

# *Revisiting the Wehrkreise Strategy: Lessons from the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949) for Modern Defense Systems*

Ridwan Akhmad Nugraha<sup>1</sup>, Edy Sulistyadi<sup>2</sup>, Buddy Suseto<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Indonesia Defense University  
Bogor, Indonesia  
[ridwan.nugraha@sp.idu.ac.id](mailto:ridwan.nugraha@sp.idu.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Indonesia Defense University  
Bogor, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Indonesia Defense University  
Bogor, Indonesia

Corresponding author: Ridwan Akhmad Nugraha



**Abstract** – This article examines the implementation of the People's Defense System (Sishankamrata) in Indonesia in facing complex and asymmetric contemporary challenges amidst significant limitations in military resources. To rediscover the unity of defense within Sishankamrata, it is essential to trace this defense system, which is rooted in efforts to defend independence during the 1945-1949 Revolution, despite the limitations of military resources when confronted with superior enemy forces. During that time, the establishment of Wehrkreise through Emergency Order Number One in 1948 played a significant role in strengthening national defense. This study aims to explore the determining factors for the success of the Wehrkreise strategy and its relevance in strengthening Sishankamrata in the modern era. The research employs a qualitative method with a historical approach, analyzing primary and secondary sources to identify key elements that supported the success of the Wehrkreise strategy. These factors are expected to bridge the gap between Indonesia's historical defense strategy and current strategic challenges. The research findings indicate that innovative leadership, inspirational motivation, alignment of strategy with local cultural contexts, and the integration of military operations with regionally-based people's resistance are the main success factors. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of developing innovative and inspirational leadership, as well as implementing defense strategies that are in harmony with local culture, to strengthen Sishankamrata in the modern era and future. This strategy ensures that the universal defense system remains relevant and resilient in facing dynamic and asymmetric threats.

**Keywords** – Wehrkreise, Total People's Defense System, Determinant Factors, Indonesian National Revolution, Defense Strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has been independent for seventy-nine years, yet much of its historical legacy remains unexplored. The golden generation that fought for Indonesia's independence experienced pivotal moments that we must honor and remember. One of these key figures, Colonel A.H. Nasution, provided a profound reflection on the concept of Total People's Defense, a strategy we still employ today. In his writings, Nasution emphasized:

"We cannot claim to be fighting for the people's interests if, in practice, our actions disturb or, worse, wound the hearts of the people"[1]

This statement underscores the importance of aligning national defense efforts with the well-being and trust of the citizens, a principle still relevant in maintaining the unity and strength of the nation today. Nasution reminds us that the struggle for the people extends beyond fighting colonial powers it also encompasses how a nation treats its citizens in maintaining sovereignty and security. Today, we must question whether the current Total People Defense System defense system truly embodies these principles. The government should conduct its governance and defense practices without harming or oppressing its people. However, in recent years, widespread distrust in the government has become apparent, as seen in various protests and criticisms of leadership behavior. This growing dissatisfaction risks weakening the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the people, making it difficult to implement total people defense strategies without public trust.

Despite these challenges, General A.H. Nasution's writings remain the foundation of Indonesia's total people defense system, which is still in place today. The concept of "*semesta*" emphasizes that national defense is not only the responsibility of the military but also involves the people and natural resources. This reflects the engagement of all elements of the nation in safeguarding independence. Through this concept, we collectively defend the freedom we have achieved.

In order to protect the country's objectives as stated in the 1945 Constitution and national interests, a comprehensive state defense system has been established, known as the Total People's Defense System or Total Defense System. This system combines military and non-military defense efforts, builds a resilient and authoritative defense capability and has a high deterrent effect. As mandated in Article 5 of Law Number 3 of 2002 concerning State Defense, this defense function is to realize and maintain the territorial integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia as a complete and comprehensive defense unit.

