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On Success in Peace Processes: Readiness Theory and the Aceh Peace Process

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Abstract

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On Success in Peace Processes: Readiness Theory and the Aceh Peace Process

Amira Schiff

Abstract

The study presents an analysis of the conflict resolution process in the Aceh conflict between the government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (“Gerekan Aceh Merdeka” or GAM). Starting with unofficial efforts by the Indonesian side from mid-2003, which eventually led the parties to the negotiation table and to the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in August 2005, the peace process put an end to the 30-year conflict over the independence of Aceh. The peaceful resolution of the Aceh conflict will be examined using readiness theory, which posits the factors that lead parties to negotiate and indicates which factors contribute to success in reaching a mutual agreement. The aim of this study is twofold. The first aim is to better understand the factors that led to the MoU. The second aim of this research is to offer a systematic examination of the assumptions of readiness theory, which have been the subject of few case studies to date. The study's findings indicate that the Aceh process was characterized by an increase in the parties' level of readiness – to the point of being fully ready to sign an agreement. In the pre-negotiation phase the motivation of both parties increased significantly, while the level of optimism rose moderately on the part of the GoI but not GAM, whereas during the negotiations motivation as well as optimism increased significantly on both sides. Nevertheless, the application of readiness theory to the case study also gives rise to a number of questions regarding the theory's hypotheses and scientific status.

Introduction

The phenomenon of “intractable conflicts” has been the subject of extensive theoretical exploration in the fields of conflict resolution and international relations during the past three decades (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2005; Coleman, 2003, 2006; Gray, Coleman & Putnam, 2007; Kriesberg, 1998; Kriesberg, et al, 1989). Research in this area has focused on the conditions that lead parties in a conflict to enter into negotiations and to reach an agreement that resolves the conflict (Diehl, 1998; Diehl & Goertz, 2000; Kriesberg et al, 1989; Maoz & Mor, 2002; Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007; Pruitt and Olczak, 1995; Zartman, 2000,

2008). As part of this research trend, the current case study presents an analysis of a conflict resolution process that was conducted in the conflict between the government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (“Gerekan Aceh Merdeka” or GAM) over the independence of Aceh. This process culminated in the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in January 2005. The Aceh peace process will be examined using readiness theory, which posits the factors that lead parties to negotiate and indicates which factors contribute to success and which to failure of negotiations (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007).¹

The aim of this study is twofold. The first aim is to better understand the factors that led to the conflict resolution in Aceh. Towards this end, the study will address three central questions: 1. Why did the antagonists agree to negotiate? 2. Which factors led the parties to reach an agreement? 3. Is there a correlation between the factors that led the parties to the negotiating table and the success of the process? The second aim of this research is to offer a systematic examination of the assumptions of readiness theory, which has been the subject of few case studies to date (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007).

This article includes three main sections. The first section presents a concise explanation of readiness theory, followed by the research questions, assumptions, and methodology. The second section describes the factors that led to the success of the Aceh process through the lenses of readiness theory, first presenting the factors that brought the parties to the negotiating table and then presenting the factors that affected the outcome of negotiations. The third section includes an examination of the assumptions of readiness theory as applied to the case study and a presentation of the theory’s limitations as revealed by this analysis.

Theoretical Overview and Methodology

Readiness Theory

A survey of the studies and approaches to research on the termination of intractable conflicts – such as the work of Zartman (2000, 2008), Diehl (1998), Diehl and Goertz (2000), and Maoz and Mor (2002) – reveals that each of these is limited in its ability to explain certain aspects of the resolution of these conflicts, and that there is room for the more comprehensive perspective that readiness theory proposes. The literature on enduring international rivalries (EIR) is limited to conflicts involving states, and the work in the area of

¹ This research was supported by a grant from the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University.

ripeness theory provides a limited understanding of the dynamics of the stages beyond the pre-negotiation stage or of the factors that lead parties in non-violent conflicts to choose negotiations. Readiness theory, in contrast, provides an opportunity to examine various factors that influence the resolution of conflicts that are not necessarily inter-state, intra-state, or violent in nature.

Readiness theory refers to a number of conditions that have the potential to bring parties to negotiation, as well as factors that encourage them to make concessions during negotiations and to reach an agreement. Pruitt notes that the theory is potentially useful for researchers seeking to scientifically test hypotheses about the significance of various factors in conflict resolution processes, including conflicts in which violence is not a salient factor. With the exception of a few articles by Pruitt (1997, 2007) in which he applies readiness theory, there has been no comprehensive study that systematically examines the variety of factors that play a role in bringing parties to the negotiating table and to the resolution of their dispute.

According to Pruitt, (2005, 2007), readiness theory describes the conditions appropriate for commencing negotiations in the language of psychological variables, with a focus on the processes underway on each side separately. The theory explains which factors could bring parties to the negotiating table, as well as which factors might lead them to make concessions during negotiations, to accept an agreement, and to also implement it (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007). “Readiness” is a characteristic of a party in a conflict that reflects the thinking of the leadership regarding the conflict, and it can vary within a wide scale of conciliatory behavior (Pruitt, 2007). A low level of readiness fosters moderate conciliatory gestures. As the readiness level rises, the party’s behavior becomes more conciliatory and might take the form of a ceasefire or commencement of negotiations. In order for the parties to continue negotiating and make concessions, an additional increase in readiness is needed; thus, the greater the readiness on both sides, the more likely they are to negotiate and to reach an agreement (Pruitt, 2005, pp. 9-15; 2007, p. 1525). According to readiness theory, each side might have different reasons for entering negotiations and reaching an agreement. The level of readiness can also attest to the nature of the agreement reached. When readiness is unequal, the party with a higher level of readiness needs to make more concessions and, therefore, will be in a less desirable position in the final agreement (Pruitt, 2005, p. 13).

As Pruitt notes, readiness entails two psychological variables, which he terms motivation and optimism. These encourage a party to a conflict to agree to conduct negotiations and to reach an agreement (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007):

1. Motivation to end the conflict derives from any or all of the following: (a) a sense that the conflict is unwinnable (that is, a sense that one is losing creates greater motivation), (b) a sense that the conflict generates unacceptable costs or risks, and (c) pressure from a powerful third party. The stronger the third party and the greater the pressure it applies, the more the parties will endeavor to demonstrate that they seek an end to the conflict (appearance of motivational change). This appearance turns into motivation to end the conflict if the third party is consistent, is in the appropriate state of mind, and demands actual motivational change.
2. Optimism refers to the possibility of concluding negotiations with an agreement that is acceptable to both sides. It requires a certain degree of faith that the final agreement will meet its objectives, as well as the perception that the negotiator on the other side can in fact make a commitment on behalf of that side and will indeed adhere to the agreement (Pruitt, personal communication, March 9, 2008). At the initial stage, when considering the option of negotiations, optimism is a function of trust between the parties. Preserving the optimism requires an understanding that a formula acceptable to both sides is achievable. The greater the apparent distance is between the parties, the lower the level of optimism (Pruitt, 2005, p. 8). Optimism derives from three states of mind: 1. lower aspirations; 2. working trust; and 3. a state of mind that perceives “light at the end of the tunnel” (leading to a higher level of optimism), meaning that an acceptable agreement is taking shape and that the other side is prepared to make the necessary concessions. According to the theory, the third element must exist in order for the peace process to succeed.

