

Indonesia: GAM vs GAM in the Aceh Elections

I. OVERVIEW

The election for Aceh governor and other local executive posts – now scheduled for 14 November 2011 – has deepened an old rivalry within the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) between incumbent Governor Irwandi Yusuf, its former propaganda chief, and those around its ex-“prime minister”, Malik Mahmud. The two factions ran against each other in 2006, with Irwandi defeating the ticket backed by Malik. Irwandi is leading in the polls again, but five years later, the context is very different with Malik and his allies controlling the GAM political party, Partai Aceh. Sporadic violence between the rival camps is likely but not on a scale to cause serious concern. The bigger problem for Aceh is how to curb the autocratic tendencies of Partai Aceh without undermining the political gains won in the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that brought an end to three decades of conflict.

In 2006 Irwandi ran as an independent and the Malik-backed slate ran under the banner of the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP), a national party. In 2008, however, GAM created Partai Aceh, a local party that turned into a juggernaut at the 2009 polls, delivering as much as 76 per cent of the vote in one Aceh district and making it the dominant faction in the provincial parliament. The party was controlled by Malik’s men, and while Irwandi backed it, he kept his distance from the leadership.

As electoral manoeuvring began in 2010, the question was whether the two factions would find some sort of accommodation through which Partai Aceh would support Irwandi’s bid for re-election, creating another unstoppable political machine. Instead, in February 2011, Partai Aceh selected the former Sweden-based GAM “foreign minister”, Dr Zaini Abdullah, and the former head of the GAM armed wing, Muzakkir Manaf, as its candidates for governor and vice governor. Irwandi’s only options were to run as an independent or as the candidate of one of the national parties, but either way, polls showed him beating Zaini.

Partai Aceh thus decided to try to obstruct his candidacy. The most obvious way was to ban independent candidates. The 2006 Law On the Governing of Aceh (LOGA), which gives a legal base to the Helsinki peace agreement, provided

that independent candidates could contest Aceh’s first local election, but thereafter candidates would have to belong to either local parties – allowed in Aceh and nowhere else – or national ones. In December 2010, Indonesia’s Constitutional Court overturned this provision.

Partai Aceh maintained that the ruling violated Acehnese autonomy and undermined the principle of self-governance in the Helsinki agreement, setting up the issue as one of central versus provincial authority. But its control of the provincial parliament gave it another card to play. Local elections require the local parliament to issue a regulation, in Aceh known as a *qanun*, setting out electoral procedures. Initially Partai Aceh vowed to enact a *qanun* that banned independent candidates, despite the Constitutional Court ruling. But knowing, perhaps, that any such regulation would be overturned in Jakarta, it resorted to procrastination instead; its lawmakers always found something more important to do than finishing the electoral *qanun*.

The strategy seemed to be to delay enacting the regulation until it would become impossible to hold the elections before the current term of the governor expires. Jakarta would then have to appoint a caretaker administrator until elections could be held, and since incumbents cannot serve as caretakers, this would prevent Irwandi from using the resources of the governorship to promote his candidacy. The central government, however, would have to pay for any caretakers, and since the failure to enact a *qanun* seemed to be the result of deliberate dilatoriness on Partai Aceh’s part, officials in Jakarta said that if a new one was not produced on time, the elections would go forward under the regulation used in 2006.

In addition to governor and vice governor, seventeen district-level posts are at stake, many of them controlled by GAM-supported men who ran as independents in 2006 and will now have to choose between Irwandi and Partai Aceh. In the meantime, sporadic incidents of violence have taken place linked to the internal GAM tensions. Partai Aceh is increasingly showing itself to be an autocratic, almost feudal party that brooks no dissent.

II. THE ISSUE OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

Partai Aceh's rejection of independent candidates has turned it into one of the staunchest defenders of the LOGA, a law its leaders had once castigated as an unacceptable watering down of the Helsinki MoU.¹ Article 67 states that candidates for governor, vice governor and district heads and their deputies can be nominated by local political parties, national political parties, coalitions of national and local parties and individuals. Article 256 then states that the provision allowing for individual nominations – in effect, independent candidates – “shall be in effect and shall be implemented only for the first election following the enactment of this Law”².

The reasoning was that Aceh's first post-conflict election was to be held within months after the law was passed, too soon for local political parties to be established.³ The provision was a safeguard that would enable GAM leaders to run; once local parties were up and operating, however, GAM candidates could compete under their own banner, and there would be no need for independent candidates.