The integrated defense is a design of the country's defense system based on a strategy that reflects the strength, capability, and deployment of defense forces (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015). This needs to be interpreted through an analysis of Indonesia's strength and ability as an independent country within the historical framework. Dewey, as quoted by Mann, Gordon, and Macleod [2] emphasizes the importance of reflection as an active, sustainable, and careful consideration of beliefs or knowledge that supports action for the future.

Reflection, as a higher-order thinking process, helps to form new beliefs or knowledge to deal with similar situations in the future. In simpler Latin terms, "reflection" means "bending" or "turning," a metacognitive process that investigates defensive strength. In this context, "turning around" is a practical way to reflect Indonesia's defense capabilities in forming a cohesive and comprehensive defense system.

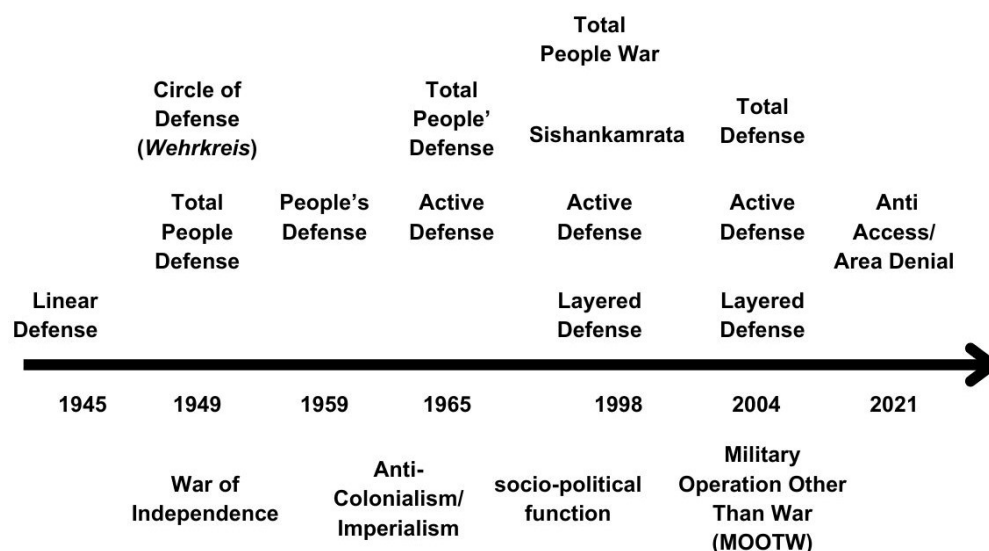


Figure 1 Evolution of Defense Doctrine in Indonesia

Source: Adapted from Widjajanto [3]

In the context of the defense of the Total People's Defense System, Indonesia's strength can be seen through the evolution of its defense doctrine from the past to the present. These doctrines not only provide strategic direction for the military, but also ensure a framework that integrates all elements of the nation in an effort to defend state sovereignty. In Indonesia, defense doctrine has evolved in response to changing threat contexts and geopolitical dynamics.

The transformation of Indonesia's defense doctrine is shaped by the complex interaction between the development of strategic thinking and the various factors that influence it. Between 1945 and 1965, the doctrine underwent significant changes, leading to the emergence of the concept of the "circle of defense". This laid the foundation for the defense and security system known as the Total People's War [3].

The emergence of the concept of Total People's Defense was in line with the development of the defense circle or Wehrkreise between 1945 and 1949. The root of this Total defense strategy began from deep strategic thinking during the period of circle defense or Indonesian Wehrkreise, a tactic reinforced by the writings of General A.H. Nasution, in which he stated that guerrilla warfare was essentially a Universal People's War [1]. This period marked the peak of Indonesia's guerrilla warfare, which inspired the modern concept of Universal People's Defense, as referenced in Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2021, which recognizes the influence of guerrilla warfare in shaping the country's current defense strategy.

Today, Indonesia's defense doctrine still focuses on military aspects, and often ignores social and cultural factors that can influence public mobilization and support for defense strategies. The gap between expectations and reality in fully involving the public in national defense efforts demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive approach. Although the concept of Total People's Defense aims to involve all elements of the nation, in practice, civilian participation is often limited to formal activities organized by the military. This can weaken the effectiveness of strategies, especially in the face of unconventional threats that require broad and flexible mobilization.

