

## Exploring the Potential of Adaptive Leadership to Enhance Military Capabilities in Facing Hybrid Threat

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine and analyse the potential of adaptive leadership in enhancing military capabilities, particularly within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), amid the growing reality of hybrid threats. Such threats compel states to reconsider their defense formulations to strengthen military deterrence in confronting worst-case scenarios. Employing a qualitative approach through literature review, this article investigates military leadership and the dynamics of hybrid threats in Indonesia. The analysis reveals that adaptive leadership is highly relevant in modern defense, contributing significantly to TNI's ability to respond to diverse threats. It fosters not only innovation in peacetime but also adaptability in wartime, enhancing physical resilience, mental endurance, and cognitive capacity. These findings imply the strategic importance of adaptive leadership in improving TNI's institutional responsiveness to complex security challenges

## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia's national defense is increasingly confronted with a broader, multifaceted, complex, and non-conventional spectrum of threats. These threats are commonly referred to as hybrid threats – an amalgamation of military and non-military elements, such as cyber warfare, terrorism, disinformation, economic coercion, and proxy warfare. The volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous nature of this threat environment demands an adaptive response from all components of national defense, particularly the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). As (Sarjito et al., 2024) noted, hybrid threats have blurred the lines between traditional warfare and non-military tactics, incorporating elements such as cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and proxy militias. By exploiting vulnerabilities across multiple domains, hybrid adversaries seek to achieve strategic objectives while minimizing the risks of confrontation.

Situated between the Indian and Pacific Oceans – regions that have become contested arenas among major powers – Indonesia faces heightened vulnerabilities. As highlighted by Niazi in (Lievonne et al., 2025), the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a critical theater of great power competition. The region encompasses vast territories, vital maritime trade routes, and abundant strategic resources, making it a focal point of geopolitical tension.

This ongoing competition among global powers increases the likelihood of hybrid threats targeting Indonesia, underscoring the urgent need to enhance TNI's institutional resilience, one key approach being through the implementation of adaptive leadership. (Sarjito et al., 2024) further argue that an effective strategy against hybrid adversaries must involve a multifaceted and adaptive approach. Responding to hybrid threats requires a proactive and dynamic defense strategy. Such an approach would elevate the operational and strategic capabilities of the TNI across multiple sectors. However, adaptive leadership cannot be effectively realized without robust institutional support, modern infrastructure, and technological advancement. Adaptive leadership demands an enabling environment, including the modernization of primary weapons systems and defense platforms (Alutsista).

Adaptive leadership is defined by the ability to swiftly respond to change, not merely by adapting but by having the courage to initiate transformation, make decisive choices, and accept the risks inherent in those decisions. Ronald Heifetz emphasized that adaptive leaders must be capable of discarding irrelevant practices. In a constantly evolving environment, adaptive leaders not only resolve challenges but also anticipate problems and identify their root causes. Such leaders excel in discerning which risks are worth taking and which actions would waste organizational resources. This enables them to develop the competencies needed to ensure that their organizations are led with resilience and foresight. Adaptive leadership centers on high-stakes decision-making but is distinguished by its openness to feedback, readiness for inevitable change, adeptness in confronting adaptive challenges, and agility in redirecting strategy when necessary (WGU, 2021).

Therefore, cultivating adaptability among soldiers is imperative. As TNI Commander General Agus Subiyanto stated, the TNI continues to play an active role in addressing national issues such as forest area enforcement, LPG monitoring, food security, narcotics eradication, and conflict resolution. He also affirmed the increase in operational food allowances and improvements in the quality of education within the TNI environment. The Commander urged all personnel to adapt, innovate, and step out of their comfort zones for the betterment of the institution: “We must be productive, contribute meaningfully, and not fear change” (TNI Prima, 2025). In numerous instances, the TNI has operated beyond its core military tasks, such as leading COVID-19 response task forces, managing natural disaster relief, and, more recently, placing active TNI personnel in various civilian institutions to optimize the use of national resources for defense purposes.

Adaptive leadership fosters a learning-oriented culture across all levels of command, wherein leaders not only issue orders but also act as role models and facilitators, cultivating soldiers who are physically resilient, intellectually critical, and lifelong learners. Given that hybrid threats operate within grey zones, obtaining accurate information becomes challenging. In the face of uncertainty and ambiguity, adaptive leaders must make swift and sound decisions. This requires the ability to accurately diagnose situations, manage unpredictable and ambiguous contexts, demonstrate mental resilience, and possess strong social awareness – all of which reinforce the TNI's capacity to withstand both external and internal threats.

