

Aceh and Council of Eight in Penang 1873-1876

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Abstract: The expanding Dutch military forces over Aceh's territories in the 19th century caused advancing international diplomacy between Aceh and the outside world. Since the defeat of the Dutch during its first military expedition in 1873, Acehnese in Penang simultaneously channeled numerous initiatives for aiding the war. When the palace fell to the Dutch during the second expedition in 1874 followed by an outbreak of cholera that presumably won most of the attacks, Penang and Strait Settlements witnessed intensifying pledges from Aceh on protection and military aids. The pleas were delivered by several Acehnese elitists in Penang whom the British named as the Council of Eight. This paper examines the establishment of the Council of Eight. It studies the factors that contributed to its decline. It investigates the implication at home and abroad resulting from its voices and activities. Relying on daily newspapers spread across the Strait Settlements between 1873-1876 and colonial civil cases reports, the writer argues that the voices and activities of the Council of Eight in Penang played a significant role in the resistance of Aceh and the rise of anti-colonial responses in the Strait Settlements and the East Indies.

Keywords: Council of Eight, Penang Island, Holland war, diplomacy, anti-colonialism

Öz: 19. yüzyılda Hollanda sömürge yönetimi ordusunun Açe topraklarına nüfuzu, Açe devleti ile dış dünya arasında uluslararası ilişkilerin yoğunlaşmasına neden oldu. Hollanda ordusunun 1873'te ilk saldırıyı kaybetmesinden itibaren, Penang'da yaşayan Açeliler çeşitli inisiyatifler geliştirmek suretiyle savaşa katkı yaptılar. Hollanda ordusunun 1874 yılında gerçekleştirdiği ikinci saldırıda Açe sultanlık sarayının düşmesinin ardından kolera salgını başgösterdi. Bu süreç Açelilerin giderek artan şekilde İngilizlerin yönetimindeki Penang ve Boğazlar Yönetimi'nden (SS) destek taleplerinin artmasına yol açtı. Bu süreçte, İngilizlerce "sekizler konseyi" konseyi adıyla anılan Penang'da yaşayan Açe eliti bu taleplerin ortaya konmasında rol oynadı. Bu makale, sekizler konseyinin oluşumunu ele almakta, bu konseyin çalışmalarının Açe'de ve Açe dışında ne gibi sonuçlar doğurduğu üzerinde durmaktadır. Buna ilâve olarak, söz konusu bu hareketin giderek önemini yitirmesindeki faktörler üzerinde durmaktadır. Hollanda Savaşı döneminde Boğazlar Yönetimi (SS) bölgesinde yayımlanan gazetelerde çıkan haberlerden hareketle, yazar Penang'da faaliyet gösteren 8'ler konseyinin, Açe'de direnişin devamında önemli rol oynadığını ve Boğazlar Yönetimi ve Doğu Takımadalar'ında sömürge karşıtı yaklaşımların güçlenmesine katkı yaptığını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sekizler konseyi, Penang adası, Hollanda savaşı, diplomasi, sömürge karşıtlığı.

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Introduction

Studies on Aceh's diplomacy in the 19th century are sufficiently available. Studies on Aceh's envoys to numerous different states in the world such as to the Ottoman Empire, France, and Italy are covered mostly by European sources which contributed to an extensive discussion. However, scholarly literature that highlights the rise and demise of the Council of Eight as one of the Acehnese international diplomatic initiatives driving for an expellation of the Dutch invasion in Aceh is extremely insufficient.

Such literary problems are motivated by the imbalance in the primary sources that record the progress of the council. Unlike a bulk of supply of colonial sources, indigenous documents are extremely limited. Hence, a couple of discussants fulfilled the gap of the narratives. Both sides of the argumentation contend with similar remarks and a stagnated chain of events revolving around the origin and function of this Acehnese circle.

Anthony Reid, a well-known historian of 19th century Aceh, authored significant literature in this regard. In 1969, Reid wrote a book titled *The Contest for Northern Sumatra: Aceh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898* which was translated and published in 2005 as *Asal Mula Konflik di Aceh: Dari Perebutan Pantai Timur Sumatra hingga akhir Kerajaan Aceh abad ke-19*. This literature provides extensive information on politics, economics, social relations and conflicts between Aceh, The Netherlands, and The British. In this book as well, Aceh's diplomacy in the 19th century is highlighted sufficiently. His narrative is recognized as the earliest information on the existence of the Council of Eight. From 372 pages, 2 pages discuss the existence and function of the Council of Eight. The author called it as the 'Aceh Party', characterized its activities as war propagandists driven by their activities of connecting envoys to the American Consulate and British in the Strait Settlement, of collecting voluntary funds for the cause of war and of involving in the so-called 'illegal' arms supply. Although Reid puts forward argumentations based on an extensive analysis of inter-colonial recollections, a close image projection of the council from among the Strait settlers and Acehnese resistance leaders are missing.

