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Falintil-Força Defesa Timor-Leste (F-FDTL) in the Era of Independence, 2002 to 2010.

Introduction

Falintil Força Defesa Timor-Leste (F-FDTL)¹ celebrated its thirty fifth anniversary on May 20th 2010. The government of Timor Leste is making a big effort through the 2020 strategic plan, it plans to develop F-FDTL into the defense force of the people that has national integrity and is able keep peace and stability. FALINTIL showed its dedication and commitment during the Indonesian occupation and became the foundation for F-FDTL, a national defense force that has the principle of neutrality within the democratic political system of Timor Leste. Although F-FDTL's roots come from the FRETILIN party the organization that produced the name FALINTIL- the transformation of FALINTIL to F-FDTL must have the principle of impartiality, in order to guarantee independence and truly submit itself to the regulations and laws of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. Timor Leste has entered a new phase that searches for the right place and function of the defense force so that there is no conflict of security policy in the country. For the first time in the history of Timor Leste, national security institutions such as F-FDTL and Timor Leste National Police (PNTL) became a major source of conflict and instability in 2006.

Timor Leste surely knows that celebrating their anniversary every year is not the fundamental objective of the military, but that the military institution needs to focus on how during eight years of becoming a formal military institution in a democratic country, they have continued to strengthen the foundation of discipline and military professionalism of their members, with a purpose of creating a military with a mentality of defending the interests of the people, not the interest of the institution (Institutionalism). An institution should not represent groups or institutions, but do its duty as the constitution requires. "Military duty is to follow the order of the Constitution".² This legal basis is very important for military members when they carry out their military duties as this can prevent politicians from intervening with military organisations. This article attempts to examine the role of F-FDTL since the day it acquired responsibility as Timor Leste's national defense force from 20 May 2002 until the present.

FALINTIL to F-FDTL

When the National Assembly approved the constitution and the East Timorese declared Timor Leste a sovereign nation-state on 20 May 2002, the F-FDTL also formally became the military representative of this country. With a very limited professional capacity and a lack of facilities, Timor Leste managed to form a military institution with the belief of considering the national interest over other things and guaranteeing the sovereignty of Timor Leste. Similar words were also spoken by the F-FDTL Commander Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak when he said we

¹ The name of FALINTIL, F-FDTL and PNTL are written as the expressions found in the Tetun language.

² Number 2, Article 49. Constitution of Democratic Republic of Timor Leste.

would, “develop a force to protect the people of Timor Leste from outside threat, help the governmental agencies, and build our country”.³ The goodwill of Timor Leste in forming a military institution received positive feedback from the international community through the assistance of many countries - bilateral agreements with Portugal, Australia, the United States, China, Malaysia, and Thailand regarding both in-country training and training abroad, providing equipment, building facilities, and training about logistic assistance.⁴

However, it is not an accurate perception that the international community helped to form the military institution because of the history of FALINTIL alone. Timor Leste must move away from the idea that F-FDTL is the symbol of a historic organisation for the people to adore. This line of thought can be very dangerous to a democratic country because it can create any number of interpretations, and some people can utilize the institution to attain political goals. Timor Leste may respect the name FALINTIL, but should not have the connotation that F-FDTL was established because of FALINTIL as this can cause discrimination between the military members, especially between the new generation and ex-FALINTIL guerillas, as well as clandestine veterans. An alumni of the National University of Timor Leste (UNTL) from the Political Science Department 2001-2009 said that from the historical point of view F-FDTL is still tied to the FRETILIN party, but history needs to be looked at in a different context; hence, he disagrees with F-FDTL acquiring assistance because of FALINTIL's reputation.⁵

Politically, the leadership structure of F-FDTL to this date is still dominated by the ex-members of FALINTIL and a majority of them learned and received professional military training for only a very short time after Timor Leste gained its independence. This is an obstacle to really developing a military institution that is independent and professional because it is difficult to separate FALINTIL and F-FDTL. Edward Rees explains that “the moment of F-FDTL transformation was too soon so it is quite difficult to separate F-FDTL from its root FALINTIL because separating them could cause negative interpretation and wrong interpretation to its future direction.”⁶ From this case, it could be said that F-FDTL has not achieved its function completely as a professional military institution because emotionally and psychologically members of ex FALINTIL have difficulty adapting and putting themselves under the regulations of the military institution. The history of FALINTIL has the ability to influence the behavior and politics of F-FDTL at any time.