In 2024, the TNI undertook a transformation of the Command and Staff College (Sesko TNI) curriculum aimed at enhancing the quality of officers destined for strategic leadership roles. It was asserted that the Sesko TNI must continuously evolve to assess and develop doctrines and strategies for confronting multidimensional warfare. One of the key initiatives was the curriculum transformation to ensure a more adaptable and high-quality education framework (PPID TNI, 2024). Despite these efforts to reform leadership models in line with current operational realities, adaptive leadership has yet to be fully institutionalized as intended.

This study aims to explore the potential of adaptive leadership and how the TNI, as a defense institution, can integrate field leadership with adaptive leadership. Field leadership refers to a hands-on leadership model where commanders are embedded and operate directly alongside their troops. This model requires rapid and accurate decision-making. The central questions of this research are: How can the potential of adaptive leadership within the TNI be harnessed? What is the relevance of adaptive leadership in addressing hybrid threats? And how can adaptive leadership be effectively implemented within the military environment?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of leadership in facing hybrid threats, we will discuss several theories that provide support and a conceptual framework for this study.

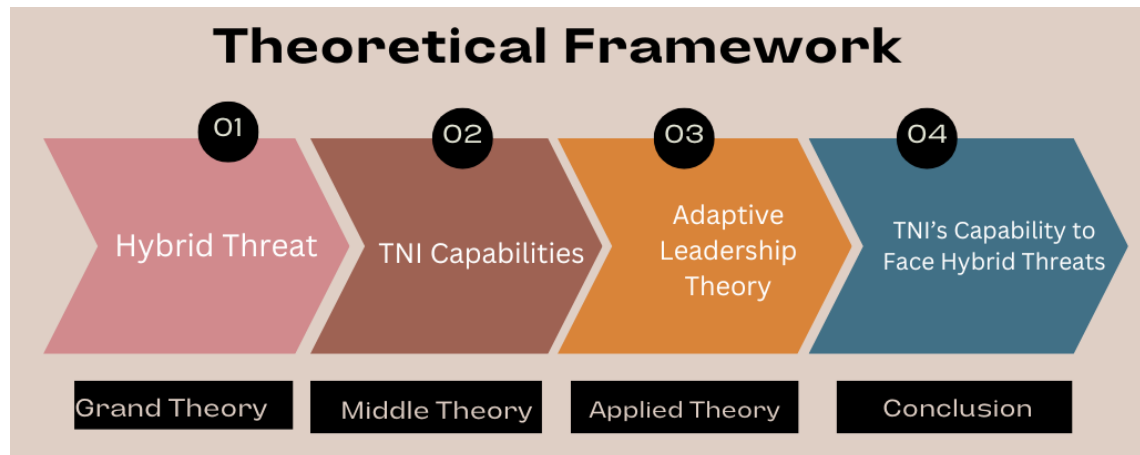


Figure 1. Framework of Theory and Concept

### Hybrid Threats

The concept of hybrid threats has become increasingly popular since the early 21st century. The term was pioneered by Hoffman to describe multifaceted threats that can endanger any country in the world. According to Hoffman (Sarjito et al., 2024), the emergence of hybrid threats reflects the evolution of warfare in the 21st century. Unlike conventional conflicts, which are marked by clear battle lines and identifiable enemies, hybrid warfare operates in a grey zone, where attribution is often ambiguous, and the line between friend and foe is blurred.

The concept of hybrid warfare is no longer new – it has been widely used as a strategy to achieve objectives, for example, in the Russia-Ukraine war or tactics in the North Natuna Sea and the South China Sea (SCS). As explained in (Zona Perang, 2024), the nature of security and international conflict remains the same. States are still involved in unfavorable military and economic competition. Armed conflict appears inevitable, security dilemmas and balance-of-power struggles continue, but the modes of operation have changed. Great power rivalry persists, as Mearsheimer (2021) argues in his offensive realism theory, emphasizing that such conflicts are essentially a political tragedy among major powers. Hybrid warfare, similarly, requires a combination of instruments of power – both conventional and non-conventional – synchronized to exploit an enemy's weaknesses in pursuit of specific goals.

Some characteristics of hybrid warfare include the absence of clear boundaries between peace and wartime; attacks may occur even during seemingly peaceful times. Often, only the effects of such attacks are visible. "Perhaps the key trait of hybrid threats is that they rarely involve actual 'kinetic' attacks – someone firing a weapon. They are much more subtle, yet often no less dangerous" (Zona Perang, 2024). In addition, such attacks are often ambiguous or conducted in the grey zone, involving disinformation and attacks on vital infrastructure. This makes it very difficult for target countries to detect attacks – Indonesia itself has experienced severe cyberattacks.

