

The Jakarta Post

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An unjust war

Whatever pretext Israel has cited for launching massive air strikes on the Palestinian-controlled Gaza strip over the weekend, the high casualty figure among civilians makes this military action totally unacceptable. By Monday morning, the supposedly surgical and high-precision air strikes had killed more than 310 people in Gaza, according to Palestinian medical officials.

More than half of these were apparently members of the Islamist faction Hamas, which has ruled the tiny strip of land — home to 1.5 million people — for the past three years. The others were civilian casualties, including women and children.

Add a few hundred other civilians who were injured and the air strikes make it the most devastating clash ever in the more than 60 years of conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. Whatever chance there was for peace has now been virtually wiped out.

Just how much "collateral damage" — the military phrase for civilian casualties caught in cross fires — is regarded as acceptable by Israel remains unclear. But to anyone with a sense of human decency, the figure is reprehensible, and the military action must be condemned in the harshest terms. It has made this Israel's unjust war.

The Israeli military and government must have known the unintended consequences of their decision, which they claimed was grounded on the constant barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas against Israeli civilian targets across the Gaza border.

Militarily, the civilian casualty is usually considered a secondary issue that can go as high as necessary to achieve the military objectives. Politically, there has to be a limit on what is the acceptable figure of collateral damage, but again, this depends on what the Israeli political leaders had hoped to achieve when they ordered the military operation.

It is looking more likely that the decision to go for a full-scale military operation in Gaza was calculated to appease

the Israeli people as the coalition government faces a general election in February.

But in the process, Israel has virtually forfeited whatever chance there was for peace. Israel cannot wash its hands that easily and lay the blame squarely on the Hamas faction for the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians over the weekend.

The air strikes have caused much more misery than that caused by the few hundred deaths and injuries among the Palestinians. Gaza, because it is controlled by Hamas, has been blockaded for much of the past three years. On Saturday morning, Israel had allowed for humanitarian assistance to be delivered, only to pound it with bombs a few hours later.

For now and the foreseeable future, peace will be the last thing on the minds of most Palestinians, and probably many Israelis, too, for that matter. Even moderate Palestinian forces who had been in discussions with the Israelis to negotiate a settlement have been outraged by the weekend attacks and many seek to avenge the deaths of their countrymen.

The U.S.'s Middle East peace initiative held in Annapolis early this year (a process of which Indonesia is also a part) is now as good as dead, thus killing the one positive legacy that outgoing President George W. Bush had hoped to leave behind. The Oslo Agreement, under which the two sides had been discussing the prospect of a two-state solution, has also been completely derailed.

Once the international community gets past the condemnations (of Israel or Hamas), it should use its force to persuade both sides to cease and desist, and return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. This is going to be a tall order given the high emotions running among both Israelis and Palestinians. But the alternative will be worse.

In the meantime, we must brace ourselves to witness more violence and bloodshed once again. Let's hope that common sense will soon prevail and that this war will be short-lived.

Any comments? Write to readersforum@thejakartapost.com or send an SMS to +628111872772

Other Opinion

Darwin and discovery

Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin. It is also the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The life and work of a great scientist and a seminal figure in intellectual history will, therefore, be the subject of intense interest and debate in the coming year.

Darwin is not merely a man of his time. The extent of his achievement gives him a plausible claim to be counted the greatest figure in this nation's history. And his ideas remain startling in their implications for prescientific modes of thinking. They are consequently an enduring target for movements that disdain critical inquiry and the life of the mind.

Darwin's ideas have overwhelming explanatory power. They provide a means of uncovering further mysteries of life, because they are driven by evidence and reason. The commemorations of Darwin's work are of immense educational value. But more, they are a celebration of the spirit of inquiry.

— *The Times*, London

A message to Mugabe

In this season of hope for all humanity, there is precious little opportunity for optimism in Zimbabwe. There is no doubt the country's completely discredited leader, Robert Mugabe, must go. Thanks to Mugabe and his henchmen, Zimbabwe is reduced less to a failed state than to a condition approaching anarchy, where life is nasty, brutal and increasingly short. The economy has collapsed.

In place of violence, resistance will depend on the few brave souls who defy the regime, such as the lawyers and judges who still stand up to Mugabe. On Christmas Eve, the country's High Court ordered that activists accused of plotting against the government be sent to hospital until they face court, apparently to save them from torture in prison. These brave souls must be supported by more international pressure on Mugabe.