A defense strategy that takes into account local meaning and cultural context will ensure the support and active participation of all levels of society [4]. An ideal defense strategy should accommodate and mobilize support organically from all components of society, not just through formal military channels. This is important to strengthen national resilience, especially in the face of unconventional threats that may arise from various directions, both domestic and international.

The history of warfare and the evolution of defense strategies provide valuable insights into how to address threats and conflicts. By understanding how strategies and technologies have evolved over time, more effective and adaptive defense systems can be designed. Additionally, learning from the past can help anticipate and adapt to changes in the form and nature of warfare, such as transitioning from direct confrontation to non-traditional threats. Therefore, leveraging the strengths of the past is not only important but also essential for building a strong and resilient defense in the future.

With this phenomenon on the Wehrkreise strategy in the Total People's Defense system, its effectiveness, and future patterns of warfare, as well as to examine the strategic factors of the Wehrkreise and the Total People's Defense system in the past to deal with contemporary and future conflict scenarios, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of a national defense strategy that is more effective and adaptive in responding to modern threats.

#### Objectives

1. To identify the determinant factors of the Wehrkreise strategy's success during the Indonesian National Revolution.
2. To assess the applicability of these factors in strengthening the Total People's Defense System in the modern era.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a historical method, analyzing primary and secondary sources. Data collection involved archival research, interviews with experts, and literature reviews, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the

Wehrkreise strategy and its contextual significance. The historical approach ensures that findings are deeply rooted in past events, while contemporary analysis bridges the gap to present-day applications.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

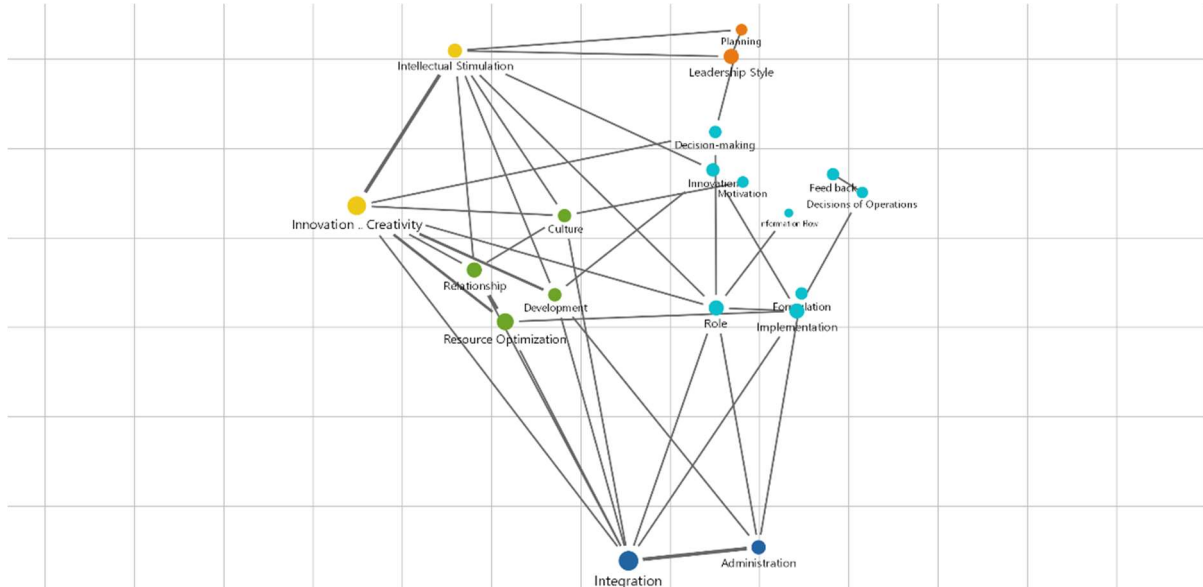


Figure 1. Code Map of Determinant Factors

Source: Processed by researchers With MaxQDA version 20.3.0 (2024)

The conclusion of the Code Map can be seen from the size of the circle on this code map which shows the level of importance or frequency of each code. Larger circles indicate that the code appears more frequently or is more important in the data being analyzed. The "Leadership Style" and "Decision-taking" codes have a larger circle, which indicates that these two concepts are very important in the analysis.

