Security Sector Reform, Democratic Transition, and Social Violence:  
The Case of Ambon, Indonesia  

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1. Introduction

Wulf’s paper presents the general framework of security sector reform in developing and transitional countries and places it under the umbrella of “general peace-building and development programme” (p.2). It also discusses some critical issues of security sector reform in developing and transitional countries and furthermore presents a valuable framework in analysing security sector reform.

The critical contribution of his paper to the discussion of the issue of security sector reform and conflict studies is: (1) identifying elements, actors and dimensions of security sector reforms; (2) formulating the scale of potentials for security reform in countries with various degrees of conflict and violence; (3) discussing problems and dilemmas of security sector reform; (4) formulating some lessons to learn in dealing with such a fragile and sensitive project like security sector reform. However, Wulf’s paper does not discuss the linkage and the interplay between security sector reform programmes and problems and the trajectory of democratic transition. It also neglects to elaborate problems and dilemmas of security sector reform in the context of various conflict stages and situations.

In order “to fill in the gap” in Wulf’s paper, I will attempt to discuss the security sector reform project in Indonesia, within the context of democratic transition and more particularly in the setting of communal conflict taking place in Ambon, in the eastern part of Indonesia. By the term “security sector”, in this paper, I will refer particularly to military and police forces as the main elements of the security forces. I argue that security sector reform has become a major demand during the post Suharto era, but it then became complicated with the occurrence of social violence in many parts of the archipelago. I will then focus on the case of communal conflict in Ambon, and attempt to analyse the linkage and the interplay between communal violence and security sector reform that has been taking place during the transition period. I furthermore contend that the eruption of communal conflict in Ambon (and other places in Indonesia) can be seen as a symptom of the poor performance of the security sector and simultaneously has brought some handicaps for the achievement of further steps of security sector reform.

2. Security Sector Reform in Transitional Country: the Indonesia’s national panorama

The fall of Suharto in May 1998, according to the reformist Major General Agus Wirahadikusumah (1999), meant the end of the ‘invulnerability” of the Indonesian armed forces or Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI). Following the extensive exposure by the mass media of the massive human rights violations and power abuse by the TNI in the New Order era, such as in Aceh, Irian Jaya and East Timor, as well as the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists, the poor image of the TNI reached its nadir. The abrupt breakdown in its public image, according to the International
Crisis Group (ICG) (2000b, p. 3), led to a significant decline in the military’s state of mind and brought TNI to a defensive position never before experienced. Then, the abolition of “Dwifungsi ABRI” (the dual-function of the military) became a major demand of the pro-democracy movement (Said 2002, p. 169). Furthermore, a research team from the Indonesian Science Institute (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, LIPI), even argued that “Dwifungsi ABRI” was “the source of the national disaster” (Sumber Bencana Nasional) (Nusa Bhakti et al., 1999, p. 59).

Since 1966 General Suharto¹ had run the country under the banner of the ‘New Order’ with the military, the bureaucracy and the military-sponsored party Golongan Karya (Golkar, the Functional Groups) as its back bone. The critical features of the military during the New Order era were, first, a territorial structure throughout the archipelago paralleling that of the bureaucracy; second, the militarisation of the bureaucracy through ‘Kekaryaan’;² third, its control over intelligence services; fourth, its extensive involvement in building a wide business network. Through its territorial structure all over Indonesia from the national, provincial, district and sub-district to the village levels, the military developed an extensive and very strong instrument with which to play a key political role in society.³ In addition, many military officers, either active or retired, occupied critical positions in government and the bureaucracy, from the national to the village levels (See Figure 3.1). Its dominant position was enhanced by its full control over intelligence services in both civilian and military institutions.⁴ Military domination was expressed through the doctrine of “Dwifungsi ABRI” (the dual-function military)—an ideology by which the military legitimised and justified its multiple roles, as both a security and defence force as well as a social-political force.⁵ As a result, the military was obviously the ruling force during the New Order era.