It took one man to ruin Zimbabwe — it will take the world to save it.

— *The Australian*, Sydney

Get priorities right

The report on the implementation of the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-10) sheds needed light on both the progress and the lack of it in our achievements of economic and social development goals. If the country is to find an opportunity in the ongoing global crisis to expedite domestic economic restructuring and pursue sustainable development, top legislators should press the government to take up tasks that remain unfulfilled.

Admittedly, great challenges resulting from a drastic change of the global economic and financial situation will make it much more difficult for China to sustain its robust economic and employment growth. But due to the solid foundation, we will stand a good chance to meet these five-year goals. And that will be remarkable given the gloomy global growth outlook in coming years.

— *China Daily*, Beijing

Lamentations

Lamenting the suffering of children who are abandoned, living on the streets, or forced to serve as soldiers in conflicts, Pope Benedict XVI said during his Midnight Mass homily on Christmas Eve: "Every child asks for our love. This night, then, let us think especially of those children who are denied the love of their parents. Let us think of those street children who do not have the blessing of a family home, of those children who are brutally exploited as soldiers and made instruments of violence, instead of messengers of reconciliation and peace. Let us think of those children who are victims of the industry of pornography and every other appalling form of abuse, and thus are traumatized in the depths of their souls."

On its face, it was a timely and incontrovertible reminder.

Catholic belief teaches that there are "sins that cry out to Heaven for vengeance." These, according to the Catholic catechism, are: willful murder; the sin of the Sodomites; the cry of the people oppressed; the cry of the foreigner, the widow and the orphan; and injustice to the wage earner.

— *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Manila

Low intensity conflicts and the future wars

Wibawanto Nugroho
Jakarta

Attacks in Mumbai have once again shocked the world. Terrorism has become one of the most pervasive and critical threats to world security in recent history. Terrorist violence has changed in recent years from an agenda-forcing and attention-getting tool of the politically disenfranchised to a significant asymmetric form of conflict employed against anything considered an adversary to economic, political, military or social aims.

It is not exaggerating to define terrorism as the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to instill fear and aimed to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.

Having described such radical and restless dedication in committing terrorism, we need to understand how radicalism enters into the terrorist's mind. Everything begins from the political, economic and social grievances that have led to the creation of some sort of social movement.

On many occasions Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono has emphasized that a critical underlying factor leading to violence is the huge population which exacerbates the imbalance in economic development and corruption in the government and non-government sectors as well as poverty.

At this stage, radical ideology enters as the key intervening variable and source of endless courage. When splinters further their action in regular violent activities and operate independently in loose networks, terrorism begins to

break away from the social movement.

Once they become clandestine, they are separated from society and are joined by the bonds of solidarity with people who share the same values and purposes. Under these conditions, they reinforce each other to take certain collective actions and at the same time they began to attack innocent people.

At this stage their activity can be mentioned as terrorism. However, based on the nature of fighting it, the usually repressive counterterrorism measures taken by authorities will unfortunately open up the possibility of adverse reactions, in which terrorists, within a certain degree, will have more courage, support and the capability to continue fighting back, thus creating more terrorism.

Thus, having seen the characteristics of terrorism and radicalism in the midst of global economic uncertainty it is very likely that terrorism will become a new form of war and the trend of low-intensity conflicts will surge in the future. Thus it is imperative as well to understand the strategic challenge that terrorism represents, as it would be imprudent to isolate it as just small tactical attacks.

The U.S. Army defines Low-Intensity Conflict as a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below a conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It often involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies, thus ranging from subversion to the use of the armed forces.

It is waged by a combination of means, employing political, economic, informational and military instru-

ments. Low-intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications such as what happened in Bali and Mumbai in these past six years.

However, low-intensity conflicts cover a wide spectrum including combating illegal drug trafficking, terrorism and counter-terrorism, insurgency and counter-insurgency and other special operations needed to counter activities which threaten security and require a government response (whether revolutionary or nonrevolutionary, political or nonpolitical and open or clandestine).

Normally, religious, racial and social or ideological conflicts (i.e., radical terrorism) are total wars, long-term and very violent because they are low-rational conflict as compared to conventional wars among states.

In order to be successful in low-intensity conflicts, states require the simultaneous and combined commitment of political and economic resources supported by effective intelligence, law enforcement and military force at different levels during the entire process.