Pruitt notes that the variables that generate motivation and optimism may vary in intensity. Thus, the stronger the abovementioned states of mind, the greater the readiness of the parties will be. Full readiness exists “when the situation is symmetrical, such that both parties are motivated to achieve de-escalation and both are optimistic about reaching an agreement” (Pruitt, 1997, p. 239).

According to the theory, motivation and optimism have the following qualities:

1. They are necessary variables, and they must exist to a certain degree in order to proceed towards negotiations.

2. They are mutually related in a number of ways: (a) Optimism determines the extent to which the motivation to de-escalate shapes behavior (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007). (b) Motivation to end the conflict can foster optimism through a number of mechanisms, which can potentially generate a confidence-building cycle, leading to negotiations and to mutual concessions once negotiations commence (Pruitt, 2005, pp. 19-21; 2007, p. 1529). First, motivation moderates the parties' demands, thereby encouraging greater optimism regarding the success of negotiations. Second, motivation often leads to the accumulation of information that challenges preexisting states of mind. The third mechanism is wishful thinking. In seeking information, wishful thinking plays a part; that is, there is a tendency to find selective evidence of the other side's logic or motivation to end the conflict. Fourth, when a party is interested in ending a conflict, it sends conciliatory signals or seeks clandestine contact with the other party. If the latter is also motivated, it will respond to these signals, thereby increasing the first party's optimism and encouraging it to send even more meaningful conciliatory signals. The result is a cycle of conciliatory gestures and an increase in optimism. Fifth, a party's motivation to end a conflict is often discerned by a third party, making the latter more optimistic about ending the conflict. The motivation of a third party to end the conflict can encourage it to take the initiative in bringing the disputing parties to negotiations (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1530). These third-party efforts can increase optimism on both sides and eventually lead to full negotiations. These mechanisms encourage optimism about the success of negotiations and generate new thinking about the rival. Optimism also develops in additional ways, such as through direct contact with people on the other side – for example, through workshops on problem solving.
3. Each variable can compensate for the shortcomings of the other. Although both variables are necessary to a certain extent in order for negotiations to commence and to reach an agreement, a greater degree of one element can compensate for a lesser degree of the other (Pruitt, 2005, p. 10; 2007, p. 1525).

Methodology

The present study employs the enhanced case study methodology of a single crucial case study for interpretive and analytical purposes (Bercovitch, 1997; Druckman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005). In this capacity, the Aceh peace process will be analyzed in terms of the variables presented by the readiness theory and will be used as a theory-testing case

study whose purpose is “to strengthen or reduce support for a theory, narrow or extend the scope conditions of a theory...” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 109).

The study includes two structures of dependent variables. The first relates to the beginning of the negotiations and focuses on the readiness that was required for commencement of negotiations. In this capacity, we will study the variables that influenced the decision of the parties to start official negotiations in January 2005. The second dependent variable is the outcome of negotiations. We will identify the factors that affected the readiness of the parties to sign an agreement in August 2005.

In order to maximize the theoretical value derived from the analysis, we will focus on the following questions: What were the factors that brought the parties to the negotiating table? What role did the third party play during the pre-negotiations stage? During the stage of negotiations, what were the factors that pushed the parties towards agreement or, alternatively, towards failure?

In addition, the following set of standardized theory-based questions will be used to generate case-based generalizations:

1. Is each of the factors cited by readiness theory as a source of motivation to commence negotiations indeed a sufficient condition, as the theory claims?
2. Is optimism a necessary condition for commencing negotiations, as readiness theory claims?
3. Can a high level of motivation during the pre-negotiations stage compensate for a low level of optimism or even the absence of optimism, in order for readiness to increase?
4. Does the case study confirm the assumption that the less trust there is between parties and the more rigid and disparate their positions (both sources of low optimism), the stronger their motivation to end the conflict must be if negotiations are to ensue (Pruitt, 2005, p. 11)?
5. Is increased optimism on both sides necessary for negotiations to begin?
6. What are the implications of the various sources of motivation for the outcome of negotiations?
7. When parties approach the negotiating table with low optimism, is an increase in optimism a necessary condition for agreement?
8. Can an increase in motivation – by urging the parties towards agreement – compensate for a low and unchanging level of optimism during negotiations?

9. Are there additional factors that affect the pre-negotiations process and the negotiations, which are not addressed by readiness theory?

The Aceh Peace Process

In August 2005, after three decades of violent conflict in Aceh entailing an armed struggle for Aceh's independence from Indonesian rule (Aspinall, 2003, pp. 128-147; Schulze, 2010, pp. 82-84), GAM and the Indonesian government signed the Helsinki MoU, a broad framework agreement for peace. The process was mediated by the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, who chairs the Finnish non-governmental organization Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). The success of the Helsinki process – which produced a peace agreement in only seven months and included different conditions than the parties had previously demanded – is especially salient in light of past failures to reach an agreement. (Aspinall, 2005, 2008; Aspinall & Crouch, 2003; Biswas, 2009; Iyer & Mitchell, 2007; Schulze, 2006, 2007).

The official negotiations between the GoI and GAM stopped when the Geneva talks reached a dead end with the collapse of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in May 2003. The Indonesian army then launched a military campaign in Aceh to destroy GAM (ICG, 2005; Morfit, 2007, pp. 118-129; Schulze, 2007, pp. 90-91-93). In parallel to the military campaign, in mid-2003, unofficial efforts by the Indonesian side began, when Yusuf Kalla, with Megawati's unofficial approval, sought to establish contacts with GAM in order to explore the possibility of reaching a peace agreement. These efforts became official Indonesian government policy upon the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) as president and Kalla as vice-president in October 2004, yet GAM did not reciprocate constructively until late-2004 (Morfit, 2007, p. 120). On December 24, two days before the tsunami disaster, the parties agreed to engage in talks to be moderated by Ahtisaari. After the tsunami disaster, the reconciliation spiral accelerated: GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire and announced its willingness to talk with the Indonesian government in order to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance. Although the Indonesian army continued its activities in Aceh, President SBY welcomed the unilateral ceasefire and called upon all sides to work together to end the conflict so that all efforts could be directed to the reconstruction of Aceh after the tsunami (ICG, 2005: 4; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2009, pp. 212, 218).

On January 26, 2005 a CMI-sponsored meeting took place between representatives of the two sides in Helsinki. During the first round, both parties held to their positions steadfastly: GAM insisted on winning Aceh's independence from Indonesia, and the GoI

insisted on maintaining Indonesian territorial integrity while granting Aceh a substantial degree of autonomy. A significant breakthrough in the talks occurred during the second round, when GAM agreed to withdraw its previous demand for Aceh's independence from Indonesia and to discuss a political framework for self-rule (Aspinall, 2005, p. 26; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). In light of the disagreements over various issues in subsequent talks, both parties had to compromise and retreat from their initial positions. After fifteen drafts, the parties reached an agreement and the MoU was signed on August 15, 2005. The six chapters of the agreement included the governance arrangements in Aceh and the relations between the province and the central government, the division of Acehnese resources between Aceh and Indonesia that was more preferential toward Aceh, human rights issues, amnesty and the integration of GAM's fighters in the society, security arrangements and monitoring mechanisms for implementation of the agreement. The analysis below will first address the factors that led the parties to enter into the Helsinki talks and then consider the factors that motivated them to sign the MoU.