## **TNI Leadership System**

Rapidly changing situations demand that organizations and leaders become more adaptive to the times. Many situations now operate amid ambiguity, posing unique challenges. While some organizations have managed to overcome these challenges, many others have failed to withstand the pace of change. The military is no exception, as it struggles to adapt to various transformations. The nature and characteristics of threats, defined as hybrid threats, must be addressed intelligently and adaptively, especially in terms of soldiers' ability to read situations and make quick decisions. Adaptive leadership is not merely the ability to adjust to change, but also the capacity to read complex environments, make precise decisions, and ensure that each action contributes to strengthening national defense.

The importance of adaptive leadership in boosting the resilience of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) lies in the fact that many attacks are unpredictable, making proactive steps difficult, especially hybrid threats that include cyber warfare. According to data from the National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN) presented by (Gestoro, 2021), there were approximately 290 million cyberattack cases in 2019. Alarmingly, several hacking incidents, such as web defacement, targeted official TNI websites, including: Seskoad's official site on July 24, 2020, Illegal scanning and DDoS attacks on DisinfoLahtad on July 24, 2020, Kodam VI/Mulawarman on September 6, 2020, Ditbekangad on September 6, 2020, Disjarah on September 14, 2020, Puskesad on September 17, 2020, Kodiklatad on November 3, 2020, Disjasad on August 13, 2020.

Leadership within TNI has long been considered insufficiently adaptive. Various crises—such as cyberattacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and proxy wars—have not been effectively addressed. Although TNI recognizes the importance of adapting to complex threats, particularly in the realm of information technology, its command-and-hierarchical leadership system must undergo reform. This includes enhancing the intelligence capacity of soldiers through education, not only for officers, by developing expertise in information technology, expanding national insight, and even understanding political issues. TNI personnel at all levels should be trained not only in Military Operations for War (OMP) and Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP) but also in leadership, intelligence, information technology, and political awareness.

## **Adaptive Leadership Theory**

In recent years, awareness of the importance of adaptive leadership within TNI has continued to grow. This growing awareness has been confirmed through several official statements. For example, Army Chief of Staff General Maruli Simanjuntak, as cited on the official TNI AD website, stated that the Indonesian Army would continue to restructure and strengthen its force posture to become more adaptive and responsive to various threats, aiming to maintain national stability and improve public welfare (TNI AD, 2025).

TNI Commander General Agus Subiyanto also emphasized that the evolving threat landscape, marked by increasing cyber incidents, shows that global challenges are now part of everyday life. Therefore, TNI must adopt an adaptive stance, always remaining vigilant and responsive to developments, since it is both the nation’s front line and last line of defense. He stated that cyber threats could compromise the TNI’s digital infrastructure if not mitigated properly, and thus internal reforms are needed, including strengthening human resources, increasing vigilance, and bolstering cyber defense systems (TNI AU, 2024). Similarly, Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY) stressed the need for greater adaptability within the TNI. He delivered this message to Seskoad students during a lecture on synergy between infrastructure development and national defense.

These various directives reflect the notion that multifaceted threats can only be addressed through adaptive strategies. Adaptive leadership helps organizations tackle increasingly complex challenges. This leadership model emphasizes mobilizing a wide range of resources to solve problems. As Heifetz explains in (McAuley, 2020), his three books distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges. Heifetz differentiates between technical problems and adaptive ones. Organizations with established authority structures are usually good at handling technical problems. However, adaptive problems require learning and innovation – there is no clear manual for solving them. In his book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz emphasizes the need for flexibility and experimentation in overcoming such challenges.

Table 1. Differences between Technical and Adaptive Problem Solving

<b>Problem Type</b>	<b>Problem Definition</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Responsible Actor</b>
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Adaptive	Requires Learning	Requires Learning	Stakeholders

Source: Book the Practice of Adaptive Leadership

The table above clearly shows that adaptive problems are more difficult to resolve. They require collective efforts and longer timeframes. Examples of adaptive challenges faced by TNI include hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, hybrid tactics in the North Natuna Sea conflict, and diseases like COVID-19, which can strike unexpectedly. Addressing adaptive challenges demands continuous innovation, which must be based on ongoing assessments of both potential and actual threats.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article employs a qualitative research method. According to Mamik as cited in (Adiwijaya et al., 2024), qualitative research is aimed at understanding social realities by observing the world as it is, rather than how it ought to be. Therefore, a qualitative researcher must possess an open-minded attitude. Qualitative research does not utilize mathematical, statistical, or computer-based models. The research process begins with the formulation of fundamental assumptions and a framework of thinking to guide the inquiry. It is characterized by the absence of numerical data in both the data collection process and in the interpretation of findings.

