Beyond Control: Militias As Inherent Part of the National Security Policy in Indonesia*

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Abstract: This article approaches the issue of militias as barely regulated actors in the provision of security, and the challenge of containing them in the context of security sector reform in Indonesia. Since independence, militias played a pivotal role in representing the central state in areas of limited statehood and hence in the Indonesian state-building process. In cooperation with the military and police, militias were deployed to maintain the political status quo. Even after Suharto's resignation and the onset of political reforms as part of *reformasi*, militias continued to act as an unregulated instrument to assert not only state control but to serve particular interests as well.

Keywords: State-building processes, civil-military relations, militias, Southeast Asia, security sector reform
Schlagwörter: Staatsbildungsprozesse, zivil-militärische Beziehungen, Milizen, Südostasien, Sicherheitssektorreform

1. Introduction

The state's monopoly on the use of force in Indonesia during the Suharto regime (1967-1998) was mainly enforced by the Indonesian military (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI)). Based on the dual function doctrine (Dwifungsi), the military held leading responsibility for sociopolitical and security affairs (Mietzner 2009: 51f). However, ABRI's reach of action was constrained by its limited financial resources as well as Indonesia's specific topographical circumstances as the world's biggest island state. Therefore, various militia units undertook the task of securing the state's monopoly on the use of force against external as well as internal security threats.

This article contributes to the issue of security provision by armed non-state actors in areas of limited statehood. Militias in Indonesia during the Suharto regime acted as status-quo forces to maintain state security and were tightly embedded into the national security approach, either as stand-alone forces to represent state authority or in joint operations with the Indonesian military and police. While these status quo militias provided regime security on behalf of the government, they also generated insecurity for the Indonesian population and perceived opponents of the regime by resorting to unrestricted violence. The downfall of the Suharto regime and commenced political reforms in course of the proclaimed *reformasi* included a transformation towards political pluralism and a thorough reform of the Indonesian security sector. Apart from the still ongoing task of delineating the roles and responsibilities of the Indonesian police and military (see Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict 2015: 2f), establishing legitimate civilian control over armed and organized militias constitutes a major challenge for the Indonesian political decision makers.

Indonesia during the Suharto regime is a paradigmatic case of status quo militias. Status quo militias are, according to Schneckener (2009: 9, 15), armed non-state actors who support and execute government policies in preventing political change, and simultaneously pursue very own material or ideological interests. In this vein, Ahram (2011: 9) terms non-state actors who operate on behalf of the government as "state-sponsored" militias. While these militia types do assume governmental policy- and security-related tasks in areas of limited statehood, militias' actions may also gather a momentum of their own. Particularly in the realm of policing remote communities, militias can dictate rules and misuse their given power (Bryden and N'Diaye 2011: 258). These "alternative networks of coercion", as Davies (2010: 397) put it, might be classified as a concomitant phenomenon during post-colonial state-building endeavors. However, by normative Western security sector reform (SSR) standards, these actor groups do represent an element of legal uncertainty and insecurity for the respective populations since militias often do not abide to given rules and regulations. Therefore, executive actions of militias undermine inherent SSR objectives of sustained legal and physical security, and aggravate legitimate civilian political control over this type of security actor.

From a conceptual level, militia-state relations in Indonesia are hereafter perceived as constantly shifting strategic alliances. Drawing on Kalyvas' (2006: 365, 383f)[1] reasoning on cooperation and conflict in civil wars as well as on developmental sociology (Zolberg 1980), these strategic alliances are driven by constant distributional conflicts over power and resources between different and competing interest groups. To achieve their respective goals, actor groups cooperate transitionally or permanently in certain fields of action. Strategic alliances and partnerships between societal actor groups are particularly relevant in state-building contexts where state-society relationships are not as institutionalized and consolidated as, for example, in the OECD. The Republic of Indonesia has been, and still is, in a constant effort of state- and nation-building. Lacking resources and institutional arrangements, not only the armed forces but also co-opted armed non-state actors played a decisive part to claim the Republican's state authority in the most remote parts of Indonesia. Moreover, shifting alliances triggered the downfall of Sukarno and the rise to power of Suharto in the 1960s.