Some people say that an organization's name can affect the policies and attitudes of an institution, especially the mentality of the members. This hypothesis could take place in Timor Leste's national defense force F-FDTL - it still carries the historic name adopted from the history of war, and was transformed from FALINTIL, which originated as the armed wing of the FRETILIN party, to later become affiliated with CNRT. FALINTIL was born from the FRETILIN party and became the national liberation force when FALINTIL Supreme Commander, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao separated this defense force from any particular parties' organization. In the era of independence, the government still has a tendency to use the reputation of FALINTIL's history, as a reference to build Timor Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL). Regarding the strategic planning for the development of Timor Leste's Defense Force in the years 2005-2020, or the 2020 plan, it says that the “state must pursue its value from the factor of national identity,

³ Sinnadurai, C. (2005) Developing a Defence Force: F-FDTL Training and Development. Public Information Office, UNMISSET.

⁴ Sinnadurai, C. (2005) Developing a Defence Force: F-FDTL training and development. Public Information Office, UNMISSET

⁵ Interview on Friday, 3 September 2010.

⁶ Rees, E. (2004). Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste: Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004, 1-75.

respect the national symbols, prestige to the defense force and make reference to FALINTIL as a service to the country, as a fundamental value to the defense force”.⁷ Members of F-FDTL who are ex FALINTIL utilize and interpret this phrase in different contexts. This arose during the petitioners case in 2006 in the form of who fought more during the resistance, and who did not, in the defense force institution.

On the other hand, an ex FALINTIL guerilla who currently lives in Santa Cruz, Dili, affirms that we cannot deny F-FDTL exists because of FALINTIL and the behaviour of Timor Leste’s military institution is impacted by the historical name.⁸ This expression also creates a little bit of doubt among the people because the veterans mentality could appear to influence the professionalism of the military institution. From 1987 until 1988, Xanana Gusmao ordered a reorganization of FALINTIL, into \ a weapon of the people that defended the resistance and did not adhere to any political interest.⁹ This historic declaration should be firmly held as a principle for the F-FDTL in the era of independence. In principle, the government should use the date as the anniversary of F-FDTL, as it marks the separation from the interests of any political party. In other respects, people can understand that F-FDTL has a quite different history, coming from Timor Leste’s system of guerilla warfare to form a professional military institution. A staff from Timor-Leste’s Ministry of Defense affirms that it is not easy to reorganize guerillas who did not use laws and discipline into becoming a professional force in independence; this process only takes place in Timor Leste.¹⁰

However, there is the question that if F-FDTL celebrates the anniversary of its birth , some people might say that FRETILIN might have more claim to celebrate with this military institution. In reality, Timor Leste celebrates its independence anniversary twice, 28 November 1975 and 20 May 2002. In this case, F-FDTL also has the possibility to celebrate its anniversary twice, especially the day of the military institution’s transformation. If not, F-FDTL may still be perceived as having strong party values. “If independence day is restoration, F-FDTL also needs to have restoration for its transformation day”.¹¹ Timor Leste still has a problem finding a place for F-FDTL as the national defence force in the new paradigm of independence, On the other hand, the veteranismo attitude is still strong in Timor Leste politics, an aspect that could heavily influence the development process of F-FDTL. “The role of veterans still dominates the nation’s politics from the suco to the capital city.”¹² This is a big issue that needs to be looked at and better studied so that there is not a veteranismo embryo living within the military institution in the future. We need a profound evaluation of how we institute new concepts in order to bring F-FDTL out of the old paradigm.