Meanwhile, according to (Sulistyawati, 2023), an inductive mindset is a hallmark of qualitative research, which emphasizes objective and participatory observation of social phenomena. These social phenomena may relate to past, present, or even future conditions. Specifically, qualitative research within the interpretive paradigm is grounded in phenomenological analysis.

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design. This design was chosen for its suitability in analyzing the concepts of adaptive leadership and TNI resilience in the face of hybrid threats through the use of relevant literature sources. This approach allows the researcher to explore theories, policies, and strategic practices from a variety of academic and institutional sources without relying on empirical field data. The study is descriptive-analytical, aiming to formulate conceptual understanding and strategic recommendations based on available literature and documents.

### **Data Sources**

The data for this research consists of relevant secondary sources such as books, national and international journals, TNI policy documents, national defense documents, research reports from think tanks, and official publications from the government and organizations focused on defense issues. Literature selection is conducted purposively, based on its relevance to the topics of adaptive leadership, military organizational resilience, and the characteristics of hybrid threats. The selected sources must be credible, up-to-date, and relevant to the context of Indonesia's national defense.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection is carried out through a literature study by accessing various sources such as Google Scholar, online books, and JSTOR, as well as other official online documents. The selected literature is then systematically reviewed to identify theories, concepts, and findings relevant to the research topic.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data is analyzed thematically. The analysis involves organizing information under major themes such as the concept and examples of hybrid threats, the concept of TNI leadership, and the theory of adaptive leadership. Each theme is examined to identify connections between adaptive leadership and efforts to enhance the resilience of the TNI in the context of hybrid threats.

## Research Ethics

Although this study does not involve direct human participation, ethical research principles remain a critical consideration throughout the literature review process. Ethical standards are upheld through academic integrity, accurate citation following APA 7th Edition guidelines, and responsibility in interpreting data and ideas drawn from various sources.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia's national defense has been confronted with a broader spectrum of threats – multifaceted, complex, and unconventional. These threats are often referred to as hybrid threats, a blend of military and non-military, conventional and unconventional threats, including cyber warfare, terrorism, disinformation, economic coercion, proxy conflicts, and more. A rapidly changing, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous situation demands an adaptive response from all components of national defense, especially the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI).