Other scholars who wrote about the council provide almost similar information based on the findings of Anthony Reid. In his edited book chapter published in 2009, titled *the Legacy of Sumatran Trade and Knowledge Networks in Penang*, Abdurrazaq Lubis comes back and forth on calling them as 'Penang Aceh Party', 'Acehnese exile' and 'Penang Acehnese resident'. The discussion of these sources

is centred on the importance of figures of Sumatran origin in the establishment of the intellectual network in Penang from the moment Penang was established in 1786. Within this 29 pages narrative, 1 page is dedicated to discussion on the Council of Eight. The author claims that the council acted as the key contributor in helping the progress of the war in Aceh through voluntarily funding initiatives and arms supply passing the Dutch blockage across the coastal areas.

The lack of scholarly literature on the subject is a justification as to why this paper is important. This article examines the rise and fall of the council. It reinvestigates the meaning of the council's diplomatic activities in Penang. It examines to what extent the Council of Eight through its lobby and political activities affected Penangites and the East Indies communities. It contests the extent of contribution by the council towards the progress of the war.

Narratives elaborated in this paper are tailored based on qualitative methods and cross checking the existing related literature. Primary sources include newspapers published by the British in the Straits Settlement since the beginning of the 19th century and vastly distributed throughout the archipelago, namely *the Strait Times*, *The Straits Observer* and *the Strait Times Overland Journal*. Since the main publication house was closely located to the central council activities, information gathered by it were deemed reliable. In addition, the writer also relies on a direct witness account documented in *Strait Law Journal and Reporter vol 1-4 and Cases Heard and Determined in her Majesty's Supreme Court of the Straits Settlement in 1808-1884*. However, due to the reason of material unavailability, essential use of indigenous sources is unfortunately inadequate.

Acehnese Foothold in Penang

To be able to understand the role and influences of the council, it is crucial to comprehend the origins of the Acehnese foothold in Penang that laid the central basis of Acehnese anti-Dutch colonialism in the area. This foothold was developed significantly when Penang was at the gate of cosmopolitanism led by the pioneer, Francis Light.

The establishment of the Council of Eight in Penang was motivated by a long-term business network in the area. Since the establishment of free trade under Francis Light in 1786, Penang gathered traders from all over the world which gradually led to a diverse society and professionalism. During this process, Acehnese traders were revealed as among the earliest settlers who traded extensively. The

political and administrative problems of the British rule in the area were resolved by one wealthy Royal Aceh-Hadhrami Arab known as Syed Hussin bin Abd al Rahman al Aidid (d. 1826).

When Aceh dominated the world stock of pepper in the 1810s -1820s, the role of Syed Hussein al-Aidid in mediating the flow of the spices to the monopoly of international circles in Penang, particularly for the British, sharply increased (Lubis, 2009, p. 72). His trade network expanded through many important ports in the Indian Ocean. From Aceh, which had been the base of Arabs and Indian trading spot, he moved on to Riau, and then to Kuala Selangor in 1779 before deciding to settle his trade network permanently in Penang. His wealth was largely based on the trading networks between Aceh-Susoh-Lingga-Siak-Penang-Coromandel Coast-Calcutta through mutual business ties with prominent Penangite merchant Koh Lay Huan and British companies such as James Scott, James Carnegy, and Palmer and Bros companies (Hing, 1995, p. 204). Until he was suspected of being responsible for the Sultan displacement plot in 1809, no levy duties and revenues were imposed on his business products or activities from Aceh (Hussin, 2007, pp. 77-78). Besides pepper, betel nut, textile, and opium were also among his major commercial products (Hing, 1995, p. 79, 91).

Tuanku Syed Hussin al-Aidid settled in Penang in 1792. His attachment to the Aceh royal genealogy and wealth increased his influence among the Arabs, Indians, and Malay Population in Penang. The Malay community accepted him as the Malay Capitan, 2 years before he was recognized as a permanent resident of Penang while the British knew him as the Prince of Merchants (Hing, 1995, p. 79). It was in 1808 that a mosque in Acheen Street, later known as Acheen Mosque was built where most social and political activities of the Council of Eight took place decades later.

Due to his wealth and influence, Francis Light is said to have been eager not only to have him settled in Penang but to guarantee his exemption from British tax laws (Hoft, 1991, p. 83). When the British faced financial troubles in 1815 and 1816, a loan amounting to more than S\$ 80,000 was provided by Syed Hussin al Aidid. In the latter year, the British held him on the accusation of piracy which was repealed due to insufficient evidence (Hing, 1995, pp. 255; Hussin, 2007, p. 78). Syed Hussein al-Aidid died in 1826 and was buried beside Acheen Mosque in Penang (Hing, 1995, p. 320).

