the 81-seat provincial legislature. In the meantime another rift appeared, this time between Governor Zaini and his deputy, Muzakir. It is this division, combined with the reconciliation between Irwandi and Muzakir, that offers the prospect of a realignment in which the old diaspora leaders are eased out.

III. ZAINI ABDULLAH VS MUZAKIR MANAF

The relationship between Zaini and Muzakir was never particularly good, but it has deteriorated dramatically since they teamed up to govern Aceh. The clash is exacerbated by differences in history, authority, regional background, personality and resources.

In 2011, when Zaini and Muzakir were chosen as Partai Aceh candidates, Zaini was the afterthought. It was Muzakir who had the popularity, name-recognition, and strong grassroots base through the KPA. He was reportedly the party’s first choice to stand for governor, but he had no interest in—and less talent for—administration. He was willing to be on the ticket in the deputy

slot, however, so Malik asked Zaini run against Irwandi. No one expected Zaini to assert himself. His only assets were seniority and service to GAM. He lacked political skills, charisma and a constituent base. Politically, he was the weakest of the troika, and everyone assumed that the real power behind the candidates was and would continue to be Malik Mahmud, who himself would have a role above the political fray as Wali Nanggroe, literally “guardian of the state.”¹ Instead, Zaini and Muzakir became locked in a power struggle in which Zaini has been repeatedly outmaneuvered by his deputy.

At one level, the differences between the two men reflect their different institutional support bases. Muzakir controls the legislature through Partai Aceh, and he runs the party like a military commander, not surprisingly since there is so much overlap between the party structure and the KPA. In the lead-up to the 2012 election for governor, he removed Irwandi supporters and anyone who questioned the leadership’s decisions. He continues to keep dissent in check by ensuring that any subordination leads to immediate eviction from the party and the perks that go with it.²

Zaini chafed at the extent of Muzakir’s grip on the party and legislature, and he began to try to use high-level appointments to build his own power base among senior civil servants in the executive branch. Those who leaned toward Muzakir were quickly replaced. In the beginning, Zaini was regarded as relatively clean, especially compared to Muzakir who had built up an impressive business empire through a company called PT Pulo Gadeng that operated among other things in construction, palm oil and mining.³ As he began to mount a challenge to his deputy, however, allegations began to appear, especially in pro-Muzakir publications, that he was indulging in nepotism and placing his brothers and in-laws in key positions.⁴

As both men built alliances, regional loyalties came into play. Muzakir Manaf favoured people from North Aceh, while Zaini was seen as being part of the disapora clique from Pidie whose members included the late Hasan Tiro and Zakaria Saman.

A. *Impact of the 2014 Elections*

A relationship that had grown increasingly competitive plummeted with Muzakir’s unilateral decision to back Prabowo Subianto over Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in the 2014 elections.⁵ Zaini had had no problem accepting money from the Prabowo family for the 2012 gubernatorial election. The only problem was that the money had been delivered to Muzakir, and many in the party questioned how it had actually been spent. Some ex-combatants saw support of Prabowo, a former army special forces (Kopassus) commander, as a betrayal of everything they had fought for, and they were unwilling to accept Muzakir’s explanation that this proved Partai Aceh’s commitment to reconciliation with former enemies. Many Acehnese just liked Jokowi and wanted to vote for him. Zaini’s decision to back Jokowi stemmed in large part from a sense of obligation to Jusuf Kalla, Jokowi’s running mate, in brokering the Helsinki peace process. But one Acehnese

1 The role of Wali Nanggroe was set out in the Helsinki agreement and later in the law that enshrined its contents, Law 11/2006 on the Governing of Aceh. GAM leaders saw it as a modern restoration of the old sultanate of Aceh, a combination of constitutional monarch and moral authority. Originally created for the elderly founder of GAM, Hasan Tiro, who died in 2010, it was assumed that Malik would succeed to the position which was formally created by the Aceh legislature in Qanun No. 8 of 2012. Jakarta blocked key sections of the *qanun* as being unconstitutional but Malik was nevertheless installed in the position, funded by the provincial government, in December 2013.

2 Interview, Syiah Kuala University, 19 January 2015. In 2013, the party secretary-general, Yahya Muaz, was removed from his position; he was reportedly seen as too close to the troika. His successor, Mukhlis Basyah, initially a compromise candidate who was acceptable to both sides, is increasingly seen as a Muzakir man.

