

The Roles of the Indonesian Armed Forces in the Process of Democratisation *

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"The Indonesian Armed Forces (better known as ABRI) will remain a professional, effective, efficient, and modern defence & security power, which is always ready to secure and share its devotion to the the smooth continuance of national development. By taking into account the increasingly complicated national challenges, ABRI's devotion will always be adjusted to the current political development. The ABRI's stance of caring about the nation's destiny will be forever embedded in ABRI. ABRI will continue to be responsible for the nation and its national components and a part of the national system as well."

*General Wiranto
ABRI in the 21st Century*

The idea of establishing democracy and a democratic civil society in Indonesia has been gaining strength since the 80's. The subject on the development of democracy and the empowerment of a civil society in Indonesia has been the main agenda in various forums of discussion both in and outside Indonesia. A difference of perception and interpretation of democratisation and civil society frequently creates different opinions in society.

The perceived source of this growing desire to develop a democratic system and a civil society is the political format and

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practices of the so called New Order system which was overly emphasized by the power of the state administration, while the people's participation and empowerment was neglected. Therefore, a democratic system and culture could not grow and develop. The long neglect of the participation of the people has generated the need to build the necessary infrastructure, institutions and activities to bridge the gap between the state and the people. The building of such a system is dependent on the people's willingness, consciousness and intention to actively take part in both national life and development.

In the current Reform era, the concept of democracy and the efforts to develop it and a civil society as well have been increasingly accepted. The Indonesian people now realise that the weak civil society developed under the former New Order administration created distortions in the democratic process itself, including the absence of positive control of the state power.

And now, every citizen and every national institution, including the Armed Forces, is challenged to actively take part in the development of democracy and a civil society in Indonesia. If *ABRI* has been criticised as an institution which was too closely tied to the former government, it is now the time for *ABRI* to find out for itself whether or not it is willing and capable enough to develop democracy and a civil society. If *ABRI* was able to maintain the stability and encourage national development in the past time, the question is : Does *ABRI* also have the capability to become the leader in the development of the values, institutions and practices of a democratic and civil society in Indonesia ? This is undeniably a very critical and challenging question for *ABRI*.

To discuss the efforts to develop democracy and a civil society, we must first understand the actual condition of the Indonesian people at

this time. In other words, to know where we ought to go, we must first know where we are. In short, to develop the democracy and civil society, the Indonesian people must conduct a repositioning beforehand. They must also establish a solid and just understanding on how democratic and strong a civil society is.

There are at least 3 (three) realities of the Indonesian condition which we need to understand beforehand. They are :

First Reality : The political format and practice of the so called *New Order* government under the Soeharto regime was marked by a strong government and strictly emphasized the necessity of stability for economic development. This was due to the needs^{of} the time, but it restricted the growth of a democratic civil society.

Second Reality : The Indonesia's historical and cultural background did not fully provide the opportunity for the development of democratic institutions and values. Indonesia's lengthy history of colonialism, tribalism and the rule of sultans cannot be compared to the Western countries which have a liberal political tradition and democratic values, which in fact the West struggled for centuries to obtain.

Third Reality : The maturity, consciousness and experience of Indonesian society has not yet reached a level at which they can totally participate in the political life of the nation and become a part of the civil society.

Any effort aimed at developing democracy and a civil society must consider the political format, political culture as well as political

maturity of the Indonesian society for a democratisation is both a *structural* and also *cultural* process.

In order that as the 21st Century arrives, the Indonesian people can grow to become both capable and willing to participate in a democratic society, we must first conduct a number of conceptual, consistent and sturdy steps to develop a democratic civil society. On one hand, the government must be responsible for and encouraging the growth of a civil society. On the other hand, the Indonesian people themselves must actively and consciously take part in the process. The people should not only become the object, but also the subject of the process. The key political leaders and leaders of non-political organisation must have the capability and willingness^{ness} to act as the *prime movers*.

If the effort to develop a democratic, civil society is taken in context with the previously mentioned three realities, then the basic strategy will include : (1) the development of a democratic political system ; (2) the development of a transparent and sound political culture ; and, (3) the improvement of the constructive political participation of the people.

The future political system will include : *First*, the establishment of a symmetric and sound relationship among political institutions at which a proper system of *checks* and *balances* exists between executive, legislative and judicial branches. In the former administration, the executive branch appeared to be dominant to the point that the parliament did not seem to have any real power. *Second*, the implementation of a transparent and accountable political process which is marked by a democratic, fair and honest national election. This would allow the establishment of a trustworthy and stable change of

national leadership selection and the establishment of public policy which is in conformity with public aspirations. In the former government era, decision making was overly centralised, while the leadership recruitment was less than transparent.