Through the role of Syed Hussin al-Aidid and his later generations, the Aceh-nese Muslims community worked peacefully with the Indian Kelings traders who

were mostly of Tamil-Arabic descent, the Arabs, the Chinese and the European (Bayly, 2012, p. 22).

His legacy paved ways for Acehese traders to trade in Penang. For the next several decades, Penang was still relying on the pepper stocks from Aceh which coupled with the establishment of Acheen Street, Acheen Mosque, and Acehese enclave community. In the period where the activities of the Council of Eight took place, one Acehese wealthy pepper trader, as well as a member of Council of Eight, called Teuku Muda Nyak Malim owned a multi purpose building equivalent to S\$ 40,000 (Reid, 1969, p. 270) where it was used not only for commodities storage purpose but also for social and political discussions intended for influencing Aceh's affairs.

The Establishment of Council of Eight

Council of Eight is not a name given officially by Sultan of Aceh; instead it is introduced by the historian Anthony Reid (1969) who mentioned the term for the first time, probably aware of newspaper publications in the Strait Settlements in 1874 where narratives on Acehese figures and partners that were pulling aids through Penang were implicitly labelled as the Council of Eight.

Strait Times on October 1874 published a column under unspecified name titled "the Items From the Java Papers" quoting: "a council ..., and consisting of 8 persons settled in Penang ... the Council of 8 continues unwearingly at work to encourage the resistance of the Acehese" ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 5). Before this sheet of news was broadcast, the Council of Eight were perceived as individual Acehese involved in Aceh's affairs.

Despite meticulous and constant news on the council, its official establishment date is not known. There was a possibility that after the victory against the Dutch in the first expedition in 1873, Sultan Mahmud Syah (r. 1870-1874) appointed his nephew, Tuanku Ibrahim as the president of this diplomatic initiative. He was sent to Penang where 'everything necessary' for Aceh's cause was to be realized ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 5). This signifies that royal orders existed. By the latter's royal influence, numerous distinguished men were recruited through Aceh-Penang trade network.

Based on the information from a news publication in 1874, eight people maintained a central diplomatic role in Penang. Among those eight people, four were Acehese, namely; Tuanku Ibrahim, Tunku Nyak Rajah, Hadji Panglima Prang Yu-

suf, and Tunku Nyak Abu. Two members were Penang born Arabs, namely; Syekh Ahmat Baschaib and Syekh Kassim. Another two were Penang born Keling/Chuliahs; Omar Merican and Gullahmaidin Merican (“Items From the Java Papers”, 1874, p. 4), who was also a clerk in the company of Lorraine, Gillespie & Co. in Penang.¹ Other influential men who acted independently out of the council were Syed Abd al-Rahman al Zahir, Teuku Paya and Teuku Muda Nyak Malem (“Items From the Java Papers”, 1874, p. 5). Had it not been for the presence of influential individuals, this council would not have attracted the attention of the colonial government.

It was well-known news that the Sultan of Aceh had earlier sent a delegation to İstanbul for reinstating their protectorate agreement towards Aceh in 1872.² This envoy was led by one of the council members, Syed Abd Al Rahman al Zahir, a Hadramaut descendent and Malabar grown scholar who was once a *malikul qadi* and prime minister of the Aceh Sultanate.³ His approach drew intense debate among the Ottomans who were ruled by Sultan Abdul Aziz to act as a caliph and rescue Aceh from the Dutch oppression. The demand garnered opinions from numerous elite circles that were published in İstanbul based newspapers such as *al-Jawa'ib* and *Basiret*. It was also highlighted by European newspapers such as Pall Mall and The New York Times. As the Ottoman's response was uncertain due to pressure from its Russian and British counterparts, the criticism from the grassroots and intellectual groups of the Ottoman intensified (Yerlikaya, 1994, pp. 113-114). However, the pleas of the delegation were not answered as expected. Al Zahir and his team returned to Strait Settlements in order to seek alternative ways, bargaining for the support of western powers against the Dutch.

Al-Zahir was immediately in contact with the council members once he returned from the Ottoman lands. In Singapore, where he took initiatives to build

1 Merican family was known as the earliest South Indian Muslim from Marakkayar ancestor who had travelled to Penang. Their great ancestor named Kader Mydin Merican was a companion of Francis Light when he first visited Penang in 1786. In 1830s Mohammad Merican Noordin was one of the chiefs Merchants of Penang, owned ships that trade salt, pepper, chandu (opium), and cloth throughout the Indian Ocean. In the 19th century, traditions of loyal trade links with Aceh was still preserved. This illuminated in the fact that the family member displayed numerous gestures towards Acehese struggles against the Dutch which is not limited to continue purchasing trade commodities but also to the extent of financing and mediating diplomatic pleas from Aceh to American envoy in Singapore (Tagliacozzo, 2005; Reid, 2005).