Responding to the public demand for the eradication of “Dwifungsi ABRI”, TNI Headquarters then declared on 5 October 1998 a set of political reforms within the TNI called the “Paradigma Baru” (New Paradigm) of the TNI. The New Paradigm of the TNI included the following elements: first, a change in its position and methods such that [TNI] would no longer necessarily be in the forefront; second, a change from the concept of occupying to influencing; third, a change in the method of influencing from direct to indirect means; fourth, a readiness to engage in political role-sharing (joint decision-making in the case of important national and governmental issues) with other components of the nation.⁶

¹ Following his arrival at the pinnacle of power, President Suharto gradually but confidently accumulated power: his appointees controlled each of the key executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Thus, he shifted from the primus inter pares of a collegial army leadership to become the paramount figure, who stood at the pinnacle of a pyramid of power under the New Order regime (Jenkins, 1998, p. 13-14).

² ‘Kekaryaan’ is the placing of military personnel in bureaucratic and non-military posts.

³ In 1980, military members occupied 53.5 percent of central government positions, such as ministers (47.5%), secretaries general (73.6%), inspectors general (29.5%), directors general (78.9%), heads of non-departmental institutions (44.4%), ministerial secretaries and assistant ministers (53.5%). They were also appointed as governors (70.3%), heads of district (56.6%), mayors (33.3%), and ambassadors (44.4%) (Notosusanto, 1984, p. 378-379).

⁴ The intelligence organisations of the Indonesian state, as discussed by Tanter (1992) in his excellent account, were used by Suharto and the military to exert their totalitarian ambitions and practices. In a comparative study of domestic intelligence regime types, the Indonesian intelligence was characterised as conducting a low level of violence but an intense degree of surveillance, targeting many groups with a low sophistication of control (1992, p. 268).

⁵ Concerning the manner in which the ‘Dwifungsi ABRI’ worked to legitimize military rule in the New Order era and to maintain the regime, see, for example, discussion in Langenberg (1992) and Azca (1998).

The New Paradigm then translated into several programs (Sukma and Prasetyono, 2003, p. 23):
1. the separation of the police and the military;
2. the liquidation of social-political posts within the military at national and regional levels;
3. the replacement of the office of social and political affairs (Kassospol) with territorial affairs (Kaster);
4. the winding down of the posts responsible for assigning active members of the military to undertake civilian positions;
5. the requirement of the military officers to choose between military and civilian careers, either through early retirement or tour of duty;
6. the reduction of the number of military representatives in the national and local parliament;
7. the termination of ABRI's involvement in day-to-day politics;
8. the severance of organizational ties with Golkar political movement and a stance that takes an equidistant position with all political parties;
9. the exercise of neutrality in elections;
10. change of relationship between the TNI and the TNI’s big family;
11. revision of the TNI's doctrines according to the spirit of reform and the role of TNI in the twenty-first century;
12. changing the name of ABRI into the TNI.

This new paradigm, according to the Editors of Indonesia (2001, p. 141), redefined the role of the military in politics in terms of power-sharing with civilian authorities, impartiality in elections and between political parties, and the separation of the police from the military. Not long after its launch, the reform-oriented Wirahadikusuma (1999, p. 7) stated that the TNI needed more than just “redefinition, re-actualisation, and repositioning”. It needed a complete change in its perspective and in the concept of “perang rakyat semesta” (the total warfare doctrine). Furthermore, according to Bhakti et al (1999, pp. 285-7), the internal reforms made by the TNI were just half-hearted.
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("reformasi setengah hati"), since they were only a response to public criticism and therefore were aimed at persuading people to accept the TNI's non-military role.

Even though the reputation of the security forces in the post-Suharto era had significantly declined, they, particularly the army, still controlled huge residual resources through which it was possible to exercise political influence. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) Report (2000b; ii-iii), there were at least three resources belonging to TNI that contributed to its political influence: first, its territorial structure throughout the nation; secondly, its strong representation in the state and military intelligence services; and thirdly, its access to funds through business enterprises and other means. Furthermore, there were indications of military officer involvement in activities that seem designed to erode the government’s authority, such as antagonism to government policy in Aceh, Maluku, West Timor and Irian Jaya.

