

Conference Paper

The Role of Indonesian National Armed Forces in the Civil Conflict in Maluku

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Abstract.

The civil conflict that occurred in Ambon caused the Indonesian government to send the Indonesian National Armed Forces to assist the police in securing Ambon. The involvement of the military and security guards in the Ambon area proved helpful in providing a sense of security, even though many people criticize the involvement of the Indonesian National Armed Forces in securing the conflict in Ambon. The study methodology is descriptive qualitative. Researchers conducted field research in Ambon, through interviews with the community, religious leaders, community leaders, and military leaders. The author has also conducted archival research. The results of the study show that the Indonesian National Armed Forces played an important role in assisting in securing the Ambon conflict. Although the Ambon conflict has ended, the Indonesian National Armed Forces is still assigned to assist the police in security.

Keywords: military, civil conflict, Maluku

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1. Introduction

The transition of military rule from Sukarno to Suharto ended the dominating role of civilians in government. At the beginning of its establishment, the military was intended to be a means of national defense, then in the New Order era it expanded its role in various fields such as politics and the economy. After President Suharto's rule ended, the military was in a cornered position. The military was considered as one of the state institutions that enjoyed the power of the New Order [1]. The push for military reform coincided with the fall of the Suharto government. Reforms that demand a change agenda in various fields, one of which is the military to leave the dual function of ABRI and business, the military is returned to the barracks and only carries out its main duties in the defense sector[2,3].

Along with demands for reform in Indonesia that ended Suharto's rule and forced the military to return to barracks. Various social and political conflicts have emerged in Indonesia, such as the case of the release of East Timor, Sambas Madura, the Poso Case, the Maluku Case, Aceh and Papua [4]

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The conflict that occurred in Maluku surprised many parties because since the rebellion of the Republic of South Maluku, Maluku has never experienced a major conflict. Maluku has a diversity of religions, cultures and local languages. However, after the independence of Indonesia, Maluku has never experienced social and religious conflicts as big as the 1999 conflict [5]

In the New Order government, Maluku was a region that received less attention, causing socio-economic disparities. After the New Order, during the Government of BJ Habibie, Gus Dur, Megawati Sukarno Putri, Maluku and North Maluku received attention with the existence of social conflict in Maluku 1999 [6]

Maluku, from the demographic and socio-cultural aspects, is very harmonious, even though in local politics there is political competition between groups which sometimes brings up issues of religion and ethnicity [7–9]. A big question arose for the public, what was the factor that caused the riots in Maluku. The riots in Maluku are often associated with the weakening role of the military after the reform, but there are those who argue that the conflict in Maluku cannot be separated from the military's game to strengthen the military's gaining power in politics in Indonesia.

After the reformation, the military in Indonesia was increasingly marginalized because of business politics in Indonesia with the riots in various regions in Indonesia, the military again had opportunities and roles, the military had a political alliance with the civilian government [10]. In the Maluku riots, the civil administration experienced difficulties in handling the riots causing the government to ask the military to get involved in handling the social conflict in Ambon.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative approach, in which researchers conducted observations and field research in conflict centers in Maluku. Data collection was carried out by means of interviews involving key informants from former members of the TNI, community leaders, religious leaders, activists of social and community organizations. Researchers also conducted literature studies and archival research.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. The 1999 conflict

The Ambon conflict on January 19, 1999, made the security of Ambon city uncontrollable, mass concentrations occurred at various points in Ambon city. Arson and violence

occurred. The military and police in Ambon experienced difficulties in handling mass actions. The Central Government then sent troops from the Makassar Division II Kostrad. The purpose of sending Kostrad division II Makassar troops is to carry out security in Ambon City. The presence of Kostrad troops from outside Maluku provided support to the soldiers in Maluku, but on the other hand the presence of the army in pacifying the conflict slowly dragged the army into the vortex of the conflict. Securing social conflict is very different from the assignment of the TNI in areas of military operations.

