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Golkar Splits: But Who Will Emerge the Winner?

*By Leo Suryadinata**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Towards the end of 2014, the Golkar Party openly split into two factions. The first is led by General Chairman Aburizal Bakrie (known as Ical), a Sumatran businessman, and the other by Deputy General Chairman Agung Laksono, a Javanese veteran politician and businessman. Both factions held different national congresses resulting in the emergence of two central boards and two general chairmen of the party i.e. Ical and Agung.
- Both groups submitted their case to the Golkar Party Court, which eventually issued a verdict. The Agung group interpreted the verdict to be in its favour, and the government took a stand that was apparently sympathetic to Agung. The Ical faction protested and took the government to court.
- The Agung faction has not won completely and has one year (until October 2016) to put Golkar in order before holding the party national congress. Meanwhile Agung has formed his own Golkar's central board and attempted to replace the one formed by Ical. He has also tried to win over members of the pro-Ical faction. If Agung joins the government coalition, it will give the Jokowi administration a parliamentary majority.

- Golkar was the personal vehicle of Suharto for legitimizing his government and it dominated Indonesian politics under the New Order. It was also a Javanese-based military-dominated vehicle, but after the fall of Suharto, it was transformed into a multiethnic party dominated by businessmen.
- The struggle for control of Golkar has not ended, and it remains to be seen whether support from the Jokowi government will see Agung emerge as the ultimate winner.

** Leo Suryadinata is Visiting Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.*

INTRODUCTION

Golkar, the second largest party in Indonesia, has split into two—the Aburizal Bakrie faction and the Agung Laksono faction. The first faction held the national congress (Munas) in Bali between 30 November and 4 December 2014, at which Aburizal Bakrie (known as Ical) was re-elected general chairman, and the second held its own national congress in Jakarta on 6-8 December 2014 at which Agung Laksono (known as Agung) was elected general chairman. Both claim to be the genuine representative of Golkar and submitted their individual case to the Golkar Party Court for official recognition.

On 3 March 2015, after two months of deliberation, the four-judge court announced an ambiguous verdict. Since the Ical faction had submitted its case to the State Administrative Court (Pengadilan Tata Usaha Negara or PTUN), two of the judges (Muladi and HAS Natabaya) wished to wait for the State Court's decision before taking a stand. The other two (Djasri Marin and Andi Mattalatta) favoured the Agung faction on the grounds that the Jakarta congress was “more open, transparent and democratic.”¹ The latter two judges nevertheless stated that the Agung faction should hold a Golkar national congress (Munas) by October 2016 at the latest. The Court's decision was expectedly taken by the Agung faction as a legal victory. In Agung's words: “We accept the verdict of the Partai Golkar Court that the Jakarta congress is a legal one, at least this is the view of the two judges of the Party Court, and no judge ever said that the Jakarta congress is illegal.”²

The Ical faction, however, considered the verdict a split decision.³

Soon after the Party Court announced its verdict, Yasonna Laoly, the Law and Human Rights Minister, issued a statement on 10 March saying that he accepted Golkar Party Court's decision and recognized Agung as the rightful general chairman of the Golkar Party. He also stated that Agung should set up the Central Board (DPP) and also absorb members of the Ical faction for the sake of reconciliation. The Minister further noted that the position that Agung held would be valid for a year (until October 2016) when the party's National Congress would be held again.⁴ His recommendations coincided with those of the two judges of the Golkar Party Court that favoured Agung.

The Ical faction protested against the Minister for siding with Agung and sued him at the State Administrative Court.

¹ See “Makalah Partai Golkar Putuskan Manerima Munas versi Agung Laksono”, Kompas.Com 3 March 2015 (Accessed 12/5/2015).

² Ibid., See also “Hasil keputusan hakim makamah Golkar: Kubu Agung dinyatakan sah.” Metrobali 3/3/2015, accessed 29/4/2015.

³ Ranny Virginia Utami, “Gugatan baru kubu Ical untuk kepastian hukum”, CNN Indonesia, 6 March 2015 (Accessed 12/5/2015).