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1 For subsequent research on Kalyvas' approach see Jentzsch et al. (2015).

Non-state armed actors or militias assumed numerous basic regulatory measures and security-related functions in Indonesia. Given the limited space, this article will focus on militias relevant for state and regime security only. Finally, the selection of occupied Timor as a model case has two reasons: First, the Eastern part of Timor has been occupied by Indonesian forces in 1975 and has been regarded unofficially as the main training ground for Indonesian armed forces (see Aditjondro 2000: 159). Secondly, Timor constitutes a crucial and instructive case for this article since Indonesian strategic planners and policy makers actually exported the Indonesian militia model to the former Portuguese colony and linked it with existing local patterns of security provision by mercenaries. This strategic export of security governance seems moreover particularly relevant in light of the abovementioned state-building processes in Indonesia.

2. Main features of the Indonesian national security approach

The importance of militias and their incorporation into the comprehensive national security approach in Indonesia can be traced back to the colonial occupations by the Dutch and the Japanese Empire respectively. During the occupation of the Dutch East Indies (contemporary Indonesia) by the Japanese Empire from 1941 to 1945, the Japanese instructors drilled and organized more than 30.000 Indonesians in military training. The majority of these trained men formed the military group PETA (Pembela Tanah Air ["volunteer army of defenders for the fatherland"]), the forerunner of the national armed forces after the Indonesian independence. Furthermore, reserve units and trained youth groups underwent military training by the Japanese military (Ahram 2011: 31; Sebastian 2006: 62f). The militarization of the Indonesian male population by the Japanese armed forces had a tremendous impact on the further security architecture in Indonesia: Apart from the Indonesian armed forces' formation which drew most of their tactics and organizational structures from PETA, during and after the Indonesian struggle for independence from the Dutch (1945 to 1949), small and locally operating militia groups acted on behalf of the Indonesian military in remote areas (Lebra 2010: 182f).

Even after independence from the Dutch, the 1950s were overshadowed by several regional uprisings against the Indonesian central government in Java. Hence, Indonesian military strategy planning concentrated, besides the threat of external interventions, particularly on antagonizing domestic uprisings which were perceived as the most acute challenge to the fragile multi-ethnic state of Indonesia. As a consequence, the developed *comprehensive people's defense and security system* "Sishankamrata" (Sistem Pertahanan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta), which was based on the thorough cooperation of regular military units, the police, local militia groups and the population, served as defense system against external military interventions as well as domestic threats to national security (Anwar 1998: 501f; Sebastian 2006: 189f). But the limited military budget as well as the vast territory of the Indonesian state prevented an extensive military presence. Therefore, in case of an intervention local militias were expected to retreat to the hinterlands and to obstruct the respective intervener in its advancement through continuing guerilla skirmishes until regular armed forces would arrive and lead a joint counteroffensive (Ahram 2011: 35; Kingsbury 2003: 31).

With General Suharto's accession to power in 1965, the Indonesian national security strategy was re-conceptualized as well: The dual function approach (Dwifungsi) of the Indonesian armed forces granted the military extensive powers to combat external as well internal threats to national security and attributed the military additionally extensive authority in socio-political affairs. This meant an important role expansion of the military beyond its traditional sphere of action and enabled a diffusion of national security interests into civilian life. Parallel to the civilian regional administration, the Indonesian military installed military administrations on every administrative level. Particularly this administrative modification strengthened the comprehensive defense system: Since the Indonesian military had at least one non-commissioned officer (Babinsa) stationed in every larger settlement, the regional military command could rely on latest intelligence gathering and was able to respond to imminent threats. Led by the locally stationed non-commissioned officers, militias complemented the Indonesian comprehensive defense system in so far as state control could reach even the most remote places in Indonesia by resorting to local militias (Kingsbury 2003: 85; Sebastian 2006: 94f).