Readiness to Negotiate

Motivation

The motivation on the Indonesian side increased from 2003 and was galvanized after the change of government and the tsunami disaster due to the leadership's perception that a continued military struggle would not lead to victory and its appreciation of the high cost of continuing the struggle under the circumstances and international pressure, and the perception of the opportunity to apply preferred policy. In contrast, the increase in GAM's motivation developed at a later stage, towards the end of 2004, as it realized that the risks and costs of continued fighting were too high, especially in light of international pressure to restart negotiation.

The Government of Indonesia

The motivation of the GoI to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Aceh was a result of the complete political commitment of SBY and Kalla to resolve the Aceh conflict. This commitment was grounded in experience gained under previous administrations and derived from the belief that a purely military solution was impossible. In their view, only a negotiated agreement could resolve the conflict and establish a stable peace. SBY, who had a rich military past, served as the coordinating minister for political and security issues in the Megawati and Abdurrahman administrations. In this capacity, he was the major sponsor of the peace talks that took place between 2000 and 2003 (Sukma, 2005). SBY was the main

architect and proponent of the "integrated approach" that guided the government in previous administrations, which included both military operations and dialogue (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 13-15; Biswas, 2009, p. 13; Schulze, 2007, p. 93). In Megawati's administration, SBY became a leading advocate of peaceful resolution of Indonesia's conflicts with secessionist groups and was willing to offer concessions to GAM even before he was elected president (Harris, 2010, p. 342). Kalla was the leading figure in the negotiations that led to the resolution of the conflicts in Maluku, Poso and Sulawesi during Megawati's administration, and he was also the most active figure in previous attempts to reach an agreement in Aceh. In light of this experience of both leaders, one of the election campaign promises made by SBY and his vice-president, Kalla, was to renew efforts to resolve the Aceh conflict peacefully. (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 13-15; Awaluddin, 2008, p. 26; Feith, 2007, p. 2; ICG, 2005, pp. 1-4; Morfit, 2007, pp. 118-120, 127-128; Schulze, 2007: p. 93; Wiryono, 2008: p. 26). It was apparent to both leaders that the military struggle had claimed many victims on both sides, and that Indonesian military activities in Aceh since mid-2003 (upon failure of the ceasefire) were very costly and stretched military and economic capability to its limits. It was clear to them that even though GAM had been hurt by three decades of military struggle, the Indonesian army was unable to eliminate the organization. Nevertheless, it appears that SBY and Kalla were not suffering from a sense of hurting stalemate; since mid-2003, the Indonesian army had scored some significant victories and was prepared to continue its military struggle if necessary (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 11-13; Kemper, 2007, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, pp. 102-103; Morfit, 2007, p. 125).

Moreover, SBY and Kalla adhered to the position that a peaceful solution to the problem of Aceh was necessary in order to improve the state's economic situation and international image, which had been damaged by its insensitive military operations in Aceh and violent actions in East Timor. Indeed, among SBY's election promises were the revival of Indonesia's regional leadership and the advancement of its aspiration of being accepted as a stable and credible international partner. These required a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Biswas, 2009, p. 141; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 11; Morfit, 2007, p. 125).

Additionally, the GoI was subjected to international criticism because of its problematic transition to democratic rule. For this reason, a national consensus in favor of a peace agreement on Aceh could be expected to improve the state's international legitimacy. Therefore, SBY and Kalla entered office committed to strong leadership, reform, and achievement of an agreement ending the conflict in Aceh through a unified policy dictated by

the government. Under this policy, civilian authority was vested in the military, which had traditionally been a very strong and significant player within Indonesian politics and had dictated the hardline policy of past Indonesian governments vis-à-vis GAM (Biswas, 2009, p. 132; Morfit, 2007, p. 125; Wiryo, 2008, p. 26; Yudhoyono, 2005).

By mid-December 2004, the efforts of SBY and Kalla to engage in dialogue with GAM's exiled leadership were successful in securing Ahtisaari's agreement to convene a meeting of both sides. Plans for the first round of negotiations in Helsinki were underway before the tsunami disaster (Gaillard, Clave, & Kelma, 2008, p. 518; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3; Morfit, 2007, pp. 117-118). At this point, the motivation of both leaders was high. Still, the tsunami disaster of December 26-27 acted as a catalyst and turning point: The parties seized the opportunity for immediate negotiations. In terms of the process itself, the tsunami aggravated the problems facing Indonesia. But the disaster was also seen as an opportunity for SBY and Kalla to realize their long-held ambition and reach a peaceful solution for the conflict (Biswas, 2009, p.133; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2009, p. 219; Yudhoyono, 2005).

The scale of the disaster in Aceh – deliberately closed to global media and international aid by Indonesia since May 2003 – drew international attention and pressure on both sides to seize this limited opportunity to end the conflict with a peace agreement and to focus on the reconstruction of the province. The international community saw the resolution of the conflict as essential for the success of recovery efforts and made it clear that the reconstruction process depended on mutual progress towards peace.

The Indonesian military, which had also been hurt badly by the tsunami, was accused by the international community of blocking aid. The GoI, however, was unable to cope alone with the massive disaster and the international accusations against the Indonesian military, which in the immediate aftermath of the disaster refused to allow foreigners to enter the area. The GoI quickly submitted to the pressure, permitting and even requesting international aid and intervention (Biswas, 2009, p. 12; Gaillard et al., 2008, pp. 517, 519-522; Keizer, 2008, pp. 76, 78; Kingsbury, 2007, p. 104; Schulze, 2007, pp. 94-95; Wiryo, 2008, pp. 26- 29; Yudhoyono, 2006). Moreover, it appears that SBY recognized the terrible scale of the disaster and the resulting moral, political, and economic obligation to end the conflict and to enable recovery. SBY sensed that the international community was waiting to see how his administration would resolve the conflict with GAM (Biswas 2009, p. 12; Morfit 2007, p. 129).

At the same time, the tsunami provided the GoI an opportunity to realize its interests, expediting the process towards negotiations and underlining the urgency of reaching an agreement. First, SBY and Kalla sought to leverage the international attention and desire to help after the disaster to reinforce support for their plans to end the conflict, and they encouraged the international community to pressure exiled GAM leaders to agree to negotiate by emphasizing the need to support Aceh's reconstruction (Awaluddin, 2008, p. 26; Yudhoyono, 2006). Second, while the October-December pre-negotiations contacts mediated by Ahtisaari were clandestine in order to avoid stirring domestic opposition, the tsunami gave the GoI an opportunity to present peace talks as a response to a humanitarian crisis rather than a change of policy (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 20-21; Harris, 2010, pp. 342-343).

GAM

GAM's strategy since the fall of the Suharto regime was directed at attaining international legitimacy and mobilizing the international community to exert pressure on Indonesia to grant Aceh independence, which GAM compared to East Timor's independence from Indonesia. The contacts between GAM and the GoI during 2000-2003 did in fact lead to GAM attaining international recognition and legitimacy, while the organization remained firm in its official stance regarding independence for Aceh. GAM's interest in internationalizing the conflict was the reason it did not respond to the GoI's efforts in 2003 and early 2004 to begin talks outside the formal and international framework (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 18; Schulze, 2006, pp. 236-244, 2007, pp. 91-92, 94).