But politicians in other provinces, seeing GAM candidates triumph as independents, petitioned the Constitutional Court for the ability to run without party backing as well – and won. In 2007, the court ruled that independent candidates would be permitted in local races across the nation; the national election law was amended accordingly.⁴ This left Article 256 in the Aceh law as an anachronism, and it was only a matter of time before it was challenged. On 30 December 2010, responding to a petition from four men

who wanted to run as independents from the districts of Pidie, Bireuen, East Aceh and Simeulue, the court ruled that Article 256 was unconstitutional, paving the way once again for candidates without party backing.

The court's decision was greeted warmly by all political groups in Aceh except Partai Aceh. Governor Irwandi was pleased. The vice governor, Mohamad Nazar, with whom he is often at odds, said it was a victory for the people of Aceh.⁵ Local leaders of the main national parties agreed that democracy in Aceh was better served by a wider choice of candidates.⁶ Partai Aceh, whose political machine had the most to lose by the decision, initially only expressed mild disappointment that the court had not consulted with the provincial parliament; its opposition was soon to become far more strident.

A. PARTAI ACEH AND IRWANDI PART COMPANY

By late December when the ruling was issued, it was increasingly clear that Partai Aceh was not going to nominate Irwandi. The rifts left over from the 2006 election had never really healed, and Irwandi was not inclined to follow the dictates of Malik Mahmud and his loyal subordinates in the party: Zaini Abdullah, former GAM foreign and finance minister; Zakaria Saman, former defence minister; Yahya Muad, secretary general of Partai Aceh; Adnan Beuransyah, head of the provincial parliament's powerful Commission A, dealing with government affairs, including elections; and Muzakkir Manaf, head of Partai Aceh's executive board.

The death of GAM founder Hasan di Tiro in June 2010 had left Malik to succeed him as *wali nanggroe*, a controversial position seen by the old diaspora as that of a hereditary sultan, the head of state to the governor's head of government for autonomous Aceh. The position, while authorised in the LOGA, as yet has no legal status because it requires an implementing regulation that remains in draft, due to the vast gulf in perceptions between Partai Aceh and others of what its functions should be. Nevertheless, one consequence of Malik's assumption of the role was that it ruled out his running for governor, if he had any inclination to do so.⁷

¹ For earlier analyses of Aceh, see Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°90, *Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach*, 23 March 2009; and N°81, *Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh*, 9 September 2008; Crisis Group Asia Report N°139, *Aceh: Post-Conflict Complications*, 4 October 2007; and Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°61, *Indonesia: How GAM Won in Aceh*, 22 March 2007; N°57, *Aceh's Local Elections: The Role of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)*, 29 November 2006; N°48, *Aceh: Now for the Hard Part*, 29 March 2006; N°44, *Aceh: So Far, So Good*, 13 December 2005; and N°40, *Aceh: A New Chance for Peace*, 15 August 2005.

² www.bra-aceh.org/download/archive/loga/loga_law_on_the_governing_of_aceh_english_version.pdf. GAM in 2006 was highly critical of the provision that the LOGA only allowed independent candidates once.

³ No other province is allowed to have local parties. The national political party law requires that parties must have a presence in more than half of Indonesia's provinces and in more than half the districts in each of those provinces. Such provisions would have made it impossible for GAM to establish a political party with Acehese characteristics.

⁴ Indonesian law 12/2008 amended Law 32/2004 on regional autonomy, based on Constitutional Court decision no. 5/PUU-V/2007 of 23 July 2007.

⁵ “Jalur Independen Mulus”, *Waspada*, 6 January 2011.

⁶ “Parpol Sambut Baik Keputusan MK”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 31 December 2010.

⁷ Article 1(1)(7) of the Helsinki MoU states that “the position of *Wali Nanggroe*, with all its ceremonial attributes and entitlements, will be established” through the LOGA. At the time of the negotiations, GAM leaders saw the position as a way to recognise Hasan di Tiro's leadership and envisaged the position as akin to Malaysian kings, with limited political powers. Indonesian parliamentarians, however, made clear in Articles 96 and

But by January 2011, Malik was giving signals that Zaini was his choice. If Malik was now “your highness” to his followers as befitting a sultan, Zaini was next in line to the throne. Through the long exile in Sweden of the GAM elite, he held the ministerial portfolios for foreign affairs, finance and health. He was active in the Helsinki negotiations and returned to Aceh in 2006 to visit after more than 25 years abroad, then eventually to live. In 2010 he regained his Indonesian citizenship and became eligible to run for office. His brother, Hasbi Abdullah, was the candidate for vice governor in 2006 on the Malik-backed ticket that lost but was elected to the provincial parliament in 2009 and became its speaker. When Zaini began to be mentioned as a possible candidate, there were mutterings of nepotism in the Irwandi camp.