The main tasks of the militias during the Suharto era included joint missions together with military and police forces to combat local insurgencies. Moreover, militias and trained youth groups undertook policing functions and monitored the adherence to religious norms at community level. In this vein, it is an interesting fact that militia members perceived themselves and their role in society as "Preman" and "Jago" – two historically deeply entrenched vigilante concepts in Javanese culture (see Bourchier 1990: 180). Furthermore, militias conducted informal missions as "agents provocateurs" to intimidate political opponents, civil society organizations (CSO) or targeted communities. In this regard, one of the most far-reaching violent acts by local militias constitutes the mass killings of several hundred thousands of alleged sympathizers or members of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)) from 1965 to 1967 (Jenkins and Kammen 2012).

The most relevant militia formations in Indonesia during the Suharto regime were the RATIH (Rakyat Terlatih ("trained population")) and the HANSIP (Pertahanan Sipil ("civil defense")). RATIH set the basis of the Indonesian militia system. As part of the "people's defence and security system" its main objectives were the defense against external threats as well as the suppression of potential local uprisings. Subunits of the RATIH were the KAMRA (Keamanan Rakyat ("people's security")) and the WANRA (Perlawanan Rakyat ("people's resistance")). Particularly members of the KAMRA militia received practical as well as theoretical military training and supported routinely the Indonesian military and police as auxiliary forces (Crouch 2000: 161; Kingsbury 2003: 141). By contrast, HANSIP militias were mainly tasked with upholding community security such as organizing neighborhood watches, executing arrests but also surveilling and intimidating opponents of the regime as well as perceived dissenters to social and national stability. Mainly

consisting of unemployed petty criminals, members of HANSIP received one to three months of training in drill, tactics and intelligence gathering by the Indonesian police (Barker 2001: 26f; Herriman 2012: 95).

3. Pro-Indonesian militias in Timor

Militias were organized and deployed to support the Indonesian armed forces and to suppress regional and local insurgencies. Particularly the Indonesian-occupied territory of Timor-Leste (Timor Timur) suffered from militia violence. The widespread massacres by pro-Indonesian militias on Timorese civilians in course of the granted referendum on special autonomy from the Indonesian state in 1999, for instance, prompted the United Nations to task the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) to intervene. While the extent of militia violence in Timor received international attention in 1999, pro-Indonesian militias had operated in Timor as early as the 1970s. The first Indonesian-trained armed groups in Timor-Leste were linked to the pro-Indonesian party APODETI (Associação Popular Democratica Timorense). APODETI militias fought alongside Indonesian armed forces during the Indonesian invasion of Timor-Leste in December 1975. It is important to stress that the majority of the APODETI militias consisted of Timorese people though. Particularly this "Timorization" of pro-Indonesian armed groups in Timor-Leste had, apart from military aspects, also a social-psychological dimension: By recruiting Timorese into pro-Indonesian militias, the Indonesian military regional command aimed at undermining the social cohesion of the Timorese society[2] and the Timorese resistance movements, most notably the Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN). Pro-Indonesian militias regularly took part in reconnaissance and combat missions, but were also tasked to guard detention camps where Timorese civilians were held captive (Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation 2005).

During the occupation several pro-Indonesian militia groups were created in Timor-Leste, organized according to the existing Indonesian militia system, and integrated into the Indonesian "people's defense and security system". According to Robinson (2006: 284), the local RATIH militia consisted of more than 30,000 Timorese in 1982 while the local HANSIP counted approximately 6,700 Timorese members at the time. Respective militia leaders had usually received basic military training as well as insight into strategic planning and logistics. These militia leaders stood in close contact with Indonesian military officers to coordinate operations and to allocate resources (Bartu 2001: 87). Yet, as Robinson (2006: 260f) points out, by establishing RATIH and HANSIP in Timor, Indonesian military strategists could draw on existing patterns of militia systems: Not only Portuguese colonizers but also local kings and princes used mercenaries and forcibly recruited men to conduct military operations. With reference to the last Timorese uprising against Portuguese colonial rule in 1912 by Dom Boaventura, for instance, Pélissier (2004: 240-244) estimates that more than two-thirds of the Portuguese expeditionary forces consisted of Timorese militiamen.

