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## Reinterpreting the Total Defense System

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Few people pay attention to our state defense doctrine the Total Defense System (Sistem Pertahanan Semesta or Sishanta), although this doctrine (published by the Defense Ministry in 2007 and publicly available) shapes the legal, political, intellectual, and even operational foundation of our entire national security system.

After 12 years of reform following the fall of Soeharto in 1998, it is important to reinterpret this doctrine and its implications for our national security.

The doctrine essentially envisions a "comprehensive view" of the security challenges facing Indonesia - categorized into "military" threats, such as an invasion, blockade, or armed rebellion, and "non-military" threats, including ideological, political, economic, sociocultural, and technological ones.

As such, our total defense system will be structured accordingly into both "military" and "non-military" defense. Specifically, the Indonesian Military (TNI) component will be strengthened by the political direction and financial support of the government in guiding force development, as well as by the revitalization of the national defense industries. Additionally, a yet-to-be-formed Reserve Component (Komponen Cadangan) and Supporting Component (Komponen Pendukung) are supposed to "enlarge and strengthen" the TNI.

Observers have criticized such an all-encompassing view that could potentially "securitize" almost every governance sector and even open the door to military "involvement" in those areas - much like in the past. Others have questioned whether a Reserve Component is needed when Indonesia is not facing any immediate external threats.

Taken to the extreme, these arguments might lead us to "blame" the Total Defense System and even speculate on dispensing with it. That, however, would be misguided.

The solution here is not to change the doctrine's underlying "logic", but to re-craft the "grammar" - to borrow from the 18th century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (who argued that the "logic" of war remained unchangeable while the "grammar" of warfare always did). This means re-framing the pronouncements and implementation of the Sishanta.

First and foremost, a total defense system does not necessarily mean that all national resources should be "directed and put under the command" of the TNI to handle Indonesia's multi-faceted national security challenges. As such, the doctrine should not automatically make the TNI the "national hub" to tackle all threats.

Instead, a total defense system implies that fundamentally, national security is the responsibility of every individual and all government agencies. In practice, this means that the President, through the yet-to-be-formed National Security Council (NSC) should direct the non-military ministries, like health, energy, or the environment, to take the lead in certain non-traditional security challenges, like climate change or pandemics.

So instead of having the TNI as the hub, we should make the future NSC as the hub and have them "redistribute" and "reassign" which government agency, military or otherwise, should do what, under what type of conditions, to handle what type of threats, and when.

To put it differently, the Sishanta should be reinterpreted to strengthen, not just the TNI, but other civilian governmental sectors to participate in shaping and defending our national security. This would allow a better, more advanced development of the non-military sectors of governance - like technology, health or industry - that the TNI needs anyway to help push their force development forward.

Thus, while the TNI is the "main component" in the Sishanta, the President must make it abundantly clear that it does not in any way mean that the TNI would be the leading actor in every security challenge, or that they have all the political, economic, or social resources at their disposal. Although in cases of a national war and mobilization, this rule may change.

Therefore, the leadership capability of the President and the NSC must be at the top of our national security system - which must be counterbalanced by the oversight role of the House of Representatives (DPR). This is the second reinterpretation of the Sishanta: The people, through the DPR, must be empowered and allowed to exercise oversight authority over the national security sector.

This includes, for example, a parliamentary-mandated breakdown of defense expenditure. It is, after all, the taxpayers' money. To curtail parliamentary oversight, therefore, is contrary to the spirit of a total defense system.

If parliamentarians are unfit to perform such duties, then the solution is not to sideline them altogether, but to strengthen their staff and boost the role of the civilian defense community to support them.

This is the final reinterpretation of Sishanta: the critical role of the media and the civilian defense community in strengthening our national security system. The former could help raise public awareness on pertinent national security issues, while the latter could help bridge the policy gap between the government, the military, and society.

So, to push for policies that could "silence" their voices or hamper their development may be counterproductive in the long run and contrary to the actual spirit of a total defense system.

The bottom line, a total defense system that guarantees the involvement of both the TNI and the people in defending the country, but both sides need to adjust the conditions and direction under which such a system could work in practice in today's democratic setting and rapidly changing strategic environment.

After all, as military theorist J.F.C. Fuller once said, for a doctrine to be effective it "must be elastic enough to admit mutation in accordance with a change in circumstances".

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