3 For an explanation of some of Muzakir’s economic activities, see Edward Aspinall, “Combatants to Contractors: The Political Economy of Peace in Aceh,” *Indonesia*, April 2009, pp.1-34.

4 See “Kroni Zaini,” *Atjeh Post*, special edition, December 2014.

5 See IPAC, *Aceh’s Surprising Election Results*, Report No.10, 30 April 2014.

observer said that relations were so bad between Zaini and Muzakir that Zaini would have automatically backed the rival of anyone Muzakir supported.⁶

Partai Aceh's machine went into action for Prabowo, but the results were underwhelming, even in the face of KPA's threats and thuggery. Prabowo carried Aceh with only 54 per cent, compared with President Yudhoyono's 93.2 per cent in 2009. In the legislative elections, Prabowo's party Gerindra only won two of Aceh's thirteen seats in the national parliament—despite the formal backing of Muzakir and Partai Aceh for those positions—and two in the provincial parliament, though it did better in local district councils.⁷

The divided loyalties in the election, however, and Muzakir's high-handed control of the party for his own purposes, prompted Zaini to up his game. On 30 August, Zaini summoned several ex-combatants to a meeting at the governor's residence. The aim was reportedly to try and pull off a coup within Partai Aceh to unseat Muzakir.⁸ It had little chance of success. Muzakir's ties with the former fighters were far stronger than Zaini's. Many reportedly thought it unseemly that the GAM elite would be fighting among themselves and were unsympathetic to Zaini, whom they saw as having deliberately restricted Muzakir's role in the government.⁹ Instead of a small meeting, hundreds of Muzakir supporters showed up, and the meeting had to be moved to the governor's office. The erstwhile strategy meeting turned into a much bigger gathering. Malik Mahmud, who was spending more and more of his time away from Aceh, came to give a lecture about the elements of the Helsinki agreement that remained unfulfilled. He said the government of Zaini and Muzakir was working to ensure that these were implemented before President Yudhoyono left office—they were not—but made little effort to use his authority to address the Zaini-Muzakir feud.

Then in September, Muzakir left to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and was away for forty days. While he was gone, Zaini made a new round of executive appointments—the sixth such shuffle since he had taken office.¹⁰ His supporters said this time, the transfers were based on objective performance criteria. His detractors said he used Muzakir's absence to try and strengthen his own position.

B. Battles in the Provincial Legislature (DPRA)

When Muzakir returned in October 2014, the battle between the two intensified. In December, Muzakir ensured that his political adviser, a former student activist named Kautsar, got the strategic position of head of the Partai Aceh bloc in the provincial legislature (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPRA), despite the fact that there were many more senior party members available. Then came the critical question of who would chair the DPRA. Zaini thought he had ensured the selection of Ridwan Abubakar (also known as Neh Tu) from East Aceh, a senior ex-combatant from the all-important Libya “alumni”.¹¹

In terms of seniority, no one else came close. Ridwan had fought throughout the conflict, rising to become head of operations for the GAM guerrilla forces. Most of his immediate family members had been killed. He had been lukewarm about the peace because it stopped short of independence, but he was loyal to his commanders and did as instructed. In 2009, he had run as a Partai Aceh candidate from East Aceh and won. He lost out at the last minute in getting one of

6 IPAC interview, Jakarta, 30 January 2015.

7 See IPAC, *Aceh's Surprising Election Results*, op.cit.

8 “Kudeta' Tuha Puet Untuk Mualem,” *Modus Aceh*, 1-7 September 2014, p.3.

9 Ibid.

10 “Zaini Mencari Ahli,” *Modus Aceh*, 4 November 2014.

11 Between 1986 and 1989-90, some 800 to 1,000 Acehese went to Libya for political and military training. These men developed strong bonds with each other and became the elite of the GAM fighting forces. See Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia*, 2009, pp.106-7.

the three available slots for deputy speaker, and felt sure that the party would want to compensate in 2014 by appointing him to the top job.¹² More importantly, he had been nominated by fourteen out of 23 party branches in accordance with procedures that Muzakir himself had put in place, and Malik, Zaini and Zakaria Saman had endorsed him for the job.¹³

Muzakir ignored all of the above, and appointed his own protégé, Muharuddin, a newly elected young legislator from North Aceh with little previous political experience. No one had nominated him, and he had no particular qualifications other than his closeness to the boss. There was no discussion with the party.

