

An Argumentative Essay



Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia

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Indonesia in recent years went through a remarkable transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic form of government. For more than three decades (1967-1998) the country was ruled by President Suharto who sought to establish stability, and ensure central control, by excessively exploiting the military institution to engage in domestic politics. The Asian financial crisis that devastatingly hit Indonesia in 1998 served as the tipping point for the people to bring down Suharto's corrupt and repressive regime. The widespread unrests, and the popular demand for "National Reform" led to Suharto's resignation. The event had forever changed the country's political landscape, as well as its civil-military relations. This essay examines the root causes of the military reform, and its dynamics in post-Suharto era. Although there were ups and downs along the way, the civil-military relations in Indonesia had been showing a significant improvement. I would argue that the key to success was the military's enduring commitment to reform, aligned with the civilian leaders' goodwill and competence, as well as the country's economic capacity to support the overall military reform agenda.

Under Suharto, the Indonesian military (TNI) developed an ideological and legal framework to support its formal role in political affairs, called "*Dwi Fungsi*" or "Dual Function", which fundamentally prescribed the TNI to perform two broad functions at the same time: 1) defense-domestic security, and 2) sociopolitical. It regulated the TNI to have corporate representation in the parliament, and allowed active and retired military officers to serve in the cabinet, as ministers, as well as in local civil administrations, as mayors or governors. Additionally, they could also be assigned to assume key leadership or managerial positions in various state-owned enterprises. For the military, Dual Function was specifically designed to support the Total People's Defense doctrine, which contemplated mass mobilization to defend the country against external and internal threats. Given Indonesia's history in dealing with regionalist rebellions, communist insurgencies, as well as Islamist-fundamentalist movements, the doctrine necessitated the TNI to establish an effective territorial command structure, which enabled the TNI to maintain presence throughout the archipelago, and build rapport with the local populace. Nevertheless, in practice, the territorial concept was implemented to protect and sustain Suharto in power, where the TNI was tasked to monitor, and if necessary, shut down the activities of religious organizations, student associations, trade unions, the media, and other nongovernmental organizations that could become sources of dissident movement. In doing so, the TNI, including its intelligence arms, acted as a "super body" with very little accountability.

For all the above practices the TNI had considerably lost its credibility as the true defender of the nation, and the protector of the people. It was evident at the height of 1998 crisis, where people, being repressed for so many years, completely disregarded, and even physically challenged soldiers who were deployed to guard the presidential palace, and other government buildings. The TNI could actually take a punitive response to restore order, and take over the broken civilian government; however, they foresaw the adverse consequences the country would have to endure in the long run. The TNI's leadership, encouraged by President Habibie (1998-1999), was determined to correct the military's past mistakes, and hence be part of the solution to the national crisis in pursuance of a better future for Indonesia. Immediately after the fall of Suharto, the TNI conducted an institutional reform. A team of senior officers, led by Lieutenant General Yudhoyono, developed the "New Paradigm". It marked several key changes within the TNI, which were primarily aimed to get the military out of politics, the economy, and domestic security; reduce its autonomy, privileges, and size; as well as create new institutional frameworks for democratic civil-military relations.

First, the New Paradigm entailed the TNI to abandon its sociopolitical function. This made it less likely that any president can coopt the military for personal gain. Active-duty military officers could no longer retain the privilege of being appointed to assume key positions in the political or economic affairs, both at the national and local levels. If they wanted to have a "second career", either in civilian bureaucracy or private corporation, they must first retire from the TNI. Likewise, if officers desired to join a certain political party in order to run for public office, they must first relinquish their military status and attributes. Military personnel were also strictly prohibited to engage in any "practical politics", such as supporting certain candidates during political campaigns. However, during Sukarnoputri's presidency (2001-2004), there were evidences that several prominent military commanders were directed to influence soldiers and their family members, as well as the civilian populations within their respective areas of responsibility to support the ruling party in the 2004 national election. However, such effort was neither effective nor sympathetic. The increasingly critical and open-minded Indonesian society refused the reemergence of TNI's old political practices, and would rather cast their votes for Yudhoyono who promised "Change and Progress" during his presidential bid.