Up until the collapse of the Geneva process in May 2003, the military leadership of GAM on the ground believed that Indonesia would not concede Aceh peacefully and that military force was therefore necessary to liberate it. But GAM's circumstances and situation changed between May 2003 and November 2004. During this period its military, economic, and political situation steadily deteriorated. In May 2003, the Indonesian army launched an operation aimed at ending the conflict by dismantling GAM. This operation had a devastating effect on the organization's military and civilian capability. The number of casualties within the organization grew, morale declined, and public support dropped. The civilian structure of the organization collapsed because its tax collectors were turned over to the authorities. There was less access to food and medical provisions. GAM suffered economic hardship, and the members of its shadow government were caught and put on trial (Aspinall, 2005:7, 11; ICG, 2005: 4; Schulze, 2006: 244-255, 2010:93). The situation worsened during 2004, but its

members evidently did not despair – despite the damage and distress facing the organization. GAM's military capability declined significantly, but its members wanted to continue resisting the Indonesian army. Some even argue that the harm inflicted on the general population by the Indonesian military action boosted the enlistment of fighters for the organization, precisely because it was under fierce attack. (Aspinall, 2005, p. 7; Keizer, 2008, p. 78; Kingsbury, 2007, p. 102; Morfit, 2007, pp. 120-121; Schulze, 2006, pp. 244-255, 2007, pp. 94-95, 2010, p. 93; Wiryono, 2008, p. 29).

The organization's international standing also reached its lowest point since the start of the Geneva process. The international community was disappointed by the failure of the Geneva talks and affirmed Indonesia's right to defend its territorial integrity. During 2004, it became clear to GAM that the East Timor precedent would not be repeated and that they would never defeat the Indonesian army without the foreign support they lacked. GAM was desperate to secure international intervention again (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27, 57; Kingsbury, 2007, p. 103; Schulze, 2007, p. 95; Thalong, 2009, pp. 334-335). An internal debate ensued within the exiled GAM leadership regarding a strategic alternative to the uncompromising position on independence: a step-by-step approach, including an interim agreement.

By November 2004, GAM leaders were receptive to a new approach: They were ready to explore “self-governance” as a possible solution, with Jakarta permitting local political parties in Aceh. As a result, contacts began between the GoI and GAM regarding a resumption of negotiations, and two days before the tsunami the organization agreed to begin talks in Helsinki. But the exiled GAM leadership was apparently very cautious during this process and the organization's official policy remained unchanged. GAM viewed these contacts and the agreement to resume negotiations as a mere matter of courtesy (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27-29; Cheow, 2008, p. 179; Keizer, 2008, p. 78; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 15; Schulze, 2007, pp. 94-95).

However, the tsunami disaster highlighted the urgency of negotiations for GAM. A return to the negotiating table now appeared much more attractive than continued fighting and offered an opportunity for GAM to realize its interests for a number of reasons, including its problematic military situation, the international pressure to end the conflict for the sake of reconstruction efforts following the massive devastation, and the fresh opportunity to internationalize the conflict. The scale of the disaster had worsened GAM's military and socio-economic situation and international standing. (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Stange & Patock, 2010, p. 99; Kemper, 2007, pp. 20, 26; Mahmud, 2005a, b, 2006; Schulze, 2007, pp. 93- 95).

Moreover, although GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire immediately after the tsunami in order to enable international aid organizations to operate, the Indonesian army actually intensified its assault and the GoI announced that it was sending an additional 50,000 soldiers to Aceh (Irwandi, 2008; Mahmud, 2005a). The aftermath of the disaster generated an expectation within Aceh's civil society of continued financial support and reconstruction assistance from the international community. GAM realized that continued fighting would endanger international aid efforts for the disaster-struck population. Given that the international community had indicated that post-tsunami funding for aid and reconstruction would be more readily available if Aceh were stable, GAM's concern was that non-cooperation would render it irrelevant and marginal. The renewal of negotiations and their conclusion through an agreement resolving the conflict became the only way for GAM to have any influence over the reconstruction of Aceh. After the disaster, GAM's prime minister in exile, Malik Mahmud, therefore announced that GAM would welcome any initiative by the international community aimed at transforming the organization's unilateral ceasefire into a formal ceasefire agreement with the Indonesian army (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Stange & Patock, 2010, p. 99; Kemper, 2007, pp. 20, 26; Mahmud, 2005a, b, 2006; Schulze, 2007, pp. 93- 95).

Optimism

The Government of Indonesia

Alongside the previous administration's military attempt to eradicate GAM after the collapse of the Geneva talks, Kalla had been seeking unofficial communication channels with senior GAM leaders in Sweden since 2003, aiming to find common ground that would facilitate an agreement to end the armed struggle. These initial efforts were fruitless (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 18; Schulze, 2006, pp. 236-244, 2007, pp. 91-92, 94). In early 2004, with the assistance of private businessman Juha Christensen, Kalla was able to enlist Ahtisaari in an effort to establish contact between the parties and bring them to the negotiating table before SBY came to power. But these efforts also proved unsuccessful (Aspinall, 2005, p. 18; ICG, 2005, pp.1-4; Morfit, 2007, pp. 126-127, 136-137; Schulze, 2007, pp. 90-93). Thus, immediately upon forming their new administration in October 2004, SBY and Kalla began intensive, clandestine efforts on a peace plan with the aim of finding Indonesia a negotiating partner. In addition to their unsuccessful attempts to create a channel of communication with GAM's leadership in Sweden, they tried to establish a channel with one of GAM's senior officers, Muzakkir Manaf and to approach senior imprisoned GAM

officials(Aspinall, 2005, p. 17; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3). During these attempts, it was made unequivocally clear to Kalla that all contacts must be with the exiled GAM leadership in Sweden (ICG, 2005: 3; Kingsbury, 2006: 18).

The GOI's consent to start unofficial dialogue with GAM, mediated by CMI, was given prior to the tsunami. However, it seems that the factor that mostly influenced the government's readiness to start official negotiations after the tsunami was the minor change in its level of optimism. The government saw a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, based on the hope that after the tsunami the international community would exert pressure on GAM to demonstrate flexibility. Thus, the government's strong motivation effected some change in its optimism level through a wishful-thinking mechanism and its readiness to negotiate was based on wishful thinking more than on any hard evidence of the other side's intentions and willingness to compromise.

In mid-December 2004, the efforts of SBY and Kalla to initiate dialogue with GAM's exiled leadership were successful in securing Ahtisaari's agreement to convene a meeting of both sides and plans for the first round of negotiations in Helsinki were underway before the tsunami disaster (Gaillard, et al., 2008, p. 518; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3; Morfit, 2007, pp. 117-118). However, Kalla's agreement to commence full and official negotiations with GAM came after the tsunami. It appears that at this stage the strong motivation that influenced Kalla's search for an Acehnese negotiating partner affected the development of a wishful thinking mechanism. The Indonesian side realized that GAM policy remained officially unchanged and that there was still a long way to go before reaching an agreement with its government in exile (Aspinall 2005, pp. 26-27; Kalla 2008; Schulze, 2007, p.95).