Not a single DPRA member came to Ridwan's defence, despite all those letters of support. The problem was that Muzakir saw Ridwan as disloyal because among other things, he had refused to support Prabowo in the elections. Ridwan himself believed he had strong support and that the reason no one came forward was their fear of being sacked. Since most had paid dearly for their seats, there was little interest in putting them at risk.¹⁴

Muzakir supporters noted that North Aceh had won the most votes of any district and that Muharuddin was the top vote-getter in the district; he therefore deserved the post.¹⁵ It was also part of a systematic process to rejuvenate the party and bring in younger people.

On 8 December, Ridwan tried to make his case on the floor of the DPRA for why he should be head, but no one was interested—Muzakir had made the decision and it was final. As members made efforts to silence Ridwan, a brief melee broke out, and police had to be called in to restore order.¹⁶

One of the questions raised by the case was Malik Mahmud's inaction in defending Ridwan. Some believed that his silence was indicative of tacit support for Muzakir, despite his having signed the letter endorsing Ridwan as head. But most of those interviewed saw this as another indication of Malik's declining influence in Aceh.

C. *The Budget Battle*

The Zaini-Muzakir rivalry deepened as the deadline of 20 January, set by the Ministry of Home Affairs, loomed for passing a provincial budget. The legislative and executive branches were at a complete standoff. Out of Rp.12.73 trillion (just over \$1 billion), Zaini wanted Rp.150 billion

12 In 2009, Partai Aceh had won almost half the available seats and believed that this entitled it to both the speakership as well as one of the deputy slots. The Ministry of Home Affairs argued that by Law No 27/2009, these positions should be allocated to the parties in descending order of their votes. Partai Aceh had the most votes so it automatically secured the speaker position. The three deputy slots thus should have gone to Golkar, PPP and PAN. Partai Aceh argued that under the MOU and the Law on Governing Aceh, it should be able to choose whom it wanted for legislative posts. It then tried to have it both ways, by creating a fourth deputy slot, which national law did not allow. The controversy blocked anyone filling the third slot for a while. It was finally resolved by giving it to PAN and making Ridwan a kind of informal fourth deputy but without the perks of an official house and car. The same issue arose in December 2014 when Home Affairs insisted that Aceh, under Law 17/2014, could only have three deputies in the DPRA while Partai Aceh officials argued that on the basis of special autonomy, it should be allowed to have four. See "Ketika Nafsu Ingin Berkuasa", *Modus Aceh*, 8-14 December 2014, p.4

13 The branches that sent nominating letters were Langsa, Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Besar, Aceh Tenggara, Pidie Jaya, Sabang, South Aceh, East Aceh, Singkil, Simeulue, Bireuen, Aceh Barat Daya, Lhokseumawe, Subussalam, Central Aceh, Gayo Lues, and Nagan Raya. Two other elected Partai Aceh legislators were nominated, Ermiadi and Zulfadhil, but neither had as many letters as Ridwan. The letter from the Tuha Peuet endorsing him was signed on 24 September 2014.

14 Interview with Ridwan Abubakar, Banda Aceh, January 2015. Every legislative candidate had to contribute to his or her respective party. In a separate interview, Irwan Djohan, a NasDem candidate, said he spent Rp.1.2 billion (about \$95,000) to get elected.

15 One non-Partai Aceh politician noted that the party's followers were particularly passionate in North Aceh, and it was not a coincidence that so many violent incidents occurred there. Fifteen men suspected of involvement in attacks on PNA supporters were arrested at Muharuddin's house on 23 March 2014; there was no suggestion that he himself had been involved in violence.

16 For more details see "Bukan Interupsi Biasa Teungku", *Modus Aceh*, 15-21 December 2014, pp. 6-11.

(\$11.8 million) channelled into a province-owned company, Perusahaan Daerah Pembangunan Aceh (PDPA) and PT Investa, a company that had originally been set up to handle oil and gas exploration and was now planning to engage in a number of joint ventures with domestic and international companies.¹⁷ The Partai Aceh bloc in the DPRA refused, on the grounds that the funds were needed for infrastructure and for electricity subsidies for the poor, and in any cases, the provincial companies needed to be restructured first with all key officials subject to “fit and proper” tests. (This was aimed at Zaini and the allegations that he had engaged in nepotism by appointing relatives to key posts.)¹⁸