Other points are that some veterans did not really change their minds when they became members of F-FDTL, especially the ex-members of FALINTIL. Emotionally the veteran members of FALINTIL have not completely left behind the memories that tied them together , such as the FRETILIN party and their supreme commander, when they were together in the

⁷ Ministry of Defence of Timor-Leste.(20 July 2006). Defence 2020: Strategy Blueprint for the development of the armed forces of Timor-Leste 2005 – 2020.

⁸ Interview on Friday, 3 September 2010.

⁹ Niner, S. (Ed.). (2000). *To Resist is to Win!: The autobiography of Xanana Gusmão*. Aurora Books, Victoria, Australia.

¹⁰ Interview on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

¹¹ Interview on Thursday, 2 September 2010. (Fundasaun Mahein: Non-Governmental Organization focusing on the area of security sector.)

¹² Rees, E. (2004). Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004, 1-75.

jungle during the Indonesian occupation. F-FDTL does not really have a commando orientation yet, and institutionally it does not function well because there is a mentality to trust and listen more to the leaders like Ramos Horta and Xanana Gusmao.¹³ It is not easy to directly eliminate these thoughts from the veterans, but they should also remember that F-FDTL should not produce attitudes of superiority and discrimination between veteran members and other members. The national military institution stands among the people and the people and political elites have the right to criticise it and develop it, through their mandate in the parliament.¹⁴

Ex-FALINTIL members have an important place in F-FDTL and politically it is still difficult to remove and replace them from the military structure. Military members do not trust the new generation to hold high positions in the military yet, because of their short time of service. Such feelings are also expressed by the new generation. An F-FDTL Captain, who does not want his name mentioned, “says that based on the situation in Timor Leste we need the old generation (ex-FALINTIL) to lead F-FDTL because until now they are the only people members of F-FDTL trust to strengthen the institution. They can be replaced when we are professional and institutionally able to replace them. He continues to say that veterans like General Taur Matan Ruak can only be replaced in 2017, that is the time when we pick the leadership to be passed down from them”.¹⁵ Therefore, based on the words from the interview, one could make the conclusion that ex-FALINTIL figures in F-FDTL still have a special place. Institutionally, regulations and military policy have not been well implemented in the Timor Leste’s military institution because veterans still have a lot of influence. Hence, F-FDTL cannot stand as a professional military institution that is democratically controlled by the civil society, because the military institution is controlled by the veterans with positions in the military, state, and government.

Defense Policy for F-FDTL

If the people of Timor Leste think that F-FDTL exists because of external factors only, it is not a strong reason because Timor Leste does not have an enemy in a regional or international context. Especially in areas where the international democratic community has been established, Timor-Leste has plenty of access and agreements with regional and international organizations; an example is the Forum Regional ASEAN (FRA), which works on security sector issues. Other countries no longer have the intention to invade or attack each other. Professor Dupont from Australia National University says that “forms of external threat to Timor-Leste, including a threat of military invasion, no longer exist as a big threat to Timor Leste...”.¹⁶ Therefore, Timor Leste should not just see F-FDTL as a warfighting institution, but must develop the military to become a diplomatic institution, considering peace and other areas in the process of development. The government is making a plan to capacitate members of F-FDTL through training and study abroad such as sending four (4) members to attend courses in Japan every year, ten (10) members to Malaysia to attend a mechanical course and many more through scholarships.¹⁷ This government policy will have a positive impact on the future of Timor Leste’s military.

In accordance with Timor Leste’s National Defense Policy, leaders are not only looking at the military physically, but another option is to form a pro-active diplomacy as a higher interest to

¹³ Simonsen, S. G. (2010). Second Division: Police-Military Tensions Remains in Timor-Leste, 1-5.

¹⁴ The political elite here refer to the opposition parties

¹⁵ Interview on Wednesday, 1 September 2010.