2 Author interview with a contemporary witness, August 17 2012, Dili.

Motivations by Timorese civilians to join the pro-Indonesian militias after the intervention in 1975 varied. However, there appear to be similar motivational patterns as in other conflict settings (such as Liberia or Sierra Leone) with regards to why particularly young men become militia members (see Boas and Hatloy 2008; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008): Some joined the militia forces out of pragmatic reasons, such as receiving food and shelter or seeing the opportunity to pursue personal vendettas against members of the community (Robinson 2006: 259). Kammen (2003: 82f) also argues that the pro-Indonesian militias provided an opportunity to leave behind the traditional Timorese social order. Particularly men from the western districts of Timor-Leste, who were deemed as serfs in the rigid traditional Timorese social order, joined the pro-Indonesian militias. However, there were also many cases where Timorese civilians were forced to gather intelligence about friends and family members, and their assumed support activities for the resistance movement. Noncompliance, as a Timorese contemporary witness explains,[3] would have been punished with death as well as threats towards the closest relatives respectively.

4. Militias as a challenge for security sector reform in Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the few nations in Southeast Asia undergoing a political transition towards democratization, including an envisaged reform of its security sector, since 1999. But despite earlier measures to disentangle the complexity of the Indonesian security sector, such as the institutional separation of the police and the military, a reform of the security sector has been ultimately stalled during the Yudhoyono administration from 2004 to 2014 (Baker 2015: 132f). Despite of reform programming, decades of militarized security structures continue to influence security actors in their daily practices and mindsets. Still, militias acted as barely regulated auxiliary forces for the Indonesian military or police during operations in Aceh and the Maluku province (Honna 2013: 194f; Miller 2009: 122f). What is more, a rise of various local religious vigilante groups with the apparent willingness to resort to violence, constitutes an additional threat to political pluralism and reform in Indonesia (Wilson 2006: 266). Their continued random misuse of power out of political calculation or self-interest respectively, constitutes a viable threat to the Indonesian people and endangers citizens' security. Moreover, these unrestricted actions contravene inherent norms of human security, such as the 'freedom from fear' and overarching SSR principles.[4]

As part of *reformasi*, bills on the police, the military and national defence passed legislation until 2004. Apart from the institutional separation of the military and the police, civilians were placed into leading positions within the Ministry of Defence to ensure civilian oversight. Moreover, a newly established parliamentary

3 Author interview with a contemporary witness, August 15 2012, Dili.
4 These principles are the ability of a legitimate civilian political leadership to exert unimpeded and accountable oversight over the security sector and its affiliated actors, transparency in decision making, the ensured safety for the citizens, and a viable and rule of law-based justice system (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2007: 21).

commission was assigned with control functions over the security sector such as budgetary and procurement oversight (Baker 2015: 125; Muna 2008: 237-241).

After having classified the Indonesian militias and illustrated their motivational drivers as well as their purpose and functions as security providers during the Suharto regime in the third part of this article, one important question remains: How can these non-state security actors be subjected to comprehensive reforms of the national security sector as part of the overall political transitional reform process in Indonesia since the downfall of Suharto?

Hendrickson (2010: 203) emphasizes the need to engage with the difficulty of containing militias in their actions through analyzing their respective roles in society. Also, the knowledge of the necessity to include non-state security actors such as militias into comprehensive SSR processes is existent (Albrecht et al. 2010: 81). However, definitional differences between a rather narrow state-centric understanding, and a comprehensive SSR understanding which explicitly includes non-state actors (Smith-Höhn 2010: 21), complicate effective multi-stakeholder reform initiatives (Ball 2010: 35f). Moreover, Schneckener (2009: 18) highlights the problem that non-state security actors could spoil or resist demobilization and disempowerment in the process of reform attempts, since particularly militia leaders might lose means of revenue and status in society.