The deployment of the military in conflict areas means that the military is often the target of shootings from both Muslim and Christian communities. This condition caused many TNI members to experience frustration and emotional pressure. The TNI from the Combat Engineering unit was assigned to carry out rehabilitation, renovation of housing and facilities damaged by the conflict. The placement of Zipur troops in the border area resulted in the Zipur troops being the target of shelling from both communities. This situation causes members of the TNI to feel pressured and depressed so they are involved in conflicts defending communities that have the same identity as them. (Interview with Vice Admiral Pur Didi Setiadi)

The conflict that lasted for a long time caused the involvement of the military in the TNI to be very large in Ambon. Initially the military from outside Maluku who were sent to Maluku came from Division II Kostrad, because the conflict was expanding and lasted for a long time causing many units to be sent in the Maluku conflict, for example from Marines, Navy, Special Forces, Combat Engineers Unit for infrastructure repair. The military in Maluku not only secures civil society conflicts but also safeguards government offices, educational institutions, public facilities and national vital objects such as Pertamina and airports. During the Maluku conflict, many public facilities were burnt by the masses, such as government or governor offices.

3.2. The Impact of Military Engagement

The military's involvement in safeguarding the Maluku conflict greatly benefited the community. At the beginning of the conflict there were riots in various areas of the city of Ambon. Security from the TNI and the Ambon Police were unable to control the riots that occurred in Ambon city. The presence of the TNI Division II Kostrad was very helpful in securing Ambon City, however, there were some people who believed that the presence of Kostrad in Ambon City made the conflict more widespread and caused many casualties due to repressive actions by the military. Kostrad, which was trained to become combat troops, experienced difficulties being assigned to resolve social conflicts. In the social conflict in Ambon, soldiers were not equipped with clear

SOPs (Standard Operational Procedures). The decisions taken by the military are more on situational considerations in the field. Wrong decision-making can cause a threat to the safety of the lives of TNI members. Many members of the TNI died while completing their task of securing the Ambon conflict. Generally they died by being shot by mobs from both the Muslim and Christian communities. TNI troops assigned to separate in the event of a conflict between the two communities often become the target of one of the communities who feel aggrieved because they judge that the military is not being fair in carrying out their security duties. Soldiers are also sometimes the target of attacks from both Muslim and Christian communities. Conflicts between units also often occur in safeguarding social conflicts in Ambon. The very large number of TNI troops in Ambon and consisting of various units made coordination difficult. Apart from the TNI, Conflict safeguards in Ambon were also carried out by the Police and Brimob. The presence of the Police from the Brimob unit is considered to be in favor of the Christian community while the Indonesian Army is considered to be defending the Islamic community. The police and army are considered to have played a role in the conflict, this has made the Maluku conflict difficult to resolve. The strong Ambon conflict with the issue of SARA caused many TNI and police officers to be judged unable to be neutral and defend their respective religious communities.

Seeing the condition of the Police and the Army who were involved in the Ambon conflict, a group of figures then proposed to the central government to send troops consisting of elements of a joint battalion tasked with providing Ambon contacts with various groups, both military and armed civilians. The military and police assisting in securing Maluku were returned to their respective units because they were seen as not being neutral and participating in the Ambon conflict.

The presence of the joint battalion in Ambon received challenges and resistance from armed groups who did not want the Ambon conflict to end. Many of the members of the combined battalion were killed. The step taken by the joint battalion was to control security in the city of Ambon by clearing the city of Ambon from armed groups in Maluku.

When the Maluku conflict occurred, many civil society owned homemade and organic firearms. Armed militias in the two communities have standard weapons owned by the TNI and Polri. This situation made it difficult for the Maluku conflict to be resolved because the peace efforts carried out by the central government, regional governments, and social organizations continued to fail because armed groups did not join or we could say grassroots movements. Grassroots groups have a direct influence on society. [11]

The security situation in Ambon which was difficult to control made Christian religious figures meet with President Gus Dur at his residence in Ciganjur, South Jakarta. The

figure asked for firmness from the state to resolve the Maluku conflict, they also asked for the replacement of the TNI Commander Wiranto who was considered to have failed to handle the Maluku conflict. They submitted a request for UN foreign troops to Maluku because they were disappointed to see the failure of the government, military and police in handling the Maluku conflict. (Interview, Pastor Agus Ulahay).

Responding to requests from Christian community groups, President Gus Dur then dismissed the TNI Commander General Wiranto from the Army and replaced him with Admiral Widodo AS from the Navy. Widodo AS previously served as Deputy Commander of the TNI. The change of commander in chief by political observers in Indonesia has always been associated with Gus Dur's efforts to provide opportunities for forces other than the army to become commander in chief of the TNI. So far the TNI Commander has always come from the Army. The background to the change in TNI commander Wiranto is inseparable from President Gus Dur's efforts to quickly resolve the Maluku conflict.

