



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Health Security in Indonesia and the Normalization of the Military's Non-Defence Role

By Jun Honna

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Like many countries, Indonesia's armed forces (TNI) have been engaging in health security activities since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The pandemic has made TNI popular in society owing to its visible dedication to crisis response at the grassroots level. It is important to clarify how this became possible and the impact it has had from the perspective of civil-military relations.
- TNI's widening and deepening involvement in health security is the product of the normalization of "military operations other than war" (MOOTW). The 2004 TNI law restricted non-defence missions and required that ad hoc arrangements to undertake such non-war emergency missions gain parliamentary approval. TNI has skilfully used patriotic propaganda to justify its COVID-19-linked activities by invoking the spirit of the war of independence. In doing so, military elites have stoked nationalist sentiments to blunt military reform measures and normalize their role expansion. This is a new development in the history of TNI's MOOTW; operations related to counter-terrorism and disaster relief in the past—for example, the 2018 natural disasters in Lombok and Palu—were limited in time and space. In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis should be understood as an important game changer in the country's post-authoritarian civil-military relations.
- The most significant implication has been the evaporation of political pressure for military reform. The skyrocketing popularity of TNI in society has incentivized political elites to

ignore reform demands. Under such circumstances, the TNI leadership has advanced various institutional agendas, including the “healthification” and revitalization of *babinsa* and the territorial command system, creation of new jobs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, promotion of politically connected generals, and consolidation of intra-military power under the new TNI commander.

- However, after two and a half years of the pandemic, whether TNI’s role expansion really signals expanded political ambitions remains unclear. It should be noted that Indonesia’s military leadership has not made any effort to hijack civilian politics or support a populist dictator’s killing of citizens and the gutting of democratic institutions as seen in neighbouring countries. Instead, Indonesia’s military elites cultivated Jokowi by providing institutional support, and carefully manoeuvred the pandemic crisis to gain greater autonomy and extend the scope of TNI’s role beyond the conventional MOOTW paradigm. It appears that intra-military political dynamics, rather than institutional political ambitions, drive this agenda.

Health Security in Indonesia and the Normalization of the Military's Non-Defence Role

By Jun Honna¹

INTRODUCTION

Military engagement in non-military affairs in response to global health threats has become prominent since the outbreaks of poliovirus (2014–17), Ebola, and Zika (Carlin et al. 2021). However, military activism in non-defence arenas may have a negative impact on democratic governance, especially when soldiers are mobilized for domestic policing. But what is it that motivates leaders to mobilize military forces to deal with health crises? Likewise, what is it that motivates the armed forces to engage in public health control?

There are two views in discussing these questions. Some analysts argue that it is a matter of utility in a country where state capacity is limited. They argue that leaders, in order to effectively deal with the complex challenges of a health security crisis, must mobilize all available resources, civilian or military, to maximize the government's performance (Chretien et al. 2007; Downie 2012; WHO 2021). According to this argument, the military obeys a call-out order as its professional commitment. Others, meanwhile, argue that military mobilization under the pretext of a health emergency is a shady form of health securitization, which largely reflects a political leader's ambition to extend emergency powers and consolidate populist/autocratic legitimacy in the country (De Waal 2014; Pinheiro de Oliveira 2016). Here, the military is understood

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to be an active agent of authoritarian ambition. Today there is a growing literature that recounts the military-backed autocratization under the COVID-19 pandemic and which advances this argument (Passos and Acácio 2021; Grzebalska and Mađarová 2021).

The two models mentioned above are of course not mutually exclusive. What we need is a more nuanced approach that allows us to analyse cases where military involvement in health security cannot be easily explained with the help of these models. Indonesia is obviously such a case. Beyond the models, I am interested in investigating the civil-military dynamics of what Wenham (2019) refers to as “securitizing health” and “healthifying security”. Through the investigation, I provide an alternative explanation for Indonesia’s case. In doing so, I examine how military engagement in health security during the COVID-19 pandemic has been exercised by President Joko Widodo (2014–), popularly called Jokowi. I discuss how it has been used as a political instrument by the president to gain the loyalty of military elites. I also argue that the supra-defence missions of the military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) are not chiefly motivated by either professional commitment or authoritarian ambition but are instead largely driven by inter-service rivalry and the quest for organizational stability.

Below, we first examine the regulations governing TNI’s non-defence missions after the country’s 1998 democratization. We then investigate TNI’s operations on the ground during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we discuss TNI’s politics in securitizing health control and healthifying military role, aimed at blunting reform pressures and advancing the intra-military agenda.

BACKGROUND: DEVISING NON-DEFENCE MISSIONS

When Suharto was forced to step down from the presidency in 1998, amid an economic crisis and nationwide protests, civil society movements targeted the military, advocating its disengagement from non-defence activities under the call to “return to the barracks”. During the early years of the post-Suharto democratic transition, political and military leaders reached a consensus on limiting the military’s role to national defence.

