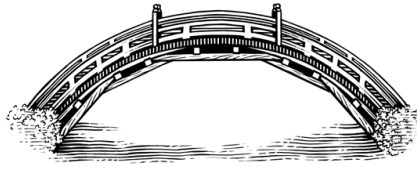


ROUNDTABLE

Indonesia After the 2019 Election



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## Civil-Military Relations under Jokowi: Between Military Corporate Interests and Presidential Handholding

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This essay examines the disposition of civil-military relations under President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo. It makes three arguments. First, since assuming office in 2014, Jokowi has tended to adopt a hands-off approach in the day-to-day management of military affairs and defense policy. He has relied on a group of retired generals as his intermediary with the Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI). He also gave the TNI organizational autonomy and even encouraged its involvement in nonmilitary domains, from counterterrorism to food-sufficiency programs. Civil-military relations under Jokowi’s first term were basically on autopilot.

Second, Jokowi’s management of the TNI is not unique. All post-Suharto presidents have had to deal with the same dilemma: how to carefully and closely manage the military without threatening its corporate interests. I develop a typology of the responses to this dilemma to classify and compare Jokowi’s civil-military relations with other post-Suharto presidents: B.J. Habibie (1998–99), Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–4), and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–14). The typology shows that Jokowi’s passive management of the TNI, while protecting the military’s corporate interests, is similar to Sukarnoputri’s approach. The typology also serves as an analytical baseline to unpack civil-military relations under Jokowi’s first term.

Third, civil-military relations during Jokowi’s second term are unlikely to be fundamentally different from his first. As far as civil-military relations are concerned, the 2019 elections did not change the fact that Jokowi is a president without his own political party and that he needs the support of the broader security establishment—the TNI and the Indonesian National Police (POLRI)—to execute his agenda. If anything, the polarized presidential campaign against retired general Prabowo Subianto likely will push Jokowi to further rely on the TNI in governance.

The first section compares how different post-Suharto presidents managed civil-military relations. The subsequent section then examines

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civil-military relations during Jokowi's first term. The essay concludes by looking ahead to Jokowi's second term and assessing the broader implications for Indonesia's democratic trajectory in the coming years.

### *Comparing Post-Suharto Civil-Military Relations*

Two variables are helpful in classifying civil-military relations in post-authoritarian Indonesia. The first is presidential handholding: the degree to which the chief executive (i.e., the president) is involved in managing the military and formulating national defense policies.<sup>1</sup> Depending on individual traits (e.g., political support or professional background) and political authority, the president may be more or less willing and able to manage the military on a day-to-day basis. How closely the president manages the military shapes the extent to which the organization can set its own policies and how far it is willing to expand its political position.

The second variable is whether the military perceives the presidential handholding to be detrimental or beneficial to its corporate interests.<sup>2</sup> Different militaries have different corporate interests, ranging from budgetary autonomy to societal prestige. How the military defines its corporate interests—and the conditions under which they are met or challenged—determines whether civil-military relations will be stable or conflictual. If the military considers the presidential handholding to be detrimental to its corporate interests, it might play the role of political spoiler, whether through disrupting the president's agenda or, at the extreme, launching a coup. But if the military considers the presidential handholding to be beneficial, it is likely to be a partner or supporter of the president.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1** illustrates how these variables interact to depict a descriptive typology of Indonesia's post-Suharto presidents and civil-military relations. These two variables are central to the persistent dilemma of post-authoritarian civil-military relations in Indonesia: how to closely