Ambon city as the capital of government in Maluku is very unsafe because many people are killed every time because of sniper shots. Firearms owned by civil society, TNI personnel, and police who participated in the Ambon riots made it difficult for the government to catch snipers who were hiding in high-rise buildings in Ambon city.

The Commander of the XIV Pattimura TNI Military Command, Brigadier General I Made Yasa, took strategic steps to restore security in Ambon by disarming civilian groups, joint battalion troops consisting of various units from the Army, Kostrad, Marines, Special Forces, and carrying out attacks base of armed militia groups.

On 22 January 2001, Hotel Wijaya II, which was used as the base for armed militias, was attacked by troops from the Joint Battalion, Yon Gab. The urban war between the Joint Battalion and the armed militias resulted in casualties among the militias and TNI Soldiers. Hotel Wijaya was successfully controlled by the Joint Battalion. The militiamen who were arrested consisted of members of the police and TNI, Major NN from the TNI, and AKBP JS and Ipda AA from the police. About 25 militiamen were arrested along with 14 firearms. The arrest of members of the TNI and Police at the Wijaya II Hotel by Yon Gab shows that there were unscrupulous members of the TNI and Polri who were involved in the Ambon riots. The involvement of the TNI and Polri in the Ambon riots was motivated by various reasons. First, group solidarity defends groups that share the same identity with them such as religious and ethnic identity. Second, economic motives, their involvement in the conflict because of the urge to make a profit, for example by selling bullets and weapons. When the conflict occurred in Ambon, many TNI and Polri bullets and weapons were circulating and used by the community. Third, the involvement of the TNI and POLRI in the conflict was caused by the factor of orders from influential forces.

The large number of firearms in circulation among civilians is caused by the conflict that lasted for a long time. This causes the community to have skills in assembling weapons manually. The Maluku conflict, which initially occurred only in the city of Ambon, then spread to various areas in Maluku. This situation led to the circulation of illegal firearms from various countries. Conflict areas are promising markets for the illegal firearms trade. The raid on the Brimob Headquarters in the Tantui area of Ambon resulted in the militia taking over the Brimob weapons. The missiles seized 900 weapons, this is what caused the Ambonese civilians to have many weapons.

Even though the peace process has been carried out in Maluku, TNI troops are still seconded to secure the Ambon area and other Maluku areas. In 2021, Kostrad regularly sends battalions to Ambon for security. The Commander of Kostrad, General Rimizar, included the sending of Kostrad Troops to keep Ambon from having another conflict because many wanted Ambon to have another flare-up. (Koran Tempo, 4 March 2021)

The presence of the TNI to safeguard the Ambon Conflict and maintain the security of Post-Conflict Ambon is part of the TNI's assistance task to the Polri institution. TNI Law No. 34 of 2004, the function of the TNI is to protect the National Defense from threats from outside countries. While the police have the task of safeguarding internal security, the TNI can carry out internal security duties if requested by the police and provide assistance, as happened in Ambon.

4. Conclusion

The Maluku conflict which occurred for a very long time caused the military to play a role in maintaining security in Ambon. The military's participation in protecting the Ambon conflict resulted in military personnel being involved in the Ambon conflict. The involvement of military personnel in the Maluku conflict was motivated by several reasons, such as reasons of primordial solidarity, economic reasons, and reasons for following orders from superiors.

Although many believe that the Indonesian military was involved in the Ambon conflict, it cannot be denied that the military in Indonesia took part in reconciling the Maluku conflict. Many members of the TNI and police were killed as a result of securing the Ambon conflict. Until now there is no legal certainty from the government as to what caused the Ambon riots and who is responsible for the Ambon riots. Although the situation in Ambon is peaceful, governmental, social, economic and educational activities are running normally, but the military, which originates from outside Java, such as Kostrad, is still maintaining security in Maluku to provide assistance and support to the police.

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- Interview:
(Interview with Vice Admiral Pur Didi Setiadi, Former Ambon Naval Base Commander)
(Pastor Agus Ulahay, Pr Crisis Center Catholic)

(Interview with Conflict Journalist Sahlan Helut)