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The Current State of Military Reform in Indonesia: Interview with Lieutenant General (Retired) Agus Widjojo (Part 1)

*By Johannes Herlijanto**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to Lieutenant General (Retired) Widjojo:

- The basic tenet of the military reform is repositioning the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) completely under the control of the civilian government.
- Once the military has undergone reform, it should only focus on defense against external threats, unless the president orders otherwise.
- The most significant obstacle to TNI reform since the *reformasi* era has been that reform of the political authority that oversees the military has lagged behind reform of the military itself.
- Many in the military have not been able to move on from the idea that the TNI should be the sole guardian of the nation and a focus on domestic sources of threat.

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INTRODUCTION

On 15 April 2016, Lieutenant General (retired) Agus Widjojo was inaugurated as governor of the National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas), an institution where senior military officers usually receive training before they are promoted to become senior military leaders. General Agus Widjojo is a leading figure in the Indonesian military, who espoused and promoted the idea of military reform and transformation when he was an active general. Beginning his career in 1970 as a young officer, Mr. Widjojo came to hold many positions, including top prestigious positions such as Commander of the Military Staff and Command School (Sesko TNI) and Chief of Territorial Staff (Kaster) of the TNI. He was also assigned by the TNI to serve as the vice chairperson of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) from 2001 to 2003. During this period, he continued to play an important role in the promotion of military reform.

Mr. Widjojo has also produced extensive works on the Indonesian military. Many of these works can be found in the book published in 2015, entitled *Transformasi TNI, Dari Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Menuju Tentara Profesional dalam Demokrasi: Pergulatan TNI Mengukuhkan Kepribadian dan Jati Diri* (Transformation of the TNI, From Fighters for Independence to Professional Military in Democracy: TNI's Struggle to Strengthen Its Personality and Identity) (Jakarta: Kata Hasta Pustaka, 2015). In the book, he specifically introduces the concept of military (TNI) reform, which he understands as the refocusing of the role and authority of the TNI, based on the 1945 Constitution.¹ He also outlines the process of "transformation" that the TNI has gone through, from the beginning of its history, when it played a role as fighter for Indonesian independence, to the *reformasi* era, when the TNI went back to the position designed for it by the 1945 Constitution.²

What does Mr. Widjojo think about the current state of reform of the Indonesian military and police? How does he regard the current relationship between the military and the civilian government? Johannes Herlijanto explores these issues and more in the first of two installments of an interview with General Agus Widjojo conducted on 12 May 2017.

¹ Agus Widjojo, *Transformasi TNI, Dari Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Menuju Tentara Profesional dalam Demokrasi: Pergulatan TNI Mengukuhkan Kepribadian dan Jati Diri* (Transformation of the TNI, From Fighters for Independence to Professional Military in Democracy: TNI's Struggle to Strengthen Its Personality and Identity) (Jakarta: Kata Hasta Pustaka, 2015). ., p. xvii. As stated in chapter 30 of the Constitution 1945 that has been amended, the TNI – which consists of the Indonesian Army (AD), Navy (AL), and Air Force (AU) should function as the state's instrument in defending, protecting, and maintaining the unity and sovereignty of the state; meanwhile the Indonesian police is a state instrument tasked with maintaining security and order, protecting and serving the people, as well as enforcing the law.

² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

INTERVIEW

Johanes Herlijanto (JH): “Reform” and “transformation” of the military (TNI) and the police (POLRI) are two important concepts in your book. How would you assess the progress to date? What are the obstacles and constraints encountered so far?

Agus Widjojo (AW): Well, if we see the beginning of the reform as a point of departure, then the reform should have been continued until it is completed. At that time, there were some crucial things that needed to be changed as part of the reform, which had not been fully carried out. In some cases, the reform even experienced a decline, due to the nature of the new democracy. We cannot blame it on someone or something. The context of a transition to democracy has resulted in conditions, which we should be cautious of, that might make reform of the security sector stall or even regress.

The obstacle is that in the transition to democracy in Indonesia, we have not had an effective civil authority order, while civil authority is actually the one that should launch the reform, or continue the reform of the TNI. In fact, if we look at history and compare it with today, which institution has undertaken a thorough reform in Indonesia, in the framework of democratic transition? Only one, the TNI, nothing else. Why? Because the TNI carried out a reform that was initiated by itself. Therefore, it was said to be an internal reform. And what about civil authority at that time? When Pak Harto resigned, Indonesia, in the political domain, was strategically stunned; everyone was caught unprepared. “Pak Harto backing down? Really?” No one was ready. Who would replace him? So, the political authority was stunned [and unprepared]. And only at least a year after Pak Harto resigned in 1998 were they able to complete the plan to amend the 1945 Constitution as further steps of political reform. Meanwhile, the TNI had taken steps to reform its internal structure.