To do so, the government first separated the police from the military in 2000 and assigned domestic security tasks to the former, while the latter was restricted to matters of national defence. Subsequent institutional reforms targeted legacies of the military's traditional political activism, which had long been legitimized as the dual function (*dwifungsi*) of the military carried out in the name of safeguarding national stability. *Dwifungsi* was exercised by extending the army's vertical command networks down to the village level and by using the nationwide coercive instrument called territorial commands (*komando teritorial*, or *koter*) for everyday military surveillance of local politics. Thus, demilitarizing politics and depoliticizing the military became the top item on the agenda of democratic reform.

In line with the demands of the reform, the post-Suharto parliament enacted Law No. 3 of 2002 on National Defence.² The new law established a clear demarcation between internal security and external defence, specifying the latter as the military's primary duty. However, this role redefinition did not rule out the possibility of military involvement in non-defence missions. Article 10 created space for the military to engage in non-defence operations, stipulating that "military operations other than war" or MOOTW (in Indonesian *Operasi Militer Selain Perang*, OMSP) was one of the military's missions, including humanitarian assistance, assistance to the police and civilian institutions, and assistance for search-and-rescue operations related to refugees and victims of natural disasters (Haripin 2019). Guidelines for military mobilization remained vague, and simply stated that they were "based on request and/or related regulations".

This vague legal provision, which allowed civilian leaders to mobilize the military as needed, was criticized by Indonesia's vibrant civil society, which suspected that it could be exploited by anti-reformist officers who wanted to claw their way back to political influence. Such concerns became stronger when a series of terrorist attacks hit the country, such as the Bali bombing in 2002, Jakarta's Marriot Hotel bombing in 2003,

² The law is Undang-Undang No. 3/2002 tentang Pertahanan Negara.

the Australian embassy bombing in 2004, and the Bali bombing in 2005. Aligning with the US-led global war on terrorism, TNI quickly seized a role in domestic anti-terrorist missions. The top brass lobbied political leaders by stressing the incapacity of the newly independent police to mount an effective counterterrorist response.

Thus, when a new law on the Indonesian Armed Forces (hereinafter, TNI law) was enacted in 2004 (Law No. 34 of 2004),³ the Megawati government ignored the demands of civil society groups working on security-sector reform to minimize the space for MOOTW, and instead expanded the military's missions to include countering separatist movements, rebellions, terrorism, and securing borders and strategic vital objects of the nation, along with other missions described in the 2002 National Defence Law.⁴ The 2004 TNI law also stipulated that the military, either for war or non-war operations, would act based on national political decisions, which means presidential orders and parliamentary approvals. Due to this wider space for military expansionism, the law was seen as a setback for efforts to limit the military's role in national defence. For the military, the law represented a big step forward toward regaining lost territory. To counter reformist pressures, military elites developed a "theory" insisting that "defence" and "security" could not be strictly demarcated, and that the conventional distinction largely ignored a "grey zone" in-between (Departmen Pertahanan dan Keamanan 2003). Here, obscuring the defence-security demarcation became a discursive weapon of the military to resist fundamental reforms.

Subsequently, in 2009, under the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former army general, a long-awaited regulation on MOOTW was issued. This was the Defence Ministerial Regulation No. 3/2009 on the General Policy on the Use of Military Forces.⁵ The regulation, *inter alia*, stated:

³ The law is Undang-Undang No. 34/2004 tentang Tentara Nasional Indonesia.

⁴ See Article 7 in the TNI law.

⁵ The regulation is Peraturan Menteri Pertahanan No. 3/2009 tentang Kebijakan Umum Penggunaan Kekuatan Tentara Nasional Indonesia.

MOOTW is conducted based on national political policy; the President—who is also the supreme commander of the military—with approval of the parliament, has the authority and responsibility to *mobilize* the military for MOOTW; MOOTW prioritizes preventive (rather than repressive) measures; the authority to *utilize* the armed forces for MOOTW is granted to the TNI commander who has to report to the president within 48 hours after doing so.

With this ministerial regulation, the basic legal framework for TNI's MOOTW was established. The president has the power to order the military to conduct non-defence missions and the decision needs to be approved by the parliament. The authority to use force is granted to the TNI commander, who is required to report such actions to the president. Moreover, these actions are designed to be temporary in nature. Interestingly, a previously emphasized passive role of “assisting” relevant bodies was not included in this ministerial regulation. New emphasis was instead put on “coordination” and “synergy” with these bodies in facilitating an active military role in MOOTW. Clearly, this marked a significant shift from the early years of democratic transition, when the military was under strong pressure to limit its role to national defence.

