

## THE MILITARY, POLITICS, AND POPULISM IN INDONESIA



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### ABSTRACT

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The military institution has faced a dilemma emerges because there is political opportunity for military to return to politic practices due to civilian inferior political groups who disappointed with the dynamic democratization process. The failure of democratic transition some countries with democratic politics that cannot shape into democratic country was caused by inferiority factor of civil politicians who lured military to take part into practical politics. Situation, both politics and threat against State has made military institution considered as answer to unresolved civilian government. In Indonesia, the weak civilian group as a known as Continuous Islamic Defending Rally (Aksi Bela Islam-ABI) has increased political tension of several political elites in Jakarta including some military officers who considered the ruling civil government incapable to control the situation. Base on that the paper will elaborate the position of military in the context of national leader based on current political dynamics. There is a current of the TNI neutrality as an institution to keep distance with political practice and militaristic culture. The paper will also elaborate the role of TNI in national leadership formation as part of administration through democratic process, where national leader should be selected from political mechanism that supported democratic political system.

**Contribution/ Originality:** The study of military and politics rediscovered its momentum as anxiety over military commander over the ongoing dynamics of political democracy. As a study, the possibility of military return to practical politics becomes a necessity when its civil political elite is inferior and unable to control the political situation. This paper captures the maneuvers of military officers coinciding with the strengthening of political populism in Indonesia. This study contributes to military in politics studies and its implications for the strengthening democracy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ball and Guy-Peters explanations (Ball and Guy-Peters, 2000) related to position of military in political dynamic of a state could become a foundation for similar situation here in Indonesia when TNI faced mass rally related to Jakarta gubernatorial election between 2016 and early 2017. There were mass rallies labeled as 411, 212 and others, where they became test for TNI as there were attempts to ask TNI to take sides.<sup>1</sup> Ball and Guy-Peters stated that, military organization dilemma emerges because there is temporary political opportunity for military to return to politic, even Ball and Guy-Peters stated that the political opportunity was created by inferior political

groups who disappointed with the dynamic democratization process. Ball and Guy-Peters even stated that the failure of democratic transition and/or countries with democratic politics that cannot shape into democratic country was caused by inferiority factor of civil politicians who lured military to take part into practical politics. On the other side, Acemoglu, Ticchhi and Vindigni stated that vulnerability of civil administration is not merely caused by military hoardings, personally or institutionally, but caused by unconfidentt civil politicians on developing the democratic system (Ball and Guy-Peters, 2000).

Situation, both politics and threat against State has made military institution considered as answer to unresolved civilian administration. Continuous Islamic Defending Rally (Aksi Bela Islam-ABI) has increased political tension of several political elites in Jakarta including some military officers who considered the ruling civil government incapable to control the situation.<sup>2</sup> In certain moment, worsened by various unclear online informations (Hoax), the situation is considered as basic step for some political elites to ensure that situation has gone out of hand and raise concern from the TNI.<sup>3</sup> Despite of formal official release and informal statement from TNI, some civil politicians believe that TNI personnel supported ABI continuous mass rallies.<sup>4</sup>

The classic question from Finer was on military commitment to maintain strong and legitimate democracy system. Institutionally and personally, the role of military is no longer dominant and superior due to civil political oversight and control to place military organization under the sub-ordinate of civil and democratic administration (Ball and Guy-Peters, 2000).

The paper will elaborate the position of military in the context of national leader based on current political dynamic. There is a current of TNI neutrality as an institution to keep distance with political practice and militaristic culture. The article will also elaborate the role of TNI in national leadership formation as part of administration through democratic process, where national leader should be selected from political mechanism that supported democratic political system.

