



A Transformation of Indonesian Military Armed Forces into Profession of Arms after President Suharto's Resignation

Wanwichit Boonprong

Institute of Political Science: School of Politics, Economics and Globalization, Rangsit University,
Pathum Thani, Thailand

Corresponding author, E-mail: wanwichit@hotmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to investigate the factors that influenced the political transformation of Indonesian armed forces into the profession of arms after the internal uprisings in 1998 as well as to examine the development of Indonesian armed forces in the period after the President Suharto's resignation to the era of augmented democracy. The study was conducted using a synthesis of documents and in-depth interviews with five informants specializing in Indonesia's political issues. The results showed that the major factors influencing the political transformation of Indonesia's armed forces included the economic crisis in Asia as well as the unceasing growth of the middle-class people who participated in political movements and encouraged an uninfringed politics caused by military forces. Furthermore, it was found that the cultivation of democratic principles among the profession of arms had gained acceptance from the society, and it also generated the positive image for Indonesia as a successful country in democracy building.

Keywords: *Indonesia Armed Forces, Democracy, Military Professionalism, Middle Class*

1. Introduction

Generally, the countries which had been colonized often left their politics in the hands of the military forces. After these countries had gained independence from the colonizers, the military forces were still in charge of maintaining the dominance and the authoritarian system established by their colonizers. (Huser, 2012)

This pattern could be applied to Indonesia which gained independence from the Netherlands in August 1945. The Indonesian armed forces played essential roles in the politics in terms of maintaining national security as well as instilling the state's political ideologies on their citizen. Their influence increased greatly during the coup d'etat in 1966 which led the country into an era of new order regime under the President Suharto's leadership. He constructed the system called 'Dual Functions' in which the government and the society were mainly dominated by the military armed forces. This system had caused a domino effect throughout the region in 1998. Suharto's authoritarian regime system lasted for more than 3 decades (Blair, 2013). However, due to the currency crisis in Asia during 1997, the armed forces that supported him became insecure and were also worsened by the growth of educated middle-class people along with the civil society's political movements demanding democracy and decentralization (Lane, 2019). Furthermore, the economic inequality stemmed from corruptions among the government officials had ignited the anger among people until the protests and riots occurred in Jakarta, the capital city, and in other big cities. These riots had escalated and turned into a confrontation between the military armed forces and the civilians. After this incident, Suharto had made the decision to resign as president of Indonesia. In addition, the loss of territory and the allegation of human rights violation in Timor-Leste caused Indonesian military armed forces to lose most of its prestige and civilians' trust (Patunru, Pengestu & Basri, 2018). The military armed forces, therefore, had decided to reduce their roles in the politics in order to regain faith among the civilians by transforming the military.

In terms of the transformation of Indonesian armed forces into the profession of arms which held a strong democratic ideology, the political scientists had proposed the military-civilian partnerships (Siddiq, 2017) in which both parties respected the roles and responsibilities of each other. This kind of relationship existed in democratic countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and France.

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After the Cold War, many government agencies in the United States had reduced their size and the military had also changed their roles. The retired soldiers had become the counselors in the security agencies in the United States as well as in other countries. This helped both parties to be able to work closely, especially when there were new threats in which the help from the military was inevitably needed.

Bamrungsuk (2006), a Thai scholar in security, explained the concept of civilian control of the military and proposed the use of good governance principles which emphasized the clarity and transparency in the working system. He mentioned that this concept would strengthen the democratic political system and is well suited with the developing countries, especially those in the transition period to democracy. In addition, Surachart had divided the concept of good governance into two components which were the participation of civil society in the development and the roles and responsibilities of the state in the administration and social services. The second component could be divided into five aspects including 1) the legitimacy of the government, 2) the acceptance of transparency inspection, 3) the protection of human rights based on the international standard, 4) the decentralization of administration, and 5) the civilian control of the military. The last aspect could be deemed to the power relations in which the military reduced its political roles and accepted the civilian political leadership.