Why, then, has Indonesia's post-authoritarian military been eager to expand its non-defence missions? Some argue that the generals' political ambitions are facilitated by this mission creep, asserting for example, that “they still believe themselves as the national guardian, so losing that role is nothing but a humiliation that should be prevented for the dignity of the institution”.⁶ Others emphasize “demand-side” reasons, maintaining that civilians, especially the police, need military support in handling security emergencies. According to this military-civilian cooperation perspective, the apolitical nature of MOOTW is the real driver of military activism

⁶ Personal communications with Indonesian police officers, 2018 and 2019.

in non-defence missions (Hakim 2020), and TNI's involvement is due to the demand for its response capacity during national emergencies, as seen in many countries.

These arguments sound plausible and can even coexist. However, as we will see below, TNI's engagement in the COVID-19 pandemic is more complicated. During the pandemic, MOOTW has provided TNI with rare opportunities to demonstrate its devotion to protecting the public, promote traditional propaganda of "people-army organic solidarity", and adeptly legitimize its non-defence role expansion while boosting public support. Over two years, massive involvement in the COVID-19 health crisis has also proven TNI's effectiveness in normalizing MOOTW. This has undoubtedly been a serious setback for military reforms that had gained momentum over the last two decades. For TNI elites, however, thwarting reforms has been a big success in creating more jobs, boosting institutional dignity, and effectively lowering the bar for further expansion of non-defence missions in a way that enlarges military bureaucracies and alleviates severe competition for promotions. In this sense, TNI's MOOTW during the COVID-19 pandemic is more about intra-military politics than the authoritarian ambitions of the military. Let us elaborate on the dynamics by examining the process by which TNI has skilfully synchronized its health emergency role with MOOTW and utilized this space to advance its institutional agenda.

FIGHTING COVID-19⁷

With the official death tally exceeding 156,000 deaths (as of 25 June 2022), Indonesia has endured the biggest coronavirus toll in Southeast Asia. The Jokowi government has struggled to stem the spread of the virus and mitigate the damage to society, facing the common dilemma of balancing epidemiological risks and the economic costs of restricting people's daily activities. Soon after the first infection was diagnosed on

⁷ Part of this section comes from my previous essay (Honna 2020).

2 March 2020, Jokowi announced his presidential decision (Kepres)⁸ to establish the COVID-19 national task force the same month. It came as a big public surprise that the task force at the national and local levels saw a massive inclusion of army officers. Headed by Lt. Gen. Doni Munardo, the former commander of the army special forces (Kopassus), with Maj. Gen. Tionpan Aritionang (the operational assistant to TNI commander) as the deputy head, the newly established COVID-19 task force mobilized more than 200 military officers (mostly from the army) as deputy heads of local task forces, creating an impression that the country's coronavirus management had been "partially militarized" (Laksamana and Taufika 2020).

In tandem with the task force, TNI took the initiative at the end of March to establish Integrated Joint Task Commands (Kogasgabpad) in four areas to coordinate COVID-19-related operations led by different agencies, including the police and the Ministry of Health. Commanded by Vice Admiral Yudo Margono, two out of four Kogasgabpad were placed in Jakarta and the other two in Riau to manage quarantine and medical support. Kogasgabpad sent a strong message to the public that it was not the health-medical authority but rather the military that would lead the country's governance of the pandemic.

The public was also surprised when Doni dressed up in military uniform and appeared at the COVID-19 task force meeting on April 27 even though the two agencies he led—the COVID-19 national task force and the National Disaster Agency (BNPB)—were civilian organizations. Doni seemingly "dog-whistled" to his army colleagues that he was retaining his military identity and was representing the army in this time of national crisis.

In late May 2020, Jokowi announced his plan to relax the "stay-home" campaign, which was officially called the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) introduced in early April. The lifting of the stay-home order was a concession to the country's powerful business community that

⁸ Kepres RI No. 7 Tahun 2020 tentang Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan Corona Virus Disease.

was eager to resume operations (Rikang 2020). Despite daily reports of increasing numbers of infections, Jokowi declared that the country should move towards a “new normal” from early June. He asked the public to maintain COVID-19 public health protocols while also lifting restrictions on socio-economic activities. What also surprised the public was his mobilization of soldiers (along with the police and non-state paramilitary groups) to enforce “social discipline”. The TNI commander, Gen. Hadi Tjahjanto, and National Police Chief, Gen. Idham Azis, soon announced that, following the presidential instruction (Inpres),⁹ they would deploy around 340,000 personnel to four provinces, namely Jakarta, West Java, West Sumatra, and Gorontalo, and 25 regencies/cities that had large numbers of infections to enforce the government’s social discipline policy. Human rights defenders complained that “the public does not need military personnel to remind them to be washing their hands and practise strict social distancing” (Arshad 2020); “what we need is a public health approach, not a security approach” (Purnamasari 2020); and “TNI has no legal ground to sanction citizens for violating health protocols” (Adyatama and Hidayat 2020).