The thickness of the line connecting the circles indicates the strength or significance of the relationship between two codes. Thicker lines indicate a stronger or more frequent connection between two codes. The relationship between "Leadership Style" and "Decision Making" is shown with a bold line, which indicates that these two concepts often appear together and have a strong relationship.

The distance between the circles indicates how close or relevant the two codes are to each other. A closer circle indicates that the two codes often appear together in the data and have high relevance. "Innovation and Creativity" and "Intellectual Stimulation" are close to each other, which suggests that these two concepts often appear together and are interrelated.

Some of the key relationships that can be identified from this code map are as follows:

- Leadership Style and Decision Making have a very strong and significant relationship, showing that leadership style greatly influences the decision-making process.
- Innovation and Creativity and Intellectual Stimulation have a strong relationship, suggesting that innovation and creativity are often associated with intellectual stimulation.
- Resource Optimization and Administration have a significant relationship, showing that resource optimization is closely related to effective administration.

- d. Some of the codes that appear in the middle of this code map are "Leadership Style", "Decision Making", "Innovation and Creativity", and "Resource Optimization". These codes have large circles and many relationships with other codes, which shows that these codes are a key concept in the analysis.

Overall, this code map helps in identifying significant relationships between different concepts or themes in qualitative data.

#### Central Code Analysis Results

- a. Leadership Style:

- a) The big circle shows that "Leadership Style" is one of the most frequently cited codes.
- b) "Leadership Style" has a strong relationship with "Decision Making" and "Implementation", which is indicated by a bold line. This shows that leadership style greatly influences the decision-making process and strategy implementation.

- b. Decision:

- a) The big circle shows that "Decision making" is a very important code that often appears in the data.
- b) "Decision making" has a strong relationship with "Leadership Style" and "Information Flow". This shows that the decision-making process is greatly influenced by leadership style and good information flow.

- c. Innovation and Creativity:

- a) The big circle shows that "Innovation and Creativity" is a very important code in analysis.
- b) "Innovation and Creativity" has a strong relationship with "Intellectual Stimulation". This shows that innovation and creativity are often associated with intellectual stimulation.

- d. Resource Optimization:

- a) The big circle shows that "Resource Optimization" is a very important code in the analysis.
- b) "Resource Optimization" has a significant relationship with "Administration". This shows that resource optimization is closely related to effective administration.

- e. Intellectual Stimulation:

- a) The big circle shows that "Intellectual Stimulation" is the code that is important in the analysis.
- b) "Intellectual Stimulation" has a strong relationship with "Innovation and Creativity". This shows that intellectual stimulation is often associated with innovation and creativity.

- f. Administration:

- a) The large circle indicates that "Administration" is the code that is important in the analysis.
- b) "Administration" has a significant relationship with "Resource Optimization". This shows that good administration is essential for resource optimization.

From this code map, it can be concluded that some central codes such as "Leadership Style", "Decision Making", "Innovation and Creativity", "Resource Optimization", "Intellectual Stimulation", and "Administration" have a very important role in the analysis. The strong relationship between these codes shows that these factors are interrelated and mutually supportive in the implementation of the wehrkreise strategy during Indonesia's war of independence. Leadership style, decision-making, innovation, resource optimization, intellectual stimulation, and effective administration are key factors that influence the success of the strategy.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the central code generated by MaxQDA 20.3.0 illustrates the connections and relationships between the various codes analyzed in this study. From the visual representation, it is evident that certain concepts play a crucial role and are significantly interconnected with various other aspects, indicating that these concepts are dominant factors in the context under investigation.