Muzakir also supported allocating Rp.10 billion (\$800,000) per legislator for *dana aspirasi* or constituency development funds. With 81 legislators, this totalled about \$65 million. Not surprisingly, these grants have become a major source of graft, although one DPRA member said piously, “This is money from the DPRA to make the people happy, not for the DPRA itself.”¹⁹

Zaini refused to sign off on the budget and the deadline passed, opening the possibility that civil servants would not be paid for the next six months. An emergency behind-the-scenes peace-making effort took place that produced a budget outline that Home Affairs was willing to accept to avert a shutdown. On 22 January, Zaini and Muzakir appeared together and signed off on the document. On 31 January, the budget was finally approved, and on 2 February, a delegation of 30 DPRA members and a few civil servants flew to Jakarta to present it to the government.

Partai Aceh got most of what it wanted, but the governor managed to push through some last minute items as well.²⁰ It is now Jakarta’s turn to scrutinise the budget more carefully, and it is highly likely that it will be sent back for revisions.

Overall, the budget debate only exacerbated the ill will between Zaini and Muzakir.

IV. EFFORTS TO REUNIFY GAM

Many in GAM would like to see all the rifts healed in order to better secure the fruits of Helsinki. Unfinished business includes finalising agreements on the powers of the Aceh government and revenue-sharing on oil and gas, and negotiations with Jakarta would be easier if various parts of the government were in agreement.

The Zaini-Muzakir split is only one of many divisions, however. Another big one has been between former governor Irwandi and Partai Aceh leaders, whose followers had faced off in both the 2012 gubernatorial and 2014 legislative elections, with serious violence resulting. Indeed, a few men linked to Partai Aceh remain in prison for a plot to kill Irwandi in the lead-up to that election.²¹ Irwandi’s party, PNA, was humiliated at the polls, winning only three seats, the result of disorganisation, poor planning and the fact that Irwandi himself did almost no campaigning. It became clear that Irwandi’s ambitions to return to his old job would not be met if he used the hapless PNA as a vehicle. It was therefore in his interests to reconcile with Partai Aceh,

17 Irwandi had set up PT Investa to take over oil and gas exploration from the Triangle Pasa company after its contract expired. His intention had never been to have the company funded out of the provincial budget. See “Irwandi: Maju Bersama Mualem akan Mempersatukan Aceh”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 23 January 2015.

18 Zaini’s brother-in-law was appointed director of PDPA, and his brother Muhammad Abdullah was a member of its energy and mineral resources board. Zaini also had appointed his brother Hasbi Abdullah, former DPRA speaker, to be a board member of PT Investa, but Hasbi later resigned. “Anggaran RKA Berubah, Presma UIN: Terjadi Ego Kepentingan,” *Atjeh Post*, 2 February 2015.

19 “Dana Aspirasi DPRA Bertambah,” *Serambi Indonesia*, 17 January 2015.

20 In the final version, the combined total for PDPA and PT Investa was reduced to Rp.80 billion, although the DPRA had tried to reduce it to Rp.30 billion. Funds for the civil service organization KORPRI had been set by the DPRA at Rp.2.67 billion; this was raised in the final version to Rp.6.3 billion.

21 They are among a tiny group of non-jihadis that have been formally charged with terrorism. Ironically, three of the group who were detained in a super maximum security prison have become followers of radical clerics there and in July swore an oath of allegiance to “Islamic State” (formerly known as ISIS).

especially as he remained generally popular with Acehnese voters.

A few small splinters committed to independence also surface periodically, some of them still using the name Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF). One such group showed up in North Aceh in December 2014, and in many districts and villages, there are dissident clusters and cliques. An ex-combatant in East Aceh named Abu Minimi caused a stir in October 2014 by robbing trucks and businesses, then posing on YouTube with an M-16, saying that he was ready to take on Zaini and Muzakir because they had failed to help former fighters as promised in Helsinki.²²

The intra-elite rifts are the ones causing increasing concern among GAM members, both at home and in the diaspora. Accordingly, after several failed attempts, GAM's "Scandinavian Committee" called a meeting that took place in Denmark on 25-26 October 2014 with a view toward appointing several respected ulama to act as go-betweens, first between Irwandi and Muzakir, then between Muzakir and Zaini. Irwandi and some of his close associates flew to Denmark for the meeting.²³

Discussion focused on how to improve and strengthen the structure of GAM. The key, according to one of those present, was the gradual replacement of Zaini and Malik Mahmud. They were honourable men who had led the movement but now they had lost energy and were just marking time, with no ideas on how to move Aceh forward. All agreed that any sudden eviction of the old guard would be dangerous and could potentially spark violence. A more subtle mechanism was needed.