Therefore, the prospects for the establishment of viable oversight and control measures regarding armed non-state actors are rather murky considering the important role of militias in remote areas to represent the states' monopoly on the use of force as part of the historically evolved Indonesian security strategy as well as continued backup for militias within Indonesian policy circles. Given the complexity of the Indonesian sociopolitical structure and its security sector, externally driven reform initiatives might have difficulties in implementing and directing SSR into the right channels without local cooperation, as other externally-led attempts to transfer security-governance models have shown (see Schroeder et al. 2013). Particularly externally-initiated and security-related reform initiatives are critically perceived by Indonesian decision makers as Beeson and Bellamy (2008: 151) emphasize. Thus, there is first and foremost a strong need for local actors such as civil society organizations, politicians as well as members of the security sector itself, to frame and to develop strategies for reform.

The necessary local ownership, however, depends largely on the Indonesian policymakers' willingness to support and to actually implement plain and accountable oversight mechanisms for non-state security actors. Yet, in view of the close ties between political parties and affiliated militia groups and their willingness to resort to violence, as described by Wilson (2006: 269f) and Salim (2010: 78f), there is apparently little interest of local politicians to curb, or at least to regulate militia operations, nor to antagonize well-organized stakeholders within the Indonesian security sector (Sebastian and Gindarsah 2013: 298). In fact, while the early reform impetus mainly targeted the police and the military, armed non-state actors were not addressed. Rather, the defence bill (Republik Indonesia 2002: Bab III, Pasal 6-11) even reiterated the comprehensive security approach which is based on the close cooperation of regular armed forces and armed non-state actors. Related to this, the territorial structure of the Indonesian military has been actually untouched by the reforms and enables the military to play a decisive role in the provinces in cooperation with armed non-state actors.

Ultimately, the strongest proponents for SSR in Indonesia are currently civil society organizations (CSO) and former student activists who organized mass rallies against the Suharto regime in the late 1990s (Muna 2008: 239f). Moreover, local CSO serve as main interlocutor for external donors regarding SSR measures and political reformism. Yet, while Indonesian CSO continuously and actively promoted the implementation of sustainable reforms within the security sector as part of *reformasi*, Scarpello (2014: 140f) argues that SSR actually does not appear on the agenda of Indonesian politicians. Indeed, the political will to press for sustained and effective reforms, as Muna (2008: 246) put it, is non-existent. Still, the civilian supervision over the security sector is sketchy. The parliamentary commission for instance has only limited access to the Ministry of Defence and, furthermore, lacks necessary leverage and high level support to prevail (Sebastian and Gindarsah 2013: 297f). In addition, the initially planned liability of armed forces personnel to civilian jurisdiction has been sidetracked by President Yudhoyono, and finally abandoned in 2009 (Baker 2015: 125; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict 2015: 18f).

5. Conclusion

This article outlined the roles and functions of non-state militias in Indonesia during the Suharto regime. It has been illustrated that militias constituted, despite their status as a non-state actor, an important part of the Indonesian security apparatus and national security strategy by representing and maintaining the state's monopoly on the use of force in remote communities. The arbitrariness and cruelty of their actions towards the respective policed communities to maintain regime security, however, highlight the problematic nature of armed militia formations. Thus, in course of the political transformation and security sector reform attempts in Indonesia since 1999, there is a strong need to actually subordinate non-state militia forces to legitimate civilian control. This measure is imperative given the necessity to protect the population from diffuse and arbitrary violence by local militias as well as to curb the linkages between militias, their potential for violence, and organized crime. The task of reforming deep-rooted security structures, however, poses a formidable challenge to the political leadership and civil society in Indonesia.

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