Once Indonesia turned its back to Suharto's dictatorship and embraced the administration of the civilian government and the political participation of the civil society, the Indonesian military armed forces had been completely transformed. The Economist Intelligence Unit compared Indonesia with Thailand, a country with a government intervened by the military, in order to see differences in the democracy index. The results were shown in the table below;

Table 1 The democracy index ranking of Indonesia and Thailand

Country	2006	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Thailand	90	93	98	100	107	106
Indonesia	65	49	49	48	68	65

In 2006, the first year the democracy index was published, Indonesia was identified as a country with flawed democracy, but Indonesian military armed forces had received much admiration from the attempt to transform themselves into the profession of arms since 1998. The positive sign of the democracy building in Indonesia also stemmed from the vision of the former President B.J. Habibie who succeeded Suharto and rejected the appointment of Suharto's relative as the Commander in Chief of the army (Mcdonald, 2015), and promoted the participation of new generation soldiers in the transformation of the military. In addition, he also passed laws that limited the military power over politics which was a new dimension in building democracy in Indonesia.

2. Objectives

2.1 To investigate factors influencing the political transformation of Indonesian armed forces into the profession of arms after the uprising in 1998.

2.2 To examine the development of Indonesia in the period after President Suharto's resignation to an era of democracy strengthening.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Population and Samples

The samples in this study included five Indonesian informants who were selected using a purposive sampling method.

3.2 Research Instrument

In order to elicit data from the informants, interviews were employed. There were both open-ended and close-ended questions focusing on three aspects which were the political roles of Indonesian armed forces, internal political crisis, and the growth of democracy in the country.



3.3 Data Collection

The researcher spent six months collecting the data using the following procedure;

3.3.1 Documentary Research

The documentary research was conducted through the analysis of documents related to the political changes in Indonesia after the uprising in 1998 as well as textbooks about the improvement standards of the profession of arms.

3.3.2 Interview

This study employed an in-depth interview and the informants were five eminent people of Indonesia who had witnessed various important incidents in the country. These five informants included politicians, scholars, and soldiers selected by a purposive sampling. The details of each informant were presented below;

1. Marty Natalegawa, a former minister of Foreign Affairs (2009 – 2014)
2. Rear Admiral Suyanto Thamrin, Head of Institution of Educational Development and Quality Assurance in Indonesia Defense University (IDU)
3. Philips Vermonte, Executive Director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
4. Dr. Aditya Perdana, Director of Centre for Political Studies, University of Indonesia
5. Colonel Navy Agus Adriyanto, Lecturer of Indonesia Defense University.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study were as follows;

4.1 The factors influencing the political transformation of Indonesia armed forces into the profession of armed after the uprising in 1998 were presented in the table below;

Table 2 Factors influencing the political transformation of Indonesian military armed forces after 1998

Name of the Informant	Main Contents
Marty Natalegawa	- The society had pressed the military to act neutral and not to support President Suharto. - People demanded democracy, freedom, and political participation.
Suyanto Thamrin	- The economic crisis in Asia greatly affected the political status of Indonesian armed forces - People could no longer bear with the privilege system among the elite which was full of corruption, collusion, and nepotism.
Philips Vermonte	- People's uprising and the ineffectiveness of the measures to solve the economic problems - The loss of territory in Timor-Leste which caused the people to lose their faith in the military.
Aditya Perdana	- The military was accused of violating human rights leading to a negative image of the worldview.
Agus Adriyanto	- The ineffectiveness of the government in solving the economic crisis.

From table 2, it could be seen that all informants tended to agree that the main factor influencing the political change of Indonesian armed forces was the economic crisis. It tremendously affected the cost of living and led to the government's delays in finding solutions to economic problems as well as the disagreement between the military leader and the government. From such crisis, the military, therefore, decided to be politically neutral and no longer support Suharto as the President of Indonesia. In addition, the political transformation of the military also stemmed from the growth of educated middle-class people, especially university students, who had been greatly supported by the people in the demonstrations against the military's dictatorship.

From the insightful interview, all informants agreed that the crisis in Indonesia stemmed from the patronage system constructed by President Suharto and those who were closely connected to him. Such system weakened the economic decentralization leading to the economic inequality. Furthermore, the



problems were worsened by President Suharto's ignorance towards the poor as well as public expression. He also implemented unfair laws to suppress people who protested and demanded the government's proper solutions to problems.