Ideally, the security sector reforms should be implemented and controlled by an effective political authority. But what happened was, the security sector and political authority were reforming themselves at the same time, and eventually, the political authority lagged behind. The TNI did it first. The amendment of the 1945 Constitution came after the TNI was reformed. The TNI reform was carried out from 1998 to 2002. The amendments to the 1945 Constitution took place from 1999 to 2002. 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002—we had four annual hearings [for constitutional amendments]. However, the results of the amendments could not be directly implemented. They were only implemented during the presidential election in 2004. So practically, political reforms only started in 2004. Now, the problem was: who controlled the TNI reform? The civilian [authorities] were not functioning effectively. Even who controlled the civil reforms was still [unclear and] a subject of debate. So, there was no one to control TNI reform, and no roadmap to determine its follow-up. There were some plans and also plans for political reforms based on the amendments, but overall, the 1998 *Reformasi* was such a startling strategic shock that we did not ideally plan on what steps to take next. So that’s the constraint: because they [reform of the military and political authority] happened simultaneously, it was not clear who controlled whom. And the reform—the military reform—had no one to control it. It is quite fortunate that the Indonesian nation has a good TNI that could control the reforming of itself.

JH: Will the idea to place the TNI under the Ministry of Defense and POLRI under the Ministry of Home Affairs, as you have advocated, gain support among TNI and POLRI elites?

AW: This reform has no connection with support. As a political decision and as a policy, it is good to have support. But as with any process in general, there will always be two aspects. One has to do with capturing aspirations from the bottom up, but that is not everything. Even in politics, we cannot deify the word “*rakyat*” [people’s demand] as if it has to be implemented absolutely. This is because there must be an educational aspect to the process as well. People must also be educated, just like when we take care of our children, not all of our children’s demands get granted. Such is also the case with the process [of gaining support for reform]. Understanding of the need for change and change itself varies from one person to another. Thus, it is not easy to get unanimous approval [or support]. Additionally, in our culture, planning for the future is rarely cultivated, while the past is remembered as nostalgic memories, fossilised and not to be changed. This puts our culture in a position that is uncomfortable with change, since change means uncertainties in the future. Our society is unused to uncertainties, feeling that uncertainties will disrupt harmony. We tend to say, “but these are existing conditions that have existed from the past, why do we have to change?” So that is also one reason why support is not the only factor.

JH: In the book you also wrote that the TNI acted as a stabilizer and “*dinamisator*” (dynamics initiator). What does it mean, and how can the TNI retain its role as a stabilizer and ‘*dinamisator*’, when it is under a political or governmental authority?

AW: What I mean with the statement that the TNI acts as a stabilizer and a “*dinamisator*” is related to the time when the TNI reform was launched. At the time the *dwifungsi* (dual function) doctrine was still being implemented, and the TNI acted as a stabilizer and a “*dinamisator*” at the operational and tactical levels. Being a stabilizer meant to maintain security and stability; while being a “*dinamisator*” was to empower (*memberdayakan*) people to carry out development according to the government’s programme. It’s a tactical thing. That’s why I said that within the TNI reform, this was nothing new. The TNI still acts as a stabilizer and “*dinamisator*” at the strategic level. As a stabilizer, the TNI maintains its defense function, including maintaining security and stability. However, as a “*dinamisator*”, the TNI consciously withdrew from politics, so that civilians could advance the democratic order. The withdrawal became a catalyst for civilians to enter the transition to democracy. It is possible that if there had been no TNI, they would not have entered into the transition to democracy. Or, if the military had intervened as in Egypt, it [the transition to democracy] would not necessarily have run smoothly.

JH: How does the TNI relate to the civil authorities? In particular, how do you characterise the relationship between the TNI and the Jokowi administration?