¹⁶ Dupont, A. (2002). Security Options for Timor-Leste.

¹⁷ Interview with a Civil Servant from the Ministry of Defense on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

Timor Leste.¹⁸ This shows that Timor Leste's defense force does not look at the warfare context only, but recognizes that diplomacy is also important for Timor Leste's defense policy. A UNTL alumni of Political Science 2001-2009 affirms that the role of F-FDTL should be looked at as warfare only but could also engage in community service such as helping fix social problems, natural disasters, and assist with border security.¹⁹ However, if the military institution only creates instability and wastes the government budget, Timor Leste needs to think carefully. Thus, Timor Leste should look at the functions of Timor Leste's defense organization in the dynamic security context of a country that adopts a democratic system like Timor Leste. The F-FDTL institution should also not promote the hero mentality, veteranismo mentality, and should also not recruit members of martial art groups.

Timor Leste needs to think and weigh its thoughts carefully if Timor Leste still needs a military force or not. Before independence, such words were also mentioned by "some leaders of Timor, including President Jose Ramos Horta, proposed Timor Leste will not have military in the future".²⁰ From that process, the East Timorese need to make a profound study about whether or not there is a need for a defense force in a country like Timor Leste. According to Mahein Foundation, when forming a defense force for Timor Leste, it is in the interest of the international community to build a defense force so that they can sell their military equipment to Timor Leste. FM's director says that although Timor Leste should not have a military, Timor Leste will have problem if it does not place ex-FALINTIL in military institutions because militias,²¹ who are still in West Timor, could provoke security problems in the frontier.²² One could argue that maybe the Timorese people have already experienced the actions of a military during the Indonesian occupation and they do not want any repetition of such military actions in the era of independence.

Edward Rees says that the "United Nations supported quietly because of big pressure from the East Timorese to form F-FDTL".²³ This shows that Timor Leste wants to have a military force but does not want to express this publicly. However, the most important thing among these issues is that when Timor Leste really needs an army force, what is to be done to strengthen the army institution so that it becomes a foundation of stability in the long term. If F-FDTL becomes the origin of conflict, of a created crisis and national instability, the people and the government of Timor Leste will need to review the roles of the military in a more comprehensive manner. In reality, Timor Leste now has a defense force and most importantly the government needs to invest money in accordance with military necessity to develop the institution in the areas of capacity building and professionalism. However, the government has not allocated sufficient funds to respond to the needs of F-FDTL, so the military institution is still not able to implement its program properly.²⁴ On one hand, the government wants to have a military, but the government is not really keen on providing a realistic budget for defence policy.

The government of Timor Leste has forced their army institution in some ways to become a more professional military that bows to the interest of the people, especially by putting the military

¹⁸ Ministry of Defense of Timor-Leste. (20 July 2006). Defense 2020: Strategy blueprint for the development of the armed forces of Timor-Leste 2005 – 2020.

¹⁹ Interview on Friday, 3 September 2010.

²⁰ <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/109814>

²¹ Militia here refers to the pro-Indonesian militias

²² Interview on Thursday, 2 September 2010.

²³ Rees, E. (2004). Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004, 1-75.

²⁴ Interview with a Civil Servant from the Ministry of Defense on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

under civilian control. This case will be fully applied in Timor Leste when all the members have the political willingness to hold the military to the principles of a democratic country. Timor Leste needs to create a condition where its' people can control the military. Civil society can contribute to the development of military activities. "In a democratic country, civil society should be able to think about how to give supportive ideas to control the military..."²⁵ Along these lines, the government that makes defence force policy also needs to involve civil society more, in order for them to know more about defense policy. The Ministry of Defense, as well as civil society, is making defence policy. It could be said that civilians can also take part in the process of development of F-FDTL in Timor Leste.²⁶ This process could be interpreted as civilians beginning to control military activity through budget allocation to make policies that build and strengthen the military institution according to the regulations of democratic Timor Leste.