Jokowi ignored these criticisms. For him, justifying the normalization of business activities and mitigating the economic downturn necessitated a grand gesture of social discipline to convince the public that health protocols could be maintained while relaxing social restrictions. For Jokowi, deploying TNI conveyed resolute leadership in tackling the pandemic. For TNI, this mobilization significantly expanded its mission, providing political cover for ramping up *operasi pendisiplinan* (disciplinary operations) in many parts of the country.¹⁰ The army interpreted broadly the presidential request to empower its territorial

⁹ Inpres No. 6 Tahun 2020 tentang Peningkatan Disiplin dan Penegakan Hukum Protokol Kesehatan dalam Pencegahan dan Pengendalian COVID-19.

¹⁰ During the Suharto era, the military regularly exercised operations called national discipline movement, or *gerakan disiplin nasional* (GDN), aimed at eliminating any threats to social order (Honon 2003, pp. 66–67). GDN was no longer active after the fall of Suharto. Clearly, the pandemic provided an opportunity to reactivate the military legacy.

command structure down to the village level, and local commands mobilized *babinsa* (village non-commissioned officers) throughout the country to monitor and patrol markets, train/bus stations, houses of worship and shopping malls. Commander of Jakarta Military Command (Kodam Jaya) Maj. Gen. Eko Margiyono also emphasized in TNI's internal media that his soldiers were on high alert for the outbreak of mass riots (Margiyono 2020). From the perspective of the police, such military operations were nothing but a serious encroachment on police turf, but for the army, such activities were consistent with the long-standing ideology of *kemanunggalan TNI bersama rakyat* (unity between the military and the people).

TNI's more systematic involvement started in July 2020 when Jokowi dissolved the COVID-19 task force to integrate its missions with his newly established Committee for Handling COVID-19 and National Economic Recovery (KPCPEN). Jokowi once again surprised the public by appointing the army chief, Andika Perkasa, as the deputy chair of KPCPEN. The KPCPEN chair, Erick Thohir (Minster of State-Owned Enterprises), explained that Andika was expected to lead the army's campaign to boost social discipline in 83,000 villages throughout the archipelago (Patnistik 2020). It became apparent that the military's social patrolling was not limited to the country's large virus-infected areas. This policy has enhanced TNI's long-term everyday policing of local communities, and it has been institutionalized despite the *ad hoc* nature of MOOTW.

TNI's mobilization of *babinsa* itself did not imply the revival of *dwifungsi*, where soldiers were deployed to constrain social activities or control local governance, but rather—perhaps more importantly for the army elites—it provided a very rare opportunity for them to carve out a new role while conducting a nationwide territorial mobilization down to the village level in the name of policing social discipline. This is important because it empowered *babinsa* while sanctifying the army ideology of *kemanunggalan TNI bersama rakyat*, helping the army elites restore the battered legitimacy of the Suharto-era territorial command structure. As a vestige of Suharto's authoritarian rule, it has been a target for reformists eager to pare back the military's role to focus solely on national defence. Significantly, this territorial command structure involves about two-thirds

of army soldiers, enabling it to preserve institutional superiority vis-à-vis the navy and the air force. For the army, reforms aimed at streamlining its territorial commands are unacceptable because that would reduce its power and influence.

TNI's glorification of *babinsa* and its propaganda of organic solidarity between the army and the people was further intensified when Jokowi introduced a new social restriction policy named Micro-scale Activity Restrictions (PPKM Mikro) in early February 2021. This community-level lockdown paved the way for TNI's territorial commands to fully mobilize local soldiers and *babinsa*, not only for public discipline patrolling but also for tracing the spread of the coronavirus in communities (Pattisina 2021). For this mission, the TNI commander insisted that 27,866 *babinsa* would be trained as coronavirus tracers and detectors in local communities (Hakim 2021). Five months later, in July 2021, when Jokowi raised the level of social restriction from PPKM Mikro to PPKM Darurat (Emergency Activity Restrictions) in response to the country's second wave caused by the spread of the delta variant, Hadi, the TNI commander, identified the pandemic as a war. He said, "TNI's *babinsa* is the backbone of the country's total war against COVID-19" (Arsilan 2021). This mobilization of the "total war" (*perang semesta*) narrative was invoked to kindle memories of the glorious independence war and wartime civil-military solidarity, fanning nationalist sentiments to strengthen the legitimacy of TNI's everyday role in local communities.