In a different formulation, Sukma and Prasetyono (2003, p. 41) write that “there are some residual problems of the military reform in Indonesia”. First, there is a gap in the reform of institutional bases for the TNI’s transformation to be a professional defence force. Second, there has been an unfinished project to revise the doctrine and to restructure the organisation of the military. Third, the lack of capacity of a civilian Defence Minister resulted in its defence policy and strategy being less comprehensive. Fourth, the government has not been able to address the problem of military impunity. Fifth, there is lack of civilian capacity to perform an oversight role. Lastly, the lack of capacity of government to provide an adequate military budget has given space for the military to gain extra financial resources and eventually resulted in the lack of government control over the military.

As discussed by Wulf, one of the critical dilemmas of security sector reform is to choose the right partner in doing such work. In the case of Indonesia, this problem appeared during President Abdurrahman Wahid’s term, particularly when he chose Maj. Gen. Agus Wirahadikusumah, a leading reformist officer, as one of his main partners in doing security sector reform. This manoeuvre then provoked resistance from conservative officers who were against his progressive ideas in reforming the military such as liquidating themilitary territorial structure, one of the most important political resources belonging to the military.

Thus, in contrast to the relatively calm government-military relations under the previous President Habibie, the situation changed significantly under President Wahid. Even though the military Commander General Wiranto and several senior military officers were appointed to the cabinet, tensions immediately escalated. Soon after his election, President Wahid began to erode Gen. Wiranto’s position by, for instance, replacing some of his allies (Editors 2001, p. 145).

Further tensions arose between President Wahid and Gen. Wiranto with the plan to reorganise the army’s territorial structure proposed by Wiranto. Rather than support the plan, Wahid backed the idea of dismantling the army’s territorial structure as put forward by Maj. Gen. Agus Wirahadikusumah before a parliament committee on 13 December 1999. One of the critical issues between Wiranto and Wirahadikusumah’s camp was their disagreement on reform programs for the army territorial structure. Wiranto and friends had an idea to sustain, and even to expand, this structure, while Wirahadikusumah and colleagues wanted to liquidate it. Wirahadikusumah and his

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7 Sukma and Prasetyono (2003) confusingly present different lists of residual problems in their paper. They display five residual problems under the subtitle “The Residual Problems in Military Reforms” (p.24-26) but explained six residual problems in the Conclusions (p. 41). The missing point in the earlier explanation is the lack of civilian capacity to perform an oversight role.

8 As the legacy of guerilla warfare conducted during pre and post independence, the Indonesia's military belong to a military territorial structure throughout the archipelago, from national to village level. This structure, which was parallel to administrative governmental structure, was part of the hegemonic political structure of the Indonesian military during Suharto's New Order. In the aftermath of the fall of Suharto, dismantling of the army territorial structure was one of major demands by student and pro reform groups.
groups were well known as the pro-reform military officers.


Another climax was reached in October 2000 when Wahid tried to promote Maj. Gen. Wirahadikusumah\(^9\) as army Commander in place of Gen. Tyasno Sudarto. This maneuver, however, was opposed by many senior army officers. Forty-five generals signed a statement calling on the army Chief of Staff, Gen. Tyasno Sudarto, to bring Maj. Gen. Wirahadikusumah before a military court for his undisciplined behaviour. The culmination of this military resistance to Wahid was the military’s support for the first memorandum adopted by parliament against him on 1 February 2002. This eventually led to Wahid being toppled from the presidency (Said 2001, pp. 334, 351-353).