### Analyzing Hybrid Threats in Indonesia

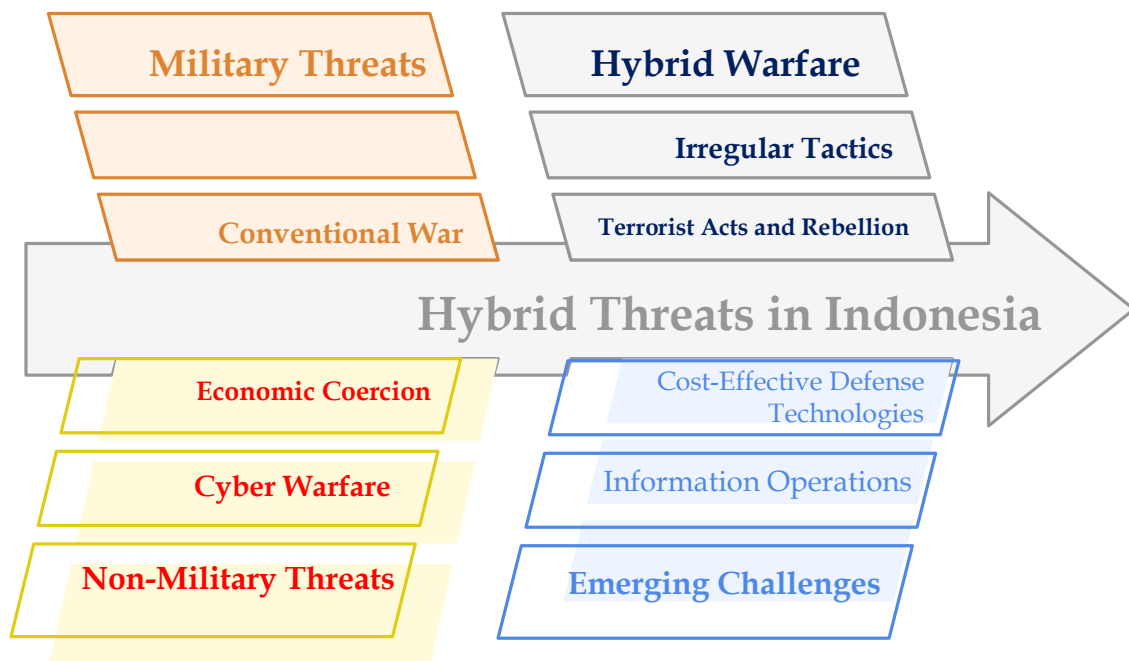


Figure 2. Analyzing Hybrid Threats in Indonesia

### Dynamics of Hybrid Threats in Indonesia

Government documents, especially those from the Ministry of Defense, such as the Defense White Paper or the General Policy on State Defense, explain in detail the types of threats. These threats are divided into two categories: potential threats and actual threats. Both are classified in detail based on observations from various components and are aligned with the Total People's Defense and Security System (Sistem Pertahanan dan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta – SISHANKAMRATA).

### **Actual Threats**

Actual threats refer to military, non-military, and hybrid threats that are currently developing and tend to persist year after year, whether originating from abroad or within the country. These threats include, among others: the recent Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts, tensions in the South China Sea, economic crises, border violations/foreign interventions, separatism and armed rebellions (by both state and non-state actors), piracy and hostage-taking of Indonesian citizens, terrorism and radicalism, cyber threats, espionage/intelligence threats, psychological warfare, biological weapon attacks, natural disasters, environmental degradation, theft of natural resources, drug trafficking and abuse, illegal immigration, as well as the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, marked by conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – known as the VUCA era.

### **Potential Threats**

Potential threats refer to threats that have not yet occurred but could arise at any time under certain conditions and may develop into actual threats. These include conventional war or open conflict (foreign invasion), food shortages, energy crises, scarcity of water resources, public health crises, and the threat of nuclear weapons.

### **Hybrid Threats**

Hybrid threats are not simply a combination of actual and potential threats, but more precisely, a mix of military and non-military threats. There remains some ambiguity in defining them, as other related terms such as irregular warfare and asymmetric warfare are also used. Nevertheless, most articles still refer to Hoffman's definition. As stated in (Stoker & Whiteside, 2020), Hoffman defines hybrid warfare as: Hybrid warfare combines different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts, including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. These multi-modal activities may be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally coordinated operationally and tactically on the battlefield to achieve synergistic effects.

Western countries, including the United States, began using the term hybrid warfare following observations by Western military experts who noted the rise of warfare involving unconventional methods that could threaten their technological dominance. These experts identified two major emerging challenges: (1) future adversaries who combine various types of warfare (including non-military tools) to gain advantage through complexity; and (2) non-trinitarian enemies who seem immune to defeat through Clausewitzian approaches such as conventional military campaigns culminating in decisive battles (Monaghan, 2019).

In Indonesia, military threats are still categorized as potential threats, whereas most non-military threats have already become actual threats, such as cyber threats, proxy threats, espionage, armed rebellion in Papua, and border violations. Since military threats are still a potential threat, hybrid warfare can also be considered a potential threat. Hybrid threats would become actual if there were foreign invasions involving military force, psychological weakening aimed at plundering natural resources, instigating division among the population, seizure of parts of Indonesia’s territory, and destruction of critical infrastructure. One example of hybrid warfare frequently cited in literature (Monaghan, 2019) is the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. This operation involved a combination of “deniable” special forces, local militias, economic pressure, disinformation, and exploitation of social division to create a fait accompli for Ukraine and the West.

Western nations predict that hybrid threats will persist and be utilized by various actors, both state and non-state. Their increasing use is driven by the emergence of cheaper, more accessible tools of hybrid warfare, such as information operations in media and the development of cost-effective defense technologies. Therefore, understanding and responding to hybrid threats and hybrid warfare effectively is of utmost importance. However, identifying them can be challenging since hybrid adversaries employ strategies that blur the lines between war and peace, combatants and civilians, international and non-international conflict, aggression, use of force, and armed conflict. These gray areas make it difficult for the target to respond decisively, as it becomes hard to interpret and conclude the true nature of the situation.