The first step was for the big five—Zaini, Malik, Zakaria Saman, Muzakir and Irwandi—to sit down together. Irwandi was ready, but it was not clear the others were. The meeting participants decided to ask three noted Muslim clerics—Abu Tumin, Abu Kuta Krueng and Abu Marhaban—to approach Muzakir and the ex-diaspora leaders. The three men, carrying letters giving the mandate to seek reconciliation, were then dispatched on their mission. Muzakir responded positively; there was no response from Zaini or Malik.

Irwandi and Muzakir finally met in Jakarta on 21 January 2015 and became front page news the next day.²⁴ Despite the bitterness of the 2012 election, the two men had been close friends in the past, in a way that neither had been with Zaini. They seem to have had different aims for the meeting, however. Irwandi was interested in the possibility of a joint ticket in the interest of unifying Aceh. Muzakir is fine with efforts at unity but he now has political ambitions of his own. All indications are that he wants the governorship, and he is said to be amassing a campaign chest to make his own bid—but not necessarily with Irwandi.

Reconciliation could be useful to Muzakir because it could improve his access to the Jokowi administration. Some of the people around Irwandi have better connections, and the meeting in Jakarta came about after a close Irwandi associate helped arrange meetings for Muzakir with Jokowi's Ministers of Trade and Industry.²⁵

DPRA members outside Partai Aceh are sceptical that reconciliation can be extended very far beyond the two principals; there is too much bad blood between their respective supporters and too many personal interests involved. They were only marginally more sanguine about efforts to

22 "Kelompok Abu Minimi Teror Sejumlah Truk Angkut Logistik di Aceh Timur", *Tribunnews.com*, 12 October 2014 and "Kelompok ASNLF Kembali Muncul", 5 December 2014.

23 Among those present were Hasan Basri Sulaiman (Denmark), Bakhtiar Abdullah (Sweden), Syahrul Hasan (Norway), Sulaiman Ilham Abdul Ghani (Norway), Abdul Qadir Hasbullah (Norway) and Makmur Habib (Denmark). The ASNLF was invited but did not come.

24 Others at the meeting included Izil Azhar, known as Ayah Merin, a former GAM commander in Sabang; Amir Faisal Nek Muhammad; Munawar Liza Zainal and Teuku Refli Pasha, friends of Irwandi; and Teuku Irsyadi, a business associate of Muzakir's.

25 IPAC interview, Jakarta, 28 January 2015.

revitalise Partai Aceh through bringing in younger members.

V. REJUVENATION OF PARTAI ACEH

The reconciliation and rejuvenation strategies are not mutually exclusive. Some GAM members dream of a united, progressive Partai Aceh that is able to attract younger, better-educated cadres and use its dominant political position to improve the well-being of the Acehnese. The problem is that it is not just the old guard that is the obstacle to this vision; it is also the continued reliance on the extortion, corruption and thuggery of the ex-combatants, many of whom see access to spoils from public office as an entitlement due them for their participation in the struggle. The party has steadily lost ground from 2009 through poor performance of these officials, and rejuvenation might be able to halt the decline.

Many in the Muzakir camp have thus pinned their hopes on one man—Kautsar, the former activist who has become Muzakir's chief strategist and political adviser. Born in 1977 in Pidie, he became active in politics in 1998, after the fall of Soeharto, when GAM stepped up its struggle for independence. He left the country briefly in 2002 when police targeted him for arrest but then returned and joined GAM fighters in Bireuen and East Aceh. After the Helsinki agreement, he and a few friends became advisers to the newly elected GAM *bupati* of East Aceh. For the first time in his life, he had to figure out how government budgets worked and bureaucracies functioned, but at least he tried to learn. His boss, like many of the former guerrillas chosen for senior political posts, had no real interest in the job and was happy to leave everything to his young assistants.

After the formation of Partai Aceh in 2008, Kautsar gradually worked his way into a position of prominence, helping draft a mission statement for the party in 2009 that reflected a real vision for Aceh—but it was one that few others in Partai Aceh could articulate, let alone implement. Muzakir recognised Kautsar as a major asset, and between 2009 and 2014, the younger man moved wholly into Muzakir's orbit, thus earning the enmity of the Zaini camp. He also reportedly secured a number of business projects of his own through the Muzakir connection. He ran as a Partai Aceh candidate from Bireuen in 2014 and won easily—and from there Muzakir ensured that he was appointed head of the party bloc (*fraksi*) in the DPRA.