On the government side, victory in low-intensity conflicts can be considered achieved in situations where the threatened government is able to conquer or pacify the illegitimate arms-organized group or limit the conflict to a manageable proportion at a domestically "acceptable" cost, whose acceptance of such a cost is often subject to debate and controversy.

Given the protracted nature of low-intensity conflicts, this sort of conflict is unfortunately rarely attractive to the general public, bureaucrats or the military leaders. However,

keys to be successful in overcoming the so-called "future small-scale wars" can be learned from several countries (U.K., Canada, German, France and Israel) and are characterized as follows.

First, any nation that has many organizations combating terrorism must make them subservient to one lead government ministry. But because many other ministries are also involved, there must be interagency coordination bodies to coordinate both within and across ministries.

Second, who is in charge during a terrorist incident must be clearly designated.

Third, there must be intelligence measures, national policies and military function-based systems and infrastructure that emphasize the prevention of terrorism. To achieve these policies, it is important to use a variety of strategies, including intelligence collection, police presence and such various security measures as physical barriers at the entrances to public buildings.

Fourth, executive branches must provide the primary oversight of organizations involved in combating terrorism. This oversight involves the review of programs and resources for effectiveness, efficiency and legality.

Last but not least, resource allocation must be based upon the likelihood of follow through of threats, as determined by intelligence assessments.

The writer is an expert staff for Chairman of Committee I, DPR-RI and special assistant for Director of Strategy Policy, Directorate General of Defense Strategy, Indonesian Department of Defense. This is a personal view.

Emerging economies tackling slowdown, staying on their feet

Gerard Lyons
Jakarta

The current attention is on how and whether emerging economies will avoid contagion from the present financial crisis. By the time of next year's IMF meetings in Turkey, the focus is likely to be on preparing for recovery in 2010. But between now and then, the economic outlook for emerging economies is highly uncertain, with slowdown inevitable and recession possible in the most open economies.

After the boom of recent years, the world economy will slow, dampening world trade and taking the heat out of commodity markets. Whilst the immediate downside risks to emerging market growth need to be taken seriously, this should not be at the expense of taking a positive view of the longer-term outlook. All the positive factors that have led to strong growth across Asia and other regions in recent years remain in place to deliver stronger future growth.

One way to view the present situation is that emerging economies are not decoupled from events in the West, but that they are better insulated than in the past. We have already seen contagion through exports slowing sharply, as equity markets have tumbled and, now, as investment plans and consumer confidence suffers. The deeper the U.S. recession, the greater the contagion but the fall-out will not be as great as it would have been in the past. Insulation is likely to be seen in many ways. The shortage of liquidity in the West is in sharp contrast to the ample liquidity seen across many

emerging regions, particularly Asia and the Middle East where savings are high. In fact one legacy of previous financial crises, most notably Asia in 1997-1998, is that, around the world, many countries have ensured they would be able to cope with a future crisis.

Currency reserves are high, and there is much room for policy maneuver. Thus, it is important to put the present cyclical downturn in context. Yes, it may be a sharp down-

turn, but it is not as severe as the Middle East and Africa has grown sharply, often with China at the centre. Whilst within China, the private sector has been let loose, triggering pent-up spending, although this is still too heavily geared to investment.

Second, and equally important, financial markets appear to still underestimate the catch-up potential of a wide array of emerging economies, such as India, Indonesia and Brazil, among others. Huge

aspect that warrants particular attention at this time of economic and financial crisis in the West.

Many emerging countries do not have the independent policy institutions, or indeed the policy tools that are taken for granted in the West. There has been, and continues to be, significant progress, but this does not lessen the challenges as we've seen increased volatility across financial markets and in capital flows.

All financial crises are different, but they often share common characteristics, where the outcome descends on the combination among fundamentals, the policy response, and confidence.

China, in particular, has ample scope to use fiscal policy as its stock absorber, with the government preparing to spend its surplus if the economy's investment-fueled growth stalls. India may not have the fiscal ammunition at China's disposal but its corporate sector, for instance, has enjoyed healthy profit margins and has not placed itself at risk through excessive leverage.

Indeed, most Asian economies have resilience from their lack of leverage, with low corporate debt, high household savings and generally low financial leverage. And with inflation worries being replaced by fears over growth, there is also the ability for monetary policy to be more stimulatory. Those defenses are likely to be tested now.

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