### Hybrid Threats as Adaptive Challenges

Based on Heifetz’s classification of technical and adaptive problems, this framework can help explain how adaptive challenges, such as hybrid threats in the context of national defense, require adaptive leadership to respond effectively. Below is a clear classification following Heifetz’s concept:

Table 2. Differences between Technical and Adaptive Problem Solving

TYPE OF PROBLEM	PROBLEM DEFINITION	SOLUTION	ACTORS
<b>TECHNICAL PROBLEM</b>	Missile attack from a foreign country	Strengthen air defense system (anti-missile capabilities and early detection)	Weapon operators system
<b>ADAPTIVE PROBLEM</b>	Radicalization of youth on various social media platforms	Collaboration between TNI, Ministry of Education, religious leaders, and Ministry of Communications; strengthen digital education and literacy	TNI and ministries as main actors, with participation from all components of society as part of the total defense system

This classification shows that dealing with adaptive problems requires many actors, extended time, and various innovations. In the context of hybrid threats, adaptive leadership must be present to design adaptive solutions (innovations during peacetime) so that if hybrid threats materialize, the national defense system can adapt (adaptation during wartime).

### **Adaptive Leadership**

In Heifetz's work, a distinction is made between adaptive leadership and adaptive leaders, emphasizing that adaptive leadership is not just an individual's capacity but an ecosystem built within an organization. Adaptive leadership is an approach that highlights the importance of the TNI commander and other senior leaders to respond to rapid and ambiguous changes, solve complex problems, and counter evolving threats, including hybrid threats, within the context of strengthening national defense. Adaptive leadership is not only about how an individual leader acts in specific situations, but also how the entire ecosystem surrounding the leader functions and supports responses to emerging challenges. It requires a holistic approach, beyond having intelligent, resilient, and capable leaders on the field. It needs a career development system that supports innovation, an organizational culture that encourages continuous learning and collaboration, and policies that allow the TNI to maneuver flexibly in facing highly complex hybrid threats. These complex threats are categorized as adaptive problems because addressing them requires multi-sectoral cooperation and long-term efforts, such as countering disinformation and hoaxes that damage the TNI's image, infiltration of radical or extremist ideologies among soldiers, failure to adapt to the multidimensional roles of TNI in Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP), tensions between traditional command structures and cross-sectoral collaborative demands, and more.

Adaptive leadership aims to produce leaders at all levels. Every organizational element must be encouraged to think strategically, take initiative, read the situation, make swift and accurate decisions, and act responsively. Hybrid threats cannot be tackled by one institution alone; strong synergy is needed between the military, civil institutions, academia, media, and the private sector for detection, response, and recovery efforts. This is in line with the mandate of Article 30, Paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which states that national defense and security efforts are carried out through the SISHANKAMRATA system. Therefore, the ratification of the law on the role and function of the TNI number 3 of 2025, Article (47) is considered relevant to create more adaptive leadership to face various threats whose spectrum is increasingly broad, including hybrid threats.

In strengthening an adaptive institution, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) must become a learning organization, constantly engaging in self-evaluation while keeping pace with contemporary developments and advancements. Adaptability must be supported by intelligence and broad understanding in order to enable swift decision-making and to minimize the risk of errors in judgment. A learning organization facilitates better comprehension of various situations and challenges it faces. As times progress, adaptive

leadership also requires the support of modern technology across multiple sectors, including technologies that enhance coordination, enable real-time access to information, support data analysis, and include early warning systems to detect potential threats.

Recent research on adaptive leadership in managing the COVID-19 crisis, such as that conducted by (Ramalingam et al., 2020), recommends that addressing the coronavirus problem cannot be approached purely as a technical effort, but must instead be treated as a leadership imperative. It emphasizes the importance of building a clear leadership vision and a management culture that supports all teams and units coordinating the response. Decisions about when and how to initiate changes in response efforts cannot be made by a handful of individuals behind closed doors. What Ramalingam articulates aligns with the concept of adaptive leadership, which views leadership as a collective effort within an ecosystem rather than the sole responsibility of a single figure.

### **Uncovering the Potential of Adaptive Leadership**

Based on the dynamics of hybrid threats in Indonesia and the classification above regarding the problems, solutions, and actors involved, this forms the foundation for uncovering the potential of adaptive leadership within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). To explore this potential, several steps are needed, including:

#### **Changing the Leadership Paradigm**

The first and most crucial step is shifting the old leadership paradigm, which was primarily command-based, to a more collaborative model. Adaptive leadership encourages leaders not only to rely on structural authority but to be more flexible by building trust and open communication, including with non-military actors related to strengthening national defense sectors. Additionally, TNI leaders and soldiers must understand the concept of hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, diplomatic pressure, political and democratic concepts, nationalism, as well as climate change and natural disaster threats.