2 In 1852 Sultan Ibrahim Mansur Syah sent a delegation to the Ottoman that was under the rule of Sultan Abdul Majid. Through this envoy, he requested the Ottoman Sultan to revive the old vassalage with Aceh, and its protectorate status which was welcomed by the Sultan. The envoy returned with a gift of honour from the Ottoman to the Sultan of Aceh (Göksoy, 2011, p. 89).

3 For a complete biography of Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir. See: Reid, 1969.

channels with the elites and influential men, he hoped that persuasion to the side of Aceh would be successfully gathered (Reid, 2005, p. 216).

Under his leadership, one underground movement intended as a platform for the liberation of society was established. All the Achenese abroad were compelled to join, including the ones in Terengganu and Kelantanese. It was presumed that the Bengalee and Turkish Muslims aided in the funding of this activity ("Items From the Java Papers", 1875, p. 2).

Unlike Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir, there are scanty biographical records of Teuku Muda Nyak Malim and Teuku Paya. The former is known as an uleebalang (noble), commander, and traditional customs upholder. His policy of death punishment towards opium abusers was well known, thus he was both respected and feared. He was one of the richest pepper plantation owners in Simpang Ulim, Northern Aceh. He possessed a multipurpose building named Gedong Atjeh valued around \$40,000 in Penang. It is believed that the place witnessed numerous discussions on negotiating alliances for Aceh (Reid, 2005, p. 140). Further records on his background are lacking, and details are extremely scanty, as is the case with the profile of Teuku Paya, another noble man who resided in the same area.

Teuku Paya, a "warrior of great renown" (Bergovine, 1876, p. 3) was born in Lambadak, Lamnga district ("Items From the Java Papers", 1876, p. 2). He owned a number of pepper lands in Tanjong Seumuntoh, a pepper plantation district near Simpang Ulim, the northern part of Aceh. Through collaboration with his Arab pepper stocker Syekh Ahmat Baschaib who was also a loyal supporter of Aceh's cause, he funded Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir's journey to Constantinople accompanied by Nyak Abas, his cousin. The envoys communicated with Teuku Paya from Constantinople via telegram (Reid, 2005, p. 141). His heavily armed ship named *Gypsey* was once detained by the Dutch in 1872, and the return of the ship was helped by Shahbandar Panglima Tibang through a request to the Dutch Resident of Rhio ("Items From the Java Papers", 1873, p. 5). A letter by Bergovine, a British agent who was in Aceh in 1876 informed that Teuku Paya returned from Penang on May 1876 (T.E.R.F, 1876, p. 3). A significant supply of war ammunition was despatched by Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir with whom he was seen in a battlefield against the Dutch at the same year ("Items From the Java Papers", 1876, p. 1). In this battle, he suffered a fatal injury, which led to his death ("Items From the Java Papers", 1876, p. 2).

Besides those two figures, the president of the council, Teuku Ibrahim is the only one who was not involved in trade business. Having had family relations with Sultan Mahmud Syah through his famous and influential uncle Teuku Raja Pakih Dalam from Pedir, father-in-law of Sultan Mahmud Syah, his experiences in foreign affairs convinced Teuku Muda Nyak Malem, and Habib Abd-al-Rahman al-Zahir to collaborate with him ("Items From the Java Papers", 1873, p. 5). Teuku Ibrahim was a highly literate man as reflected in letters that he sent to one newspaper in Singapore. The letter signifies his credibility. He stated that he led initiatives on delivering news on Aceh which was frequently published in Penang Gazette, acted officially as agent and attorney of the government of Acheen (Ibrahim, 1875, p. 7). Throughout the first 5 years since the war breakout, the members of the council acted on behalf of the Sultan in negotiating protections and securing military aid in the Straits Settlements.

Council of Eight Activities

The Council of Eight was a medium of propaganda and an agent for procuring military aid, protection, and funds. A publication narrated that:

"(...) Though by blockade Acheen itself was speedily deprived of opportunities to come into contact with the outside world, there were Acehnese settled or residing in the Straits Settlements and the Malayan Peninsula, who zealously set to work to promote their country's cause according to their own ideas; they were aided in their effort by Moham-medans of all nationalities. The Chinese traders too, suffering from the blockade, and other adventures, did not remain behind in striving to damage the Dutch (...)" ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