⁴ “Menkumham: Kepengurusan Golkar Kubu Agung Hanya 2016”, Kompas.com 12 March 2015 (Accessed 29/4/2015)

As soon as Agung received the verdict from the Golkar Party Court, he proclaimed that he would withdraw Golkar from the oppositional Red and White Coalition (Koalisi Merah Putih) and join the ruling “Outstanding Indonesia Coalition” (Koalisi Indonesia Hebat). Jusuf Kalla, the Vice-President of Indonesia and former general chairman of Golkar, welcomed Golkar’s move to join the government party coalition. Surya Paloh, chairman of Partai Nasional Demokrat (Nasdem Party) and Wiranto, chairman of Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat (Hanura Party), both former leaders of Golkar, met with Agung and also welcomed his decision. In fact, it was Jusuf Kalla and Surya Paloh who had helped Agung in his endeavor to become general chairman of Golkar. It was also the two of them who lobbied Megawati (chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle, PDI-P) to get the Minister of Law and Human Rights (who is from the PDIP) to issue a statement recognizing Agung as the rightful general chairman of Golkar.⁵

Golkar joining the ruling coalition would give the coalition a majority in parliament. This would definitely benefit the Jokowi government. At the moment, the coalition government has 246 seats in parliament, making up 43.9% of the seats. With the Golkar Party in its ranks, the coalition government would have 337 seats. i.e. 60.2% of the seats in parliament.

THE VICISSITUDES OF JAVANESE INFLUENCE IN GOLKAR

However, will the Agung faction be able to curtail or co-opt members of the Ical faction and consolidate its own power? Let us look at a brief history of Golkar in order to gain a possible answer.

Partai Golkar was called Sekber Golkar (abbreviated as Golkar) during the Suharto era and was first organized in 1964 as a loose federation of anti-communist socio-political groups. Many of these were linked to the military. When General Suharto came to power after the 1965 coup, this organization was reorganized and turned into an electoral machine in order to legitimize the military regime of Suharto. Between 1971 and 1998 six general elections were held, and Golkar, which aimed at defending the interests of the New Order regime and the Suharto family, won between 62% and 74% of the votes in these elections.⁶

Suharto was the chief *Pembina* (“Mentor”) of Golkar. In reality, he controlled the organization. He was solely responsible for policy making and for the selection of top leaders in Golkar. In his 32-year rule, Golkar had six general chairmen, the majority of whom came from the Javanese ethnic group and five out of six of these were military men. The only civilian general chairman was the last one, Harmoko, an ex-journalist who created his own newspaper empire who was also a Javanese. Due to the Javanese domination and the image of Suharto—he was often seen by outsiders as a “Javanese king”—Golkar was also perceived as a “Javanese-based political party”.

⁵ “Tangan Daeng di Rumah Beringin”, *Tempo*, 29 March 2015, pp.38-39.

⁶ Leo Suryadinata, “The Decline of the Hegemonic Party System in Indonesia: Golkar after the Fall of Soeharto”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, (vol. 29, no.2) August 2007, p.336.

Suharto thus had absolute control over Golkar. Nevertheless, towards the end of his rule, his control over the military began to weaken and he had to rely on civilians, especially those with Islamic background, to strengthen his grip. One could begin to see the emerging struggle between the military faction and the non-military faction within Golkar, but there was no open conflict while Suharto was still at the helm. However, the moment Suharto stepped down, the struggle for power came into the open. The civilian faction in Golkar gradually succeeded in curtailing the power of the military faction.

In July 1998, a few months after Suharto's downfall, Golkar officially became Partai Golkar or the Golkar Party; and the military faction and non-military faction competed for the top leadership of the party. The military faction was represented by the retired general, Edi Sudradjat, while the other was represented by Akbar Tanjung, a former leader of the Muslim Student's Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam or HMI). Akbar eventually won and became the party's general chairman. From this time onward, Golkar was never again led by an ex-military man or ethnic Javanese.

GOLKAR AND THE GOVERNMENT

Being a Batak, Akbar appeared to be a transitional figure. He soon lost his position to another Muslim businessman, the Buginese Jusuf Kalla. Apparently, Jusuf Kalla, then Vice-President of Indonesia, had the full support of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and the party saw the advantages of having the Vice-President as its general chairman. Nevertheless, SBY in running for a second term as president in 2009 did not select Jusuf Kalla as his partner. Jusuf Kalla decided to run for president as well but was defeated.

He also lost the Golkar general chairmanship to the wealthy Sumatran businessman Aburizal Bakrie (Ical). Ical had supported SBY, who, in being re-elected rewarded Ical with the position of Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs. However, during the 2014 presidential elections, Ical supported Prabowo who lost his bid for the presidency, and Golkar became part of the opposition camp.

With the downfall of Suharto, Golkar saw dissatisfied key members leaving to establish their own parties. If we don't include SBY, who was not an office bearer anyway, there were at least three such leaders: General Wiranto who set up Hanura Party in 2006, General Prabowo Subianto who established Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra) in 2008 and Surya Paloh who founded the NasDem party in 2010.