To create such leaders, TNI training and education materials – especially in command schools – must include case studies of hybrid threats like the Russia-Ukraine war, China-US cyber operations, and the involvement of non-state actors such as Hezbollah. The training and education must be intensive, consistent, and continuous. The Ministry of Defense and TNI are expected to strengthen the integration of adaptive issues and adaptive leadership into the TNI training system, from basic military schools to TNI staff and command schools. Modules related to adaptive leadership, hybrid threats, civil-military relations, and problem-solving must be reinforced at all levels of TNI schools.

In addition to formal education, regular simulation exercises involving multiple actors are essential to prepare TNI to face cyber threats, proxy conflicts, and various crimes that threaten national sovereignty and territorial integrity. These exercises can also involve various ministries and institutions as supporting components, such as BSSN (National Cyber and Crypto Agency), Kominfo, BNPB (National Disaster Management Authority), and others. In essence, the universal defense system (Sishankamrata) is the mobilization of all resources to strengthen national defense.

### **Mapping and Identifying Adaptive Leaders**

In various leadership rotations within TNI, adaptive leadership competence should be a prerequisite for occupying strategic positions, especially command roles. TNI can conduct regular assessments of its officers using evaluation tools based on adaptive capabilities, such as understanding various threats and their dynamics, national insight, the ability to manage the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) environment, resilience under pressure, cross-sector communication skills, learning agility, and decision-making in uncertain and fast-changing situations.

TNI is expected to regularly assess its officers to evaluate their adaptive leadership capacities. Moreover, it should create experimental spaces to test new strategies on a small scale before expanding them organization-wide, so officers fully understand the leadership tasks they are entrusted with. TNI must also continue collaborating with networks such as academics, defense research institutions, analysts, civil society organizations, media, religious leaders, and government agencies. As stated in Article 47 of the TNI Law No. 3 of 2025, which allows active soldiers to hold certain positions in ministries/agencies, this law enhances cross-sector coordination and the development of adaptive leadership within TNI and promotes policy-making based on defense and security perspectives.

An adaptive military organization, such as the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), possesses identifiable characteristics, one of which is its ability to accept change and not be fixated on outdated approaches in facing hybrid threats. The TNI has made efforts to respond to the changing forms of threats, the expansion of threat spectrums, and the escalation of conflicts in various countries. However, these efforts have not yet led to significant changes due to various factors, including budget constraints, limited political support, and a lack of public alignment in viewing these changes. One clear example is the difficulty in passing the revised Law No. 34 of 2004 on the TNI, which required high-level political maneuvering and faced public criticism that often merely viewed the bill through the lens of past political formats that were seen as repressive toward civil rights, without examining the urgency of the proposed changes.

The complexity of threats requires collaborative efforts across sectors to effectively address each challenge. Another key trait of adaptive leadership is openness to involving multiple divisions and the willingness to implement structural, strategic, and policy changes to respond to threats. Additionally, an adaptive TNI continually conducts periodic evaluations as part of its decision-making improvement efforts and to deepen its understanding of emerging problems. Adaptive leadership also entails direct interaction with soldiers to gain insight into their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which serves as a basis for appointing suitable leaders in each division, known in military terms as operational commands in various regions.

To support such collaborative efforts, the implementation of regulations must not be overly rigid. Bureaucratic inflexibility can hinder organizational effectiveness. For example, several laws have limited the TNI's ability to conduct military operations other than war (OMSP) due to restrictive regulations. In facing adaptive challenges that are complex, uncertain, and operate in the "grey zone," quick decision-making is crucial. Organizational flexibility in such cases demands mutual trust among all elements, including public support, because a state without the support of its people holds no real strength. Building and maintaining public trust in the TNI is also part of adaptive leadership, which requires the collective effort of all organizational components.

Another defining characteristic of a military organization that has embraced adaptive leadership is its ability to maintain stability while simultaneously innovating to achieve long-term goals. Innovation must be supported by capacity building and resilience among TNI personnel through continuous training, mentoring, and education, as part of efforts to empower individuals to confront complex challenges. High capacity and capability enable TNI soldiers to better monitor changes in the external environment, such as technological developments, global conflict dynamics, political and economic shifts, and evolving social trends.