GAM

The contacts during 2002-2003 increased mistrust between GAM and the GoI. The inauguration of the SBY-Kalla administration signaled to GAM that the GoI would now be more flexible and supportive of peaceful conflict resolution based on mutual respect. However, from the perspective of GAM's leadership, the new government still had to prove that it would take negotiations seriously (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27-28). GAM had plenty of reasons to believe that the government's real strategy was geared towards military victory, not peaceful resolution (Morfit, 2007, pp. 121, 137). In spite of the parties' clandestinely mediated consent to resume negotiations, which was given just days before the tsunami struck, GAM did not trust the GoI to implement whatever agreement might be reached and therefore demanded guarantees that the agreement would indeed be implemented (Irwandi,

2008). In light of the devastation from the tsunami, GAM declared a ceasefire and called for renewed talks; however, this call did not stem from heightened optimism that Indonesia would commit and adhere to an agreement. From GAM's perspective, there was an enormous gap between the GoI's declarations and its activity on the ground. After the disaster, Kalla welcomed the ceasefire and GAM's readiness to assist reconstruction efforts and hold talks, and he stated that Indonesia would make a comparable effort. Yet this statement came a day after the GoI imposed new restrictions on aid workers in Aceh and announced plans to send 50,000 additional soldiers to the area. Moreover, Indonesia's foreign minister declared that Jakarta wanted all aid workers out of Aceh within three months (Mahmud, 2005b).

Negotiations in Helsinki

Motivation

During the negotiation that took place between January and August of 2005, motivation of both parties grew due to third-party pressure on both sides, and especially on GAM. As will be elaborated, Indonesia also put pressure on GAM.

Several international actors intervened during the various stages of the peace process. Their involvement brought the parties closer to the negotiating table, made them more inclined to compromise during negotiations, and helped oversee implementation of the agreement. This intervention eventually played into the hands of both sides and served their interests.

The key international actor during negotiations was the mediator Ahtisaari, whose conduct during negotiations, his character, and his connections enabled the negotiations to conclude in only seven months. Ahtisaari brought substantial experience and authority to the role of mediator. Through his international connections, he secured the necessary international support and backing, which boosted his political leverage. His management of the negotiating process led the parties to moderate their demands and make compromises during the talks and, as elaborated below, it generated increased optimism in both parties (Ahtisaari, 2008, p. 10; Aspinall, 2005, p. 19; Cheow, 2008, p. 179; Keizer, 2008, p. 79; Kemper, 2007, p. 30).

In light of the urgency of the narrow window of opportunity resulting from the tsunami disaster, as well as the short-term nature of the planned international intervention (which was based on a recognition of the obvious imbalance of power between Indonesia and GAM), Ahtisaari applied pressure on GAM from the outset, both directly and through diplomats representing the international community (Djuli & Rahman, 2008). The

international community was constrained by the various interests it held in Indonesia and, therefore, applied its pressure towards compromise primarily on GAM. During the first meeting, each side continued to insist on its own position: GAM on independence and the GoI on preserving the integrity of Indonesia, while granting a high degree of autonomy to Aceh. Ahtisaari made it clear to GAM that international support for independence was unattainable and that he would use all his influence to persuade European states and the rest of the world not to recognize Aceh's independence (Awaluddin, 2008). Ahtisaari made it unequivocally clear that he had no time to waste on nonsense during negotiations (Keizer, 2008, p. 79). The GoI itself also applied pressure on GAM through the threat of continued military operations (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 24-26; Cheow, 2008, p. 180; Kemper 2007, p. 27). During the second and third rounds of talks, this collective pressure succeeded in leading GAM to concur that a solution to the conflict was possible only in an autonomous framework that would pragmatically and legally address GAM's main concerns, while honoring the territorial integrity of Indonesia (Ahtisaari, 2008; Aspinall, 2005, pp. 19, 23, 25; Awaluddin, 2008, p. 27). GAM realized that they had no alternative under the circumstances and that the GoI would withdraw from the talks (which would then collapse); if GAM did not accept the GoI's demand to discuss only autonomy, and not independence (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 22, 29; Djuli & Rahman, 2008).

Although most of the pressure exerted by third parties in the negotiations was directed at GAM – whose initial concession enabled the first significant breakthrough in the process – Indonesia faced some pressure too. The fact that pressure was brought to bear on both sides resulted in an agreement that included mutual concessions. Even though the peace agreement was drafted under conditions it had dictated – for example, autonomy as the basis for discussion and the integration of ASEAN in AMM (Biswas, 2009, p. 134) – the GoI realized that failure to reach an agreement would disrupt the supply of international aid necessary for continued post-tsunami reconstruction. Therefore, it recognized the need to make concessions (Aspinall, 2008, p. 12; Cunliffe, Riyadi, Arwalembun, Tobi, 2009, pp. 18-19).

In addition, Ahtisaari's approach forced both sides, and especially GAM, to focus on reaching a workable compromise on the core issues, to set aside the past and focus on the future and on achievable demands. He did not allow the parties to digress from the issues on the agenda. He carefully oversaw the information submitted to the media, insisted on direct talks during each round of negotiations, and set a deadline of six months for the talks to succeed. Ahtisaari's personality and contacts enabled both sides to satisfy their needs: GAM

received international legitimization and the GoI secured the unity of Indonesia in the agreement (Biswas, 2009, p.137).

Optimism

At the start of the Helsinki talks, neither side trusted the other side or believed that during official negotiations the other side would display the willingness and flexibility necessary for reaching a mutual agreement to end the conflict. GAM was very skeptical about the government's commitment and intentions, and did not expect the talks to succeed. It was not committed to the process at this point. Nonetheless, GAM regarded Ahtisaari as a person of high international standing, contacts and credibility, so it decided at least to listen to what the GoI had to say (Mahmud, 2005a, b; Morfit, 2007, pp. 121, 137). From the GoI's perspective, despite the gathering in Helsinki and the indication Kalla had received that GAM was willing to consider being flexible about independence, GAM's policy remained officially unchanged and there was still a long way to go before reaching an agreement with its government in exile (Aspinall 2005, pp. 26-27; Kalla 2008). During the first meeting, it became clear to the Indonesian side that it had to persuade GAM to renounce violence and to be more realistic about its political power after the tsunami; the Indonesian representatives to the negotiations also realized that they had to convince GAM that Indonesia had something to offer (Schulze, 2007, p. 95). The level of optimism did not change in the first round.

During the negotiations, the parties gradually became more optimistic about reaching an agreement, which contributed to the parties' readiness to sign an agreement. This optimism resulted from the mediator's tactics, the willingness of the parties to moderate their demands and compromise, and the third party's willingness to oversee implementation of the agreement. In light of his experience elsewhere and lessons learned from past efforts on Aceh, Ahtisaari appreciated the need for a realistic perspective regarding a peace agreement that would preserve the dignity of each side, as well as the need for the gradual building of lost confidence (Ahtisaari, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, he adopted a negotiating approach and tactics that allowed each side to offer compromises while pursuing its most important interests, all within a limited timeframe. It was clear to Ahtisaari that there was little room for compromise on Indonesia's part: The GoI was only willing to offer a special form of autonomy. At the same time, he understood that it was important not to demand that GAM declare a concession on the issue of independence at the outset of the process. Accordingly, he adopted the formula that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." This strategy permitted bridging the foremost gap between the parties without the talks collapsing over

initial disputes. This in turn made it possible to reach a general agreement that would address the important issues within a reasonable amount of time. Consequently, neither side could claim victory of any sort during the course of negotiations. All points of agreement were included in the MoU and announced only at the end of the process. This approach helped persuade GAM to systematically examine the option of autonomy and allowed the negotiators to work in peace and concentrate on the issues under discussion. (Ahtisaari, 2008, p.10; Aspinall, 2005, p. 23; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2009, p. 231).