## 2. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POPULISM

It had to be admitted that for the last ten years, popular politics is part of current national political dynamic. The presence of popular political figures and sometimes without support of a political party is rising. For the last one decade, there are two parts of popular politics in Indonesia, political party based or supported popular leaders and popular leaders who tend to make distance with political parties and elites by strengthening the role of volunteers and use political party for administrative needs only.<sup>5</sup>

The first part, popular elite who joined the political party is based on three issues: first, popular figure was cadre of the political party who was then supported by the party to become head of a region or national leader. Second, a popular figure who was not cadre or member of a political party but was asked by a political party to be nominated for head of a region or national leader. Third, popular elites who realize that political is part of current political reality and use political party for candidacy, but when the elite won the election the elite does not have obligation to follow political party instruction.<sup>6</sup>

The second part is where political elites tend to make distance with political party. The phenomenon started in the last 2017 direct regional election, where some incumbent and contenders in the gubernatorial, regent and municipal elections prefer to make distance with political parties and run as individual candidate by developing volunteer team.<sup>7</sup> The role of political party is considered weak and has no control to enforce party ideology during election period, despite on the final candidacy stage, some elites decided to accept political party offers for alliance.<sup>8</sup>

Popular politics in national leadership should stand on the support of political party, where Law No. 7/2017 on General Election stipulated that a President candidate should have minimum of 20% Parliament Seats or 25% National ballots supports. The situation, in contextual matter, has forced popular figures to ensure their minimum support of 20% Parliament Seats or 25% national ballot.<sup>9</sup>

Joko Widodo (Jokowi) who was considered as popular figure by national and international media had run for several elections during his political career. He started from Mayoral Election in Solo and won for two periods, Jakarta Gubernatorial election in 2012, and Presidential election two years after that with Jusuf Kalla (JK) as Vice President. Jokowi-JK political policy is considered as popular political policy, by many analysts, based on the interest of public and supporting political parties. Although there are differences in policy making with supporting parties, Jokowi-JK is considered success in implementing popular policy. The popular politics emerged in Indonesia and at certain situation, Jokowi and JK is also considered success to integrate interests of supporting parties with public demands who did not feel comfortable with political pattern of political parties.<sup>10</sup> The most viable evidence was on the integrated of Jokowi-JK volunteers, who were mostly anti political parties activists, with political party cadres to support Jokowi-JK political programmer (Marcus, 2015).

The elementary question is what do we really understand about popular politics? This question came up since the popular movements were based on their discomfort to current political situation. There were three issues on political expression related to popular politics: anti-establishment, political authority leadership and strong sense of in-group (Gidron and Bart, 2013). In general, Cas Mudde described popular politics as, "political position that put "the people" and "corrupted elites" in opposites, and popular politics is considered as perspective and expression from the people (Mudde, 2004).

Of course, each period has its own leadership characteristic, depends on the leading figure. We can compare it since Soekarno era, Soeharto era and Reform era where there are Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Soekarno Putri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Jokowi. The character of popular politics was implemented by Jokowi without changing national political paradigm. The same popular politics was also conducted by Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati and SBY with different stressing.

Based on the situation, national leadership is considered as a leadership system in state administration and development, including all elements and structures in state governance and society, to achieve national ideas according to their roles in the government and society with nation values as stipulated in national constitution. Therefore, the figure in national leadership is a figure who could understand the people's need and aspiration as a whole including the nation values, in order to inspire and envision the Indonesian nation according to the national ideals. The most important thing is the leader was elected by the Indonesia people through democratic process.

The relation between popular politics and national leadership is based on four aspects: first, popular politics is part of current political reality that turned national leadership paradigm not as a sacred and distant position; it is an integrated and correlated process. The idea of current political situation is by integrating the leader and people in the same foundation, not just political trends, but as part of strong reality. One factor that strengthens the integration is the use of social media that bring leader closer to the people (Ferber *et al.*, 2007).

Second, national leader should have popular aspects and understand on the people's will. The popular national leader evolution was started by Abdurrahman Wahid until now. The basic of policy making should be on the interest of public interests. So far, based on Jokowi-JK leadership, the basis of national leadership is on the greater of people and national interest (Santosa, 2014).

Third, national leader must have space to be reached by all elements, through democratic mechanism. The democratic system may turn the national leader politically stronger and legitimate. It would certainly accelerate the development process and effective public service (Muradi, 2015).

Fourth, national leader is a working leader in the context to achieve national ideals. The working leader is implementation of national leader who can implement the people's mandate into real program (Hasibuan, 2008).