Leadership emerges as one of the most influential factors in this code map. The code "Leadership Style" is linked to several key concepts such as Planning, Decision-making, and Motivation. This suggests that leadership style directly impacts how decisions are made, how planning is conducted, and how motivation is fostered within an organization.

This interconnection highlights that effective leadership is essential in ensuring the smooth operation of various strategic processes. Leadership that provides Intellectual Stimulation and encourages Innovation can also create an environment where creativity and development thrive. Therefore, the appropriate leadership style not only influences operational decisions but also plays a significant role in building an organizational culture that supports innovation and resource optimization.

Strategic Fit in this context refers to the extent to which the implemented strategy aligns with the internal and external needs and conditions of the organization. The code map indicates that Integration plays a central role in linking various concepts such as Resource Optimization, Administration, Implementation, and Formulation. This suggests that the organization's ability to integrate various operational and strategic aspects is key to successfully implementing an effective strategy.

Strategic Fit can be observed in how concepts like Resource Optimization and Administration are connected with Implementation and Formulation. This indicates that to achieve strategic alignment, an organization must be able to optimize existing resources and manage administration effectively so that the strategy can be implemented efficiently. This relationship also underscores the importance of the integration process in achieving alignment between the formulated strategy and its execution on the ground.

From this analysis, it is clear that Leadership and Strategic Fit are the most dominant factors influencing various other aspects of the organization. Effective leadership acts as the main driver in decision-making, planning, and motivation, which in turn contribute to achieving strategic alignment. Meanwhile, Strategic Fit is essential to ensure that all organizational elements work harmoniously and in a coordinated manner toward common goals. Successful integration of various operational and strategic functions is crucial for the organization's success in facing existing challenges.

Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of focusing on developing adaptive leadership and implementing strategies that align with the organization's internal and external context to achieve optimal outcomes. The analysis showed that strategy formulation was considered the most important aspect, with all respondents (100%) emphasizing its importance. This is in line with the theory that the formulation of a strategy is an important first step in developing the strategic direction of an organization. The high percentage underlines that without solid formulation, the implementation of the strategy, which is also considered very important (83.8%), will not be effective. In the context of Wehrkreise, these findings suggest that the success of a strategy depends heavily on careful initial planning.

In addition, the role and planning in the strategy received significant attention from respondents, with each factor obtaining 66.7%. This shows that the success of a strategy depends not only on accurate planning but also on clearly defined roles in the organization. Although innovation and feedback are important (50%), they are considered less important compared to other aspects. This suggests that in the implementation of the Wehrkreise strategy, the main focus remains on solid planning and execution, with innovation and feedback perhaps seen as more flexible supporting elements.

In the field of human resource management, motivation emerged as the dominant factor, with 83.3% of respondents highlighting the importance of motivation. This shows that in the context of Wehrkreise, keeping the team motivated is key to ensuring the successful implementation of the strategy. Operational decisions, which are also considered important by 66.7% of respondents, confirmed that daily decisions made by management have a significant impact on the effectiveness of human resources.



However, the aspect of interpersonal relationships among team members, which is considered important by only 50% of respondents, suggests that in Wehrkreise, the focus may be more on operational outcomes than on interpersonal dynamics. This is consistent with a strategic approach to military that often emphasizes efficiency and results rather than personal relationships.

Leadership in the Wehrkreise strategy was strongly influenced by innovation, creativity and inspirational motivation, which were recorded by 66.7% of respondents respectively. This shows that in situations such as war, as represented by the Wehrkreise strategy, leaders who can inspire and encourage innovation are considered important. Leadership that provides intellectual stimulation and implements an effective leadership style is also recognized by 50% of respondents, indicating that adaptive and forward-thinking leadership is necessary to face dynamic challenges in military strategy.