Through early 2011, there was still speculation that if Partai Aceh held a genuine party congress, Irwandi could use his extensive support in the field to mount a coup against the Malik bloc and secure the nomination for himself. For some field commanders, the ideal ticket that would also help reconcile the intra-GAM divisions would be Irwandi for governor and Muzakkir Manaf for vice governor.⁸ On 27 January, Irwandi told a reporter: “I’m running for governor. The first choice would be via the party that I nourished and paid for, Partai Aceh. But if Partai Aceh doesn’t want to nominate me, there’s always the independent route and other parties ...”⁹

Several GAM leaders still believed that a democratic Partai Aceh congress would be held in early February, especially

97 of the LOGA that the position would be that of a cultural guardian and ceremonial leader, with no political power. The provincial parliament in Aceh, elected before the Helsinki agreement and serving five-year terms from 2004 to 2009, drafted a *qanun* along these lines, but it was never enacted. One of the first acts of the Partai Aceh-dominated provincial parliament in early 2010 was to draft a new *qanun* giving the *wali nanggroe* the power to dismiss the governor, dissolve the provincial parliament and declare a state of emergency. Had it been enacted it would have been revoked by the home affairs minister, and many Acehnese were unhappy with its provisions. As of mid-2011, it had not been passed, but Malik assumed the role anyway, without a formal legal basis. A governmental regulation from the law and human rights ministry, Peraturan Pemerintah 19/2010 on the authority of provincial governments, states in Article 6(3) that the *wali nanggroe* will be part of the provincial leadership forum, together with the governor, vice governor, head of the provincial parliament, regional military and police commanders and public prosecutor. Some argued that to include the *wali nanggroe* in the forum was to acknowledge a political role and was thus in conflict with the LOGA. Malik, in his informal role, does not take part in these meetings.

⁸ Crisis Group conversation with Partai Aceh members from South Aceh, Jakarta, February 2010.

⁹ “Ketika Bang Wandu Berminat Maju Lagi”, *Modus Aceh*, 31 January-6 February 2011, p. 13.

since the candidates for the 2006 election had been chosen in a highly participatory “Congress of Acehnese from Around the World”, marked by lively debate and discussion.¹⁰ In December 2010, Muzakkir Manaf summoned leaders of Partai Aceh and the ex-GAM commanders, now members of the powerful but unaccountable Aceh Transition Committee (Komite Peralihan Aceh, KPA) for a meeting and hinted at broad consultation on candidate selection.¹¹ They were called back again for a meeting on 6 February at Malik Mahmud’s house in Banda Aceh for what many thought would be a discussion leading to the selection of nominees, but it turned out the GAM leadership had already decided, and there was no opportunity for dissent. “We were summoned just to listen, not take part”, said a disgruntled participant.¹²

At the end of the meeting, the KPA issued a press release saying that:

- ❑ the meeting had been called to evaluate local and national conditions in the lead-up to the 2011 elections, and the security situation was basically good;
- ❑ no significant progress toward developing Aceh had taken place despite the authority and resources available (this was a deliberate swipe at Irwandi);
- ❑ the KPA was ready to evaluate candidates for district and provincial office, as well as to assess the possibility of coalitions with other parties for district races but not for the governor’s race; and
- ❑ the KPA, after giving due consideration to the issue, decided to nominate Zaini Abdullah and Muzakkir Manaf for governor and vice governor, because they had the “knowledge, experience and dedication to uphold the ideals of the struggle as enshrined in the Helsinki MoU”. This decision had wide backing from Partai Aceh supporters as well as the general public.¹³

Muzakkir Manaf, at the press conference convened at Malik Mahmud’s house, said he hoped Irwandi would pull out of the contest so the party could speak with one voice.¹⁴ The statement shut off any prospect of Irwandi emerging at the last minute as a Partai Aceh candidate; it also ended speculation that Zaini might stand with a technocrat, the capable Aminullah Usman, former director of the Aceh Development Bank. But Aminullah had no name recognition or mass base, and one observer speculated that if Zaini

¹⁰ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Aceh’s Local Elections*, op. cit.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 10 May 2011.

¹² Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 10 May 2011.

¹³ “Siaran Pers Komite Peralihan Aceh (KPA) tentang Rapat Pimpinan KPA Seluruh Aceh”, 6 February 2011, as published in www.siawah.com.