Military institutions need to be representatives of the people and the country of Timor Leste. If not, the institutions principles could create different interpretations from the military members. The military institution and security sector actors such as F-FDTL and PNTL need to identify their security roles, especially their specific objectives within the security policy. The roles and function of F-FDTL and PNTL have not been implemented properly, and this creates a big challenge to security policy.²⁷ Many times this has become a big problem for Timor Leste. When trying to place responsibility accordingly, security functions often create confusion among the members of the military. When there is not effective and consistent security management and coordination between state institutions, disagreements over zones of security can arise, especially between F-FDTL and PNTL. This also creates the opportunity for a third party to utilize and influence the role of the military for political interests. Therefore, these two institutions need to abide by the principles of impartiality and accountability in order to ensure maximum contributions to the process of national development.

Timor Leste's Constitution clearly defines the role of the police as strengthening and applying law and order in the country, and that the law will command and determine the actions of the police and other security forces.²⁸ From this article we have shown that F-FDTL and the police are institutions that undertake the function of guaranteeing law and order in the country. However, according to implementation, security policies are not effectively coordinated and are often the cause of confusion, which leads to conflict between members of the security institutions. An example is maritime security. The Timorese government bought two navy boats but has not determined which institutions will patrol and catch foreigners who steal the wealth of Timor Leste. The Minister of Defence says that the "government has not really decided who will legally patrol in the maritime area, especially to fight those who fish illegally in the territory of Timor Leste. There is no law yet deciding that F-FDTL or PNTL, Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Fisheries) that have responsibility to give security to the maritime area".²⁹ Legally, these two navy boats cannot begin their work. The government should have created a law and system for their maritime operations before buying these navy boats, so that there was no need to spend so much money on their maintainance.

²⁵ Stepan, A. (1988). *Military and Democracy: Experience in Several Countries*. Princeton University Press, Translated by PT Pustaka Utama Grafiti.

²⁶ Interview with a Civil Servant from the Ministry of Defense on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

²⁷ Rees, E. (2004). *Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004*, 1-75.

²⁸ Article 147, Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

²⁹ Interview on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

Independence of the F-FDTL Institution

F-FDTL must have principles and commitment to resist any intervention from political parties, the government, and other outside organizations. According to Timor Leste's Constitution, F-FDTL cannot follow political parties, but only listen to the competent sovereign institutions and comments from civil policies.³⁰ Doctrine and military behavior must be tied to the constitution and the civil law for the military. The government has the responsibility to give proper training to the military, up to a sufficient level, in order to interpret defense policy properly and avoid disagreements over security with other security institutions. Relations between the military and police are still complicated and their areas of responsibility are not clear.³¹ The 2006 crisis is a lesson for Timor Leste's security and defense institutions.

The 2006 crisis showed Timor Leste and the international community that Timor Leste needs to review the role of the military in the context of a democratic nation-state. The F-FDTL institution needs a paradigm shift to clarify its function and establish objectives of national defense based on the impartiality principle. In other democratic countries, the military becomes a force to strengthen and implement a national unity that reflects a common interest based on the constitution. Military members have to know their role as a defense force and follow their military codes to serve the nation. The roots of the military comes from the people, so the people should be given the power to control the military system. Timor Leste should give control of the functions of the military to civilians.³² The government in charge of military policies needs to gradually give control of the military over to civilians. If Timor Leste wants to become a democratic country, it needs to look at the military institution as an impartial element in the development process, signified by the feeling that the presence of military people helps people feel secure democratically. Hence, Timor Leste needs to wait a little bit before recruiting new members of the F-FDTL. When the current members have attained the quality service of a professional military, then new members can be recruited, although, in principle, the government has a plan to raise F-FDTL membership up to 3,000 before the year 2020. The actual membership of F-FDTL is in the 1,275 range including the Generals to the soldiers, and the government has a plan to recruit more every year.³³