Furthermore, it was clear to Ahtisaari that in order to reduce uncertainty surrounding the agreement (given past failures), a certain degree of international intervention – in order to support the agreement and oversee its implementation – was crucial for both parties. Towards this end, Ahtisaari succeeded in enlisting the European Union (EU) to cooperate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the activities of the oversight committee (AMM) for implementation of the agreement to the satisfaction of both sides (Aspinall, 2008, p. 12; Gaillard et al., 2008, p. 518; Keizer, 2008, pp. 81-82; Kingsbury, 2006, pp. 17-18).

As noted, the willingness of the parties to moderate their demands and compromise also generated a positive change in the level of optimism. In exchange for GAM's flexibility on autonomy and willingness to disarm, the GoI showed willingness to meet all of GAM's demands in the agreement. For example, GAM demanded that the GoI's term "special autonomy" not be used and insisted on calling the political arrangement "self-governance." For GAM, the term "autonomy" conveyed the suffering and oppression of the past, and the GoI's empty promises (Cunliffe et al., 2009: 18-19; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 17). The final agreement included the right to establish political parties and hold local elections, partial withdrawal of the armed forces, the immediate release of imprisoned GAM members and amnesty, elements of restorative justice, a truth and reconciliation commission, and reparations for victims of the conflict. From the outset, the GoI's acknowledgment of responsibility for human rights violations in Aceh was a salient issue for GAM representatives. At first, they insisted on clauses requiring the GoI to account for past crimes. In order to lessen GAM's initial insistence, Ahtisaari urged the representatives to focus on the future rather than the past (Aspinall, 2008, pp. 16-17; Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19). Eventually, GAM's main objective during the talks – establishing its rule over the area through local, democratically elected political parties – overshadowed that demand, and ultimately GAM acted pragmatically, recognizing that in the current political reality, it would

be unrealistic to conduct trials of Indonesian generals who had committed crimes (Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19).

The agreement also included an economic dimension whose management influenced the confidence-building process between the parties and which was used as a vehicle to sustain the talks when, during the third round, the parties reached a deadlock regarding international involvement in overseeing the agreement. During this round, the parties were able to reach an agreement on a new division between Jakarta and Aceh of the revenues derived from the gas- and oil-rich province, as well as an agreement with regard to the use of Indonesian currency in Aceh. Under this new agreement, 70% of the profits would go to Aceh (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 39, 43-45; Cunliffe et al., 2009, pp. 19-20; Wennmann & Krause, 2009, pp. 1, 16-17). The GoI did not object to the new division of revenues, and therefore had no difficulty accepting the agreement, since the parliament had already approved the “Special Autonomy Law” in 2001 (Wennmann & Krause, 2009, p. 17).

Two of the key elements at the core of the dispute were also deliberately left to the final stage of the talks, thereby enabling confidence to be built between the parties through discussion of “lighter” issues: The first was the number of Indonesian soldiers to remain in Aceh, a matter on which agreement was reached only when the talks had nearly collapsed, after tough, marathon-style negotiations. GAM had originally sought a presence of only 4,000 soldiers, while the government sought 25,000 – an enormous discrepancy. Eventually, the parties agreed on 14,700 soldiers and 9,200 police personnel. Towards this end, the GoI agreed to concede somewhat, but apparently GAM had no choice other than significant compromise in order to avoid deadlock (Aspinall, 2005, p. 43; Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19). As two of GAM's negotiators explained: “Had we decided to reject this, the peace talks would have been at a stalemate” (Djuli, Abdullah, & Kingsbury, 2005).

In this respect, GAM's concerns were somewhat eased by one of the AMM's assignments: ensuring that the Indonesian security forces were indeed engaged in protecting against foreign enemies.

The second element was the government's agreement to allow political parties in Aceh, which was considered a major government concession and a key factor in achieving agreement (Aspinall, 2008, p.16; DeRouen, Ferguson, Norton, Lea, Park, & Streat-Bartlett, 2010, p. 341; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 17). From the GoI's perspective, independent political parties in Aceh posed a significant threat. Historically, they had been prohibited, as their existence was seen as encouraging sentiments of secession and threatening national unity. For

GAM, the status of political parties in Aceh was the top priority. The significance of recognizing national political parties was that GAM representatives could thus be elected and gain control of the constitution and government of Aceh, which would in turn grant legal and democratic legitimacy to their aspirations and their relations with the central government.

As shown, the parties' readiness to compromise during the negotiations resulted in a warming of relations (Djuli & Rahman, 2008), which in combination with the mediator's confidence-building tactics and the willingness of the EU and ASEAN to oversee the agreement, increased each side's perception of the possibility of realizing their interests through the agreement (Kalla, 2005a, b; Mahmud, 2006; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). The turning point at which the GoI became gradually and increasingly optimistic about the possibility of reaching an agreement occurred after the second round of talks, when it became clear that GAM had undergone a paradigmatic shift in its thinking (Kalla, 2005a, b; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). During the third round, when the serious bargaining began, the Indonesian negotiators publicly expressed optimism about the possibility of an agreement, and asserted that Indonesia was willing to compromise on some issues, especially the symbolic ones (Aspinall, 2005, p. 31). Another factor that increased the GoI's impression that GAM would abide by the agreement was the outcome of a meeting in the jungle during the Helsinki talks between Kalla's personal representative, Farid Husain, and GAM commander Sofyna Dawood. After this meeting, it became clear to Indonesia that GAM fighters would adhere to an agreement emerging from their talks (Kalla, 2008).

During the negotiations, there was also a change in GAM's perception of the chance of realizing their interests in an agreement. This change was reflected in the following statement by GAM's exiled prime minister: "The policy of previous governments was that they did not want Aceh to gain independence and, at the same time, they imposed a system that was not acceptable to the Acehnese, and this caused many problems. Under the new government, we saw that this had changed. They were more flexible on that point and, of course, we have responded accordingly. If Aceh can achieve what it wants peacefully without separating itself from Indonesia, why should we go to war? ... So, we feel that we got our rights back" (Mahmud, 2006).

Discussion and Conclusions:

Readiness Theory and Explanation of the Outcome of the Peace Process

Readiness theory appears to be attractive as an explanatory theory, as it includes many factors affecting the willingness of parties to negotiate and reach an agreement. The concept

of readiness theory, which addresses influential factors that vary over time and can lead to negotiations and agreement, seems to allow flexibility and an understanding of the complexity of the factors that influence negotiating processes in conflicts of various kinds, as well as an understanding of the influential factors beyond the stage at which the parties sit down at the negotiating table. In this research, readiness theory served to explain the success of the Aceh peace process in bringing an end to the thirty-year armed conflict and to study the strengths and limits of readiness theory in identifying the factors that encourage parties to enter into negotiations and reach an agreement. The analysis demonstrates that the readiness theory, more than any other theory in the field, may support Pruitt's aim to present a comprehensive picture of the different dimensions that play a role in bringing parties to reach an agreement. Still, the analysis raises a number of questions with regard to the theory's hypotheses and scientific status.