Since the Sultan of Aceh did not convey specific commands prior to the appointment of Teuku Ibrahim as the representative of foreign affairs, the activities that were delivered were based on the Acehnese communal initiative in Penang. Numerous efforts were done for one aim, helping the Acehnese reclaim their independence from the Dutch. It could perhaps be understood from the incident that when the British envoy came to convey the Queen's objection to assisting the Aceh war, the Sultan, who was of a young age, and especially his royal representatives, were not alerted of the progress of events caused by the Aceh party in Penang ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

The Acehnese approached numerous European and Non-European Consulates for aid. The Dutch used these particular activities as an excuse to continue their ex-

cesses over Aceh. Those European powers were the British Government, consulates of America and Denmark. Presumably, the Italian and French consulates too were not able to skip the Acehnese persuasion attempts. Besides that, the Siam consulate was a non-European power that was recorded to have a link with this issue as revealed in one of Strait Settlement news publications.

The action of Aceh Sultanate on negotiating the alliance with the British in the Strait Settlements and America had been highlighted in various newspapers around the world since 1872. *The New York Times*, for instance, quoted *de Java Bode* on Aceh's attempt to seek English Protection ("The War in Acheen", 1873, p. 8). This basically comes from the activities of a Tamil Muslim convert, Panglima Muhammad Tibang and a Riaunese, Muhammad Ariffin, whose position as Sultan's seal bearer was later disputed (Reid, 2005, pp. 336-354). Furthermore, it was also informed that the Acehnese were willing to hand over regions to the British government as long as it attained help to expel the Dutch from the country (Alteram, 1875, p. 4). The British, however, changed its stand on Aceh as its oldest ally after the signing of 1871 treaty where the British exchanged Aceh for African gold possessions from the Dutch ("Items From the Java Papers", 1875, p. 2).

The Queen of England conveyed a letter to the Sultan in which she rejected giving any form of assistance and suggested that Aceh acknowledge the sovereignty of the Netherlands. It seems that this letter did not reach the hand of the Sultan since, by the time the letter bearer came to the palace, it was already occupied by the Dutch while the Sultan himself fled to avoid the cholera epidemic. The letter was then handed over to the commanding general of the Dutch in an expectation that it would be delivered to the Sultan in another opportunity ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). Afraid of being misunderstood, the British then sent another ship named *Thalia* to Aceh by the aid of a mediator of Arab origins, the Sultanate received the letter ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

Besides that, the lobby of the council had probably reached the Denmark consulate in Singapore. Considering the fact that the British and Denmark consulate concluded a treaty on 'Mutual Extradition of Criminals' ratified in Copenhagen on March which came into effect on July 1873 weakened either side of the society with regards to responding to the Acehnese pleas ("Untitled", 1873, p. 11). There are no reliable narratives that explain this agreement between the British and Denmark that can relate directly to the impact of Acehnese intense negotiation activities. However, the Acehnese Sultan was known to be keen on employing Europeans, included the Danes as his advisers. For instance, a Danish man who

was believed to be a spy and supervisee to the Sultan was captured in Aceh's palace during the second Dutch expedition in 1874. Through his knowledge, the Dutch gathered information on the booty found around the palace and in Kota Babi such as two legendary cannons infamously labelled as 'a handful of pepper guns' (*Lada sicupak*) gifted by the Ottoman Sultan for an exchange of pepper presumably in the 1560s ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

Beyond that, the Acehnese from the council approached the Siam consulate in Singapore. The Siam minister that received them for discussion for war assistance was Chow Phya Baduwongse a.k.a Phraklang who later refused to help both materially and immaterially due to concern over the mutual relationship between Bangkok and the Hague ("Items from the Java Papers", 1875, p. 2).

Other similar activities were also suspected to happen at the Italian and French consulates. Based on the publication of a newspaper in İstanbul, the accusation of Aceh seeking an alliance with France and Italy was a lie propagated by the Dutch to create a perception of malice against Acheen ("Items From the Java Papers", 1873, p. 12) and indirectly would justify for an open war.

Such activities in the Strait Settlements increased the concern of the Dutch who blamed the British for their silence. The council initiatives succeeded in decreasing the number of native chief submissions as revealed in the news where an aged and influential Acehnese *uleebalang* (noble) named Rajah Bendahara was persuaded by a representative of the council to cancel his intention to submit to the Dutch agent in Penang with his other fellow countrymen. It was encouraged strongly than by his son in law, Teuku Ibrahim, who then succeeded to prevent him from any submission ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

Due to insecurities over economical interest, the British then put in place radical measures to stop the collaborative provocation of citizens in the colony. A treaty on prohibition to assist fugitives in each colony was signed in 1874 between the British and the Dutch which immediately took effect on every Acehnese fugitive and aid in the Strait Settlements.

Besides participating in diplomatic initiatives, the Council of Eight was simultaneously known as the centre of information pertaining to the state of war in Aceh. Through Aceh visitors, exchanges of letters and telegrams from the field of war, along with proactively publicized materials in colonial newspapers, stories from Acehnese field of war interspersed diverse information in the region.