Quality and Quantity

At this time, Timor Leste should not recruit new members of F-FDTL, but when the current members have shown positive steps then they could review and add more.³⁴ When the government and state only think about the quantity of the military in order to create jobs, this policy will become a big threat to Timor Leste's development process in building a democratic country. "The people of Timor Leste need to have the mentality that to enter the military is to dedicate themselves to defending the nation not just to think about basic necessity to sustain

³⁰ Number 3, Article 146. Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

³¹ Simonsen, S. G. (2010). Second Division: Police-Military Tensions Remains in Timor-Leste, 1-5.

³² Rees, E. (2004). Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004, 1-75.

³³ Interview with a Civil Servant from the Ministry of Defense on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

³⁴ Alumni UNTL 2001-2009, Political Science

their life.”³⁵ According to the statement from General Taur Matan Ruak F-FDTL is not an appropriate institution to search for employment, thus those who enter this institution need to think about it thoroughly.³⁶ On the other hand, Timor Leste also needs to think about people that need money in order to survive, so they undertake their function professionally. Mahein Foundation continues to say that there is a need for economic capitalization for the salaries of F-FDTL members to undertake their functions properly and in accordance with the law.³⁷

The state and government should have the principle of quality over quantity for its military force. Quality signifies that the military has the capacity to live in the political dynamic of national development and interpret defense policy properly. Professionalism of military members is like a fence that nourishes the democratic process in the country. Daily military behavior needs to create an image for the public that they represent the people of Timor Leste, particularly when they walk around outside of military buildings or out of uniform. F-FDTL is not yet professional in undertaking its functions properly and its military responsibility is also not strong enough to participate in military missions overseas. Therefore, F-FDTL members need to be taught how to respond to certain situations. “F-FDTL, principally, has not been tested politically and operationally.”³⁸ From this aspect, the state and the government need to look at policy carefully, to increase the quality and capacity of the military without looking at history and the issues of the veterans. The Government, through the Ministry of Defense, has shown a political willingness to develop F-FDTL to become a professional military by building a National Defense Institute (IDN) to look at military issues which civilians can also attend.³⁹

Conclusion

The military institution needs to improve the mentality of its members, moving from that of a resistance organization to that of a professional military, who think in the context of international standards. They need to increase their knowledge through training and also attend university where they can study law, justice, rights, health and other things. Universities in this country and abroad can also work together with the military institution to have an interaction between students. This could involve seminars, research, sports, social services, and other components. The military institution needs to be open when receiving public criticisms and suggestions, and increase their direct interactions with the people so that they know and get close to the institution. Open debates and seminars about the role of F-FDTL in a democratic country are also useful in helping the public understand what F-FDTL actually does.

The defense force needs to become an important element in the process of nation building; helping minimize poverty through a de-centralized system, social education, illiteracy eradication, assistance in the wake of natural disasters. As military members acquire disciplined training and become more organized, along with obtaining sufficient military equipment, it would be easy to involve them in the national development programs, particularly in emergency situations. Finally, the state and the government need to separate FALINTIL from the

³⁵ Dias Quintas, C. (Timor Lorosae edition, 16-17 Agosto 2010). Reflection on the Role of Força Defesa Timor-Leste (F-FDTL)

³⁶ “ “The Fish is out of the Water” The Relationship between the Military and the civilians in Timor-Leste. Mahein Nia Lian No. 7, 6 July, 2010.

³⁷ Interview on Thursday, 2 September 2010.

³⁸ Rees, E. (2004). Under Pressure Falintil – Força de Defesa de Timor-Leste Three Decades of Defense Force Development in Timor-Leste 1975-2004, 1-75

³⁹ Interview with a Civil Servant from the Ministry of Defense on Sunday, 5 September 2010.

professional military that represents Timor Leste. F-FDTL has to separate itself from the veteranismo mentality in order to build a quality military institution that is responsible and maintains national integrity.

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