The necessary political culture should include : *First*, the growth of openness and a sense of responsibility from all components, including the government. If such a condition can be established, corruption, collusion and nepotism, which have been currently condemned by the society, will not develop. *Second*, the growth of a willingness to form a consensus and agreement. The essence of democracy is obviously consensus and compromise. This is in line with the wise saying "*The minority has its say, and the majority has its way.*" Indonesia is multi-faceted country in which *consensus building* is very important. *Third*, the establishment of a new frame of mind the government no longer declares itself as the only capable institution, but regard for public opinion and potential. Such climate, i.e. the appreciation and accomodation of public aspirations, will undeniably provide a great deal of support to the empowerment of a civil society, as the society grows and develops to be more capable, independent and responsible.

The task of developing maturity, awareness and constructive participation of the people should include the following : *First*, developing a public awareness of basic rights – including human rights – and a sense of responsibility. All countries in the world, including liberal democracies, strongly emphasize a balance between *rights* and *responsibilities*. *Second*, teaching the people how to express their aspirations, guiding them to think creatively and also enabling them to convey their aspirations in an orderly and appropriate manner. All institutions in a civil society must be able to perform its control

functions and also act as a good counterpart to the government. A civil society must be able to act as the sparring partner with the state.

In response to the nation wide effort to develop democracy and a civil society, the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) must play a constructive role. Public criticism which stated that a civil society in Indonesia could not develop due to the dominating role of the military in the social and political life of the nation should be positively greeted and responded to. Such criticism that ABRI should reduce or adjust its socio-political role in such a way so as to allow for a *civil society* to grow. It is the opinion of ABRI that the intensity of ABRI's socio-political role will systematically be decreased in line with the emergence and growth of the civil society itself. Should this premise be true, ABRI will respond immediately and become an inseparable part of the adaptation process and also of the process of empowering the civil society.

For those who lack a knowledge and understanding of the role of the Indonesian military both in defence and security fields, and in national development, it is worth underlining that the Indonesian military is responsible to actively take part in the national political life. The main orientation of ABRI's socio-political role is to safeguard the state ideology and constitution ; maintain and sustain national unity and secure and dynamize national development. ABRI's socio-political role has been an inherent part of national history and was also the national consensus during the New Order government and was enacted in the Law. Therefore, it is correct to say that ABRI's socio-political role has a historical, judicial and political basis.

The military's role in Indonesian political life has created a great amount of debating. However, it should be mentioned that such discussion is also a part of the current international controversy regarding

civil-military relations. In regards to Indonesia, Samuel P. Huntington's paragraph is worth considering :

*"Future problems in civil-military relations in new democracies are likely to come not not from the military but from the civilian side of the equation. They will come from the failures of democratic governments to promote economic development and maintain law and order."*¹⁾

Inspite of the fact that not all people would agree with this point of view, Huntington's thought can be useful for providing a better understanding of the role of the Indonesian military at this time.

However, in facing the challenges and new realities of the twenty-first century, ABRI realizes that it must readjust its role in life of the nation. In regards to the Reform movement, ABRI will not only fully support it, but also will be a part of it. ABRI, under the leadership of *General Wiranto*, has established a very important historical milestone, namely the formation of a new paradigm or blueprint concerning the role and mission of ABRI in the future whose theme is : *ABRIⁱⁿ the 21st century : Redefining, Repositioning and Reactualizing of the Role of ABRI in the National Life*. Through his short speech on 21 May 1998, just after Soeharto handed his presidential power over B.J. Habibie, General Wiranto, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, stated :

*"The Armed Forces support and welcome the decision of Mr. Soeharto to step down as the President, and, based on the constitution, support Vice President B.J. Habibie as the President of the Republic of Indonesia."*²⁾

1) Samuel P. Huntington, *Reforming Civil-Military Relations* (Article written in Civil-Military Relations and Democracy, edited by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

2) DR. Salim Said, *The Military in Indonesian Politics in the Post – Soeharto Era* (Paper to be presented to the Centre of Asian Studies of the University of Hongkong, Hongkong, November 2, 1998)

According to Salim Said, a senior political analyst, Wiranto's sentence in essence means :

"ABRI after Soeharto no longer dominates politics, but only supports the government" ³⁾

The new paradigm of ABRI's socio-political role is essentially oriented to '*Indirect-role mode*' and '*Constructive role sharing*.' With the implementation of this new paradigm and concept, the active participation and involvement of ABRI in national life and development will be kept in line with the era of reform and so will be in conformity to public aspirations and demands.