The fall of Wahid from power has held back security sector reform and gave the victory to the ‘conservative camp’ of the military. The continuing preservation of the military territorial structure, referred to by Anwar (2000, p. 197), indicates a victory for the ‘conservative camp’ within the military. Anwar (2000, p. 195) suggests that this group basically resisted civilian supremacy over the military and the idea of bringing the military back to the barracks. In contrast to the ‘progressive camp’ that supported the idea of gradually dismantling the military territorial structure as part of democratisation, the ‘conservative camp’ believed that it is a critical instrument in the maintenance of national integration.\(^11\) The leading figures of the ‘progressive camp’ were the late Lt. Gen. Agus Wirahadikusumah and Maj. Gen. Saurip Kadi, who openly articulated their support for the gradual liquidation of the military territorial structure but they, however, were marginalised from key positions.


The religious communal conflict in Ambon first erupted on 19 January 1999 – eight months after the fall of Suharto in May 1998. Just prior to President Suharto being toppled, there were two major outbreaks of riots in Jakarta (13-14 May) and Surakarta (20-21 May). In the following days during the early post-Suharto era, a series of communal conflicts erupted throughout the archipelago. Soetrisno et al. in a report of the Research Center for Rural and Regional Development (Pusat Penelitian Pembangunan Pedesaan dan Kedaerahan, P3PK) (1998) note that there were 13 riots in several cities in Indonesia from October 1996 to June 1997. Of these, however, the conflict in Ambon has been one of the longest and most severe in terms of casualties and damage to public and private property.

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\(^9\) The English version of this report is in Masters of Terror: Indonesia’s Military and Violence in East Timor in 1999 published by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra (2002).

\(^10\) When General Wiranto was listed as one of those responsible for the East Timor violence by the Joint Fact Finding Committee, Maj. Gen. Wirahadikusumah, then the Commander of the Wirabuana Kodam, responded publicly asking Wiranto to resign. Maj. Gen. Djaja Suparman, on other hand, then commented that this call had provoked unrest among soldiers. Wirahadikusumah’s comment provoked fury among senior officers (Said 2001, pp. 343-5).

\(^11\) The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Rymizard Ryacudu, quoted by detikcom (9 July 2003) says: “The existence of military territorial structure is final”.

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Indonesia’s transition period was marked by the emergence of communal riots throughout the country. A study by Tadjoeddin (2002, p. 34-5) contends that the outbreak of communal violence was an important feature of the Indonesian transition period. The scale of violence and the number of incidents and deaths increased significantly over time. While in 1997 there were 12 incidents and 127 deaths, the number increased significantly to 75 incidents and 1,300 deaths in 1998. In 1999 the number of incidents rose slightly to 139 and the number of deaths to 1,442, and then continued in 2000 with a further increase in the number of incidents (170) but a decrease in the number of deaths (1,150). However the number of deaths presented by Tadjoeddin is probably an under-estimate if, for example, we include the documented deaths in Maluku, where more than 3,000 were killed in the first two years of the conflict.\footnote{12 I thank Dr. Jaap Timmer for pointing out this matter. Tadjoeddin’s work is based on only two national press sources, Kompas and Antara. This is most likely the main cause of its lack of accuracy.}

The increasing mass violence during the transition period can be seen as an indication of the chronic crisis facing Indonesia as a whole. According to the International Crisis Group (2000), the lack of resources, capacity to govern and national cohesion in addressing the national crisis was evident in Maluku as well as in the rest of the country.

We can also link the spread of social conflict during Indonesia’s transition period with the issues of governance and security sector reform. The linkage between security sector and violent conflict factors can be described as follows: (1) the security sector and structural causes of conflict; (2) the security sector and trigger factors; and (3) the security sector and perpetuating factors (Clingendael, International Alert and Saferworld, 2002, p.2-3).