### 3. POLITICS OF THE TNI

Indonesia Armed Forces (TNI), just like other elements of the nation, also has the same right and obligation to maintain and access the national leader. As part of a system, national leader is an inseparable part of current

political system, so, there should be mechanism to ensure the same right before the political candidacy process.<sup>11</sup> The Old Order and also New Order implemented the internship (*kekaryaan*) as implementation of Dual Function from Nasution which was then elaborated into *Dwi Fungsi ABRI* (Crouch, 2007; Ayako, 2015; Muradi, 2016). There should be wise steps taken, for national leader political candidacy, in order to prevent TNI from short term political trap and reduce the strength of the organization. So far, the Islamic Defending Continuous Rallies (*Aksi Bela Islam-ABI*) and some other mass rallies may be good examples. The name of Commander of TNI was iconized and confronted to the current national leader.

Formally, TNI has published book on steps to make distant with politic, especially during general election in 2014 and regional elections in 2015 and 2017. The article will not elaborate the content of the TNI book<sup>12</sup>, but focus on the political events that involved TNI leaders, Commander of TNI in this case, who were dubious and did not act according to the policy. The news media also directed the public idea that Commander of TNI had different perspective with the national leader.<sup>13</sup> A number of clarifications were made by Headquarter of TNI related to public opinion on the position of Commander of TNI who was considered taking side according to news media and social media.<sup>14</sup>

It was tried to understand the text and context on statements issued by Commander of TNI related to the issue. If its started from the beginning of ABI mass rally in October 2016, 411 rallies, and 212 rallies and afterwards in early 2017, there are opinions among protesters that Commander of TNI was on their side and against the ruling government. The perception grew stronger when Commander of TNI did not make clear steps to declare that TNI was part of the ruling government. In cyber world, news and information run fast. If the explanation and steps taken were not made fast, the institution will be packed in an issue and put in a danger.<sup>15</sup>

Despite efforts made by TNI as an institution asking the personnel not to take part in practical politics, the opinion had grown strong and made Commander of TNI as new icon against the ruling government and may also potential candidate for 2019 Presidential election. Especially Commander of TNI did not respond anything on issue of being promoted as President or Vice President Candidate on the next 2019 election.<sup>16</sup> People who opposed Jokowi after 2014 election has just found alternative figure other than Prabowo Subianto, or even as part of the next candidacy.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, based on Ball and Guy-Peters, on political dynamic of the TNI, there are five issues needed to be stressed on TNI politic and neutrality: first, TNI officers with political desire. Ball and Guy-Peters actually underlined that, in a country with democratic transition, there are some ambitious officers in military institution who wanted to take part in practical political events. Ball and Guy-Peters stated that the political awareness could be part of the instinct or career.

Second, the move made by Commander of TNI is considered as expression of disappointment by intern of TNI, as stated by Finer, as it is not considered equal to what TNI received after releasing 30 years of political influence and rule. The situation indicates disappointment on limited resources provided to TNI currently. Meaning, the move and maneuver of Commander of TNI will be supported by intern of TNI. Ball and Guy-Peters stated that, there is always anxiety among military personnel during transition of professionalism.

Third, public who disappointed on the result of 2014 Presidential Election grew stronger after Jakarta Gubernatorial Election and make people divided. The dividing people are considered part of process to delegitimize national leader. This situation in many countries was considered as space for practical politics and could become opportunity for military to take part and grab political opportunity. Thailand and Turkey are examples where their armed forces are nationalist and always put national interests above everything else.<sup>18</sup> There are efforts from groups of society who dislike the government trying to take TNI into politic whether as symbol or active figures. The opinion was then emerged and the group considered Commander of TNI as part of their group to oppose the ruling government.<sup>19</sup>

Fourth, inferiority of civil elites against military officers. The myth of civil-military pairs in political candidacy emerged and raises the name of Commander of TNI. Some political parties declared new civil-military pair is Nasdem Party, Golkar Party, and also PAN.<sup>20</sup> The raise on issue of civil-military pair was part of desire to promote Commander of TNI as President or Vice President including the poor confidence of national civil elite. The step is considered as part to strengthen national leadership and administration. However, Harries-Jenkins stated that, there is a concern when promoting active military officers as political candidate as it would only provide space for military officers in practical politics (Harries-Jenkins, 1990). In Indonesia, promoting active military officer for future political contest is considered possible and the person is directed to Commander of TNI as the active military officers with biggest opportunity.

