

## Indonesia must learn from Lebanese lessons

by Chibli Mallat

Every other day brings in news of another massacre in Indonesia, the latest being the killings in the province of Aceh. In Lebanon, this sounds all too familiar, as it does in the Balkans, Central Africa, or Ireland, at different rhythms and on a different scale. What do Lebanon and Indonesia have in common? The answer is precisely this: fissiparous and violent trends in society, which make countries implode. This may be accompanied by foreign interventions involving neighboring or far-away powers which either fan the flames by siding with a given minority, or find their “peacekeeping” troops at war in the midst of chaos, another word for the all too current trend of Lebanonization.

There are significant differences between the situation in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990, and that of Indonesia after the demise of the Suharto dictatorship. The most important, however, is historical. Indonesia offers today the prodromes of what Lebanon was in the mid 1970s: immense economic and social disparity, uncontrolled political change, collapse of the rule of law, militias taking over from the state, and the judiciary undermined by inefficiency and the corruption of the executive branch. This is why these significant differences offers opportunity for Lebanon to “export” the lesson drawn from its harsh experience. This lesson may forestall Indonesia’s descent into mayhem. This descent seems inevitable in face of the looming horrors, the country’s dislocation along ethnic and sectarian lines, and the flight of the educated elite and of international and local investment, followed by a decade or so later by a slow licking of the wounds and the painful piecing together of the puzzle. The scales, naturally, are different. The Indonesian Archipelago consists of over 7,000 inhabited islands, some with unparalleled density. Denys Lombard, the author of *Le Carrefour Javanais* (Paris 1990), underlines at the outset of his three-volume masterpiece the country’s geographical importance. The archipelago stretches over a surface which is equivalent to the whole of Europe, from Iceland to Turkey. In addition, Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world, with over 220 million inhabitants, including dozens of ethnicities, religions, and languages. These characteristics mean that civil conflict is inevitable. As was observed in the recent Dayak insurrection on the island of Borneo against the Madurese last month, and simmering Acehese separatism which resulted in the continuing killings. So what can Lebanon offer as a model, if by default? First, how does one support the moderate middle ground of Indonesia against the warring extremes who find themselves, by the sheer spiral of ethnic and sectarian violence, courted and “respected?”

Secondly, how does one draw the line between legitimate socio-economic and political grievances, for instance the indigenous Dayaks who slowly found themselves marginalized and bereft of their livelihood by “immigrants” from other

islands, and who respond with ethnic cleansing? Or the Acehnese, who offered a little known but unique Muslim tradition in the world, underlined over 100 years ago by the great Dutch Orientalist Snouck-Hurgronje, against Javanese who take away their oil and squeeze Acehnese natural resources while ignoring their representation and their region's unique Islamic legacy of jurisprudence?

Thirdly, how does one avoid the misuse of the army, which is tagged as "a factor of stability," at a time when any army should be kept away from assuming law and order because its role is to defend the frontiers of the nation, and not get involved in ethnic problems which its structure and mission are incapable of confronting? There are naturally, no copycat answers. Nor did Lebanon find a definitive solution to any of these questions. It did, however, provide a useful beginning.

Lesson one would be the strengthening of the moderates. How does one support and vindicate the "Raymond Eddes" of Indonesia? Who are they, nationally and locally, and how is it possible to make sure that the present rifts between the president, the vice-president and the speaker remain at a level which does not threaten the unity of the country?

Lesson two is to recognize the local and national problems, and respond with formulas of autonomy and/or federalism, economic and political, that involve the locals seriously and engage them in their own affairs. The gaping wound of south Lebanon over the 20th century has still not been resolved, but the problem is at least recognized.

Lesson three is that the strengthening of law and order cannot operate by way of the army, and that the rule of law should be assumed first by a competent and effective judiciary, which must be made to oversee the police and the use of legitimate force. Nor is this problem, despite the precedents of the Ahdab coup of March 1976 and the Feb. 6, 1984, collapse recognized enough in Lebanon.

It is unfortunate that the Indonesian minister of foreign affairs, who had been scheduled to be in Beirut last month, chose at the last moment to change his plans. In addition to a welcome support from a great Eastern nation to our struggling state, we could have started reflecting in common on how "Lebanonization" can be avoided for Indonesia, and whether that frightful commonality can be "sold" or marketed intellectually to the many countries going down the mayhem path.

It is true that, sooner or later, with the rise of the massacres, the international community will be called upon to "do something" in Indonesia.

It is up to the likes of Paul Wolfowitz, the US deputy secretary of defense and former ambassador to Indonesia who wrote a thoughtful op-ed piece last year in the Wall Street Journal, to chart the course of the international response, rather than the powerless Lebanese. But an "anti-Lebanonization package" is needed for Indonesia, which would save millions of lives.

Then of course, Lebanon can learn Indonesian lessons in reverse, especially since the shadows of Lebanon's own history still loom large over its future, from the rise of extremism, to justified grievances of minorities and communities, to the misuse of the army.

*Chibli Mallat, who holds the Chair of European Law at Universite Saint Joseph, is the lawyer of the Indonesian Embassy in Beirut. This commentary was written for The Daily Star in his private capacity*