Together with *babinsa* and its community-level engagements, TNI has emphasized the critical role of the territorial command structure in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. A notable example was TNI's involvement in the nationwide vaccination programme announced in February 2021 at the annual leadership meeting of TNI and the National Police (Rapim TNI-Polri). With the response to COVID-19 being the central theme of the annual meeting, TNI proposed mass vaccination operations by using local military hospitals and training an army of vaccinators in uniform (Putra 2021). Six months later, in August 2021, it was reported that TNI's territorial commands had mobilized 803 military hospitals and 10,867 vaccinators in this campaign, delivering 8.5 million first doses and 1.3 million second doses (Satuan Tugas

Penanganan COVID-19 2021). Maj. Gen. Syafruddin, who replaced Tionpan Aritonang as the operational assistant to the TNI commander, emphasized the role of the territorial network in achieving mass inoculations, claiming that it could deliver two million doses per day nationwide (Bona 2021).

Along with the vaccination roll-out, TNI's territorial commands conducted public-awareness campaigns regarding the coronavirus at the city-regency level where district military commands (Kodim) conduct civic action projects twice a year under the programme called "TNI for Village Development" or TNI Manunggal Membangun Desa (TMMMD). Beginning in June 2020, these awareness campaigns proved effective in terms of public health and in highlighting the enormous contribution of TNI's territorial commands to the country's war against the COVID-19 outbreak. As Jokowi said on 5 October 2021, at TNI's 2021 anniversary ceremony, "the success in handling this long war on COVID-19 would not be possible without TNI's big role" (Adyatama 2021).

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, TNI has manoeuvred to enlarge its mission in the name of MOOTW. Initially, its primary mission was to provide emergency medical assistance including evacuation and quarantine. However, the role quickly expanded to public discipline patrolling, and then to coronavirus tracing and detection. This was then followed by a nationwide vaccination campaign. Importantly, this large-scale role expansion required justification as almost two years of managing the national health crisis could hardly be identified as consistent with the ad hoc, temporary nature of MOOTW. To counter public pressures demanding military withdrawal from the "health front", TNI has mobilized war narratives to align the current battle to contain the pandemic with the glory of the country's independence war. By invoking nationalism, TNI elites have skilfully propagandized how *babinsa* embodies TNI's organic solidarity at the grassroots, and the need for reviving this unity in the current war on COVID-19. This campaign blurred the boundary between national defence and MOOTW while side-lining critical voices questioning the legitimacy of TNI's massive involvement in health sector governance.

Civil society organizations working on security-sector reform, human rights protection, and health issues have raised criticism of this

mission creep and warned about the negative implications of military reform to no avail. In the early stages, for example, they issued a press release warning that TNI's role should be strictly limited to assisting in humanitarian missions on a limited scale (Koalisi Masyarakat Sipil 2020). The legal grounds for TNI's expanded role were also questioned, as Jokowi's decision to involve TNI in the COVID-19 national task force was carried out without seeking parliamentary approval, a legal requirement for invoking MOOTW (Fahrizal 2020). TNI's mobilization of *babinsa* for social discipline patrols, drew criticism for sowing fear in local communities under the pretext of pandemic countermeasures (Rahma 2021). One legal aid activist asserted that these patrols made it seem, "like a military emergency" (Ronald et al. 2021). LaporCOVID-19, a civil society coalition that launched a platform for citizens to report on COVID-19, also criticized the behaviour of security forces while conducting social discipline patrols. The coalition reported that from July 2020 to April 2021, citizens reported 1,096 cases of violence related to COVID-19 countermeasures perpetrated by soldiers and the police. (LaporCOVID-19 2021). As a result, the group warned the government against giving too much authority to TNI in enforcing health protocols and vaccinations. When Jokowi encouraged TNI to fight the war against COVID-19 at the 2021 TNI anniversary, a civil society organization overseeing security-sector reform criticized TNI for impinging on civilian affairs under the pretext of quelling the pandemic and stonewalling reform under the Jokowi presidency (CNN Indonesia 2021). Some also demanded the reformulation of a roadmap for TNI reform since it had lost direction (Yosarie and Hasani 2021).

Despite these voices from civil society, it is notable that parliament (DPR) has never criticized the government on military reforms or for involving TNI in the coronavirus war. Although there has been no parliamentary approval of the presidential decision to use TNI's MOOTW, as legally required, many lawmakers have expressed support for TNI's mobilization during the pandemic (Mengko and Fitri 2020). They typically insist that mobilizing the military during a national crisis is necessary, especially when the resources and capabilities of civilian institutions are limited. As Jokowi's government coalition in parliament now constitutes a super-majority, dominating 81 per cent

of DPR's total 575 seats, the practice of parliamentary oversight has become moribund. At the same time, there seems to be no incentive for opposition party politicians to challenge TNI's patriotic "total war" narratives, as it surely risks them being labelled as traitors. Moreover, since the issue has not been transparently discussed in the DPR, the public shows no significant interest in limiting military involvement in health governance. A regular nationwide opinion survey indicates the popularity of TNI has been increasing during the COVID-19 outbreak, with its "public trust" level rising to 95 per cent of the total respondents—the highest among government agencies (Indikator 2021, p. 25). A survey conducted by the *Kompas* newspaper reported similar results (Afrianto 2021). Given the lack of public pressure and parliamentary debate, TNI and Jokowi are insulated politically from criticism by civil society groups regarding military reform and pandemic-facilitated mission creep.