¹⁴ “Partai Aceh Usung Zaini Abdullah-Muzakkir Manaf”, <http://jumuah.blogspot.com>, 7 February 2011.

had any hope of winning, he had to be paired with someone who could draw votes away from Irwandi and mobilise the KPA machinery – namely Muzakkir.¹⁵

The next day, the erstwhile spokesman for Partai Aceh, Ligadinsyah, held his own press conference to say that the choice of Zaini and Muzakkir (later dubbed the “ZIKIR” ticket) was not final and twenty of 23 regional KPA heads had rejected the ticket.¹⁶ Partai Aceh came back immediately to say that Ligadinsyah had been sacked three months earlier and had no right to speak for the organisation, and that Darwis Jeunib, one of the most senior GAM members he had named as objecting to Zaini, in fact supported him.¹⁷ Journalists then interviewed a somewhat reluctant Darwis, who simply noted that he followed orders, and if the order was to back Zaini, he would do so.¹⁸

Not everyone was so pliant. On 19 February, thirteen KPA heads wrote to Malik expressing unhappiness with the decision and the way it was taken. The letters were identical, rejecting the choice of Zaini and Muzakkir, urging the party’s executive council to review the decision in the interests of party unity and asking the leadership for a consultative process in accordance with the founding charter of Partai Aceh and the aspirations of the regions.¹⁹ Partai Aceh sacked most of the signatories, who were seen as Irwandi supporters. They included some of the KPA’s most respected leaders, men such as Muharram of Aceh Besar and Abu Sanusi of East Aceh, who had built their reputations during the guerrilla struggle as bold and effective commanders.²⁰

Being removed from a KPA leadership position almost certainly has practical consequences, at least in Partai Aceh-controlled districts: economic spoils, such as contracts for construction and other public projects, will be given to others. However, as Abu Sanusi pointed out, it also frees those sacked of the burdensome responsibility to get out the vote in November.²¹ In the meantime, polls taken by some of the national parties like Golkar and Partai Demokrat, the party of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang

Yudhoyono, continued to show Irwandi beating Zaini by a significant margin, and their interest in backing him grew.

B. THE PARTAI ACEH CHALLENGE TO JAKARTA

Partai Aceh then embarked on a two-pronged strategy, both elements of which were likely to cause confrontation with Jakarta. One was to reject the Constitutional Court decision as a violation of Acehnese autonomy. The second was to delay issuing the election regulations that would enable the necessary pre-poll preparations, such as voter registration, candidate verification and appointments of local election supervisors.

The argument against the court ruling was both procedural and substantive. Partai Aceh leaders maintained that the central government has no authority to intervene in electoral issues, which should be the sole preserve of the provincial government, in accordance with Article 7 of the LOGA:

The government of Aceh and its district governments have the authority to manage the governmental affairs in all public sectors except those that are the authority of the central government ... including those having the characteristics of national affairs, foreign affairs, defence, security, judicial, monetary, national fiscal, and certain affairs in the religious sector.²²

Therefore, party leaders reasoned, the court had no right to tell Aceh what it could and could not do in relation to elections. Its parliamentary leaders were determined to pass a *qanun* that would ban independent candidates, regardless of the court ruling, thus eliminating Irwandi as a candidate and virtually ensuring victory for their own nominee. If they allowed the court to chip away at the powers granted under the LOGA, they said, it would be just a matter of time before other provisions were diluted or nullified, and Aceh would be left with the same status as any other Indonesian province.²³ Moreover, they argued, the court had violated another LOGA provision and its own procedures by failing to consult formally with the provincial parliament before reaching its decision.²⁴ As a result, according to party member Adnan Beuransyah, “rejection of the ruling is non-negotiable”.²⁵

¹⁵ “Partai Aceh Terbelah”, *ibid*, 8 February 2011.

¹⁶ The word “zikir” refers to the recitation of the name of Allah. The acronym for the ticket, therefore, provides an Islamic cast.

¹⁷ Ligadinsyah said it was the first he had heard that he had been sacked. “Harus Berpikir Jernih Ke Depan”, *Modus Aceh*, 14-20 February 2011, p. 10.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 10 May 2011.

¹⁹ The districts they represented were Singkil, Tapak Tuan, Meulaboh, Aceh Rayeuk, Bener Meriah, Gayo Luwes, Blang Pidie, Aceh Jaya, Batee Ilee, Sabang, Takengon, Tamiang and Aceh Timur.

²⁰ One source said that Abu Sanusi was not really pro-Irwandi, but his local rivals told the Partai Aceh leadership that he was in order to get him expelled. Communication to Crisis Group, 10 June 2011.

²¹ “Sanusi bin Muhammad: Apa Salah Saya”, *Modus Aceh*, 16-22 March 2011.

²² Bernhard May, “The Law on Governing Aceh: The Way Forward or a Source of Conflicts?”, Conciliation Resources, www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/aceh/governing.php.

²³ Crisis Group interview, Adnan Beuransyah, Banda Aceh, 10 May 2010.

²⁴ Article 269(3) of the LOGA says that the law can only be amended after consulting with and receiving the opinion of the provincial parliament.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Adnan Beuransyah, Banda Aceh, 10 May 2010. The Indonesian phrase used was “Menolak MK adalah harga mati”.

