

Ripeness in Civil Resistance: Applying Ripeness Theory to Aceh and Timor

(DRAFT)

In examining the shared dynamics of nonviolent movements and negotiations, Finnegan and Hackley (2008), Veronique Duduoet (2011) and Wanis and Rosen (forthcoming) all argue that the key nexus point between civil resistance and negotiations is that the direct action of civil resistance builds leverage that negotiation translates into sustainable gains. In this paper, I attempt to further this project by zeroing in on this interaction point between leverage and negotiated gains. I argue that while the civil resistance literature already has a sophisticated conception of how direct action generates leverage, it is significantly less attuned to the specifics of how and when exactly leverage becomes translated into negotiated gains.¹

I argue that the negotiation framework of ripeness has the potential to shed considerable light on this process by illustrating: 1) 'how much' leverage is sufficient to force a regime to negotiate and 2) when exactly a civil resistance movement might be ready to negotiate an agreement short of its maximalist goals. In order to illustrate these points, I apply the ripeness framework to two movements operating in almost the exact same time and space: Aceh and East Timor between 1998 and 2000. First, I examine how ripeness helps us understand the decision of the Indonesian regime to allow a referendum in East Timor. Then, I explore how ripeness helps explain the hesitancy of the Acehnese leadership to negotiate autonomy within Indonesia.

¹ Obviously, this needs to be fleshed out with a robust lit review section. I don't really have space for that here, since I want to go in depth in my analysis in the 10 pages allotted, but I basically already have this written for my (anticipated) longer piece on ripeness in NVM.

Theory: Ripeness

Ripeness is a concept developed by William Zartman (2003) as a framework to understand when a conflict is amenable for a negotiated settlement. His framework pays particular attention to the timing of negotiations, emphasizing:

“Parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so—when alternative, usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory results are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament (Zartman 2003).”

Zartman argues that a conflict is ripe for settlement when the parties perceive that they are in a ‘mutually hurting stalemate’ (MHS)-they believe that they cannot escalate to victory and the deadlock is painful. A conflict will ripen further if parties perceive an imminent ‘catastrophe’ in which the pain will be sharply increased if no action is taken to resolve the conflict. He adds that we are most likely to see a resolution to a conflict if in addition to a mutually hurting stalemate, parties perceive a ‘way out’-an enticing opportunity for a face-saving solution (Zartman 2003).

How might the concept of ripeness be relevant to the link between leverage and negotiated gains in civil resistance movements? First, I argue that while the current nonviolent movement literature richly describes *how* nonviolent action creates leverage, it has much less to say on *how much* leverage is necessary to generate the change that the movement is pursuing. Introducing the concept of ‘ripeness’ brings us to the possibility of analytically encountering an ‘inflection point’ for a regime in the asymmetrical bargaining process in which a regime perceives negotiated concessions as more appealing than its unilateral options. Zartman’s framework suggests that when regimes perceive that the costs of refusing a movement’s demand are higher than the benefits, when it cannot perceive a way it can escalate the conflict to victory, and when it fears an imminent ‘catastrophe’, negotiation is likely: the conflict is ‘ripe’ for

resolution. Zartman's framework further suggests that a nonviolent movement is more likely to successfully translate its leverage into a 'win' if it can offer the regime an "enticing opportunity".

Second, the concept of ripeness presses us to pay attention to the readiness of both sides of the conflict to negotiate—not only the targeted regime but the leadership of the movement as well. I argue that the civil resistance literature has insufficiently explored the dynamics of 'partial victories', often sticking to a false dichotomy between total victory or failure (Cunningham 2014). Yet, as Cunningham discusses, particularly in the case of self-determination disputes, maximalist successes are quite rare and partial victories much more within the realm of attainability. Partial victories imply difficult concessions by the movement; yet the civil resistance literature is limited in its understanding of when movements may be ready to make concessions and accept partial victories. Ripeness can help fill this gap by illustrating how the concepts of a hurting stalemate, enticing opportunity and a valid spokesperson from the other side are also relevant to understanding when civil resistance movements are likely to accept partial victories.