If its take popular politic and national leadership issue, the politic of TNI is part of what has been conducted or framed by Commander of TNI. The problem was then popular politic conducted by Commander of TNI tends to use religion issue.<sup>21</sup> The characteristic and leadership of the Commander of TNI give four advantages related to popular politic: First, the Commander of TNI is in advantage due to his current title and position. Some people found Gatot Nurmantyo figure could become answer after the result of 2014 Presidential election. Gatot Nurmantyo is even framed as national political hope.

Second, Gatot Nurmantyo as Commander of TNI is considered as a figure with close relation with religious groups. It is based on statements made by Commander of TNI who preferred to stand and defend the Islamic Defending Rallies (*Aksi Bela Islam--ABI*) and his statement was framed as if Gatot Nurmantyo is ready to defend the protester.<sup>22</sup> The situation was also supported by provocative social media that easily formed public opinion. Based on popular politic perspective, steps taken by Commander of TNI were considered smart by taking advantage of momentum, while there is also opportunity to put Commander of TNI as an opposing figure against the ruling government.

Third, Gatot Nurmatyo is considered as antithesis of the ruling President. There is even opinion that Gatot Nurmatyo will foster Indonesia compare to current leader. The communist issue and also foreign infiltration, especially from China, increase people's confidence to Gatot Nurmatyo as a figure who can lead the salvation of Indonesia against latent enemy of communism and foreign workers from China.<sup>23</sup>

Last but not least, Gatot Nurmantyo was not cadre of political party and still an active four stars military general. Gatot has gained support as President or Vice President Candidate for 2019 elections from various political parties. Gatot Nurmantyo realized that he is a popular figure and get attention from public. It is possible that political parties may promote him as candidates for 2019 elections due to no available cadres to promote from political parties and inferiority feeling among civil politicians where military figure will control national political stage.<sup>24</sup>

Based on explanation above, neutrality and politics of TNI is actually based on four issues: First, leadership figure inside the TNI. Commander of TNI and Chief of Staff have different characteristic in each period. The dependency and command from TNI figure leader has made TNI had tumultuous policy, sometimes aggressive and dominant, while sometimes are calm and tend to keep distant from practical politics.

Second, Neutrality and politic of TNI should be parallel with commitment of a civil democratic administration to meet the need of TNI as part of agreement to keep TNI away from politic. It is not just a matter of regulation, but also steps to ensure that TNI as institution is supported to meet the welfare of soldiers and also defense capability. As long as the state has limited budget to meet the demand, political elites and ambitious military officers may take advantages in any political moments.

Third, neutrality and Politic of TNI is also affected by the strength of political alliance in the ruling government. If the alliance is weak, then issue on neutrality and politic of TNI will always emerge. Author considered the continuous ABI rallies have tested the political alliance of the ruling government. So far, the

negative issue cornering the government did not affect the political alliance. However, steps to divide public political opinion are working until now.

Fourth, democratic political system is the basis of neutrality and politic of TNI. The more mature political elites to strengthen democratic system, the more potential on TNI to keep distant from politic, remain to the state administration system and not take part in any practical politic issues. The stress on democratic political system for TNI is to remind all elements inside the TNI to leave the institution identity (official resignation) if the person wish to take part in any national political process. It is important as the politic should be implemented in the frame of national interest not practical interest. The only answer for TNI personnel to access public service position in national politics is through political candidacy process.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The article elaborated on how national political leadership is closed to popular politic that put options on popular political policy and leave political ideology behind. The situation encourages strengthening on national leadership based on nation-state perspective. Neutrality and politic of TNI on specific political moments are affected by four issues: leader figure in TNI, government commitment to ensure welfare of TNI personnel, solid elite alliance and civil democratic administration. Therefore, the article also strengthens the argument that TNI in a national leadership formation is an integrated part through democratic process, where national leader should be elected through democratic political mechanism.

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#### Footnote:

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