But they also stalled on enacting the *qanun* – in fact the only serious legislation they have yet passed is the provincial budget, and even that they dawdled over, making Aceh the last Indonesian province to get its Fiscal Year 2011 finances in order.²⁶ It should have been passed by January 2011, but it was enacted only on 15 April, and the province incurred a sizeable penalty as a result.²⁷

By this time, election preparations were well behind schedule. Initially, Aceh's independent election commission (Komisi Independen Pemilihan, KIP) had set the election day for 10 October 2011, but it had counted on the election *qanun* being passed by March. In early May, Partai Aceh lawmakers extended the deliberations on it until 6 June. The National Election Commission instructed KIP to go ahead and set a new election date anyway. The election was accordingly rescheduled for 14 November, with second rounds if necessary on 14 January 2012.

Even this is cutting it close.²⁸ Among other things, it means that, to qualify, independent candidates for governor and vice governor have to collect names and photocopies of identity cards of 3 per cent of the provincial electorate by no later than 8 July – a huge task.

Partai Aceh has shown no signs of speeding up its deliberations, and many assume that it is engaged in deliberate delaying tactics, waiting until it becomes impossible to hold the elections before the governor's current term expires on 8 February 2012 (by law first-round elections must be held at least 30 days before that date). At that point, the central government would be forced to step in and appoint caretakers for the governor and all district heads whose terms were also expiring; these appointees would serve until elections could be held. Governor Irwandi could still run, but he would lose the resources he has access to as governor.²⁹ It would also give Partai Aceh a chance to prove to the

electorate that some of his very popular programs, like free health care, could still function without him.³⁰

Partai Aceh members deny that they are stalling. They maintain the budget process went slowly because Jakarta was late in releasing funds the year before. In any case, they say, they had to hold extensive public hearings because they had the best interests of the people at heart and wanted to ensure that programs such as education, health care and agriculture were very carefully thought through. The special committee drafting the election *qanun* has been doing its best but cannot be rushed.³¹

Governor Irwandi dismisses these arguments and notes that the KIP is now under instructions from the National Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) in Jakarta that if no new *qanun* is forthcoming, it is authorised to use the one under which the 2006 local elections were held. Partai Aceh fumes that the KPU has no authority in Aceh, and any directive to use the old *qanun* would be another unwarranted violation of the authority granted Aceh under the LOGA.

Partai Aceh now has five options, none of them really palatable:

- ❑ grudgingly pass the new *qanun* with provisions that allow for independent candidates and avoid a showdown with Jakarta;
- ❑ pass a *qanun* banning independent candidates and have it thrown out by the home affairs ministry and the election go forward under the 2006 *qanun*;
- ❑ keep on stalling and encourage a legal challenge to the 2006 *qanun* with the hope of forcing the caretaker solution, then sit back and see what Jakarta does. Some politicians interviewed also thought intimidation of KIP members was a distinct possibility;
- ❑ drop Zaini and make Irwandi the Partai Aceh candidate, thereby finessing the issue of independent candidates, at least at the provincial level, or persuade Irwandi to drop out. The first is unlikely, however, and the second impossible; or
- ❑ boycott the elections if they are held under the 2006 *qanun*.

Despite the bombast of Partai Aceh leaders, KIP commissioners still believed in mid-May that the first of these options was the most likely, although with the possibility that the party might set new conditions for independent nominees

²⁶ "Tinggal Aceh yg Belum Sahkan APBD", *Media Indonesia*, 1 March 2011.

²⁷ The penalty was 25 per cent of the total central government allocation for Aceh. For 2011, the total was Rp 716 billion (about \$79 million), so the penalty amounted to Rp 178 billion (about \$19.7 million). It also meant that many teachers and other civil servants went unpaid for the first four months of the year. See "Aceh Kena Penalti Rp 178M", *Serambi Indonesia*, 31 March 2011; and "Paripurna RAPBA Senin Depan", *Serambi Indonesia*, 8 April 2011.

²⁸ In Decision no. 63/2010, the national election commission set seven months (210 days) as the necessary preparation time before election day. The November date, set forth in KIP decision SK no.1/2011 of 18 May 2011, is already being challenged in court as giving too short a lead time to independent candidates. See "KIP Aceh di Somas", 24 May 2011, <http://pilkada.org>.

