

Conflict Resolution: The Role Of The Indonesian Military In Resolving Social Conflict In Ambon, Maluku, Indonesia, 1999-2002

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ABSTRACT

The social conflict that occurred in Ambon from 1999 to 2002 prompted the central government in Jakarta to deploy the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to assist the police in securing Ambon. The involvement of the TNI and the security forces in the Ambon region significantly contributed to providing security protection for civilians. However, many people criticized the TNI's involvement in securing the conflict in Ambon, claiming it was unprofessional and resulted in numerous civilian casualties. The methodology used in this study was descriptive-qualitative. The researchers conducted fieldwork in Ambo. They interviewed community informants, religious leaders, community leaders, and military leaders. They also conducted literature and archival research related to the Ambon conflict. Research findings indicate that the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) played a crucial role in assisting with security during the Ambon conflict. Both police and TNI personnel were involved in the conflict. Although the conflict has ended, the TNI remains tasked with assisting the police in securing Ambon post-conflict. The 1999-2022 conflict in Ambon saw frequent inter-village conflicts, both within and outside the same religion.

Keywords: The Role of the Indonesian Military, Resolving Social Conflict, Ambon, Maluku, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Transfer of military power from Sukarno to Suharto ended the role of civilian dominance in government. The military, initially established as a tool of national defense, expanded its role in various fields, including politics and economics, during the New Order era. After President Suharto's rule ended, the military found itself in a marginalized position. It was considered one of the state institutions that enjoyed the power of the New Order (Jacques Bertrand, 2009). The push for military reform coincided with the fall of the Suharto government. This reform demanded an agenda of change in various fields, including the military's abandonment of its dual role between the

Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) and business. The military was returned to its barracks and solely carried out its primary duties in the defense sector.

Along with demands for reform in Indonesia, which ended Suharto's rule and forced the military to return to the barracks, various social and political conflicts emerged in Indonesia, including the secession of East Timor, Sambas, Madura, Poso, Maluku, Aceh, and Papua (Wening & Rahel, 2021). The conflict in Ambon, Maluku, surprised many because since the RMS Ambon incident, Maluku had not experienced a major conflict, despite Ambon's religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity. After Indonesian independence, Ambon, Maluku, has never

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experienced a social and religious conflict as large as the 1999-2002 conflict (Badrus Sholeh, 2008).

From a demographic and socio-cultural perspective, Ambon, Maluku, is very harmonious, although in local politics, political competition between social groups, sometimes involving religious and ethnic issues, emerges. A big question arises for the public, what was the factor that caused the riots in Ambon, Maluku? The riots in Ambon, Maluku are often associated with the weakening of the military's role after the 1998 reforms, but some argue that the conflict in Ambon, Maluku cannot be separated from the military's game to strengthen the military's bargaining power in Indonesian politics.

Following the military reforms in Indonesia, its influence in Indonesian business and politics was increasingly marginalized. With the post-reform unrest in various regions of Indonesia in 1998, the military regained opportunities and assumed a role in politics, establishing a political alliance with the civilian government (Muhammad Najib Azca, 2006). During the Ambon riots in Maluku, the civilian government struggled to manage the unrest, prompting the civilian government to request military involvement in addressing the social conflict in Ambon.

The conflict, which occurred in Ambon from 1999 to 2004, resulted in extraordinary destruction. In addition to the number of deaths and injuries, various public facilities and homes were also destroyed or burned. Furthermore, the impact of the conflict also resulted in the extreme division of Maluku society into two communities: Muslim and Christian. Residents of diverse ethnic, racial, and religious communities were displaced and separated, and then regrouped or integrated with their respective communities.

RESEARCH METHOD:

This research method uses a qualitative approach, where researchers examine various phenomena of military involvement in the Ambon-Maluku conflict. Data collection was conducted through literature studies, archives, and interviews. Interviews were conducted with policymakers and TNI leaders at the time.

A. TNI Involvement

The Ambon conflict of January 19, 1999, destabilized Ambon City. Crowds gathered in various locations, causing arson and violence. The military and police in Ambon struggled to control the crowds. The central government then dispatched military troops from Makassar, South Sulawesi, from the Army Strategic Reserve Corps (Kostrad) II Division. The purpose of sending the Kostrad II Division troops to Makassar was to provide security in Ambon City. The presence of Kostrad troops from outside Ambon, Maluku, provided support to the military in Ambon, Maluku. However, the impact of the military's presence in securing the conflict in Ambon, Maluku, gradually dragged the military into the conflict.

Securing social conflicts is very different from military deployments in military operations areas. While military deployments in military operations areas clearly distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, in conflict areas, the response strategies are different for ordinary civilians who engage in violent acts.

The deployment of military personnel in conflict areas has resulted in frequent shootings from both Muslim and Christian communities. This has resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, leading to frustration and emotional distress.