According to the Proxis Leadership Center (2020), the adaptive leadership model includes three key elements: First, Precious vs. Expendable – Leaders must be able to identify what should be retained and what should be discarded, whether through expansion or reduction. They must be bold enough to let go of elements that no longer serve the organization. In the TNI, strong seniority can sometimes act as a barrier to mission success, as members may hesitate to propose ideas or suggestions for fear of breaching hierarchical norms. Therefore, while maintaining the principle of seniority, the TNI must also foster openness at all levels.

Second, Experimentation and Smart Risk – Adaptive leaders encourage innovation and creativity, recognizing that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. Through experimentation, organizations can discover new ways to achieve their goals. Adaptive leadership develops innovations based on threat analysis—for example, addressing hybrid threats that combine foreign military invasions with disinformation campaigns aimed at creating internal division and weakening the government. In response, the TNI must generate innovations across sectors, such as through defense-oriented education policies to in still national pride and trust in the government, collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and digital affairs to enhance public digital literacy, and other strategic partnerships.

Third, Disciplined Assessment – After developing new approaches, leaders must monitor their impact and make necessary adjustments to ensure that adopted strategies are truly effective and contribute to organizational advancement.

### **Enhancing the TNI's Capabilities**

Adaptive leadership is the best path to improving the capabilities of the TNI. Based on various literature discussing adaptive leadership, it pushes the TNI to become a resilient, flexible, and innovative organization. Heifetz and Linsky explain in detail that not every challenge can be solved with technical solutions alone—many require changes across multiple sectors. In some cases, organizations even need to change their leadership systems, values, and organizational culture to address more serious problems. Therefore, the current era—often referred to as the VUCA era—demands adaptive organizations.

According to official documentation (Department of The Army, 2019), authority delegation in decision-making at lower levels is necessary due to the fast and uncertain pace of change. However, this requires ongoing training to ensure that decisions made at the lower level align with the intentions of higher-level command. Delegating authority—or entrusting subordinates to make decisions—is based on principles of subordinate competence, mutual trust, shared understanding of the problem, clarity of the commander's intent, disciplined initiative, and readiness to accept risk.

In the context of Indonesia's vast geography and its thousands of islands, decision-making must be decentralized and grounded in local situational awareness. This, of course, requires continuous training and learning—an adaptive organization must also be a learning organization. TNI personnel not only need physical strength but also intelligence that they can apply at all times, including the ability to read and respond to the evolving situation. The implementation of adaptive leadership will strengthen the TNI's resilience amid hybrid threats. It will also enable the TNI to better understand its core needs in the face of budget limitations, because it develops a deeper awareness of global dynamics and the threats that may endanger national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the safety of the entire Indonesian nation.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) has recognized the critical importance of adaptive leadership as a foundational pillar for strengthening military organizations amid an era marked by uncertainty, multifaceted, and hybrid threats. These threats blur the lines between military and non-military domains, war and peace, as well as state and non-state actors. Adaptive leadership not only enables rapid and effective responses to dynamic challenges but also empowers the TNI to collaborate across sectors—including ministries, government agencies, religious leaders, and civil society—to build comprehensive national resilience.

This leadership model emphasizes intellectual competence, resilience, responsiveness, and context-based decision-making, all of which are essential in navigating Indonesia's vast and dispersed geostrategic landscape. In this context, the capability of TNI personnel must be cultivated not only through physical strength but also through continuous learning, including modern education, sustainable training, and an organizational culture that is open to innovation and transformation.

However, the successful implementation of adaptive leadership requires regulatory support, progressive budgetary policies, and a shift from rigid bureaucratic structures toward more decentralized and responsive systems. Therefore, integrating the values of adaptive leadership into the TNI's doctrines, education systems, and personnel development frameworks is a strategic necessity for enhancing the force's resilience against multidimensional threats.

This resilience extends beyond conventional battlefield strength. It encompasses the ability to analyse evolving situations, navigate political and economic crises, make timely and measured decisions, foster public trust, and facilitate the implementation of Indonesia's Total Defense and Security System (Sishankamrata). In conclusion, adaptive leadership is an imperative for the TNI to remain relevant, resilient, and fully prepared to face the full spectrum of contemporary threats.

- The TNI must conduct periodic evaluations regarding the implementation of adaptive leadership by examining various adaptive challenges that have been successfully addressed.
- Continuous development efforts are needed to foster a more adaptive organization, including how the state encourages cross-sectoral collaboration in facing hybrid threats.
- Future research should be conducted directly within the TNI institution using interview methods to assess the extent of adaptive leadership implementation and its implications for the development of the TNI's institutional capabilities.

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