Even with an indirect and more proportional role, ABRI will still hold an integral role in the development of ^{democratic} systems, values, institutions and ~~democracy~~ practices in Indonesia. The gradual reduction of the intensity of ABRI's socio-political role in the future, does not mean that ABRI will be apathetic or indifferent about where the country is headed, moreover if it heads in the wrong direction. By learning from past events, ABRI must take positive steps to prevent any excessive acts and also must be able to restrain itself from feeling that ABRI is totally responsible for any matters dealing with the national life. The role of ABRI in national development must be entirely oriented to the safeguarding of national interests, based upon the state constitution, cohesively included in the national system and in line with the aspirations of the Indonesian people.

It is wrong to see Indonesia as a country which is established, fully integrated and completely 'free from socio-political threats'. The real condition of the Indonesian people is quite different indeed. Therefore, politically speaking, it is logical and reasonable if ABRI pays

³⁾ Ibid

attention to and is involved in the responsibility of building the nation. In a seminar held in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, focusing on *ABRI in the 21st Century*, Bilver Singh explicitly mentioned :

"while the changes taking place in Indonesia and abroad must be taken cognizant of and factored into the way, ABRI's socio-political role will be actualized for the remainder of the century and beyond 2000, at the same time, sight must not be lost of the enduring threats to the Indonesian nation. By all definitions, Indonesia remains a very vulnerable nation, has been and will remain so, for along time to come. With greater openness and the global trends of rising ethno-nationalism, the society will become more pluralistic in the negative sense of the word, especially with the rise of primordialistic contentions. In these circumstances, ABRI's socio-political role would be even more relevant and an ABRI without a socio-political role will weaken the chain from Sabang to Merauke, if mismanaged, could follow the disintegration that befell the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia." ⁴⁾

What Bilver Singh stated is acceptable. It is due to the fact that the Indonesian people are quite diverse, while at the same time, the challenges they face are also very complicated. Moreover, in the current Reform era, the people demand fast, fundamental and dramatic changes. It is not that easy to make people enjoying the euphoria of a change in leadership to understand that a great and responsible change will need time and will involve a process and transition. In the midst of a national crisis, which has not yet been thoroughly overcome, any excessive movement which deviates from its goal must be strictly prevented. In this context then, *ABRI* will play a positive role by upholding stability, *law and order*, and at the same time, motivating and taking part in the Reform while also encouraging the development of *democratic civil society*.

⁴⁾ Prof. DR. Bilver Singh, *ABRI's Role in the 21st Century : The Future of Dwi Fungsi ABRI (Social -Political Function) – A Perspective* (A Paper to be presented in Seminar ABRI's Role in the 21st Century, Bandung 22 September 1998)

Finally, it is important to understand that establishing and developing democracy and a civil society is a great undertaking. This enormous task cannot be done overnight. Determination, consistency and seriousness is undeniably of great importance. All national components must be involved in a responsible manner. This of course is true for ABRI as well.

If the Indonesian people take the right steps and walk on the right path, they will be entering the twenty-first century being empowered lofty goals. And as was intended by our *founding fathers*, Indonesia will become an independent, united, sovereign, just and prosperous nation and society.

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BIOGRAPHY

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SUSILO B. YUDHOYONO CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE INDONESIAN ARMED FORCES FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Lt. General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who was born on 9 September 1949 in Pacitan, East-Java, was graduated from the Indonesian Military Academy (better known as AMN) in 1973. After several years on his duty-service, he was assigned to attend Webster University, U.S.A. for a further study and gained his Master's Degree (M.A.) in Management.

His military career both in command and staff duties in the period of 1974-1982 commenced with a number of assignments in the army operational units as unit commander as well staff and operational services. After serving as a faculty member in the Army and Command & General Staff College, he assumed the post of Secretary to Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. A brigade commander, chief of staff of a regional command and commander of a military territory were assumed afterwards. In 1977, he was assigned to a UN Peacekeeping Operations mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (the former Yugoslavia) as Chief Military Observer concurrently the Indonesian Contingent Commander. After serving as Assistant to Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Armed Forces for Socio-Political Affairs and a permanent members of the Working Group of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), he is currently appointed Chief of Staff of the Indonesia Armed Forces for Socio-Political Affairs.

During his duty-services, he has been engaged in a number of counter-insurgency operations, in addition to such various opportunities in foreign countries training's and education's as a battalion commanders course, army general staff & command college, airborne and ranger course in U.S.A., jungle warfare school in Panama, army tank course in Belgium and West Germany. Besides, he attended a variety of conferences, conducted visits, on the job training's and observations, as well as participated in joint and combined exercises in numerous countries as USA, Panama, Germany, U.K., Russian Federation, Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia. Also, he took part in a wide range of peacekeeping operations under the UN banner.

Lt. General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is married with two grown-up sons and currently in the outskirts of Jakarta.