Analysis: Regime-side Ripeness in East Timor

In this section, we focus on the case of the East Timor independence movement to explore regime-side ripeness. In keeping with the ripeness framework, we ask: was there a 'hurting stalemate'—did the movement put the regime in a 'painful' deadlock from which it could not escalate to victory? Did the regime have cause to fear an 'imminent catastrophe' if it did not negotiate?

Through numerous localized resistance practices the East Timorese were able to raise the local costs of occupation. Pietsch (2010, pg. 13) describes the East Timorese capital of Dili in

1998 as incapacitated by a general strike, "with the civil service shut down and pro-independence youths maintaining roadblocks in and out of urban centers." Pietsch estimate that by 1998, the occupation was costing Jakarta perhaps \$1 million per day for a highly impoverished province that contributed few resources back to the center (Pietsch 2010).

However, perhaps even more effective were the twin strategies of the East Timorese resistance of what Chenoweth and Stephan (2008) describe as "Indonesianization" and "Internationalization". East Timorese students in Indonesia intentionally worked to build links with Indonesian civil society by "consistently engaging with Indonesian intellectuals, political opposition leaders, and human rights activists" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2008, pg. 29). Indonesian activists participated in some of the most high-visibility East Timor protests, such as the fence-jumping at the American embassy at the 1994 APEC conference. Indonesian human rights groups played a critical role relaying human rights information to the international and Indonesian media, broadening the struggle and undermining the anti-East Timorese propaganda disseminated by the Indonesian government. By 1999 the Indonesian press and public began to openly discuss the need for a change in policy in East Timor (Pietsch 2010).

The second crucial strategy was 'internationalization', targeting multilateral institutions and foreign governments directly by pursuing elite-level diplomacy efforts under the leadership of Jose Ramos-Horta and indirectly by building links with international activists. East Timorese students traveled around the world to participate in international human rights conferences (Stephen 2006, 63). They targeted visits from foreign delegations and staged a series of high profile sit-ins at international embassies to raise international awareness. And perhaps most importantly, they intentionally sought out and built relationships with international journalists as

early as 1989, encouraging them to tell the East Timor story (Fernandez 2011).

Additionally, the East Timorese leadership was highly unified and disciplined in crafting a cohesive, resonant message to the international community. By the late 1980s, FRETILIN had publically abandoned its Marxist inflections in favor of a message that stressed the rights of the East Timorese to self-determination and democracy, couched in the normative legitimacy of international law (McCulloch 2005). This articulation of East Timor's message was made all the more compelling by the leadership's well-publicized commitment to nonviolence and its ability to preserve non-violent discipline (Fukuda 2000, pg. 23).

Their work paid off in the form of a vibrant international activist network centered on East Timor; by the end of the 1990s there were highly organized and effective solidarity groups functioning in over 20 countries, demanding their governments to put pressure on Indonesia and to raise the East Timor issue in international organizations. By 1995, activists had won campaigns ending arms sales to Indonesia in Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, Britain and Germany. Congress cut military training to the Indonesian government in 1992 and barred sales of US supplied weapons to East Timor in 1997. Immediately following Suharto's resignation, the US Congress unanimously issued a resolution calling for President Habibie to support an "internationally supervised referendum on self-determination" (Jones 2011).

Thus, by the end of 1998 Habibie found himself in a painful deadlock on the East Timor question. His regime desperately working to extricate itself from the financial crisis that had precipitated the downfall of the Suharto regime. Yet Jakarta consistently found the East Timor question a significant impediment to the foreign aid it badly needed. Pietsch (2010, pg. 13) argues that the international community made it clear that continued aid depended on concrete

progress on the Timor question: "East Timor came to be seen internationally as a 'litmus test' for Habibie's reform credentials." Kingsbury (2007) relates that the high cost of Indonesia's role in East Timor was a frequent sticking point in Indonesia's negotiations with the World Bank for loans.