The military from the Combat Engineering Unit (Zipur) is tasked with rehabilitating and renovating housing and facilities damaged by the conflict. The deployment of Zipur troops in the border area between the Muslim and Christian communities has resulted in Zipur troops being targeted by shootings from both communities. This situation has caused psychological stress, leading to depression, and ultimately, involvement in the conflict, defending communities that share their religious identity. (Interview with Vice Admiral Pur Didi Setiadi: 2024)

The long-running conflict resulted in a significant military presence in Ambon, Maluku. Initially, the military from outside Ambon, Maluku, was sent to Ambon, Maluku, from the Second Division of the Indonesian Army Strategic Reserves Command (Kostrad). As the conflict escalated and lasted for a prolonged period, numerous military units were sent

to Ambon, including the Marines, Kopassus, and the Engineers Unit for infrastructure repairs.

The military in Maluku not only secured civilians in the conflict but also secured government offices, educational institutions, public facilities, and vital national assets such as Pertamina and the airport. During the Maluku conflict, many public facilities, including government offices, such as the governor's office, were burned by mobs.

B. The Impact of Military Involvement

The community felt the benefits of military involvement in securing the Ambon-Maluku conflict. At the beginning of the Ambon-Maluku conflict, riots broke out in various areas of Ambon City. The security forces of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in Ambon were unable to control the unrest. The presence of the Kostrad II Division military troops significantly assisted in securing Ambon City, Maluku. However, some believed that the presence of Kostrad troops in Ambon City exacerbated the conflict and resulted in numerous casualties due to the lack of repression from the military. Kostrad, trained as a combat force, experienced difficulties in resolving social conflicts. During the Ambon conflict, the soldiers lacked a thorough understanding of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling social conflicts involving religion and ethnicity.

Many military personnel died while carrying out security duties during the Ambon-Maluku conflict, typically after being shot with firearms by the opposing groups. Troops assigned to separate conflicts between the two communities were often targeted by one of the communities, which felt aggrieved, believing the military was acting unfairly in its security duties.

The military was frequently targeted by both Muslim and Christian communities. Conflicts between military and police units also frequently occurred during security operations in Ambon-Maluku. The large number of military troops in Ambon-Maluku, consisting of various units, made coordination difficult. In addition to the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), security forces in Ambon were also provided by the police and the Mobile Brigade (Brimob). The police and Brimob units were also

involved in security operations during the Ambon conflict. The presence of Brimob officers was widely perceived as siding with the Christian community, while the Army was perceived as defending the Muslim community.

The police and military are considered to have played a role in the Ambon-Maluku conflict, making it difficult to resolve. The conflict, which leveraged religious and ethnic issues, has prevented many TNI and police officers from remaining neutral and defending their respective religious communities.

Observing the involvement of the police and army in the Ambon-Maluku conflict, community leaders in Ambon-Maluku proposed to the central government to deploy a Joint Battalion, tasked with taking action against the military and police in Ambon who were involved in and supporting the conflicting groups.

The Joint Battalion's military presence in Ambon has faced challenges and resistance from armed groups who do not want the Ambon conflict to end. Many members of the Joint Battalion have been shot dead. The Joint Battalion's strategy is to maintain security in Ambon-Maluku by clearing the city of armed groups.

When the Ambon Maluku conflict occurred, many civilians owned homemade and organic firearms made by weapons factories that were obtained on the black market. Armed militias in the two communities had standard weapons owned by the military and the National Police, this situation caused the Ambon Maluku conflict to be difficult to resolve, peace efforts carried out by the central government, local governments, and community organizations continued to fail, because they were not followed by armed groups at the grassroots level, grassroots groups have a direct influence on society (Kirsten E Schulze, 2002).

The uncontrolled security situation in Ambon, Maluku, led Christian figures to meet with President Gus Dur at his residence in Ciganjur, South Jakarta, asking for the state's firmness in resolving the Ambon, Maluku conflict. They also requested the replacement of General Wiranto from the position of Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Chief of Staff of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), Lieutenant General Suadi Marasabesya,

who was considered to have failed in handling the Maluku Conflict. They conveyed the request for UN foreign troops to Maluku, because they were disappointed to see the failure of the government, military and police in handling the Ambon, Maluku Conflict (interview, Pastor Agus Agus Ulahay: 2024).

Responding to requests from Christian community groups, President Gus Dur subsequently dismissed the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) Commander General Wiranto, who was from the Army, and replaced him with Admiral Widodo AS from the Navy. Widodo AS had previously served as Deputy Commander of the TNI. Indonesian political observers have consistently linked the change of commander to Gus Dur's efforts to provide opportunities for non-army personnel to become TNI Commanders. Previously, TNI Commanders had always been from the Army. The background to Wiranto's replacement was inextricably linked to President Gus Dur's efforts to resolve the Maluku conflict quickly.

Ambon, the capital of Maluku, remains highly unsafe, with many people dying from sniper fire, firearms owned by civilians. TNI and police officers involved in the Ambon riots have made it difficult for the government to apprehend snipers hiding in Ambon's high-rise buildings.