Among the letters that were confiscated by the Dutch in Kutaraja, some of them were from the Council. Various intentions had been stated in these letters. One of them is an intention to collaborate with influential prince namely Pangeran Hidayat who was banished from Banjarmasin which resulted in the more intense focus on individuals' movement within Aceh ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). Two more letters that fell in the hands of the Dutch were from Panglima Polem to the representatives in Penang, explaining that the war would be impossible to carry without the supply of ammunition and weaponry materials so that he requested this to be fulfilled ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 2).

The news and information coherently link to the evidence preserved among colonial correspondences in the region reflected that the Council of Eight acted as an initiator of supplying ammunition and medically used opium. This council was aided by Muslims from diverse communities, including the Chinese whose trade suffered from the blockade ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). The council's hospitality turned into a secure place of refuge. In 1874, there were 270 Acheinese pilgrims in Penang whose returned was disrupted by Dutch sea blockade; the council maintained necessary actions to keep their return chances wide open (Reid, 2005, p. 140).

The End of the Council of Eight

There were two elements that contributed to the demise of the activities of the council. Firstly, the political shift in Aceh concentrated mainly on the existence of presumably unfavorable leaders corresponding with matters of war and the council activities. Secondly, financial disadvantages experienced by the council in Penang further weakened the council members. These two points are elaborated below.

In 1874, Sultan Mahmud Syah died of cholera, which left Sultanate temporarily in the hands of renown elites. His successor was only 11 years old ("Items From the Java Papers", 1875, p. 1) when coronated in 1875 ("Items From the Java Papers", 1875, p. 1), the sultanate administration was subsequently handed over to Tuanku Hasyim Bangtamuda and Panglima Polem (Alfian, 1987, p. 56), two militarily experienced octogenarians, who were among the most trusted advisers to the previous Sultans. The sudden death of the former Sultan triggered significant instability towards the way of war progress which seemed to play a significant role in shaking the balance inside the Council of Eight. Disagreement on the activities of the council in Penang led to the replacement of Teuku Ibrahim with Teuku Meuraksa (Lubis, 2009, p. 78). This further created insecurity among the council members.

This shifting authority drove opposition against peace talks presumably led by elite members of the council. As revealed by news during the period, a specific Acehese headman once went for peace negotiations with the Netherlands through the support and persuasion of Habib Abd al Rahman al Zahir and Teuku Ibrahim who were going to return to Aceh after the said event. The report mentioned that the representatives had sent a telegraph to Batavia regarding the negotiation on peace deal and reconstruction of Aceh as a native state. The Acehese civilians opposed the development ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). Another letter was sent to the Aceh Sultanate persuading for "peace negotiations with the Dutch so that the old commercial relations could be resumed". This argument was foiled by the combatant circles during a meeting which was attended by Panglima Polim, Tunku Nanta, along with other key *uleebalang* ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 2).

Such refusal event was understandable considering realities of Acehese resistance throughout the previous centuries that were hesitant for any form of submission. Although their decreasing number led to resistance weakness from time to time, it had never lowered their spirit. Sometimes, the relentless resistance continued with numerous attacks conducted by more than 3000 people who marched from Peusangan and Meureudu ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 2). This included a series of fortifications from the coasts to the mountains which were continuously constructed. The Acehese in Trumon, Tapak Tuan, and Analabu (now Meulaboh) were committed people protecting their lands, and thus rejected any peace agreements ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). However, deaths of prominent figures and conditional surrender of Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir in September, 1878, during the month of fasting, where he was promised annual stipends and permission to retire to Arabia ("Java News", 1878, p. 5) contributed further to the weakening and demise of the council.

Other reasons that perhaps contributed to the ending activities were difficulties in financing the war. In 1878, Teungku Muda Nyak Malim sued a Chinese trading company named Khoo Tean Tek & Ors on the breach of contract due to the lack of payment by the latter on the purchase and delivery of pepper in Aceh in 1873. The case was then barred due to the ended statue of limitation which supported the plaintiffs only for three years since the case took place (Kyshe, 1885, p. 453). Around the same year, the Sultan of Aceh owed \$41,000 from a Chinese, trader named Lim Guan Teet which was not recovered as the debt. The case was heard in British Court in Penang in 1882 where an Arab member of the Council of Eight

named Syeikh Ahmad Baschaib acted as the defendant (Kyshe, 1885, pp. 536-539). Such financial trouble express the difficulties that contributed to the further paralysis of the council itself.