First, structural causes of conflict refer to relatively permanent factors that lead to cleavages and disparities within society that can be a source of tension and possible violent conflict among people. The security forces often reflect such structural causes and can perpetuate or amplify their impact. Second, the security sector can be a trigger factor that brings underlying tensions to the surface and cause an escalation of violence. the security sector as a trigger factor can also be linked to the structural factors of conflict. For instance the security forces may respond to political turmoil with unnecessary violence because they are unaccountable or they are protecting an unrepresentative regime. Third, the security sector can also be part of the perpetuating factors, in which the dynamics that contribute to prolonging the violence and make the conflict become protracted, such as the existence of war economies and the ready availability of small arms and light weapons.

In the case of Ambon the security forces, particularly the police, reflect structural causes of conflict, where its members were predominantly Christian. Thus, from the very beginning of the conflict, police was perceived by Moslems as biased towards Christians. On the other hand, soon after the conflict some army battalions (from Makasar and Eastern Java, areas which are predominantly Moslems) were deployed to Ambon and they were predominantly Moslem. This fact resulted in a common perception among Christians that the army was biased towards Moslems.

The security sector was a trigger factor in the conflict particularly when some of its member either responded to the riots with unnecessary violence or performed a partial role by siding with their co-religionists. Thus, in the early period of the conflict, there were two stages in the role of the security forces; first, the “security forces stand by” phase, which began from 19 January, and then, the “security forces open fire” phase, starting from 13 February, due to a clash in Haruku Island (Human Rights Watch report, 1999). Whereas the first phase was marked by most casualties being caused by civilians and traditional weapons, the second phase saw most casualties being caused by the bullets of troops. Thus, since the second stage of the conflict, security forces sometimes have played a role as a trigger factor in instigating further clashes.
A prominent example of the security forces’ role in perpetuating the conflict was the case of “co-operation” between a group of Christian militia named the Coker (Cowok Keren, Handsome Boys) and a couple of personnel of the army special forces (Kopassus, Komando Pasukan Khusus) from the end of 2001 to mid-2002. The story began to be exposed when a member of the Coker gang was arrested by police in early May 2002 and from him police extracted information about the role of the Coker gang in many violent incidents in Ambon with the support of Kopassus troops. (Sinar Harapan, 22 October 2002). According to a police investigative report, Berty’s gang was involved in 13 cases of terror in Ambon – in which 9 cases allegedly involved Kopassus troops (Tempo, No. 46, 13 January 2003). Those cases included the bomb blast on the ship ‘California’ in December 2001 (6 died, 43 injured), a bomb blast at Yan Pais street (6 died, 61 injured), conflict at Porto and Haria, two Christian villages, in April 2002 (8 died, dozens injured, 40 houses burnt) and an attack on Soya village in March 2002 (12 died, one church burnt, 20 houses burnt). Though clear motives behind their involvement in such terrors are still blurred, it certainly resulted in prolonging the conflict.

The story of conflict in Ambon was also very connected with security sector reform which began to be implement in the post Suharto era. Whereas the eradication of the army territorial structure was one of the most demanded political reforms, the communal conflict in Ambon had the reverse outcome. Just four month after the conflict began in January 1999 the military territorial structure institution in Ambon was upgraded—from the sub-regional military command (Korem, Komando Resort Militer) led by a colonel to the regional military command (Kodam, Komando Daerah Militer) led by a brigadier general. When the clashes escalated, operational command and control to deal with security affairs was transferred from police to the army. It was a backward step. The reform era has decided to separate police from the military and installed a new division of roles between police and military: According to the new regulation (Tap MPR No.VII/MPR/2000), the major responsibility for domestic security is now in the hands of the police and the police force is able to call for support from other forces when necessary. In the case of the conflict in Ambon, however, army deployment outnumbered the police and in some cases took over operational command and control in the field.