Second, the New Paradigm called for a shift of the TNI's traditional focus from internal security to external defense. It required the military to go "Back to Barrack" in order to achieve the "new professionalism", which revolved around combat effectiveness and operational

readiness to defend Indonesia's sovereignty from threat of conventional attack by external forces. Therefore, in 1999, the National Police was separated from the TNI, reporting directly to the President. The intention of this separation was to transfer the TNI's, especially the Army's primary responsibility for domestic security and maintenance of public order to the National Police. Nevertheless, at the time the National Police was in general undertrained and underequipped. They alone were incapable of handling massive demonstrations in Jakarta; let alone dealing with inter-ethnic violent conflicts in Poso and Maluku, fighting the insurgents in Aceh and Papua, combating the homegrown terrorist networks, or engaging in large-scale natural disaster-relief efforts. Consequently, the TNI could not reduce its size significantly, and would need to retain its force structure and territorial system throughout the country in order to able to maintain its involvement in internal security. At best, the TNI could only dismiss or downgrade several positions in the organization, most notably the Chief of Staff for Territorial Affairs.

Third, the military and police representation in the parliament was reduced from 75 to 38, and was scheduled to be phased out by 2004. This policy was again parallel with the TNI's effort to leave the politics. However, with the abolition of such representation in the legislature, there was a serious concern that nobody in the parliament could ensure that military and security aspects of proposed legislation would be considered accordingly. This was due to the fact that defense and security affairs had always been the military's domain; thus, Indonesia lacked of civilian cadres who possessed such expertise and experience. To address this issue, some analysts suggested that the military personnel should begin to use their rights to vote. Nonetheless, the TNI refused to do so, given the potential consequences of internal disunity, and a strategic setback in the overall process of democratization and military reform. The New Paradigm also allowed a more effective legislative oversight of military affairs. This was critical as the TNI sought to establish transparency and accountability within the institution.

Fully implementing the new doctrine required enormous changes in the TNI's culture, organizational structure, training, and personnel practices; and loosing privileges was indeed painful for most of the TNI officers. It was natural that they felt uncomfortable with the country's new demand; and they were not ready to come out from their comfort zones. However, the TNI's leadership earned the credit for what they were willing to give up. Another challenge was related to the requirement for a considerable amount of resources to retrain and reequip the TNI to fulfill the high standard of "new professionalism". Nonetheless, the most concerning challenge to the military reform was that the process itself was not (all the time) supported by

competent civilian leaders. For example, President Wahid (1999-2001) heavily involved in the TNI's top brass promotion mechanism; while President Sukarnoputri reduced the authority of the ministry of defense as the executive's primary institutional link to the military, and depended more on personal connections to top Generals.

During Yudhoyono's presidency (2004-2014), the TNI saw a golden opportunity to regain its credibility and trust from the people. The remarkable economic progress allowed President Yudhoyono to allocate a significantly greater defense budget. This would essentially realize his vision since he was still an active Army officer: a professional, modern, relevant, effective, and respectable TNI. To achieve his vision, President Yudhoyono required the TNI to first improve its human resources capacity through a better training and education system, including through the newly established Defense University, which would serve as a melting pot of civilian and military personnel in defense and security affairs. Second, the TNI must develop a more relevant doctrine, with a greater emphasis on "jointness" among the three services, to meet the challenges of the 21st century's complex security environment. Third, the TNI should modernize its forces, and improve its operational readiness through procurement of new weapons system and equipment. In doing so, the TNI should work closely with various indigenous civilian defense industries. Fourth, the TNI was required to improve the quality of life of soldiers and their families. By enhancing soldiers' welfare system, including a progressive increase in their salaries, the TNI would be able to retain the best and brightest talents who would only focus on their missions at hand. Additionally, in order to improve the civil-military relations, President Yudhoyono constantly underscored the importance of TNI's neutrality during any political elections. He also avoided meddling in the TNI's internal affairs, including its promotion system. Finally, although there was a temptation to appoint his classmate in the Military Academy as a Minister of Defense, he was determined that such position should be occupied by a competent civilian professional who was not affiliated with any political parties, including his own. All these were aimed to affirm a democratic civilian control regime as mandated by the people.

For any nations pursuing a democratic transition, a military institutional reform is not only desirable, but also imperative. In the case of Indonesia, although there existed several setbacks along the process, the TNI in general had been moving in the right direction. However, nothing should be taken for granted. To accomplish a full democratic consolidation, the military must continue its commitment to reform, and to progress; while the civilian leadership should further their willingness and competence to support the military, both politically and financially.