The Commander of the XIV Pattimura Military Command, Brigadier General I Made Yasa, implemented a strategic move to restore security in Ambon by disarming civilian groups. The Joint Battalion, consisting of various units of the Indonesian Army (Kostrad), Marines, and Kopassus, attacked the base of an armed militia group.

On January 22, 2001, the Wijaya II Hotel in Ambon City, which served as a base for armed militia, was attacked by the Joint Battalion, Yon Gab. The urban warfare between the Joint Battalion and the armed militia resulted in casualties among the militia and TNI soldiers. The Joint Battalion successfully captured Hotel Wijaya II, and the militias were captured, including police and military personnel. Approximately 25 militiamen were captured, along with 14 firearms. The arrest of military and police members at the Wijaya II Hotel by Yon Gab showed that there were military and police members involved in the Ambon riots (Interview: Sahlan Helut: 2023).

The involvement of the military and police in the Ambon, Maluku riots was motivated by various reasons. First, group solidarity, defending groups that shared a common identity, such as religious or ethnic identity. Second, economic motives, involving the police and military in the conflict stemmed from the desire to profit, for example by selling ammunition and weapons.

The large number of firearms circulating among civilians was caused by the long-running conflict, which has led to the development of skills in manual weapon assembly. The Ambon, Maluku, conflict, which initially occurred only in Ambon City, then spread to various regions in Maluku, leading to the circulation of illegal firearms from various countries. The conflict-ridden region of Ambon, Maluku, has become a lucrative market for the illegal firearms trade.

Although the peace process has been implemented in Ambon, Maluku, military troops remain deployed to provide security in Ambon and other Maluku regions. In 2021, the Army Strategic Reserves Command (Kostrad) routinely dispatched a battalion to Ambon for security purposes, following the Malino II Agreement. Kostrad Commander General Ryamizard Ryacudu stated that the deployment of Kostrad troops was to prevent further conflict in Ambon, Maluku, as many wanted unrest in Ambon and Maluku to resurface (Koran Tempo 4, March 2021).

Following the Malino II Agreement, security conditions in Ambon gradually improved. The post-conflict situation in Ambon-Maluku demonstrates that, despite segregation between Muslim and Christian communities, social integration is gradually occurring naturally (Saidin Ernas, 2018).

The presence of the TNI (Indonesian National Army) to secure the Ambon Maluku Conflict, is part of the TNI's assistance duties to the Police institution, TNI Law No. 34 of 2004, the TNI's function is to maintain National Defense from threats from foreign countries, while the Police have the task of securing domestic security, but the TNI can carry out domestic security duties if requested by the police and the nature is to provide assistance, as happened in Ambon Maluku.

Following the Malino II Agreement, security in Ambon improved, with developments in health,

education, and infrastructure. The economy rebounded, and traditional traders in Maluku, mostly women, resumed trading activities in traditional markets (Weding Udasmoro: 2022). Despite these improvements in security and the economy, social conflict remains frequent in Ambon, Maluku, shifting from religious issues to minor conflicts between neighboring villages. An in-depth anthropological and historical study is needed to determine why social conflict frequently occurs in Ambon, Maluku. Inter-village conflict on Ambon Island, Maluku, has been ongoing since the Dutch colonial era. The conflict has always involved acts of violence, which continue to occur today (Ismail Rumadan: 2022).

The military in Indonesia has a big role in maintaining the conflict in Ambon, Maluku. After the conflict, without the military, the security conditions in Ambon, Maluku, were difficult to maintain. Various strategies were carried out by the military in Ambon, Maluku to prevent the conflict from happening again in a larger form like the 1999-2002 conflict.

CONCLUSION

The prolonged Ambon-Maluku conflict has led to the military's involvement in maintaining security in Ambon. The military's involvement in the Ambon-Maluku conflict has led to the involvement of military personnel in the conflict. The involvement of military personnel in the Maluku conflict is motivated by several reasons, including primordial social ties, economic reasons, and simply following orders from superiors.

Although many believe the Indonesian military was involved in the Ambon conflict, it cannot be denied that the Indonesian military has been involved in resolving the conflict in Ambon-Maluku to this day. Many military and police personnel have been killed while maintaining security in the Ambon-Maluku conflict.

Until now there is no legal certainty from the government, what caused the Ambon Maluku riots and who was responsible for the 1999 Ambon riots. Although the situation in Ambon has been peaceful, government, social, economic, and educational activities have been running normally, the military from outside Java, such as Kostrad, still maintains security in Maluku, to provide assistance and support

to the police. After the Malino II agreement, social conflict in Ambon Maluku continued to occur but became a conflict between traditional villages, both between villages of the same religion and between villages of different religions.

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INTERVIEW

Laksamana Madya Purnawirawan Didi Setiadi,
Former Commander of the Ambon Naval Base

Pastor Agus Ulahay, Pr Crisis Center Catholic Ambon
Maluku Indonesia

Sahlan Helut, Television Journalist covering the
Maluku conflict

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