As a result, support for Jakarta's East Timor policy dramatically waned among Habibie's key supporters. Most of the new wave of politicians stepping into government leadership after the fall of Suharto, "played no part in the decision to invade East Timor and resented having to bear the burden of a policy for which they were not responsible and from which they derived no benefit" (Fernandez 2011, pg. 179). Likewise, Jakarta's business elites "lost enthusiasm" for the occupation under the glare of heavy international pressure (Chenoweth and Stephan 2008, pg. 31). Some of his closest advisors were Muslim intellectuals who questioned the value of retaining a territory with an overwhelmingly Christian population (Martin 2001). Suter (1999, pg. 8) argues that by the time he made the decision to allow for a referendum, Habibie perceived East Timor as an "expensive burden".

It's difficult to pinpoint whether or not Habibie perceived an 'imminent catastrophe' that pressed him to make his sudden decision to allow for a referendum in May 1999. However, two factors hint at this possibility. First, the economic necessity of international aid to Indonesia cannot be understated; as Kingsbury (2007) relates, Habibie undertook political reforms to secure economic aid as a matter of political survival. Second, Pietsch (2010, pg. 13) argues, Habibie was acutely aware that Suharto "had been forced from power by mass popular mobilizations." As Indonesian activists grew increasingly vocal over human rights issues in Timor, Aceh, Papua and elsewhere, "pressure for reforms simply could not be totally ignored."

At the same time, the UN-Portuguese negotiations for a UN-led and paid-for referendum offered Habibie an enticing opportunity to at once alleviate this domestic pressure and gain international legitimacy. As both international institutions and donor countries had made it clear that aid was contingent on political reforms, Habibie was actively searching for opportunities to "impress the international community with his commitment to democracy and human rights (Martin 2001, pg. 22)." It was an opportunity that the Habibie administration believed would come at little cost: up until the actual results of the referendum, Jakarta firmly believed that a majority of East Timorese would opt to remain with Indonesia (Martin 2001). Thus, Habibie believed he would be able to gain international credibility and legitimize the occupation, paid for by the UN.

Finally, the sustained international attention to East Timor ensured that the Indonesian government had no opportunity to escalate to victory, as the TNI (the Indonesian military) failed attempt to do exactly that illustrated. In the lead-up to referendum, the Indonesian military armed pro-unity militias; after the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence, the Indonesian army unleashed these militias in a wave of violence. However, two factors ensured a rapid, forceful response from the international community. First, international activists were able to use the relationships they had cultivated over most of the decade to generate pressure for a response in critical countries like the US and Australia. On September 11, less than two weeks after the August 30 referendum, President Clinton announced that future economic and military assistance to Indonesia was contingent on restored peace in East Timor (Gunderson 2015). Second, because the UN had mediated the negotiations leading to the referendum and had sponsored the referendum vote itself, it was heavily committed to the legitimacy of the

independence process. The first international peacekeepers arrived on September 20th; the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor was established a month later to guide the territory toward independence (Gunderson 2015).

Analysis: Movement-side Ripeness in Aceh

Next, we switch to the case of the Aceh independence movement to explore movement side ripeness in Aceh, investigating how the framework of ripeness helps us understand when the leadership of a movement is ready to accept partial victories. The fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 touched off a renaissance of resistance in Aceh, a fiercely independence-minded province on the northern half of Sumatra. This resistance centered on two loci: SIRA (the Information Center for Referendum on Aceh), the umbrella organization for a student-led nonviolence movement centered in urban areas of Aceh, and the GAM (the Free Aceh Movement), a guerrilla organization based in rural Aceh. For a number reasons², the GAM was chosen to represent Aceh in negotiations with Jakarta mediated by the Henry Dunant Center (HDC). Both domestically and internationally this legitimized and entrenched the GAM as the representatives of Acehnese interests; this section explores the GAM's readiness to accept a negotiated outcome less than full independence. We ask: did the GAM perceive a hurting stalemate? an enticing opportunity? a legitimate spokesperson for the other side?