POLITICS OF NORMALIZING MOOTW

What, then, incentivizes both Jokowi and TNI to expand the scope of and normalize MOOTW during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are they seizing the opportunity to build a "strongman" regime backed by the military? Observers have already noted a democratic decline under the Jokowi administration (Power 2018; Aspinall et al. 2020; Mietzner 2020; Warburton 2020) and assert that the COVID-19 pandemic has effectively contributed to his power consolidation (Fealy 2020; Setijadi 2021). For Jokowi, who has no direct control over a political party or powerful social organization to exercise power, TNI is an institutional source of power that he can wield relatively freely without the intervention of, or meddling by, party leaders. Unlike many cabinet members and parliamentary leaders, who are loyal to their party leaders, TNI's top brass is selected by presidential prerogative. By securing their institutional loyalty, Jokowi, as the constitutional supreme commander of the armed forces, has been able to deploy TNI to demonstrate his political leadership to the public. For Jokowi, TNI is a significant source of political support for his national agenda enshrined in *Wawasan Indonesia 2045* (Indonesia Vision 2045)—Jokowi's slogan

for transforming the country into one of the world's top five economies by 2045, the centennial of Indonesia's independence. To achieve the goal, the president has prioritized infrastructure mega-projects with the maximum promotion of foreign investments, a policy that could prompt accusations from the opposition that Jokowi is neoliberal and pro-oligarchy. Thus, aligning with the military is his best protection against unstable civilian politics (Mietzner 2018, p. 148).

In exchange for supporting the president, TNI elites have gained a greater degree of autonomy in handling TNI's internal agenda. This *gotong-royong* (mutual help) relationship is crucial in understanding TNI's role expansion. Beyond that, what then is the intra-military agenda for expanding non-defence missions, including the response to COVID-19?

As seen above, MOOTW is, to a large extent, a response to post-authoritarian pressure to drastically reduce TNI's activities beyond national defence duties. This role reduction, often called "back to the barracks", had a serious impact on the army, the largest among the three services, as it faced a structural crisis of losing massive extramilitary positions and jobs that had absorbed army high-ranking officers during the authoritarian era. Post-Suharto army chiefs were confronted with the problem of alleviating the increasing numbers of surplus officers who had no real jobs in the organization (IPAC 2016; Laksamana 2019). By 2018, the number of "jobless" high-middle-ranking army officers exceeded 500. An internal workshop held by the Defence Ministry in 2018 identified joblessness as a serious problem in human resource management, and in need of an urgent response (Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia 2018).

It is against this backdrop that the army under the Jokowi administration has endeavoured to create positions for generals, including the creation of a third infantry division of the army strategic reserves command (Divinf-3 Kostrad) headed by a major general; a decision in 2019 to change the rank of the commanders of some subregional commands (Korem) from colonel to brigadier general; the mid-2019 establishment of three Joint Regional Defence Commands (Kogabwilhan) throughout the archipelago; and the presidential regulation (No. 66/2019) to create

sixty new positions for high-ranking army officers (Prihandoko and Gindarsah 2022).

However, this significant organizational expansion was not enough to placate officers who resented what was seen as unfair promotions of politically well-connected officers. This discontent put army chief, Gen. Andika Perkasa, in the hot seat as he is well-connected to Jokowi's inner circle, having become the commander of the presidential guard in 2014. He also enjoys the strong backing of his father-in-law, Lt. Gen. (ret) Hendropriyono, former intelligence chief, and a right-hand man of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the country's ex-president and chairwoman of the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P), which supported Jokowi's political career. Given such strong political connections, it is natural that Andika incites jealousy among many officers, but it has also incentivized him to demonstrate the merits of having a well-connected army leader who can lobby the president on behalf of his subordinates. Against this backdrop, some of the measures for organizational expansion discussed above were taken under Andika's leadership after he became the army chief in November 2018. At that time, he asked Jokowi and the Ministry of Defence to create 200 new positions for the officer corps (Rikang 2022).

Importantly, the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic provided momentum to advance Andika's agenda. In tandem with the formation of COVID-19 task forces across the country, the army conducted massive personnel changes in early April 2020 involving more than 280 army officers. During this reshuffle, there was a remarkable increase in the number of Korem elevated to "A-type Korem". An A-type Korem is now commanded by a one-star general, whereas previous commanders held the rank of colonel. As seen above, this scheme was first introduced in early 2019 and has been adopted by more than 70 per cent (34 out of 47) of all Korems throughout the country. In 2020, the rationale for increasing the number of A-type Korems was attributed to the need to upgrade the army's response to COVID-19 at the local level.