Although the trust of elites of the Sultanate towards the council decreased, the communication with Penang continued throughout the war. The tradition of trade with Aceh that was rich with sugar cane, pepper, nutmeg, betel nut, copra (Hurgronje, 1898, p. 82), naturally compelled the Dutch to allow the Keling and the Chinese from Penang, either on behalf of the British representative of trade or for personal trade, to conduct commerce in the coastal areas of Ulee Lheu and Idi. Through these traders, the information on the war spread to other parts in the Archipelago. The disseminated information was very sensitive and controversial, especially regarding the Acehnese' perspective towards the Dutch and treatment to the natives. When Teuku Umar proved his betrayal, the information from the Keling and Chinese traders that came out of Aceh via Penang had significantly influenced the perceptions of international communities towards the Dutch (Hurgronje, 1994, pp. 58-59).

Penang Response to the Council of Eight's Activities

Some sources noted the Penangites' increasing concerns towards the Acehnese struggle against the Dutch. There are several reasons behind this. Firstly, the Dutch justification for war against Aceh was unfair. The second was the unpredictable Acehnese victory in 1873 where general commander, J. F. Koehler's the death, followed with death of several other key commanders causing a major retreat from the field of war. Thirdly, the activities of the Council of Eight through Penang and Singapore succeeded in reviving the pulse of anti-colonization. Here the writer discusses the latter point.

The lobby activities of the council sparked numerous questions on whether the ambiguous Dutch remarks on slavery and plundering activities in the Straits commanded by the Acehnese were true and whether it should be resolved by military means ("Items From the Java Papers", 1873, p. 2; "Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 2; "Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 5). Further, the unconcluded decisions on the treaty of 1857 between the Dutch and the Sultan of Aceh (Justice, 1873, p. 7; "Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1), following with "purposefully excluded all mention of Acheen" in the draft Treaty of 1868 which was modified for the Treaty of 1871, were still controversial ("the Dutch in Sumatra", 1874, p.

1). The point is that the treatment of the Dutch and the British towards Aceh was heavily challenged. Responsible persons representing this newspaper formed an opposition and called for justices over the ill fate befalling Aceh.

A high number of British traders and travellers expressed their disagreement with the Dutch decision against Aceh. A publication in 1874 said that: "Hundreds and thousands (of people) have been made unhappy." ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1). Stuart Herriot, a British born trader based in Penang and known as a productive thinker, is one of the people that questioned the justification of the war and opposed the progress. His residence in Penang presumably created chances of contact with the members of the council and channeled through their perspectives and intentions ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

The information that he had presented to the newspaper was probably obtained from a council member as the newspaper stated that it was from the "most trustworthy channel from Acheen" whose relatives and friends were residing in Penang (T.E.R.F, 1876, p. 2), such as that of the Council of Eight. This leads to a further argument for the invalidity of the war and indirectly pressured the Dutch to reconsider its decision. However, the Dutch were not keen on fulfilling the expectation. Instead, the approaches of the Council of Eight towards its European counterparts were used as the justification to strike back and validity of invasions by the Dutch (Justice, 1873, p. 7).

After the Queen officially refused assisting in any matters related to the Acheen war, The British failed to respond to the cries of its own citizen in the Strait Settlements. There has been disagreement over the attitudes of the British towards its oldest ally in the Straits of Malacca. In 1875, a man under the pseudonym of Audi Alteram Partem reminded the folks of Britain in the Strait Settlements about the uncivilized amnesiac attitudes of the British on Aceh matters (Partem, 1875, p. 4).

After all the ongoing debate over the war got to be pulled or not or whether justice should prevail, the Acehnese threw back the Dutch by slaying their general commander who immediately resulted in a fatal blow of humiliation vocalized by the international press. This impacted by the growing activities of the council and those directly affected by the war to contribute to the Achenese requests.

Most of the mosques in Penang and other places in the Strait Settlements disseminated the news on the ongoing war. It was followed with the collection of voluntary funds to help in providing not only ammunition but also medical assistance to those battling on the ground. At the end of 1874, it was recorded that 100,000 Spanish dollars were collected (Veer, 1985, p. 88).

Such responses feared the colonial government of increasing anti-colonial sentiments. Fear that the spirit of the Acehnese would contaminate the native's minds in the Straits Settlements and Malaya that would overthrow British rule in the area. To combat such perspective, the British established numerous restrictive regulations appointed to decrease support towards the Acehnese cause and its fugitives. For instance, the British law with the help of the Danish government constituted punishment for helping the Acehnese ("Untitled", 1873, p. 11). Furthermore the British concluded a prohibition of transfer of war material from its colony to another part of Malayan Peninsula and Eastern Archipelago ("the Dutch in Sumatra", 1874, p. 3; "Partem", 1875, p. 4.) which was presumably committed by those sympathizers for their Acehnese counterparts. One of them was Syed Muhammad al-Attas, the leader of Muslim secret societies in Penang, who supplied arms to the Acehnese resistance in the 1870s (Lubis, 2009, p. 78).