Communication in the Wehrkreise strategy highlighted decision-making as the most important aspect, with 53.8% of respondents emphasizing the importance of it. This is consistent with the theory that emphasizes the importance of clear and effective communication in strategic decision-making. Good information flow, which is considered important by 38.5% of respondents, also supports effective decision-making, although vertical communication receives less attention (7.7%). This may reflect a more rigid and hierarchical command structure in the implementation of the Wehrkreise strategy, where the flow of information and decision-making tends to be more centralized.

The strategic fit factor shows that culture and integration are considered very important in the implementation of the Wehrkreise strategy, with 88.3% of respondents supporting this view. This shows that the alignment between the strategy and the culture of the organization, as well as good integration among the various elements of the organization, is the key to the success of the Wehrkreise strategy. Resource and administrative optimization were also recognized as important factors by 66.7% and 50% of respondents, respectively, underlining that operational efficiency and effective administrative management are important supports for strategic fit in this context.

Based on the interpretation of the data, it can be concluded that key determinants such as strategy formulation and implementation, motivation in human resource management, innovation, inspirational leadership, and effective communication in decision-making and information flow all contribute significantly to the success of the Wehrkreise strategy. Strategic alignment, particularly in terms of culture and integration, also plays an important role in ensuring that strategies can be implemented effectively and aligned with the context of the organization.

Leadership is a key factor in the success of defense strategies, especially in dynamic and stressful contexts such as national defense. Modern leadership theories, including transformational leadership, emphasize the importance of leaders who can not only provide direction but also motivate and inspire team members to achieve common goals [5]. In the context of the Wehrkreise strategy, Colonel A.H. Nasution is an example of effective leadership. His ability to innovate and motivate troops in difficult war situations demonstrates the critical role of inspirational and adaptive leadership in the successful implementation of strategies.

Strategic alignment, or alignment between strategy and cultural and operational contexts, is an important factor in ensuring the successful implementation of defense strategies. Strategy theory states that the fit between strategy and operational context is the key to operational effectiveness and efficiency [6]. In the context of the Wehrkreise, the ability to integrate the values of a culture of mutual cooperation and community spirit into military strategy shows how strategic alignment can improve morale and operational effectiveness.

The research shows that 88.3% of respondents view culture and integration as very important factors. This reflects the importance of adapting strategies into local contexts to ensure that they are accepted and implemented effectively. In the context of the Wehrkreise, integrating local culture with defense strategies not only boosts morale but also increases public support for defense efforts. Resource optimization and efficient administration, recognized by 66.7% and 50% of respondents, respectively, highlight the importance of good resource management in supporting the success of this strategy.

The success of the Wehrkreise strategy underscores the importance of aligning defense strategies with cultural and social contexts. For modern applications, integrating advanced technologies such as cyber capabilities with the principles of decentralized resistance

is crucial. Moreover, fostering innovative leadership and community engagement remains vital for addressing multidimensional threats.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Based on the factors that influence war strategy, including strategy, human resource management, leadership, communication, and strategic suitability, it can be seen that Leadership and Strategic Suitability are the two most important factors in the success of a war strategy.

Leadership is essential because effective leaders not only inspire and motivate their teams but also guide them to overcome challenges in innovative and adaptive ways. The findings point to inspirational innovation, creativity and motivation as important aspects of leadership in the context of Wehrkreise strategy. This underscores the importance of developing leadership that can motivate and adapt to change, ensuring that defense strategies are successfully implemented and responsive to evolving threats. Leaders such as Colonel AH Nasution or Army General Soedirman have shown how innovative and adaptive leadership can increase the effectiveness of strategies.

Strategic alignment, or alignment between strategy and cultural and operational contexts, is also an important factor. Research shows that culture and integration are essential. The ability to integrate local cultures, such as mutual cooperation and nationalism, while ensuring efficient management of resources, has been shown to improve morale and operational effectiveness. In the context of Indonesia's defense, strategic alignment allows for the implementation of relevant and effective strategies that are accepted by the community and implemented efficiently in accordance with the local context.

Therefore, innovative and inspiring leadership combined with a strong Strategic Fit is the key to strengthening Indonesia's defense. Focusing on these two aspects will ensure that the defense strategy is implemented.

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