A close look at the April 2020 reshuffle also reveals that many of these officers who were promoted to one-star generals were graduates of the military academy between 1985 and 1987, meaning that they would

retire soon. Given the large difference between colonels and brigadier generals in terms of post-retirement opportunities for income and power, it appears that the health crisis helped Andika (graduate of 1987) appease senior officers and strengthen his institutional support.

Another opportunity arrived when TNI was mobilized for social discipline patrols and COVID-19 tracing. Now, with the restoration of *babinsa* and in carving out a new emergency response role for the “healthification” of territorial commands, Andika’s army could fend off pressures to downsize, manoeuvring to maintain a bloated army and budget in an archipelagic country where the navy and air force are better suited to dealing with external security threats.

In July 2020, Jokowi appointed Andika as the deputy chair of the KPCPEN. This position was strategic for him to promote himself to the public as a top general who fights COVID-19. His social media team in the army organized a campaign to highlight his COVID-19-related activities, producing more than 2,800 YouTube videos in a year (Dinata 2021). This self-promotion was very effective in establishing a consensus in the political community that Andika—who stands at the forefront of the pandemic response—is the best candidate to become the next TNI commander after Gen. Hadi’s retirement in November 2021. Within the TNI, there was a wide expectation that Hadi, who was from the air force, should be replaced by a four-star general with a navy background, since the TNI law states that the TNI commander *can* be selected in rotation among the three services. Hadi’s predecessor, as a TNI commander, was the army general Gatot Nurmantyo. Thus, it was natural for navy and air force officers to expect that the navy chief Admiral Yudo Margono would replace Hadi, and this idea was widely shared by security-sector experts as a necessary measure to enhance military professionalism and maintain inter-service harmony and morale (Supriatma 2021). It was reported that Jokowi’s inner circle initially held the same view and planned to nominate Yudo as the new TNI commander while offering the position of deputy TNI commander to Andika—an offer that Andika rejected twice (Maulidar 2021). Finally, to avoid alienating the army, Jokowi nominated Andika as the new TNI commander in November 2021, demonstrating that he had skilfully used his COVID-19 mission to navigate intra-military politics and achieve his personal ambitions.

Interestingly, the COVID-19 crisis has also facilitated other politically sensitive personnel changes in the army. Other political patrons have proteges too whom they want to promote, such as Let. Gen. Maruli Simanjuntak, the son-in-law of retired army general Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, Jokowi's right-hand man who served as Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs and who is widely dubbed "prime minister". Like Andika, Maruli had the experience of serving as the commander of Jokowi's presidential guard. During the COVID-19 crisis, Maruli commanded the Udayana Regional Military Command (Kodam Udayana) that oversaw Bali and West Nusa Tenggara to manage regional COVID-19-related operations.

Another well-connected general is Maj. Gen. Kunto Arief Wibowo, son of Gen. (ret) Try Sutrisno, who served as the country's vice-president under the Suharto government and who is also a long-time advisor to Megawati. Kunto is also a brother-in-law of Gen. (ret) Ryamizard Ryacudu, another close advisor to Megawati, who was appointed as defence minister during Jokowi's first term (2014–19). During the pandemic, Kunto served as the chief of staff of the prestigious Siliwangi Regional Military Command (Kodam Siliwangi), which oversees West Java, a politically significant region adjacent to Jakarta.

Maj. Gen. Widi Prasetyono is also known to have special political connections. Widi is Jokowi's confidante since the former served as district military commander in the city of Solo when the latter was the mayor. When Jokowi became President in 2014, Widi was recruited to be his presidential adjutant. During the COVID crisis, Widi served as the chief of staff of the Central Java Regional Military Command (Kodam Diponegoro).

It should be noted that Maruli, Kunto and Widi were given rare opportunities to demonstrate crisis leadership in their respective regions. This experience provided a strong rationale for Andika to promote the three politically connected generals to higher positions in TNI without triggering resentment among the officer corps. In January 2022, Andika, as the TNI commander, conducted his first big personnel change involving more than 300 officers, with Maruli being promoted to a three-star general commanding the army "green-beret", strategic reserves command (Kostrad), while Kunto was promoted to a two-star

general as the commander of Kodam Siliwangi, and Widi got promoted to the two-star commander of army special forces (Kopassus). It was also very unusual to see a Kopassus commander stay only two months in the post, as Widi was sent back to Central Java—Jokowi’s home ground—in April 2022 as the commander of Kodam Diponegoro. These promotions illustrate that the COVID crisis has smoothed the path for four politically connected generals—Andika, Maruli, Kunto and Widi—to advance their military careers.