He has had to repeatedly deny that he is the brains behind Muzakir. In a Facebook post on 22 January, he wrote, “While Aceh was still at war, I was once with Darwis Jeunieb (the GAM commander) and rumors flew that I was influencing policies in [the area]. After the peace, I became an adviser to the East Aceh *bupati* and rumors flew that I was the de facto *bupati*. Then I became head of the party bloc and I just heard the other night that some people are saying I'm the de facto head of the legislature. Good thing I'm not too close to Muzakir Manaf or people would say I was the de facto vice-governor. Makes me think, when am I going to be something de jure?”²⁶

Unlike some of the old guard, he is seen as open and smart, someone who can cross factional and party lines, even as Muzakir's man. He had hoped that two other young intellectuals from Partai Aceh, Muhammad Dahlan and Hendra Fadli, a former staff member of the human rights organization KontraS, would be elected to give the Partai Aceh bloc a little more intellectual heft. In the end, both lost their races (at least one reportedly as the result of manipulation of the ballots by local Partai Aceh officials themselves). Nevertheless, a process of bringing new people into the party, some of them without a history of GAM involvement, is continuing.²⁷

But Kautsar also has enemies, not just among Zaini supporters, where one man referred to

²⁶ Facebook entry on Kautsar's profile page, posted 22 January 2015.

²⁷ In addition to Kautsar and Muharuddin, the head of the legislature's legal drafting committee was the youngest person elected in the province.

him as “the bullet that will shoot Dr Zaini”, but also among other party stalwarts who see him as having risen too fast or benefited too much economically as he skyrocketed to the top.²⁸

The challenge for Partai Aceh is that some of the national parties are doing a better job of attracting precisely the kinds of candidates that its reformers would like to see in GAM. NasDem, the new party that fielded candidates for the first time in 2014, has a rising star in Irwan Djohan, an architect elected to the DPRA who hopes to become mayor of Banda Aceh in 2017. Unlike most other legislators, he is committed to transparency and puts his salary, allowances and monthly expenditures on his Facebook page. NasDem secured nine seats in the DPRA in 2014; it could significantly improve this performance in another five years if some of its other cadres can match Irwan Djohan’s popularity.

VI. ISLAMIC LAW

In addition to bringing in younger members, Partai Aceh appears to be consciously reaching out to conservative clerics as a way of shoring up its base—a tactic that some local politicians from national parties, notably the Banda Aceh mayor, are trying to use as well.²⁹

The old diaspora elite was decidedly secular in outlook, as were some of the Aceh-based leaders like Irwandi and Muzakir. But from the beginning, GAM saw the promise of Islamic law as a way of appealing to its base and promised that an independent state would be based on *shari’a*.³⁰ This commitment helped convince then President Abdurrahman Wahid in 1999 that the key to persuading the rebels to drop their demand for independence—or at least to drying up their support base—was to give Aceh the authority to apply Islamic law. This right was written into the 2001 special autonomy law, four years before the Helsinki agreement was signed, and the institutions, including the *shari’a* police, *wilayatul hisbah* (WH), were in place by 2004.³¹

While Irwandi as governor tried to curb the zeal of the WH, Partai Aceh has supported the expansion of the *shari’a* bureaucracy. In September 2014, it fully supported the adoption of provincial regulation (*qanun*) No.6/2014 that expanded the application of *shari’a*, increased the number of offenses that could be punished by caning, outlawed homosexuality, and provided that penalties for certain offenses could be applied to non-Muslims—even though Zaini has insisted repeatedly that non-Muslims will not be affected.³² Zaini signed it into law, just as he signed Qanun No.8/2014 on the Essentials of Shari’a that required the provincial and district-level budgets to allocate no less than 5 per cent toward implementing Islamic law. At the height of the budget debate in late January, one NasDem politician complained that the final draft contained less than 1 per cent for the provincial *shari’a* office.³³

In a series of tweets celebrating the adoption of the budget, Kautsar urged the government to expand the collection of Islamic funds to help the poor and needy—*zakat*, *infaq* and *shadaqah*—so that Islam would be recognised for its mercy and compassion.³⁴ (Given the level of corruption in Aceh, any effort to do so should be accompanied by strong accountability mechanisms.) Looking ahead, as Partai Aceh fends off challenges from national parties, it could seek to further bolster its Islamic credentials.