²⁹ In May, the governor's photograph was on banners all over the province announcing various events, from the Aceh Fair in Banda Aceh to celebration of the Prophet's Birthday. He would be less in the spotlight as a private citizen.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, local journalists, Banda Aceh, 11 March 2011.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, Komisi A, provincial parliament, Banda Aceh, 11 May 2011.

that might make Irwandi's candidacy more difficult.³² By mid-June, however, time was rapidly running out for enactment of a new *qanun*, and it seemed as though only the first and last options remained. Though Partai Aceh leaders insist they are acting on principle to safeguard the gains of Helsinki, many outside the party are convinced that their concern is more about Irwandi's popularity than about power-sharing with Jakarta. However, even some who strongly support independent candidates are worried about gradual slippage in the amount of authority that Jakarta is willing to confer on the provincial government.

III. THE CANDIDATES

Despite the focus on Zaini and Irwandi, there are other possible contenders who could run as candidates of national parties like Golkar and Partai Demokrat. While the likelihood of a non-GAM candidate winning in November is low, party leaders also have their eyes on national elections in 2014 and are already beginning to do calculations. Partai Aceh, after all, delivered almost 93 per cent of the province's vote for Yudhoyono and his Partai Demokrat in the 2009 presidential election, and other parties would like a share of that bonanza. Several would like to back Irwandi, but their formal support would open him up to the charge from Partai Aceh of being a turncoat. They probably have a greater chance of eating into Partai Aceh support at the district level, where unhappiness with some of the GAM district heads is higher, and candidates backed by a national party coalition have a chance of pulling off an upset.

A. CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR

Several men have either declared their intention or are seen by powerful constituencies as potential candidates. They include:

□ **Irwandi Yusuf**, born in Bireuen, Aceh 1960, MS in veterinary science from Oregon State University in the U.S., elected governor December 2006. He has been criticised for lack of attention to bureaucratic detail and lack of interest in day-to-day governing but in the last two years has championed several hugely popular programs, including free health care for all Acehnese, direct grants to villages, university scholarships to deserving Acehnese students and assistance to orphans and widows. He has also tried to keep the KPA in check and has developed good relations both with Jakarta and the local military and police commanders. Partai Aceh accuses him of neglecting development; he also is

periodically accused of corruption, less that he personally benefits than that he has failed to rein in members of his administration. Most polls show him with a significant lead over all rivals that he hopes to cement by choosing a running mate from the south or west coast, areas historically excluded from access to provincial political office.

- **Zaini Abdullah**, born Teureubeu, Pidie around 1941. Trained as a medical doctor, he took part in the declaration of the Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front in 1976 with Hasan di Tiro. In 1981 he left for Sweden, and was the personal doctor for di Tiro until the latter's death. He was chosen as the gubernatorial candidate on the basis of seniority in GAM rather than electability, has no experience in administration and thus far has shown no particular political skills. His running mate, Muzakkir Manaf, is from North Aceh, so both are from the populous east coast Acehnese heartland, with little appeal to the central or south and south-west areas of Aceh. The ticket is expected to do well in North Aceh, Pidie, Pidie Jaya and East Aceh.
- **Muhammad Nazar**, born Pidie, 1973, currently vice governor. He headed the pro-referendum student organisation SIRA in 1999, when it organised a massive demonstration in Banda Aceh that catapulted him to fame – and prison. He was jailed twice, released for the second time after the Helsinki agreement in August 2005. He is more a natural politician than Irwandi and better at getting things done, but his cockiness often rubs people the wrong way. He said in May that he expects the backing of a national party coalition, has the highest electability of all candidates and has no doubt he will win. No one agrees with that assessment. He has set up dozens of organisations at the village level, heavily staffed by ex-GAM, to help with his campaign.
- **Mawardy Nurdin**, born 1954, Sigli, a graduate of Bandung Institute of Technology and with an MS in engineering from the University of New South Wales. Mayor of Banda Aceh from Partai Demokrat and up for re-election. Without a doubt, one of Aceh's most capable executives and very popular in Banda Aceh, but without much of a base outside the capital. Would like to run for governor but hampered by his party's informal alliance with Partai Aceh in 2009. He reportedly is convinced that a non-GAM candidate cannot win, so is likely to sit this one out and run for a second term as mayor instead.
- **Darni Daud**, born 1961, Pidie, rector of Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, graduate of New York University and Oregon State University, where he received a PhD in higher education. He is interested in running on a national party ticket but could be competing with Nazar for party backing.

³² Crisis Group interview, election commissioner, Banda Aceh, 11 May 2011.

- **Tarmizi Karim**, MS in agriculture from Syiah Kuala University, former district head of North Aceh 1998-2002, acting governor of East Kalimantan, currently head of the home affairs ministry's education and training department. Experienced administrator, generally popular. Some non-GAM politicians in Aceh are supporting a Tarmizi-Mawardy ticket, but Mawardy is unlikely to want to run as number two.