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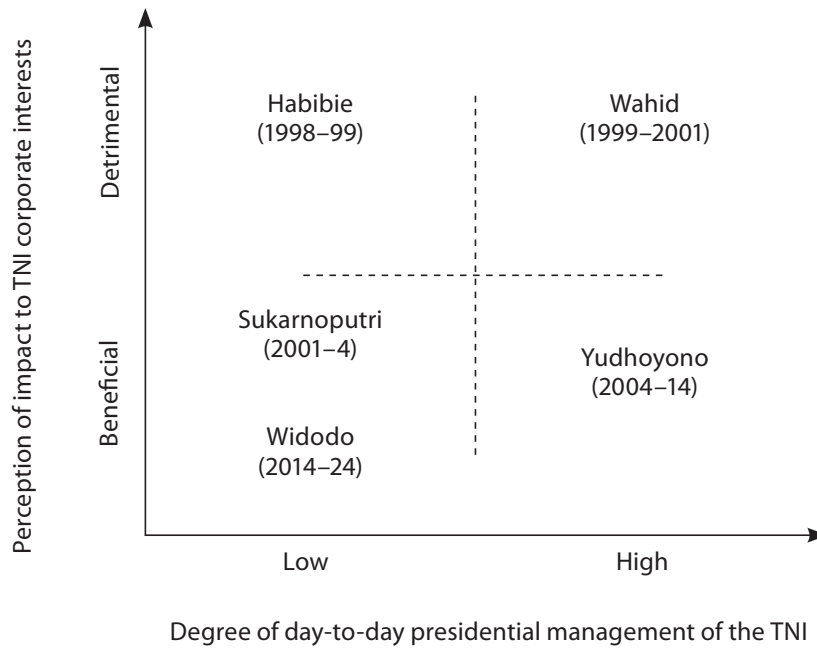
<sup>1</sup> See Risa A. Brooks, "Integrating the Civil–Military Relations Subfield," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 379–98; and Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002); and Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> For a critique of the corporate interest argument, see Terrence Lee, "The Military's Corporate Interests: The Main Reason for Intervention in Indonesia and the Philippines?" *Armed Forces and Society* 34, no. 3 (2008): 491–502. On the modes of military support of the president, see Aurel Croissant, *Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 5.

FIGURE 1

*Post-Suharto Presidents and Civil-Military Relations*



manage the TNI without risking political backlash. On the presidents’ side, each has a different political will and personal authority to closely manage the TNI. On the TNI’s side, its most salient corporate interests can be categorized as either internal or external. The internal interests are personnel promotion and management, operational planning, the deployment and employment of forces, organizational structure, and doctrinal development, while the external ones are its bureaucratic standing vis-à-vis the police and other coercive institutions, domestic stability, and the regional strategic environment.

In the upper-left quadrant is Habibie. During his short presidency as Suharto’s successor, he let go of East Timor, decentralized the country, amended the constitution, and laid the groundwork to depoliticize the military. His government also introduced free and fair general elections and expanded press freedom and civil liberties. While these issues were high on the list of the military’s corporate interests, Habibie struck a deal with the military under General Wiranto. The deal allowed the military to formulate its own reform policies in return for support of Habibie’s policies

and political position.<sup>4</sup> Habibie, lacking his own political base, needed the military to stabilize his rule and prevent rogue officers from undermining his policies, while the military needed the president's goodwill, given his constitutional powers and ability to distribute resources and set the political agenda.<sup>5</sup> Although some of his policies might have been detrimental to the TNI's corporate interests, the president was not directly involved in managing the TNI. Consequently, there were no major civil-military crises during Habibie's tenure.

In the upper-right quadrant is Wahid. TNI leaders considered his meddling in officer appointments, encouragement of intra-military factionalism, and use of the police to counterbalance the military as detrimental to their corporate interests.<sup>6</sup> Wahid also pushed for difficult military reform policies, such as abolishing the territorial command structure, and he excluded the TNI from the Aceh conflict's resolution. Rather than striking a grand bargain like Habibie, Wahid believed he had a strong mandate and personal authority to micromanage the military. He was, after all, the leader of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, and the first democratically elected post-Suharto president. But as the country plunged from one political crisis to another, the TNI leaders decided that the state of civil-military relations was unsustainable and facilitated Wahid's impeachment in 2001.

In the lower-right quadrant is Yudhoyono, a retired general and the first popularly elected president. Like Wahid, he had a hands-on approach to the TNI. But Yudhoyono's personal military background and strong network within the TNI gave him an authority that Wahid did not have. He appointed his former Military Academy classmates, former aides-de-camp and subordinates, and family members to senior TNI positions. He ended the Aceh conflict in 2006 and elevated external engagement duties (from defense diplomacy to peacekeeping operations) as important professional career markers. The best graduating officers from the Military Academy and Command and General Staff Colleges, as well as those coming from the

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<sup>4</sup> See details in Yuddy Chrisnandi, *Reformasi TNI: Perspektif baru hubungan sipil-militer di Indonesia* [TNI Reform: A New Perspective of Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia] (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2005), 97.

<sup>5</sup> See Marcus Mietzner, *The Politics of Military Reform in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Elite Conflict, Nationalism, and Institutional Resistance* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2006), 10.

