

### Briefing Memo

The purpose of this column is to respond to reader interests in security issues and at the same time to promote a greater understanding of NIDS.

A “briefing” provides background information, among others. We hope these columns will help everyone to better understand the complex of issues involved in security affairs.

Please note that the views in this column do not represent the official opinion of NIDS.

### **Impact of Tsunami Disaster off Sumatra On The Regional Security**

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The magnitude 9.0 earthquake and associated tsunami that hit Indian Ocean nations on December 26, 2005 entail a natural disaster of tragic proportions. The estimated dead and missing was around 300,000 and roughly 1.5 million people had been displaced. The estimated total damage amounted to more than US\$7.2 billion. (IMF/World Bank, February 4, 2005) Tsunami caused serious damage not only in the north coast of Sumatra of Indonesia, where the damage has been greatest, but also in Malaysia, Myanmar, the west coast of Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka and more over, in Seychelles, Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania. The Asian Development Bank has warned that about two million people across Asia, mainly living in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (hereafter referred to as “Aceh province”) at the northern part of Sumatra, could be thrown into poverty. (Asian Development Bank, Jan. 2005)

The International community, including the United States, Japan, Australia and other countries, has been actively engaged in assisting the tsunami-hit countries to cope with the aftermath of the disaster, providing transportation of relief material and dispatching emergency rescue crews including medical supports in addition to financial assistance. It is true that the deployment of the foreign troops, which offered humanitarian support, draw a high degree of attention in that they would change power balance among the extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia. As Tim Huxley points out, the influence of the Sumatra Earthquake and Tsunami on the regional security can be summed up in two points: Influences on power balance in the region with the actions taken by intra and extra-regional countries and influences on the security policies of the affected countries, which can be categorized as the influences on separatist movements and the priority of the security policy itself.

## **U.S. Bolsters Its Presence**

It was the United States that strengthened its presence in the relief effort against the tsunami and earthquake in Southeast Asia. At first, the United States offered a financial contribution of about US\$ 200 million but it caused an argument among the affected countries that it was far below the expected amount. Finally, the United States expanded the amount to more than US\$ 600 million including the infrastructure rehabilitation in Aceh province. In addition to that, President Bush engaged in a massive and agile aid program sending an aircraft carrier, Abraham Lincoln, to Sumatra, deploying helicopters and transport aircraft for transportation support and also dispatching 15,000 troops. As well as the hard power, United States contributed financially and technically for restoration of Aceh rebuilding for infrastructure and succeeded in strengthening its soft power in the region. Among other tsunami-hit countries, the United States gave special emphasis to support Indonesia. Indonesia is the biggest Muslim country in the world and is regarded as the base of Jemaah Islamiah, a terrorist network in Southeast Asia, and it is vital for the United States to strengthen cooperation with the Indonesian government in order to carry out war against terrorism effectively in the region. In fact, The United States suggested Indonesia lift its arms embargo and restart military cooperation. Indeed, U.S. and Indonesian relations has entered a new stage after the tsunami. (Singapore's Straits Times, March 1, 2005) The new development of this relationship could be a counter act against China being enthusiastic about finding a closer relationship between Indonesia after Suharto has deposed.

Australia too has scored a point through its relief activities. The relationship between Australia and Southeast Asia has not been historically friendly. Especially when Australia has played a leading role in sending an International Force to East Timor, the relations further chilled between Australia and Indonesia. However, Australia has pledged US\$ 760 million in disaster relief at Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami on January 6, 2005, which was the largest amount for relief aid pledged by the participating countries at the meeting. In addition, Australia has sent 7 helicopters, 7 transport aircraft and a naval ship and provided infrastructure rehabilitation, a search and rescue and a medical support. Australia also has serious concern over terrorist threats and feels it necessary to strengthen ties with Indonesia for the effective prevention of terrorism. In addition to that, it is vital for them to strengthen economic relations between ASEAN reserving a favorable relationship with Indonesia.

The relief activities of Japan and China, major powers of Asia, also drew attention. It is considered that Japan has fallen behind China in its response to the currency crises in Asia in 1997. But Japan's response against Sumatra Earthquake and Tsunami disaster was dramatically prompt and established a high international reputation. In January, Japan has announced US\$500million of financial aid and where most countries offered international financial aids as loans, Japan's aid was mostly offered as grant assistance. Also, three vessels of the Maritime Self-Defense Force, which were on their way home from the Indian Ocean, were immediately sent to Phuket, Thailand for the rescue and recovering bodies. Japan also sent about 1000 troops to the disaster area for search efforts, medical care, and transport of relief supplies. On the other hand, China also pledged its financial support, but the

sum of US\$60 was relatively low. Although China also offered specific assistance, they were limited to providing relief supplies such as medical supplies and cooperation in conducting DNA tests. Many point out that these facts reveal that although China enjoys its economic boom and in promoting military buildup and the modernization of People's Liberation Army, their ability is not as much as expected. At the time of the currency crises, the Chinese government received reputation by announcing they would not devalue the Yuan, but it did not make a very substantial contribution to the economic recovery of the crisis-hit countries.

### **The Response of ASEAN**

Among the Southeast Asian countries, Singapore's support to the Aceh province was noticeable. Singapore sent seven transport aircraft, two helicopters and landing ships and provided rescue efforts and reconstruction support for the infrastructure. Singapore also pledged to provide US\$ 100 million for financial aid. It is clear that Singapore intent to have a closer relationship with Indonesia through this relief support. And of course, Singapore expects an early stabilization of Aceh, for the instability of the neighborhood could cause unwanted influences on Singapore itself. Malaysia too, has sent an aircraft and has provided medical supplies. Cambodia and Vietnam promised financial support for Indonesia although the total amount was not so large. Also, Malaysia has stood for assisting reconstruction in the Aceh province.

As a whole, the reaction of ASEAN against the political act of the supporting countries is dispassionate. Although it is a disaster relief, ASEAN considers that the involvement of the foreign troops violates national sovereignty and they are very cautious of particular countries having a strong influence within the region. The Indonesian government has asked for dismissal of the foreign forces within three months. They seemed to have a sense of vigilance for foreign countries intervening in the separatist movements in Aceh. For the role that Japan and China have played, although they appreciated Japan's support, they are aware of China's strong political influence within the region. It remains unclear why Thailand has declined Japan's financial support, but presumably they gave sufficient consideration to China that they are strengthening the relations recently. China, which was inconspicuous in the tsunami relief support, tries to construct a comprehensive cooperative relationship including disaster relief and military matters between Indonesia by signing the strategic partnership agreement in April 2005. On the other hand, Indonesia is asking the US to ease its arms embargo, and the Bush administration has reportedly shown some willingness to respond. There is a possibility of the United States and China playing a severer power game focusing around Indonesia after the tsunami disaster.

In terms of internal security issues, a conflict between Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and Indonesian military and maritime piracy that are temporarily calmed down have intensified again as reconstruction of Aceh is rolling forward. Separatist movements and regional disputes in the province of Papua and Maluku are still continuing. Social turmoil in the southern part of Thailand remains unchanged. Each country's policy gives high priority to eliminate the root causes of these confusions. There are also threats of infection such as SARS and bird flu. The large-scale disaster of tsunami has

highlighted not only the security issues but also the problems involving the issue of human security. It is expected that regional cooperation within ASEAN could be deepened further by taking advantage of the tsunami disaster and it is one of the effective ways to deal with the issues of human security.

### Reference

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- Masaru Tamamoto, "After the Tsunami, How Japan Can Lead," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Jan/Feb., 2005, pp. 10-18.

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