A further setback to security sector reform took place in May 2002, when a new security structure was established in Maluku. Under the Komando Operasi Pemulihan Hukum dan Keamanan (Koopslihkam, Operational Command to Restore Law and Security), the Pattimura regional army commander was placed at a higher level than the Head of Maluku provincial police. The rank of the army regional commander was also upgraded, from a brigadier general to a major general. The reason behind this change is likely to overcome the problem of the ineffectiveness of the security forces under the previous system, wherein the Head of the Maluku Polda was the chief while the Pattimura Kodam Commander was the deputy. The main sources of the problems was probably the fact that the two commanding officers had the same rank and because army personnel outnumbered police in Ambon and Maluku. In addition, the superiority complex of army officers towards the police as a legacy of the old structure in the New Order era probably did not help.

The structure of Koopslihkam has been liquidated since 5 October 2003 and operational command control has been brought back to the police from the military, coinciding with the anniversary of Indonesian armed forces and the cessation of the state of civil emergency in Maluku which was introduced in June 2000. However, the rank of a commander of Pattimura Kodam is still major general—higher than brigadier general for the head of Maluku Provincial police. However, security sector reform to some extent resulted in improving the capacity of police in dealing with crime investigation and security affairs in general.
The success of police in investigating some cases in which some Kopassus troops allegedly took part, as discussed above, is one of the striking examples of the positive consequence of separating police from the military and the improvement in its capacity. It would be hard to imagine that the police would be able and encouraged to expose such cases if the police was part of the military. The increasing capacity of the police institution in handling critical cases was evident later, for instance, when it dealt with the Bali bombing at the end of 2002. After conducting hard and careful work and investigations, the police amazingly succeeded in capturing almost all of the main actors and in disclosing its network.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the outbreak of communal violence can be seen as a symptom, and also a consequence, of the poor performance of the security sector during the transition period. The lack of capacity and the unprofessional attitude and behaviour in dealing with social unrest led to the eruption of social or communal violence in some areas in the archipelago. It is evident in the mushrooming social violence in many parts of Indonesia. Furthermore, the outburst of communal violence will probably hinder security sector reform as discussed above in the case of Ambon. In contrast to demilitarisation and demilitarism as the agendas of political reform in the post Suharto era, what has happened in Ambon was the reverse: the intensification and expansion of military involvement in the public space through its personnel and institutions, and the intensification and internalisation of military values and norms in society.

Expansion and proliferation of the army territorial structure not only occurred in Maluku, but also took place in Aceh and, will probably happen, in Poso, Central Sulawesi. Following the revival of the Pattimura Kodam in Maluku in 1999, the Iskandar Muda Kodam was also revived in Aceh in 2002 to deal with the prolonged separatist movement there. In the aftermath of the communal violence in Poso, that began to occur in December 1998 and escalated in 2000, a new Merdeka Kodam is, in all likelihood, in the process of being launched in Central Sulawesi (Aditjondro, 2002, p. 1). According to Aditjondro (ibid.), the rationale behind the creation of a new military territorial structure in Poso was to maintain the military’s political hegemony and, more particularly, its elite economic and political interests.

In sum, the relationship between communal violence and security sector reform can be formulated as follows: communal violence can be perceived as a consequence of the poor performance of the security sector and, therefore, a symptom of a need for security sector reform. On the other hand, communal conflict is likely to handicap the implementation of security sector reform, as is evident in the case of the communal conflict in Ambon. The eruption of communal violence will be a (new) justification for the military to support the police in handling the riots and, furthermore, to return to its ‘old’ function as security force — rather than defence force. All these phenomena can be understood in the context of the early stages of a democratic transition period in which the military continues to have huge political and economical residual resources. Thus, as reflected in the case of Ambon, the way to genuine security sector reform in Indonesia is still a ‘long and winding road’.

13 According to Shaw (1991, p. 11-13), ‘militarisation’ means ‘a military build-up’, while ‘militarism’ means ‘the influence of the military organization and values on social structure’.
14 It began with enlarging the number of army troops deployed in Central Sulawesi from January 2003 onwards, from one to two battalions (Adijtondro, 2003, p. 3).
15 “Long and winding road” is the title of a song by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. It was used as the title of a paper to explain constraints on democracy in Indonesian politics written by Dhakidae (2001).
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