4.2 The interview contents related to the development of the Indonesian military armed forces in the period after Suharto's resignation to an era of augmented democracy were presented in the table below

Table 3 The development of the Indonesian military armed forces after Suharto's resignation

Name of the Informant	Main Contents
Marty Natalegawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lesson learned from the Muslim countries with an effective military management such as Turkey and Egypt were applied to the political transformation of Indonesian military armed forces. - The former President Yudhoyono was behind the military transformation from dictatorship to political neutralization.
Suyanto Thamrin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The decision to join UN peacekeeping force had brought more dignity, benefits, as well as international supports to the Indonesian military armed forces.
Philips Vermonte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All military officers could not hold the civil servant or local official positions without resigning from the military forces. The military officers must submit their resignation if they wished to stand for the election. After they had resigned, they were unable to return to their military position.
Aditya Perdana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The military's dual-functions must be terminated. - The military armed forces took orders from the elected President. - The military employed the concept of good governance in the appointment or the transfer of high commanders or chiefs of armed forces so that the power and authority would not be centralized in one armed force. - All Indonesian military officers had no rights to vote since the accusation of being unneutral may arise due to the fact that the President came from the election. - The military armed forces learned from the democratic country like the United States of America that the coup d'état brought various negative outcomes.

From table 3, it could be seen that after Suharto's resignation, the size of the military had been reduced. Indonesian national police was no longer under control of the military. In addition, the dual-functions system and the appointment of military officers as members of the parliament were completely abolished. The military had no rights to intervene politics and if the military officers wished to stand for the election, they had to resign beforehand. Furthermore, Indonesian military also joined UN peacekeeping force in the countries where dispute and civil war existed in order to gain acceptance and generate a positive image about human rights protection. All informants posited that Indonesia could not fully implement the western norms and ideologies in the development of democracy. However, the country had learned from the Muslim countries such as Turkey and Pakistan, and adopted what suited it. In addition, the informants agreed that the government might create the right environment for the military so that it would be able to adjust itself to the global context under democratic rules.

President Suharto's resignation along with the national economic crisis had directly affected the military and brought about the military transformation. The military had to decrease its political roles, the economic exploitation, and the social privilege that it used to have in the past. Moreover, one of the key figures leading to the transformation of military to the profession of arms was Lieutenant General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who received the consensus from most generals and soldiers in the military to be a pioneer who drafted the military transformation principles. Furthermore, Lieutenant General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had won the election and become the president of Indonesia for two consecutive terms (10 years), and this helped the transformation of the military to be conducted in a continuous manner. As a result, the image of Indonesia had also become more positive comparing to the time when Indonesia was in President Suharto's hands.



Therefore, from the discussion on the transformation of Indonesian military armed service to the profession of arms based upon the military-civilian partnerships proposed by Siddiq (2017) and the concept of good governance and transparency proposed by Bamrungsuk (2006) indicated that the internal economic crisis and the civilians' anger towards the government's ineffectiveness had forced the military to transform. However, after the political transformation and the decline of dictatorship, the military had gained much admiration from the decision to work under the leadership of the civil government that came from an election. The military granted the government full authority in administration and became a government counselor and a policy implementer instead. However, the public still question if the military-civilian partnership system would last. If Indonesia encounters with any severe crisis like the uprising in 1998, how the military would position itself. Will the military intervention become a choice?

5. Conclusion

The development and transformation of the Indonesian military armed forces after President Suharto's resignation was a result of uncontrollable internal incidents caused by the economic crisis in Asia. Such crisis had seeped into Indonesia during the time when the country was ruled under dictatorship in which the military had gained a lot of benefits for more than three decades. The political participation of the middle-class people and university students who can no longer tolerate the military's inability to control the confrontation and bloodshed in the country and the loss of faith and trust in the military after the loss of territory in Timor-Leste was a key factor that disillusioned the military. The military started to see that dictatorship would spiral the country into chaos and stated to open the ground for democracy. The military had adopted the western concept of profession of arms which made Indonesian military armed forces a good model for other developing countries, especially Myanmar who learned from Indonesia and reduce the political roles of its military. On that note, Thailand should also learn from this context and listen to the public's voice which demands democracy free from the military's intervention in order to avoid serious disputes which may arise in the future.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

In the future, Thailand should learn from the case of Indonesian military armed force. Furthermore, Thai military armed forces should welcome the public participation in order to find the best way to transform the military into the profession of arms on the path of democracy.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Studies

1. Further studies may investigate the development of the military armed forces of other Asian countries with similar or different social contexts.
2. Further studies may investigate the development of the profession of arms under the rules of democracy by focusing on successful countries as well as those that need to transform the military armed forces into the profession of arms.

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