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Counter-Terrorism in Indonesia: Enter the TNI's Task Force

By Jennifer Yang Hui

Synopsis

The establishment of a counter-terrorism task force under the Indonesian military should consider the dynamics of military-police cooperation and how to increase overall public trust in the security apparatuses in general.

Commentary

ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2013, a policeman was mysteriously gunned down in front of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) building in South Jakarta. In the past year, there have been six cases of shootings of police in which four officers have been killed and two seriously injured. In the wake of these attacks, the idea of involving the Indonesian military (TNI) in counter-terrorism operations has once again surfaced.

For instance, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, Djoko Suyanto, has stated that the military would now be given a bigger role in countering terrorism as a result of the recent attack, and Indonesia's new army commander, General Moeldoko has declared his intention to build a counter-terror unit within TNI.

The new CT unit's strengths

While still in the planning phase, it is envisaged that this new CT unit would be: firstly, better coordinated as the navy, army, and air force would coordinate their efforts to deal with terrorist threats; and secondly, highly flexible as the CT unit would only be assembled and deployed in counter-terror operations, and return to their respective branches during peace times.

Indeed the extensive territorial structure across the country and capabilities of the TNI make it well-equipped to address the challenges of counter-terrorism, which entails both internal as well as external/foreign challenges. For example, as effective intelligence is a cornerstone in counter-terrorist operations, one of the TNI's strengths lies in its intelligence-gathering capabilities, which surpasses that of the police and even the Indonesian Intelligence Agency (BIN).

The various intelligence agencies, for example, have been accused of failing to detect and prevent the recent attacks on the police. More scandalous, in May 2010, police intelligence photos of alleged terrorists aiming their weapons at a picture of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at an Aceh military training camp were later discovered to have been taken two years earlier in Poso, Central Sulawesi instead. In view of such debacles,

the TNI was urged to contribute its expertise in the area of intelligence-gathering to counter-terrorism operations.

There are three important factors that must be considered in the process of creating the TNI's counter-terrorism force, however. Firstly, the current responsibility for counter-terrorism operations is largely the remit of the Indonesian police, particularly Detachment 88. Created on 20 June 2003 in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombing, the unit is funded and trained by the United States and Australia, and has carried out many successful operations against terrorist cells.

For example, the unit was instrumental in the killing of Jemaah Islamiyah militant and bomb makers Azahari Hussein in 2005 and Noordin M Top on 17 September 2009. Detachment 88 has also successfully arrested terrorist suspects across the archipelago. In August 2013, nine terrorist suspects were apprehended in various locations in Java and their weapons confiscated.

Need for clear jurisdiction

Secondly, there is, therefore, a need to clearly outline the TNI's counter-terrorism task force's jurisdiction so that there will not be overlaps in functions with the police. With the end of the military's prominent role in Indonesia's political sphere after 1998, the police were tasked with dealing with the internal threats of terrorism, communal violence and separatist conflict, while the army concentrated on defending the country from external forces. However, as Indonesian security scholars such as Dewi Fortuna Anwar have observed, the distinction between domestic and external security for Indonesia has never been clearly drawn.

The 2003 and 2008 Indonesian Defence White Papers, for example, had implied a division in labour for the TNI and the police in various security conditions, broadly outlining that the TNI involvement will be required in a "military emergency" as well as military operations other than war. However, the specific conditions for involvement for either organisation were not clearly delineated.

One result is the turf-fighting over security jurisdiction in the parliament. For instance, the police had shown objection to the draft national security bill in 2008 due to the fear of losing their post-1998 power over domestic security.

To add to the challenge, the relationship between the police and the TNI has always been highly competitive. Besides competition over jurisdiction of security operations, physical clashes at the ground level between police and military officers often occur. A recent example was a clash between members of the TNI and police in Ogan Komering in South Sumatra in March 2013 that resulted in the injury of eight police officers and torching of the precinct police headquarters and police posts, allegedly due to rivalry between security apparatuses.

Without clear guidelines as to the circumstances in which the military should be brought in to bolster the police force in counter-terrorism operations, clashes are almost certain to occur. Thus the mechanics of police-military cooperation must be clearly outlined in order to ensure operational efficiency and effectiveness in the field.

Public trust litmus test

Finally, the creation of TNI's counter-terrorism task force needs to pass through the litmus test of public trust. The Indonesian lawmakers and the public in general are often suspicious of any indication of the military taking on a greater role in post-Suharto Indonesia due to its history of human-rights abuses during the New Order era (1965-1998). Yet support from the civil society is integral to establishing resilience against extremism.

It should be noted that the Indonesian military, through the National Resilience Institute (Lemhanas), a state research and education centre, had been instrumental in the conception of national resilience (*ketahanan nasional*) against communism in the 1960s and 1970s. Given the renewed interest in resilience as a bulwark against terrorism, besides operational considerations, the TNI and the police should ponder reintroducing the concept of resilience in national security issues, including counter-terrorism, which would ensure a whole-of-society approach in dealing with the issue of terrorism.

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