When negotiations began in 2000, I argue that the GAM did not perceive themselves to be in a hurting stalemate in their conflict with the Indonesian government. As Aspinall (2009) relates, by the end of 1999, the GAM leadership perceived independence to be inevitable, a sense was widely shared throughout Aceh. The East Timorese referendum in August 1999 proved that

² Bit beyond the scope of this paper to go into this, but according to Aspinall (2009) there was a spike in fighting between the GAM and TNI, so they would be an obvious spoiler if they weren't represented. But why exactly SIRA got no representation I haven't been able to find-this would require some deeper archival research.

an independence vote was an achievable goal. The speed and size of the mobilization in Aceh, culminating in a massive protest in the capital of Banda Aceh on November 8th that drew perhaps over a million people out of a population of approximately 4 million created a sense of unstoppable momentum (Aspinall 2009). And just as protests were peaking, Abdurrahman Wahid, who had publically voiced support for a referendum in Aceh, was elected president.

Thus, the GAM read attempts by the Indonesian regime to placate Aceh with autonomy concessions as equivocations, proof that pressure was working (Aspinall 2009, pg. 132). Aspinall further argues that the GAM fully recognized that independence would not be on the table in the 2000 'Humanitarian Pause' negotiations and never had any intentions of negotiating over the particulars of autonomy. Instead, the GAM pursued negotiations as a way to internationalize the conflict; they strategically viewed internationally mediated negotiations as a way to grow international interest in the conflict, which they believed would eventually lead to direct UN involvement. Praise and funding for the process, the UN, US, Japanese and the EU suggested to the GAM that this strategy was working (Aspinall 2009, pg. 227).

Second, I argue that the GAM did not perceive the 2000 negotiations as an enticing opportunity, as the HDC-mediated negotiations consolidated the GAM's position as the legitimate voice of Aceh, internationally and domestically. Drexler (2008) argues that the importance of the negotiations helped the GAM leaders unify the disparate regional factions of the GAM and completely altered the balance of power between the GAM and the various nonviolent groups under the SIRA umbrella:

"[Following the HDC negotiations,] in order to oppose the central government, a person had to identify as GAM. NGOs that had formerly spoken out against GAM violence were blacklisted. Activists who suggested that GAM did not represent the voice of the Acehnese people were frequently intimidated (Drexler 2008,

190)."

Thus being a part of ongoing negotiations was a critical power asset to the GAM in consolidating their position in Aceh. However, because their claim to Acehnese leadership was deeply tied to a mythology of an Acehnese sultanate, "independent since time immemorial (Aspinall 2009, pg. 226)" it is very likely that GAM leaders understood that accepting the partial victory of autonomy would have come with a serious loss of prestige and power within Aceh.³

Finally, I argue that the GAM did not perceive Jakarta as a legitimate partner to negotiate with, for reasons both long-term and proximate. First, the abuses of two decades of military rule created a "profound level of distrust" among the GAM and Acehnese society more generally towards Jakarta. These memories would be especially salient among the GAM, who faced some of the worse of the abuses of the TNI. The end of the Suharto regime created a wave of activism around the hope that finally there would be justice for past abuses. The failure of the new regimes to hold the military into account convinced most Acehnese that little had changed in Jakarta vis its relationship with Aceh (Aspinall 2009). Second, it must be recalled that President Wahid repeatedly voiced his support for a referendum in Aceh before his election; thus his failure to follow through on what many in Aceh believed to be a political promise meant that his word had little credibility (Drexler 2008).

Conclusion

In this paper, I've argued that applying the ripeness framework to civil resistance movements sheds considerable theoretical light in understanding the success or failure of movements in two regards. First, as we saw in the East Timor case, 'ripeness' allows us to

³ A separate group of moderate Acehnese political elites were at the time trying to sell the Acehnese public on an autonomy bill that was greeted with widespread cynicism and distrust. In the political environment of 1999-2000, it was impossible to argue for autonomy within Indonesia without 'selling out' (Aspinall 2009, pg. 144-148)

encounter a leverage 'inflection point': regimes are likely to seriously negotiate when they are in a hurting stalemate from which they cannot escalate to victory. Negotiations are still more likely if the regime perceives an imminent catastrophe if it does not negotiate and an 'enticing opportunity' if it does. Second, as we saw in the Aceh case, movements are unlikely to agree to partial victories if they do not sense themselves to be in a hurting stalemate, if they do not see an enticing opportunity, and if they do not see the other side as legitimate or credible.

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