AW: First, let me explain the TNI’s relationship with civil authorities. In a democracy, power is held by civilian officers or elected public officials. Why? [Because] they are elected by the people, [and as such], they hold the people’s mandate. They can make political decisions because they have the mandate from the people as a form of people’s sovereignty. What does this mean? No matter how valiant the TNI commander is... whether he wears green, red, purple, or orange beret... he never holds a political mandate, because he is not elected by the people. He is the instrument of the president. So as an analogy, we can

consider the TNI chief as a chauffeur. Although he holds the weapon – and the weapon is more often held by the commander of the TNI – the instrument is actually still the instrument of the president. Likewise, although the chauffeur more often holds the steering wheel of the car, we should remember that the car is owned by the employer. So, the chauffeur who drives the car only drives the car under the orders of the employer.

That's basically how the military commander should be positioned in relation to the president. So, in a democracy, power lies in the hands of public officials elected by the people. Actually, the civilian authority is said to have supremacy over the military authority, because it can deploy the TNI. The TNI cannot give orders to the president.

But the concept of civil supremacy should not be understood as the civilians having control over the army. Because this [civil supremacy] is only about the way authority flows through the public policy-making pipeline regarding defense – that policy comes from those who have political authority, and is carried out functionally by the main operational actor, the TNI. So, any goal in the TNI's duties always contains political objectives, and this is in accordance with the law regarding the tasks performed by the military everywhere. TNI's goals always contain political aspects, and are within the framework of political objectives.

JH: So is there any difference in how President Joko Widodo and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono relate to the military?

AW: It depends heavily on the president's understanding of civil-military affairs, and the president's personality in asserting control over the TNI. That's what makes one president different from another. But the normative, authoritative, and mechanical procedures are fixed.

JH: In your view, does the current situation—especially under the Jokowi Administration—conform to the idea of reforming and transforming the TNI and police that was started in 1998?

AW: Inside the TNI itself, the leaders have not thoroughly agreed on how to view the reform of the TNI. Many TNI officers, especially those in the army, view TNI reform as consisting of two aspects. They agree on the first aspect, which is that the TNI should be based on the president's political decisions. But they do not agree on the second aspect, which is that the TNI should give up its role as the “sole guardian of the nation”. They are worried. Therefore, from within the TNI itself, reason will always be sought to keep involving the TNI in non-defense functions, based on this second understanding of its role.

JH: How do you see the TNI's involvement in various issues related to ideologies outside of Pancasila, such as the ones about radical Islam and the establishment of the Khilafah system in Indonesia?

AW: These people, especially the army officers, are still very eager to delve and engage in non-defense functions, such as political functions. Most of them are TNI officers acting in their capacity as individuals. But in my view, it can be interpreted in this way: they see this as an opportunity to make political investments. For example, when they are freed from active service in the future, they may be able to join one of the political camps, in order to be able to get a political position. It can be interpreted in that direction. So even though it is

not the TNI as an institution that moves into politics, there is a tendency for individuals to slip into politics, which in effect is essentially an abuse of the TNI institution.

JH: If so, how should the TNI deal with ideological positions that are outside of Pancasila?

AW: They should not participate in politics. That's the responsibility of the government. They should continue the reform process to transform the TNI into a professional military institution under the principle of democracy, primarily under civil supremacy.

JH: Even in relation to the HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia),³ should the TNI be involved?

AW: No, it's the responsibility of the government. That's politics, with all its instruments. They have intelligence. They have political power. They have law enforcement. Because any violation originating or occurring within the country is in essence a violation of the law. For example, treason, that's a violation of the law. The perpetrator should not be attacked with a platoon of Kopassus (Special Forces Command) squad. It has to be shown what law they violated in the Criminal Code, then carry out the legal proceedings, and apply sanctions after the trial. So all that, as long as it happens within Indonesia's national jurisdiction, in the event of the breaking of the law, the response should be law enforcement.

JH: So should the TNI only focus on external defense?

AW: Yes, there's no reason the military should do anything outside of its [external] defense function, unless the president orders otherwise. The primary mission of the military basically is to engage in combat missions to defend the sovereignty of the state and integrity of national territory against external military aggressions. Any military force is never designed to be a law enforcement force in the internal affairs of the state. It is also healthy to keep the military away from any involvement in politics. But the military can be brought in to assist civilian authorities in peace time by order of the president. A change in role and authority can be brought about by the declaration of a state of military or war emergency.

JH: Speaking of defense, even though Indonesia is a maritime country, the navy is often said to not be strong enough. Are there any discussions about strengthening the navy under TNI reform?

AW: TNI reform is primarily concerned with the issue of *role and authority*. The dual function is a matter of *role and authority*: that there were military officers who became ministers, that there were military officers doing political work, and that there were military officers supporting Golkar. Those were not *within* their *constitutional roles and authority*. So the concern is with the issue of authority, not policy.