In accordance with Pruitt's analysis in his studies applying readiness theory (Pruitt, 1997, 2007), it may be argued that the peace process in Aceh was characterized by an increase in the parties' level of readiness – to the point of being fully ready to sign an agreement. In the pre-negotiation stage, the motivation of both parties increased significantly, while GoI's level of optimism rose moderately and GAM's optimism did not increase. During the negotiations, however, both motivation and optimism increased significantly among both parties in the conflict. On the Indonesian side, motivation increased from 2003 and was galvanized after the change of government and the tsunami disaster, as a result of the leadership's perception that a continued military struggle would not lead to victory and its appreciation of the high cost of continuing the struggle under the circumstances. The increase in GAM's motivation developed at a later stage, towards the end of 2004, as it realized that the risks and costs of continued fighting were too high. These perceptions on the part of the GoI and GAM served as fertile ground that made it possible, immediately after the tsunami, for international pressure to effect changes in the parties' positions and perceptions of the opportunity to benefit from management of the process and from the outcome of an agreement.

Towards the end of the pre-negotiation stage, Indonesia's optimism increased somewhat but remained limited, whereas GAM's level of optimism did not change during this time. Although the Indonesian side came to the negotiating table with a certain level of optimism, which derived from the mechanism of wishful thinking, it was still clear to Indonesia that it would have to work hard to persuade GAM to compromise. Given the GoI's

conduct on the ground, GAM was skeptical about the government's willingness to compromise. At the start of negotiations, neither side was certain that the other was prepared to compromise on its official position in order to reach an agreement. The intervention and conduct of various international actors played a significant part in increasing the motivation and optimism of the parties during negotiations; that is, they influenced the parties' level of readiness to sign an agreement. During the negotiations that took place between January and August of 2005, the parties' increased motivation was further reinforced as a result of third-party pressure on both sides, particularly on GAM, as well as the pressure Indonesia applied to GAM and GAM's realization that the alternative to the talks would be a return to the path of war, which had already proved to be expensive and useless. It appears that the parties' readiness to compromise led to warmer relations and, together with the mediator's tactics for increasing mutual trust and the willingness of the EU and ASEAN to oversee the agreement, boosted the parties' optimism during the negotiations.

With respect to the theory-based questions, we can draw a number of conclusions from the analysis. First, we sought to examine whether each of the factors the theory cites as creating motivation to come to the negotiating table is indeed a sufficient condition, as the theory holds. In the Aceh case, a number of factors contributed to the parties' willingness to negotiate and more than one condition was met. The attempts by the Indonesian side to start a process already began in 2003 when Kalla and SBY considered pursuing the negotiation option for several reasons: their philosophical belief that there was no military solution to the conflict, their perception of the high costs and risks entailed in continuing the conflict, and third-party pressure. GAM motivation grew gradually by the end of 2004 in light of changing circumstances, growing perceptions of present and future risks, international pressure and an opportunity GAM recognized in the re-involvement of the international community in the process. Interestingly, the tsunami catastrophe served as a turning point for both the Indonesian government and GAM, providing them an opportunity to take advantage of the situation and the international community's involvement in order to improve the chances of reaching an agreement under the difficult circumstances.

This issue corresponds with the questions raised about the importance of strong motivation to end the conflict in cases in which mutual trust is low and a large gap exists between the parties' positions and with respect to the implications of the various sources of their motivation regarding the outcome of negotiations. In the case of Aceh, the sources of motivation for the parties' readiness during negotiations remained valid throughout the

process, which was relatively short. The pressure applied by a third party that understood the importance of financially backing its strategies was a significant factor in both sides' realization that the alternative to talks was a return to the bloodshed that had proven to be costly and ineffective. Throughout the Aceh process, the parties' motivation to end the conflict was strong and compensated for their mutual mistrust and the gap between their positions when negotiations began, and it served to soften their stances during the process.

Therefore, with regards to our question about the compensation ability of the variables and whether an increase in motivation can compensate for a low level of optimism during negotiation in pushing the parties to reach an agreement, it appears that the Aceh case confirms Pruitt's argument that: "... The compensatory part of the theory implies that with stronger motivation, less optimism is required to create a given level of vigor and concession making and to reach and adhere to an agreement" (personal communication, March 9, 2008).

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the Aceh case in regard to our question about the theory's claim that optimism is a necessary condition for commencing negotiation and our question about the compensatory potential of the variables – that is, whether increased motivation can compensate for a low level of optimism or even the absence of it during the pre-negotiation stage and negotiations. In the pre-negotiation stage that took place in the Aceh conflict, the parties' strong motivation compensated for the low level of optimism on the part of the GoI and, even more so, for the lack of optimism on the part of GAM. This compensatory trait led both parties to seize the opportunity to examine the possibility of reaching agreement. Thus, motivation did successfully compensate for little or no optimism with respect to the parties' readiness to begin negotiations. In GAM's case, the strong motivation compensated for the lack of optimism in persuading the organization to agree to negotiate.

However, the dynamics of the negotiation process demonstrated that a certain level of optimism and an increase in this variable – that is, the understanding of both parties that it is possible to overcome their differences – is a necessary condition for reaching an agreement. Despite having agreed to negotiations, GAM was very skeptical about the possibility of reaching an agreement with the GoI when they sat down at the table. Any change in optimism on the GoI's part that occurred in the pre-negotiation stage was minimal. Other factors affecting motivation played a part in determining the timing of the GoI's agreement to negotiate. During the negotiations, GAM's optimism increased as a result of its realization that, in light of the changing reality and international pressure, negotiations could produce an

agreement that would serve its interests better than the military option could. A similar change took place in GoI's level of optimism only during the negotiations.

It appears that in the Aceh case – in which at least one of the parties came to the negotiating table with no optimism about the possibility of reaching an agreement or about the ability of the other party's leader to implement an agreement – is not exceptional. A comparable example is the agreement between Israel, under the leadership of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and the Palestinians, led by Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, to embark on the Annapolis process in October 2007 (Schiff, 2013). Yet another example is the process that led to negotiations in the Cyprus conflict between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in February 2004 (Schiff, 2008). In both cases, the parties came to the negotiating table with low optimism or no optimism at all. Yet, it should be noted that in contrast to the Aceh case, in which optimism increased during the negotiations, in both these cases one of the reasons negotiations failed was that the parties were unable to generate any sense of optimism during the negotiations. The dynamics of the Aceh negotiations illustrate that during negotiations an increase in the level of optimism and an understanding by both parties that differences can be overcome are necessary in order to achieve an agreement. One might propose a revision of readiness theory in the form of a research hypothesis deserving further study: Strong motivation during the pre-negotiation stage can be a sufficient condition for the parties' readiness to enter into negotiations. Full readiness, however, requires both variables – motivation and optimism – and an increase in at least one of these is a necessary condition.