Furthermore, Andika’s politics of personnel management have benefited greatly from the favourable public opinion of TNI, stemming from its leading role in the government’s response to COVID-19. Relying on the political capital generated by “high public trust” in TNI, Andika promoted Maj. Gen. Untung Budiharto to the high-profile post of Jakarta Military Commander in January 2022, although the latter has a notorious track record and was sentenced for human rights violations in the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists during Suharto’s last days in 1998. The country’s human rights defenders criticized Andika for this, claiming that the move would only encourage TNI’s culture of impunity (Hidayat 2022). However, no one in the political community, including Jokowi, questioned Untung’s promotion. They seem to understand that the promotion of Untung is Andika’s significant step to gain the loyalty of a group of officers who have been side-lined within the military due to their affiliation with Prabowo Subianto—Suharto’s ex-son-in-law—who organized the covert kidnapping operation conducted by Kopassus at that time. Soon after the fall of Suharto, the military court discharged Prabowo from TNI, but he later returned to politics with his own political party, Gerindra, only to lose two presidential elections to Jokowi. When Jokowi surprisingly invited Prabowo to join his government and offered him the position of defence minister in 2019, he raised expectations among former Prabowo followers in TNI that their derailed careers would get back on track. Andika’s high-profile move to promote Untung as Jakarta Commander was only possible because he anticipated minimum backlash from the public and political community, and it was COVID-19 that created such a political environment. Although Andika antagonized some civil society groups by making this decision,

he was able to consolidate his power within the military. For him, this was a huge advantage gained for a small price. Importantly, Andika's consolidation of power also opened the chance to promote himself as a potential vice-presidential candidate for the 2024 presidential election, with a claim that the country needs a leader who has built trust with American and Western security elites in the age of escalating US-China strategic competition.¹¹

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the COVID-19 crisis has contributed to TNI, particularly the army, in advancing its institutional agenda. The pandemic has made TNI popular in society owing to its visible dedication to crisis response at the grassroots level. As discussed above, TNI's widening and deepening involvement in health security is the product of the "normalization" of MOOTW. The 2004 TNI law restricted non-defence missions and required that ad hoc arrangements to undertake such non-war emergency missions had parliamentary approval. TNI has skilfully used patriotic propaganda to justify its COVID-19-linked activities by invoking the spirit of the war of independence. In doing so, military elites have stoked nationalist sentiments to blunt military reform measures and normalize their role expansion. This is a new development in the history of TNI's MOOTW as operations related to counterterrorism and disaster relief in the past—for example, the 2018 natural disasters in Lombok and Palu—were limited in time and space. In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis should be understood as an important game changer in the country's post-authoritarian civil-military relations.

¹¹ Andika was educated in National Defense University, Harvard University and the George Washington University in the US. As the army chief, he led the US-Indonesia Garuda Shield military exercise in 2021. A year later, in 2022, he—as TNI commander—once again led "Super Garuda Shield" military exercise, joined also by Singapore, Australia and Japan. Interestingly, Andika did not hand it over to his successor as army chief, i.e., Gen. Dudung Abdurachman.

The most significant implication has been the evaporation of political pressure for military reform. The skyrocketing popularity of TNI in society has incentivized political elites to ignore reform demands. Conversely, civil society groups struggling to establish effective civilian oversight are often subjected to cyberbullying orchestrated by right-wing trolls with implicit government backing. Under such circumstances, the TNI leadership has advanced various institutional agendas, including the healthification and revitalization of *babinsa* and the territorial command system, creation of new jobs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, promotion of politically connected generals, and consolidation of intra-military power under the new TNI commander.

Given the legacy of authoritarianism associated with the army, its expanding role during the early days of COVID-19 tended to be interpreted as a return of TNI to politics (Chandran 2020; Jaffrey 2020; Vatikiotis 2020). This interpretation fits well with the broader discourse on democratic decline around the world during the pandemic (IDEA 2020; Freedom House 2021; V-Dem 2021). Many of these cases involve the military's active engagement in health security. However, after two and a half years of the pandemic, whether TNI's role expansion really signals expanded political ambitions remains unclear. It should be noted that Indonesia's military leadership has not made any effort to hijack civilian politics—like its counterparts in Thailand and Myanmar—or support a populist dictator's killing of citizens and the gutting of democratic institutions as in the Philippines under President Duterte. Instead, military elites cultivated Jokowi by providing institutional support, and carefully manoeuvred the pandemic crisis to gain greater autonomy and extend the scope of TNI's role beyond the conventional MOOTW paradigm. It appears that intra-military political dynamics, rather than institutional political ambitions, drive this agenda.

These developments are likely to shape the new normal in post-pandemic Indonesia because national lawmakers facing the 2024 general elections have no incentive to antagonize the powerful military at a time when it is enjoying public approval. TNI skilfully managed the COVID-19 crisis to lock down and quash key post-Suharto military reforms under the cover of health security and appear to have been inoculated against effective civilian oversight.

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