The winner will need to have the support of a sizeable proportion of the KPA, and that of a few well-known clerics (*ulama*) would not hurt. Irwandi's relationship with the latter has been somewhat uneasy given his resistance to the expansion of Sharia (Islamic law), but he has directed significant provincial funds to Islamic schools and won over many as a result.³³ GAM learned in 2006, however, that the real key to electoral victory lies in the countryside. The only way to break Partai Aceh's stranglehold is to focus on rural voters.

B. LOCAL RACES

In the seventeen local races for district head or mayor, much will depend on who the local KPA supports. It underscores the extent to which incumbent executives and their challengers have become dependent on this powerful organisation of former guerrilla commanders and fighters. In several districts, internal divisions in GAM could work to the advantage of national party candidates.

An example is West Aceh. The district head (*bupati*) H. Ramli, who was backed by GAM in 2006, is running against a candidate supported by his own brother, Abu Yusaini, head of the West Aceh KPA. Ramli, a former school-teacher who has made a name by overly strict enforcement of Sharia regulations – in 2009 he banned women from wearing jeans – initially planned to run for a second term as the Partai Aceh candidate. He withdrew from the race as his name began to be mentioned as the party's candidate for vice governor. He and his brother then threw Partai Aceh's support to a bureaucrat in the district government, Adani. But Ramli's ambitions were dashed when Partai Aceh chose Muzakkir Manaf for the second slot. Though he wanted to return to the race, Partai Aceh had already announced Adani as its candidate. In early May, the national party PKS announced it was supporting Ramli, who retains significant GAM backing in non-urban areas.

Two strong non-GAM candidates have also emerged: the young deputy district head, Fuadri, backed by Partai

Demokrat, and a wealthy businessman, Haji Tito Alaidin Syah, backed by Golkar, PAN and three smaller parties.

In the first round of the 2006 district elections in West Aceh, Partai Aceh received 24.6 per cent of the vote, then smashed the opposition in the second round with 76 per cent. But, said Fuadri, the first round result means that the non-GAM parties have potential to capture 75 per cent, and the contest for it will come down to youth (Fuadri) vs money (Haji Tito).³⁴ If the election goes to a second round again, however, Partai Aceh still has the machine to win.

C. THE KPA

The KPA may turn out to be the greatest scourge of post-conflict Aceh. It was originally set up in December 2005 by GAM's then highest decision-making body, the National Council (Majelis Nasional), as a way to help oversee the reintegration of former combatants and ease the transition from conflict to peace. As Muzakkir Manaf said when he dissolved the Aceh National Army, "the main goal of the KPA is to see that former fighters get jobs".³⁵ In the five years that have passed since its founding, senior KPA members have not just received jobs; they have become powerful political brokers and businessmen (no women in the top ranks), demanding and usually receiving a 10 per cent cut on major public projects. There is considerable overlap with Partai Aceh – Muzakkir Manaf, for example, is head of the KPA and secretary general of the party.

The KPA has no legal status and no interest in acquiring any. In response to suggestions that it register as a mass organisation with the home affairs ministry, Partai Aceh leaders said it would just make it easier for the government in Jakarta to disband it.³⁶ It would also be anathema for an organisation composed of former guerrillas to acknowledge that its ideological basis was Pancasila, the set of principles that was elevated to the status of a state ideology under former President Soeharto. That acknowledgement is a requirement of registration under Indonesian Law No.8/1985.

In many areas, the KPA has become a thuggish, Mafia-like organisation that has created an atmosphere of fear. In Meulaboh, a local parliamentarian asked about its role looked over both shoulders, then got up, went to the door of his office and looked both ways before returning to his seat and replying in a low voice that it was a problem. Two NGO representatives in the same city chose to meet at night in the furthest corner of a poorly lit outdoor restaurant so the discussion could not be overheard. One said he did

³³ In February 2011, 97 *ulama* released a letter to Malik Mahmud that they had written in July 2010, urging Partai Aceh to renominate Irwandi. See "Giliran Ulama Dukung Irwandi", *Modus Aceh*, February 2011.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Meulaboh, 14 May 2011.

³⁵ Crisis Group Briefing, *Aceh's Local Elections*, op. cit.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 11 May 2011.

not feel safe talking politics any longer, because there were intelligence agents all over, some from the government and some from the KPA. He was more afraid of the latter: “If the military makes threats, there’s at least someone to report to, but who do you go to for the KPA?”³⁷

On the night of 13 May in Pidie, Ghazali Abbas, a well-known Acehnese politician, was attacked in the middle of a public speech in which he criticised the practices of demanding cuts of public projects and imposing illegal taxes – a clear reference to the KPA. Suddenly the electricity went out, and some twenty men surrounded Ghazali and began shaking the podium and demanding that he leave. They then attacked some members of the audience, wounding three, one seriously.³⁸ Such behaviour may explain the fear of the KPA that was evident in Meulaboh.