<sup>6</sup> See details in Tatik S. Hafidz, *Fading Away? The Political Role of the Army in Indonesia's Transition to Democracy 1998–2001* (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2006)

army's combat-ready Strategic Reserve Command, were also promoted to key positions.<sup>7</sup>

Realizing that such an interventionist approach might backfire, Yudhoyono was careful to protect the military's broader interests. He more than doubled the defense budget, positioned hundreds of senior officers into civilian ministries and agencies, expanded the territorial command structure, and created a multi-decade modernization plan under the Minimum Essential Force blueprint. The TNI's nonmilitary roles, from counterterrorism to civic action, also expanded under Yudhoyono. Thus, even though he intervened in internal TNI policies like Wahid did, he successfully managed the military leadership because of his ability to build a strong base within the TNI and protect the organization's broader corporate interests.

Finally, in the lower-left quadrant is Sukarnoputri, Wahid's vice president and successor. As she relied on the backing of the TNI and retired senior generals within her party, the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P), she was generally hands-off in her management of the military.<sup>8</sup> As an illustration, she let military hard-liners drive policymaking in the Aceh conflict, which led to the re-imposition of martial law and the execution of the TNI's largest counterinsurgency operation. Many military reform policies, such as the abolishment of the territorial command structure, were effectively on hold during her tenure. In addition, considering her precarious relationship with the civilian elite, she granted greater concessions to the TNI by increasing its autonomy and influence in national decision-making processes.

This simple typology helps us locate Jokowi's civil-military relations within Indonesia's broader post-authoritarian context. As will be discussed in the next section, Jokowi's approach closely tracks Sukarnoputri's. However, he was more politically underwhelming in his first term, having never held a national political office nor led his own party. Jokowi therefore needed to protect the TNI's corporate interests even more than Sukarnoputri did.

### *Civil-Military Relations during Jokowi's First Term*

In 2014, Jokowi came into office without the political capital, interest, or experience to closely manage the military. A former furniture

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<sup>7</sup> For further details, see Jun Honna, "Civil-Military Relations in an Emerging State: A Perspective from Indonesia's Democratic Consolidation," in *Emerging States at Crossroads*, ed. K. Tsunekawa and Y. Todo (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 255–70.

<sup>8</sup> See Sukardi Rinakit, *The Indonesian Military after the New Order* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2005).

businessman who became the mayor of Surakarta and governor of Jakarta, Jokowi neither held a national position nor hailed from the military-backed Suharto establishment. While a member of the PDI-P, he never became its leader. Sukarnoputri and her party stalwarts called the shots.

Without his own strong political machine and network, and having to balance a fragile coalition of parties, Jokowi relied on a small group of close friends and advisers. These included prominent retired generals such as Ryamizard Ryacudu, Luhut Pandjaitan, and A.M. Hendropriyono.<sup>9</sup> The circle of retirees grew as Jokowi increasingly needed an intermediary to manage the TNI. By the end of his first term, he had appointed more retired generals: Wiranto (coordinating minister for political, legal, and security affairs), Moeldoko (chief of staff), and Agum Gumelar (to the Presidential Advisory Board). These men not only helped Jokowi manage the TNI, but they also ensured that he did not create policies that were detrimental to the TNI's interests. They believed that Jokowi should not spend political capital on controversial military reform policies when economic development and infrastructure were the centerpieces of his re-election campaign. The military, after all, was one of the most popular institutions in the country by the early 2010s and its territorial command structure parallels the civilian government down to the village level. The TNI's support is thus important for the success of Jokowi's agenda.

As Jokowi was hands-off in his management of the military, the TNI managed its own affairs and pushed the boundaries of civil-military relations. His first two commanders—Generals Moeldoko and Gatot Nurmantyo—were publicly outspoken on a wide range of issues, from criticizing the government's approach to the South China Sea to promoting fearmongering campaigns on “Communist revival” and “proxy warfare.” Many also criticized Nurmantyo for his political rhetoric and behavior, such as publicly visiting prominent Islamic clerics, making accusations against the police, and preparing a presidential exploratory committee immediately upon retirement.

Jokowi's relationship with the TNI improved only after Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto became TNI commander in late 2017.<sup>10</sup> The president generally chose not to publicly rein in senior officers when they

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<sup>9</sup> Jokowi installed Ryacudu as defense minister and Pandjaitan as chief of staff and then as coordinating minister for maritime affairs. Hendropriyono became an informal adviser.

<sup>10</sup> Jokowi had been close with Tjahjanto since their days in Central Java, when Jokowi was the mayor of Surakarta and Tjahjanto was the commander of the local air force base.



made controversial statements or policies; instead, he protected the TNI's corporate interests. Jokowi almost doubled the defense budget from roughly \$5.7 billion in 2014 to \$8.9 billion in 2020, and allowed the TNI to expand its structure across Indonesia. He also further encouraged the TNI to expand its nonmilitary activities. Research by the Jakarta-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies shows that between 2014 and 2017, the TNI and Ministry of Defense signed 133 agreements and memoranda with ministries, social organizations, and universities on various programs ranging from basic military training to rural development projects. Finally, Jokowi issued a presidential regulation after the election that would allow active-duty officers to be assigned to various civilian agencies and ministries to accommodate hundreds of officers experiencing promotional logjams within the TNI.