AGUNG FACES CHALLENGES

The parliamentary elections were held in April 2014, in which Golkar lost ground. It only obtained 91 seats, 15 fewer than in 2009. Many in the party blamed Ical for this. At the same time, he was unable to gain support from other parties to be nominated as presidential candidate. In fact, his nomination faced opposition within his own party, where Agung

refused to endorse Ical because his electability was in question, due to his business firm's involvement in a scandalous industrial disaster in Sidoarjo (East Java).

By October 2014, the differences between Ical and Agung had divided Golkar into two factions. The Ical faction supported Prabowo while the Agung faction sided with Jokowi. Ical hastily planned the IX Golkar National Congress to be held in Bali between 30 November and 4 December 2014. The spokesman of the Ical faction, Theo Sambuaga, made the announcement only on 24 November 2014. In response, Agung held the Central Board meeting at Golkar headquarters and set up the "Save Golkar Presidium" (Presidium Penyelamat Golkar), as part of his plan to oust Ical.⁷

Those who did not support Ical were barred from attending the Bali congress, and it was reported that those involved in the "Save Golkar Presidium" were expelled from the party. As the sole candidate at the Bali congress, Ical was elected general chairman, and by acclamation, not by secret ballot. The congress also nominated the Golkar Central Board, which included many better-known figures linked to the New Order. Veteran politician Akbar Tanjung was made the Assessment Board Chairman, but this was more in recognition of his seniority and offered no real power. The nine deputy general chairpersons included Fadel Muhammad, a businessman who was former leader of the HMI, and Siti Hedianti Harijadi, the daughter of Suharto and ex-wife of Prabowo. (For the list, see Appendix 1).

The Agung faction had initially planned to hold the party congress in January 2015 but was forced to hold it in Jakarta on 6 December 2014, two days after the Bali congress ended. Three candidates were proposed, and Agung was elected general chairman. His Golkar Central Board members appear to be younger and less established. (For the list, see Appendix 2).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Partai Golkar has developed into a formal political party after the end of the New Order. Its support came more strongly from the Outer Islands, making it a multi-ethnic party that is now led by non-Javanese. It is not yet clear if Agung will succeed in becoming the sole legitimate leader of Golkar by garnering majority support and defeating the Ical faction. The composition of Agung's Central Board has yet to be accepted by the government and many of Golkar's members in parliament remain supportive of Ical. Moreover, on 1 April, the State Administrative Court temporarily suspended the Law and Human Rights Minister's decision to endorse the Agung faction.

⁷ Elvan Dany Sutrisno, "Golkar pecah, ini peta pertarungan kubu Ical vs Agung Laksono Cs", Detiknews, 26/11/2014

Will the support of the government for the Agung faction be enough for him to gain the upper hand? It is still too early to tell. Nevertheless, the victory or failure of Agung will have a big impact on the parliamentary strength of the Jokowi government.

Appendix:

1. Golkar Central Board: The Aburizal Bakrie (Ical) Version

Chairman of Assessment Board: Akbar Tanjung

General Chairman: Aburizal Bakrie

Deputy General Chairmen (9 persons):

Theo Sambuaga

Nurdin Halid

Setya Novanto

Sjarif Cicip Sutardjo

Fadel Muhammad

Siti Hediati Harijadi (Titiek Soeharto)

Ahmadi Noor Supit

Ade Komaruddin

Aziz Syamsuddin

Chairmen of Various fields (Ketua Bidang, 36 persons)

Ketua Harian: Moh. Sulaeman Hidajat

Secretary-General: Idrus Marham

Deputy secretaries (36 persons)

Treasurer-General: Bambang Soesatyo

Deputy Treasurers (34 persons)

(Source: "Inilah Pengurus DPP Partai Golkar Hasil Munas Bali", Tempo.Co., 4 December 2014)

2. Golkar Central Board: The Agung Laksono Version

General Chairman: Agung Laksono

Deputy General Chairmen (3 persons):

Priyo Budi Santoso

Agus Gumiwang Kartasasmita

Yorrys Raweyai

Chairmen of various fields (Ketua, 22 persons)

Secretary-General: Zainuddin Amali

Deputy secretaries (19 persons)

Treasurer-General: Sari Yuliati
Deputy Treasurers (18 persons)

(Source: "Ini susunan pengurus Golkar Munas di Ancol", Kompas.com 8 December 2014)

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Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30, Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang, Singapore 119614
Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955
Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735

Homepage: www.iseas.edu.sg

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