³ HTI is a Muslim organisation known to aim at establishing the caliphate, a transnational political entity often regarded as antithetical to the very nature of a unitary nation state such as Indonesia. For a background understanding of HTI, see Fahlesa Munabari, "Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia: the Rhetorical Struggle for Survival", in *Islam in Contention: Rethinking Islam and State in Indonesia*, edited by Ota Atsushi, Okamoto Masaaki and Ahmad Suaedy (Jakarta: Wahid Institute & CSEAS, 2010), pp. 169-217.

However, to address the above question, one can say that to build a military service that is technology-heavy requires a large budget and more professional planning.

JH: How does the TNI view the role that Indonesia should play in the Natuna Sea and the South China Sea? Is there a strategy that the TNI wants Indonesia to employ to defend the Natuna Sea and other border areas?

AW: I see that culturally, the TNI's mindset cannot completely move away from the domestic mindset. This is especially true within the army. They are always [preoccupied with domestic issues]...If people talk about the South China sea, or where [external] threats are coming from, they are not enthusiastic enough. But when talking about Papua and Aceh — [domestic] threats to the nation — they become excited and very agitated. We are not yet able to divert our energy from a domestic orientation—which was the main reputation of the TNI of the past—to analyse possible external threats in the future.

JH: What are your views on the role of the police (Polri) under the Jokowi Administration?

AW: The police has shown considerable progress. The point is, they are willing to learn, and they are much assisted by the Australian federal police after the Bali bombing. From then onwards, they have been progressing considerably through learning.

Under the presidency of Jokowi, there is also one important thing that we need to observe, namely, that President Jokowi has given political backing for the police to carry out its duties in law enforcement. Among these is Jokowi's presidential declaration that “no mass organization is allowed to do *sweeping*.”⁴ If there is a mass organization that does “sweeping”, it will be dealt with [by the police]. Well, that gives political backing and morale for the police to act, as compared to previous presidents, who did not give clear political support to the police to carry out law enforcement.

JH: What is your view on the role of the military and defense education in the process of military reform and transformation?

AW: The process of military education can be a means for communicating and transmitting the concept of reform within the TNI, but it is not the material source of reform. Because education lags behind [the institution]—it is not possible for education to be more advanced than the institution. Where did the source of education come from? Frankly, from abroad. People who want to make progress have to have some access to comparisons. When one has no comparison, one cannot say, “How valuable is this right now”. But if one has that, one can say, “This is valued at 8, this 4.” So this comes from education abroad, particularly from the United States. Especially with the freezing of IMET (International Military

⁴ In contemporary Indonesian society, the English word “sweeping” is used to refer to unlawful actions (such as raids) conducted by mass organizations to ensure that people conform to the norms espoused by the organization. One example of such actions is the “sweeping” conducted by certain Muslim organizations in December 2016 to ensure that Muslims working in shopping centres were not forced by their employers to wear anything associated with Christmas, an action that prompted President Jokowi to order the police to take firm action against those organizations (see <https://en.tempo.co/read/news/2016/12/19/055828900/Jokowi-Orders-Police-to-Take-Firm-Action-Against-Organizations>).

Education and Training) by the United States, which is an act of ignorance, this [education opportunity] has been closed to Indonesia, to generations of officers from that time to this day.

JH: As the governor of Lemhannas, what role can you play in this education?

AW: When I was outside of Lemhannas, I had already seen Lemhannas as an educational institution that was more oriented towards prescriptive, not to say doctrinaire methods]. So the participants just sat passively, waiting to be given material. It was rote learning. Now I try to better balance it with critical thinking, I told them the same thing during the opening ceremony. I want them all to enjoy their time here; if they like learning, enjoy it. We will not spoon-feed and smother them with materials; we will invite them to find solutions to the problems we face today: “Okay, [if] we’re talking about Pancasila, what do you think about Pancasila? Why is Pancasila lagging behind? What’s your analysis, and how do we find the solution to restore Pancasila?”

So we invite the participants to think. That is especially what I want to do in Lemhannas so that the participants, the students, think more critically, and use scientific approaches and critical analysis based on causal processes. They have to be able to conduct critical thinking. Participants should not expect to be spoon-fed. We invite them to take part in the thinking process. Frankly speaking, the challenges and problems are not only in relation to the students, but also implies a change of mindset among the faculty staff and lecturers, which is not easy either.

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