Altogether, these developments suggest that civil-military relations were on autopilot without Jokowi's personal and day-to-day involvement. Meanwhile, the TNI expanded its political and bureaucratic space. Jokowi's presidential handholding, or lack thereof, has thus been beneficial to the military's corporate interests. It should be noted, however, that intra-organizational pressures—including hundreds of “jobless” officers and promotional logjams within the Army—and bureaucratic rivalries (with the police in particular) largely explain the military's regressive behavior, rather than a grand design to bring back authoritarian rule.<sup>11</sup>

### *What to Expect in Jokowi's Second Term*

Jokowi may have resoundingly defeated Prabowo this year by more than seventeen million votes, but his underwhelming political authority has not changed. He remains without a political party of his own. If anything, the expansion of his party coalition and PDI-P's victory in the legislative elections mean that he has to accommodate more interests and agendas beyond his own. The polarized political landscape surrounding the downfall of Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama led Jokowi to protect his right flank during the campaign. He consequently relied on more retired

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<sup>11</sup> “Jobless officers” were those whose promotions were placed on temporary hold as there were no open postings or billets within the TNI structure for their qualifications or rank. On how intra-organizational pressures shape civil-military relations under Yudhoyono and Jokowi, see Evan A. Laksmana, “Reshuffling the Deck? Military Corporatism, Promotional Logjams and Post-Authoritarian Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49, no. 5 (2019): 806–36.



officers to counter Prabowo's team, which was also backed by a group of retired officers (on top of hard-line Islamists).<sup>12</sup>

In terms of policy, Jokowi will continue his developmentalist agenda. In a July 2019 speech, he declared that his second term will focus on infrastructure, human capital, foreign investment, bureaucratic reform, and budget management.<sup>13</sup> He did not mention the global maritime fulcrum doctrine that was signature to his first term. It is unlikely then that military reform will be high on Jokowi's second-term agenda.

At a more personal level, Jokowi is unlikely to suddenly be more invested in, or capable of, managing the daily operations of the TNI. While increasingly cognizant of the broader implications of letting the TNI push the boundaries of civil-military relations, he remains most invested in his domestic development agenda. More retired generals are likely to play a role as part of his inner circle and administration. Jokowi's relatively good relationship with Tjahjanto is also expected to continue, though he is set to retire in 2021. Analysts predict that current chief of staff of the Indonesian Army, General Andika Perkasa—Hendropriyono's son-in-law and Jokowi's former bodyguard—is a serious contender to replace Tjahjanto.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, Jokowi will continue to let the military formulate its own policies and rely on retired generals as his advisers and intermediaries. The military for its part will continue its current path of organizational autonomy and political expansion. From the perspective of Indonesia's democratic trajectory, such developments are not encouraging. On the one hand, the military's organizational autonomy and expansion without direct presidential supervision could be detrimental to the quality of Indonesia's democracy. Given the history of military domination in Indonesia and the sacrifices made during the democratic transition, ensuring democratic civilian control over the military should be a constant priority for any administration. On the other hand, a stable civil-military relationship—even one built on protecting the TNI's corporate interests—helps the president focus on his broader development agenda and prevents the TNI from becoming political spoilers or violently challenging the democratic system.

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<sup>12</sup> In February 2019, Jokowi's team announced that more than one thousand retired officers were backing the president's campaign. See Abba Gabrillin, "Soliditas 1.000 Purnawirawan dan Dukungan untuk Jokowi-Ma'arif Amin" [1,000 Military Retirees Solidly Support Jokowi-Ma'arif], *Kompas*, February 11, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> See Karina M. Tehusijarana, "We Can Be One of Strongest Countries in World: Jokowi's Full Speech," *Jakarta Post*, July 15, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> "Indonesia's Security Forces," International Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Comments 25, no. 7.

This contradiction underlies the persistent dilemma of managing the TNI in post-authoritarian Indonesia. A president who manages officers too closely without the right sticks and carrots, or the personal gravitas to do so, risks impeachment. If a president releases the reins too much, the military will push the boundaries of civil-military relations. Every post-Suharto president has had to balance the TNI's perception of the safety of its corporate interests and the degree of handholding military affairs. In this regard, Jokowi is no different from the presidents who came before him. 