28 IPAC interview with Partai Aceh legislator, Banda Aceh, January 2014.

29 Illiza Sa’aduddin Djamal, the mayor, has supported Islamic vigilante organisations raiding “unauthorised” churches and “deviant” sects, prohibited New Year’s celebrations and generally taken an ultraconservative approach to Islam.

30 See International Crisis Group, “Islamic Law and Criminal Justice in Aceh”, Asia Report No.117, 31 July 2006, p.5.

31 Ibid, pp.7-8.

32 In an end-of-year interview, Zaini told Tempo magazine, “Toh, peraturan kami tak akan mengenai orang nonmuslim.” See “Saya Utamakan Program Tingkat Bawah”, *Tempo*, 28 December 2014.

33 “Paripurna IV – Tahun 2015”, Seuramoe Informasi Pemerintah Aceh, 31 January 2015, available at dpra.acehprov.go.id/index.php/news/read/2015/01/31/41/paripurna-iv-tahun-2015.html.

34 Tweet by @Kautsar03, 31 January 2015, available at www.twitter.com/Kautsar03/status/561480337838981120.

VII. RELATIONS WITH JAKARTA

How a changing of the guard would affect relations with Jakarta remains to be seen. The diaspora elite has tended to see relations with Jakarta largely in terms of the Helsinki agreement and the failure of the central government to implement key provisions, particularly those relating to oil and gas revenue and provincial authority.

The Yudhoyono government saw its relations with the ex-rebels as generally very good, and became agitated only if it saw any hint of separatism resurfacing, as happened when the DPRA passed a *qanun* making the old GAM flag the official provincial banner.³⁵

Both sides have different priorities now. When Muzakir wants to meet officials, it is not over the Helsinki agreement but over trade and business issues. The Jokowi administration, for its part, is far too busy with palace politics to pay any attention to Aceh at all, and that is likely to continue for some time. If there is any time left over for internal security concerns, Papua and Poso likely will be more of a focus than Aceh.

That said, the reconciliation between Irwandi and Muzakir, if carried to the conclusion of a united stand on a political agenda for moving forward, is probably not in Jakarta's interests. The Yudhoyono government wanted a government in Aceh that was united enough to ensure the peace as well as help the president's party. Even if individual military commanders and intelligence personnel were more interested in divide-and-rule tactics, their impulses were largely kept in check by the president's own engagement and the sophistication of some of his key advisers, notably Djoko Suyanto as Coordinating Minister for Political, Security and Legal Affairs.³⁶

The people who are running Jokowi's security policy today are not the best and the brightest. They are more throwbacks to a Soeharto-era style of thinking, liable to get overly alarmed by the idea of a newfound GAM unity. For them, rejuvenation might be less threatening than reconciliation, especially if it meant not only easing out the old guard but also easing in a generation that had never directly participated in the guerrilla movement.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Any institution has to move beyond its founding generation, and GAM needs to make that move. The combination of ex-combatants and diaspora leadership are a critical part of its history, but they are increasingly a liability rather than an asset. If Partai Aceh could be cleansed of corruption; infused with a new commitment to democratic—or at least less authoritarian—decision-making; and staffed by individuals with an ethos of public service rather than entitlement, then perhaps it could help move Aceh toward realising its potential. The chances are not high, but the disappearance of Partai Aceh and the removal of GAM from the political system are probably not in anyone's interests either. The creation of local parties was the hardest-fought part of the peace process, and GAM's ongoing political participation is the surest guarantee that there will be no return to conflict.

³⁵ See International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Tensions Over Aceh's Flag", Asia Briefing No.139, 7 May 2013.

³⁶ Military and intelligence personnel were involved in a number of divisive initiatives during the Yudhoyono years. These included support for the creation of two new provinces, Aceh Leuser Antara (ALA) and Aceh Barat Daya Selatan (ABAS), largely along ethnic lines; the creation of Partai Daulat Aceh, based in Islamic schools, to challenge Partai Aceh's religious commitment; and election violence prior to the 2009 elections. See International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh", Asia Briefing No.81, 9 September 2008, pp.4-6, and "Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach", Asia Briefing No.90, 23 March 2009, p.1, 5 and 6.

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