To further inspect the impact of the war or the so called increasing fanaticism resulted from the Aceh resistance, Dutch Government sent its Honorary Advisors on Native Affairs to Colonial Government, Karl Frederick Holle to Singapore in 1873 to investigate a wave of supports on Aceh's resistance. He later confirmed that there was increasing outrage towards colonial regimes resulted from Acehnese outrage flamed through the widespread anti colonial narratives brought by the pilgrims (Laffan, 2003, p. 82).

However, the treatment of the British towards Aceh followed with restrictions on interfering with the war through the establishment of some excessive laws which involved arrest, confiscation, conviction, and economic threat; the activities of the council, gradually weakened. As of the realities in Singapore, *Strait Times* recorded that "More important was the influence of the war on the Mohammedan population, who exhibited great sympathy for the Acehnese cause, and whose principal and most fanatical headmen left nothing untried, at first, to aid the enemy directly or indirectly. Their effort, however, 'did not succeed so well as they had hoped, and, at the end of the year, they become calmer and caused but little trouble.'" ("Items From the Java Papers", 1874, p. 1).

Looking at the responses from the field of war, there were some interesting views that the Dutch witnessed on their battlefield. Convicts from the Nicobar and Andaman Islands escaped and fled to Aceh and were seen as soldiers in the battlefield. In January 1874, the Dutch witnessed in the open battle that the Acehnese fighters were aided by the refugees and convicts who escaped the Nicobar Island and the Andaman Sea and were fighting skillfully with banned Ceylon rifles ("War

in Acheen”, 1874, p. 2). On September 1874, more fugitive was seen in Acheen (“Items From the Java Papers”, 1874, p. 12). Till next year, the convicts still chose Aceh as their refuge location (“Items From the Java Papers”, 1875, p. 2). Beside those, the Dutch also witnessed natives from Nias Island among the Acehnese fighters (“Java Items” 1876, p. 1).

Conclusion

Scanty indigenous sources provide a challenge for constructing narratives on the Acehnese Council of Eight in early years of war against the Dutch. Its existence as revealed in previously existing literature traced from a confidential colonial correspondence, are indeed investigatable through the proliferation of newspapers in the Strait Settlements. Tailored from evidence provided, the Council of Eight can be seen to be a political unit and an anti-colonialism voice established to seek international support to win back Aceh’s territories from the Dutch.

Council of Eight was run from Penang through the request of Sultan Mahmud Syah’s shadow administration represented by his nephew, Teuku Ibrahim who gathered initiatives from several multi-racial influential commandants and merchants. Its strategies and negotiations took place based on communal initiatives led by Teuku Paya, Teuku Nyak Malem and Syed Abd al Rahman al Zahir. Their contacts with the British, American, Danish, Italian, French, and Siamese consulates in the Strait Settlement aimed to pursue military aid and political recognition, which heightened fear of the Dutch who later accused the British government of breaking agreements that both parties signed in 1871, and later pressured the implementation of new amendments towards treatment and aid given to the Acehnese side. For such development, British civilians in the region condemned the decision, called it the betrayal of the oldest and closest ally to the Acehnese.

The activities were intensified to the extent of smuggling of arms, opium, poultry, and rice as the sea blockade induced by the Dutch in Aceh led famine and further intensified Dutch barbaric treatment. The exchange of information led by the Acehnese incomers found sympathy among the Muslims and non-Muslims in the region who aided in funds, protests, the establishment of the anti-colonial unit and direct involvement in the ground battle. On the other hand, numerous anti-colonial events took place in Penang as the result of the activities of the Council of Eight. The existence and activities of the Council of Eight significantly challenged through an official implementation of law toward Acehnese fugitives and scrutiny

over any form of delivered aid. This resulted in the restriction of the activities of the council. Numerous key figures returned to Aceh.

In 1876, the political fragility and insecurities in Aceh intensified due to the demise of influential figures, surrender, and betrayals which finally divided the Council of Eight. This was reflected in 1876 where Teuku Paya, one of the strongest funders and influential figures were killed during the battle. A number of other key figures submitted to the Dutch. In 1878, another fatal blow was delivered when Syed Abd al Rahman al-Zahir followed in the footsteps of surrenders. For the rest of the years, numerous Council of Eight members such as Teuku Muda Nyak Malim and Syekh Ahmad Baschaib was taken to the Strait Settlement court of justice dealing with a high amount of due payments yet to be returned by Sultan of Aceh. The elimination of the key figures choked the existence of the council. To sum up, the Council of Eight from the years of 1873- 1876 is marked as the last official international political body acting under the Sultanate of Aceh.

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