One of Governor Irwandi’s accomplishments is that he has managed the KPA reasonably well, intervening when intimidation or extortion have gone beyond the norm. In the 2006 elections, a factor in his victory was the support he had from many of the most respected KPA leaders, including Muzakkir Manaf. Partai Aceh is hoping that Muzakkir’s place on the 2011 ticket will erode that support, but it also seems willing to employ harsher tactics – what a local journalist referred to as “shock therapy” – to bring pro-Irwandi KPA members into line.

IV. LOCAL VIOLENCE

On 29 March 2011, hundreds of men believed to be KPA members stormed the Partai Aceh office in Bireuen, vandalising the building, beating up a few men inside and causing damage estimated at Rp 400 million (\$44,000). The head of Partai Aceh for Bireuen and acting KPA head, former GAM military commander Darwis Jeunib, was holding a meeting with close confidantes inside. The attack reportedly was sparked by his refusal to hear their complaints about his abrupt sacking of several local KPA heads in the aftermath of the party’s decision to back Zaini for governor. Saiful Husen alias Cagee, the KPA leader for the region of Batee Ilikek, had opposed the decision and was summarily dismissed. That was bad enough, but for his followers, the injustice was compounded by replacing him not with his deputy, but with Darwis, who proceeded to replace several of the KPA leaders at the sub-district level.³⁹

On 7 April, an arsonist burned down Irwandi’s weekend home in Maheung, Kuta Cot Glie subdistrict, Aceh Besar. Arrested two days later, he turned out to be a former GAM

member who told police he had acted on his own initiative, but many were sceptical, including the governor himself.⁴⁰

On 8 April, a grenade was thrown at the Banda Aceh home of Izil Azhar, a KPA leader in Sabang, causing minor damage. Governor Irwandi said the attackers drove by his house first, but his guards chased them away.

On 29 April, Malik Mahmud’s entourage was denied entry to the district of Bener Meriah by the local police commander on the grounds that he did not have a permit. The Malik camp was convinced that Irwandi was behind the police action. While no violence was involved, the incident contributed to tensions between the two camps.

On 1 June, a car carrying the bupati of Bener Meriah, Tagore Abubakar, a vocal GAM opponent, was surrounded and reportedly shot at in Bukit sub-district, but investigators could find no bullets or bullet casings, leading to speculation in the media that the incident had been staged.⁴¹

All these incidents are small, and nothing yet approaches the pre-election violence in 2009 in which four senior GAM members were killed.⁴² One reason the violence this time may be less, is that the current regional military commander will stay neutral, unlike his predecessor in 2009 who made no secret of his determination to take whatever steps were necessary to stop GAM. But there is concern that the intra-GAM rivalries, combined with the thuggery of the KPA in some areas, have the potential to produce more trouble as election day nears.

V. CONCLUSION

Aceh’s first post-conflict local election in 2006 was a celebration of the peace. Acehnese were overwhelmingly prepared to give GAM a chance at governing. Three years later, in the legislative elections of 2009, Partai Aceh made its debut and proved to be a powerful and sometimes ruthless political machine. The huge margins it recorded in some districts reflected the relative unity and papered-over differences that marked the party’s first venture into electoral politics. Now the unity has disappeared, and the gloves are off – which is ultimately good for democracy in Aceh, if the friction can be kept peaceful. Aceh has been heading toward one-party dominance with little, if any, improvement in social services or infrastructure to justify it.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Meulaboh, 12 May 2011.

³⁸ “Dakwah Maulid di Pidie Ricuh”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 14 May 2011.

³⁹ “Semoga Bukan Pertanda Buruk”, *Modus Aceh*, 4-10 April, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 8 February 2009.

⁴¹ See “Diduga Rekayasa, Penembakan Tagore Direkonstruksi”, *Harian Aceh*, 4 June 2011.

⁴² For a list of violent incidents in the lead-up to the 2009 elections, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach*, op. cit.

Competition within GAM, expressed through elections and perhaps later through splinter parties, is a positive development. The challenge for Aceh going forward will be to use competition to produce better policies and improved governance, including the eventual defanging of the KPA, without losing sight of the hard-won autonomy of the 2005 Helsinki MoU. Jakarta needs to understand that Aceh is not just another province with a little more money. It has a special status within Indonesia thanks to the peace process. When the Acehnese public recognises that this status can be protected not just by GAM but by others as well, another milestone in the peace process will have been reached.

Jakarta/Brussels, 15 June 2011

APPENDIX A MAP OF ACEH