Furthermore, regarding the interaction of motivation and optimism, during the pre-negotiation stage, Kalla's strong motivation fueled a wishful thinking mechanism regarding the possibility of reaching an agreement with GAM. The theory holds that one of the mechanisms by which a strong motivation to end a conflict can foster optimism is the mechanism of wishful thinking. However, the theory does not offer details about the significance of this mechanism in terms of its influence or the role it plays in relation to other variables during negotiations. In the case of Aceh, strong motivation during the negotiations successfully led to a spiral of concessions by the parties, which ultimately also resulted in increased government optimism regarding the success of the process, beyond the mechanism of wishful thinking that originally motivated the GoI to enter into negotiations. In light of this finding, the following might be an interesting hypothesis for further research: When one or more of the parties is motivated to conduct negotiations because of optimism that derives

from wishful thinking, then this mechanism is not a sufficient source of increased readiness. In this case, in order to increase the parties' readiness to reach an agreement, the mechanism of wishful thinking must be replaced during negotiations with a solid understanding that a final agreement is expected to meet the objectives and that the other side can commit and adhere to the agreement.

Analysis of the case study also reveals a significant element the theory overlooks: the influence of the asymmetry between the parties on their readiness to reach an agreement. This dynamic revealed in the analysis raises questions the theory should address, but does not: Does the status of the parties need to be perceived as equal, and how does inequality influence their level of readiness throughout the peace process? What is the role of a third party in a process characterized by asymmetric levels of readiness? As we saw in the case of the Aceh negotiations, where asymmetry between the parties was clear to all, in order to minimize the significance of the blatant asymmetry, the third party adopted certain tactics (such as the establishment of AMM) that influenced the weaker party's level of optimism regarding the potential of the proposed formulation for addressing its interests.

An additional point regarding the asymmetry issues that arise from the analysis of the Aceh case relates to the theory's assertion that when the parties' level of readiness is unequal, the side whose readiness level is higher needs to make more concessions and is therefore in a less desirable position when crafting the final agreement (Pruitt, 2005, p. 13). Indeed, the case of Aceh demonstrates that GAM's strong motivation at the start of negotiations, the opportunity to realize its interests in light of the difficult military situation, Indonesia's threat of continued military operations, and international pressure to end the conflict all combined to bring about GAM's first meaningful concession as well as the turning point that allowed the talks to continue. Although the parties' level of readiness increased during the process, and both were required to make concessions, as Aspinall states, "GAM was in some crucial respects a relatively weak actor even in the Helsinki peace process, which was largely concluded according to the Indonesian government's agenda" (Aspinall, 2008, p.11).

Regarding the questions that arise from examining the hypotheses of the theory. The analysis notes some methodological issues concerning the application of the theory to the case study and challenges the scientific status of the theory by questioning whether its hypotheses are what Popper calls "conclusively decidable" and whether the theory itself meets the criterion of falsifiability (Popper, 1963a, pp. 17, 18; 1963b). For example, the theory holds that the parties' level of readiness influences the extent to which they engage in

conciliatory behavior. However, beyond Pruitt's observations that "*Some* readiness is needed on both sides of a conflict for negotiation to start and agreement to be reached" (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1525) and that "...both [motivation and optimism] must be present, in *some degree*, for any conciliatory behavior to be enacted" (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1525), it is entirely unclear what level of readiness is needed in order for negotiations to commence and agreement to be reached, or how fluctuations in the variables that represent readiness are to be measured.

Furthermore, analysis of the Aceh case makes it clear that operationalization of the "optimism" variable under the theory is not trivial, and that the attempt to point out changes in the level of optimism can lead the researcher to a tautology. According to Pruitt, "Optimism is *a sense* that it will be possible to locate a mutually acceptable agreement... *Some* optimism is required for a party to enter negotiation" (Pruitt, 2005, p. 8.). Apparently this *sense* of optimism is not always subject to a precise definition under the theory, and it is especially difficult to measure changes in the level of optimism. The theory itself does not clearly indicate how much change is needed in order to effect a change in the degree of readiness that will enable movement through de-escalation efforts towards the negotiating table and beyond, to "full readiness" to sign an agreement.

The case of Aceh proves that it is difficult to know with certainty whether optimism exists at the low level required by the theory for negotiations to begin. The question we need to ask when applying the theory is whether Kalla's appreciation of the window of opportunity for initiating peace talks after the tsunami indeed led to a perception of the light at the end of the tunnel and to the "certain degree" of change in optimism that is required by the theory for the parties to agree to begin negotiations, or whether another factor was at work. For indeed, it is clear that the parties came to the negotiating table without a relationship of mutual trust, and not until after the second round did they have a sense that it would be possible to reach an agreement. It appears that the answer is a matter of the researcher's subjective interpretation.

Another illustration of the problem of operationalizing the optimism variable can be found in a study by Pruitt regarding the process that led the parties to sign the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Pruitt states,

"It can be argued that optimism about the viability of negotiation grew steadily on both sides from 1988 onward. The sequence of gestures shown ...is evidence of growing optimism. Furthermore, if we assume that each side was reacting to the other side's most recent move, we are looking at a conciliatory

spiral that helps to explain that growth. When a secret channel of communication opened between British Intelligence and Martin McGuinness in 1990 ... working trust presumably grew with all of these actions” (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1530).

This analysis by Pruitt indicates that in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict resolution process, the parties’ dynamic of a conciliatory spiral and their sitting down to the negotiating table is what led Pruitt to conclude that their optimism had indeed increased. Apparently the distance from the difficulty of operationalizing the variable of optimism to falling into the trap of tautology is short.

Moreover, it appears that the inclusiveness of the theory and the complexity of the variables it embodies burden their operationalization and the ability to refute its hypotheses (Popper, 1963a, 1963b). In an effort to address some of the limitations of ripeness theory, Pruitt(2005, 2007) presents two variables, motivation and optimism, each one of which may depend on a number of factors. What happens, however, when one of the factors influencing motivation or optimism decreases while another increases? How then do we measure the change in the level of motivation or optimism? Do we conclude that it has decreased or increased? The Aceh case study is a somewhat clear-cut case in which all factors affecting motivation and optimism were increasing at some point. However it is not always like this. There are cases in which one factor affecting motivation or optimism may grow while the other may decrease. An example of this can be seen in the Sri Lanka peace process that took place between the end of 2001 and beginning of 2004. On the one hand, the pressure applied by a third party increased as the process advanced. However, on the other hand, the ceasefire established on February 2002 created a comfortable situation for the parties, which undermined their motivation to make concessions during negotiations if these concessions did not serve their interests. How would the change in motivation be measured and presented in this situation, as an increase or a decrease? It appears that in such cases determining whether motivation increased or decreased depends on the researcher’s subjective interpretation. Another issue this theory fails to clearly explain is: How can an increase in motivation or optimism possibly be measured? These questions become even more acute when assessing the extent to which each variable compensates for a deficiency in the other variable, as the theory posits.

In conclusion, Pruitt holds that readiness theory is more heuristic “in part because it allows use of a compensatory model and in part because it can be extended to make

predictions about more outcomes, including concession making, agreement, compliance and third-party intervention” (Pruitt, 2005, p. 30). The analysis of the Helsinki process in the Aceh conflict demonstrates that readiness theory enables us to identify and map many more factors that influence conflict resolution processes than any other theory in the field. However, the analysis also highlights the shortcomings of readiness theory, which in fact derive from its comprehensiveness and complexity.

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