

Indonesia's armed forces in the democratic era



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Bilateral defence cooperation with Indonesia remains controversial in New Zealand. This paper considers how Indonesia's armed forces (TNI – Tentara Nasional Indonesia) have adjusted to the democratic era established after the fall of President Suharto.

New Zealand suspended bilateral defence cooperation with Indonesia in September 1999 in response to the violence sponsored by Indonesia's armed forces after East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence. Defence relations remained in suspension until March 2007 when an Indonesian officer was invited to attend the New Zealand Defence Force Command and Staff College course. The further development of bilateral defence relations has been cautious, partly because of vocal public opposition in New Zealand and partly because other commitments limit New Zealand's ability to move more quickly.

Continuing opposition to resumed defence cooperation reflects dissatisfaction with Indonesia's failure to hold its armed forces accountable for the violence in East Timor, and perceptions that TNI continues to commit human rights abuses with impunity in Papua. These are reasonable concerns but are often expressed in terms implying that Indonesia's armed forces have not changed their behaviour since the fall of President Suharto. It is more accurate to say that reform in the armed forces, as in several other aspects of Indonesia's public life, is incomplete when judged by the standards of older democracies.

Political participation

The armed forces, which then included the national Police, played a pivotal role in Suharto's New Order government. Their non-military roles were explicitly acknowledged in the doctrine of *dwi fungsi* (dual function). They were allocated a large bloc of seats in the national parliament; senior officers frequently served in Cabinet posts, senior civil service posts, governorships and in ambassadorial posts; and military personnel, both retired and active, were prominent in GOLKAR, one of only three political vehicles permitted to contest general elections, which was in effect, though not in name, the government's party. Together with the territorial command structure, which ran parallel to the civil bureaucracy all the way down to sub-district level, *dwi fungsi* gave the armed forces huge influence over government and what passed for political activity. Although the number of seats reserved for the armed forces in parliament was reducing before Suharto's fall, they were sufficiently numerous, and closely enough linked to GOLKAR, to guarantee control.

Reforms introduced after Suharto's fall ended the political role of the armed forces. There was a transitional period in which a reduced number of seats was reserved in the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (the People's Consultative Assembly) on the grounds that armed forces personnel could not vote and would not otherwise be represented. The transition ended with the 2004 general election. There are now no active military personnel in the parliament. Anyone from the armed forces who seeks election to parliament, is appointed to a civil service post (with a very few exceptions), or accepts appointment to Cabinet must resign from the armed forces.

Civil-military relations

From the beginning of the Republic, Indonesia's armed forces had a singular view of civil-military relations grounded in a belief that civilian politicians had compromised the independence cause, which would not have succeeded without the army. This encouraged the armed forces to believe they were not subordinate to the civil authority but rather the guardians of the state and ultimate arbiters of its direction. The mythology developed around the 1965 Gestapu incident, when army intervention allegedly saved Indonesia from communism, reinforced this belief.

This self-image remains strong within TNI, though moderated by the senior officers chosen to command it by the current President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a career soldier and former general. But their restraint has not been backed up by institutional reforms that unambiguously subordinate TNI to the civil authority. TNI headquarters reports directly to the President, not through the Minister of Defence, and the Commander, TNI continues to be a Cabinet member, diluting the authority of the Minister. The appointment of civilians as Defence Minister in each administration since President Wahid's has not significantly strengthened civilian control over the Ministry, where key positions are still held by military officers.

Parliamentary oversight of the armed forces is weak. Legislators have limited knowledge of the armed forces, and parliamentary committees have few expert staff. Civil society groups have been able to participate in consideration of legislation but take a selective interest in defence issues, focusing on justice and human rights. Even in these areas, public pressure for change appears to be easing. Deliberations on draft legislation extending civil jurisdiction over military personnel for some categories of offences were suspended in 2009, and the courts seem still to give them favoured treatment, if not outright impunity, with only limited public objection.

Although TNI doctrine affirms that TNI is an apolitical force carrying out the policies of the democratically chosen government, there are few institutional safeguards against a future military intervention in politics and government.

Military doctrine and defence budgets

The decisions, early in the reform process, to separate the Police from the armed forces and to make internal security a Police responsibility implied a shift of focus to external defence. The TNI Act of 2004 formalised this, although it defined several areas of domestic security in which TNI could still play a role. The most recent statement of military doctrine, issued in 2007 by TNI Headquarters, falls well short of a comprehensive re-orientation. Its objective is a minimalist force capable of responding quickly to crises throughout the archipelago. To this end it provides for greater use of navy and air assets in defence operations, civic action and disaster relief, and for regional commands which integrate personnel from all three services. Related procurement plans prioritised air and naval equipment, especially transport aircraft, which the Aceh tsunami relief effort showed to be a serious capability gap.

The defence budget was increased by more than 70 percent during President Yudhoyono's first term, partly to offset anticipated losses of revenue from off-budget fund-raising by TNI-owned companies which, under a law passed in 2004, were to be taken over by the state in 2009. In fact, only a handful of TNI businesses eventually passed into government hands, and off-budget revenue generation, much of it conducted through the territorial command structure, continues to be significant. Expenditure controls are poor and accountability is weak. These flaws weaken civilian control.

As a percentage of GDP, Indonesia's defence spending was 0.9 in 2009, well below its ASEAN neighbours, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand (and also below New Zealand at 1.2). In May 2010, the government announced that defence expenditure would rise to 1.2 per cent of GDP in 2011 and 1.5 per cent by 2014. Whether such levels will be achievable is open to debate. The May 2010 announcement also proposed to maintain expenditure for non-core military activities at static levels, thereby making greater funds available for procurement from 2011 onwards.

The procurement tasks are significant, given the diverse sourcing of current weaponry, the high proportion of obsolete or inappropriate weapons systems and platforms, and the limited capability of Indonesia's defence industries. Efforts have been made to improve inefficient procurement processes by creating a tri-service planning and budgeting system which involves the Finance and National Development Planning Ministries, but reaching agreement on priorities among the three services remains difficult. A problem carried over from the Suharto era, the role of middlemen in procurement, and the high cost of their commissions, continues to impede efficiency: a former Defence Minister estimated that inefficiencies in

procurement accounted for up to 40 per cent of the allocated budget.

Despite the modest tilt towards naval and air forces, TNI remains an army-dominated force. The territorial command structure remains in place, although it is irrelevant to external defence. Recent measures to give TNI a role in counter-terrorism do not give confidence that reorientation towards external threats is fully accepted, although it may be motivated by the desire to access foreign expertise and material assistance that has been flowing to the Police as Indonesia's counter-terrorism force. Conversely, pressure for continuing military reform by foreign donors seems to have eased as part of their strategies to secure Indonesian cooperation in counter-terrorism.

Conclusion: Unfit for purpose

Indonesia is ill-equipped militarily to meet the external challenges facing its neighbourhood. This is especially true of strategic competition in the South China Sea and of control of the international straits within the Indonesian archipelago. Its maritime and air capabilities are quite inadequate for either national action or participation in a coalition force to deal with such challenges. To the extent that defence forces matter in staking out a regional leadership role, TNI's continuing internal focus and army obsession will limit Indonesia's ambitions.

Implications for New Zealand

In the 1970s New Zealand was among the first western countries to engage in defence cooperation with Indonesia. The scale was modest but all three services were involved on both sides. The significance of this cooperation lay in Indonesia's departure from a philosophy of self-reliance in defence which had previously ruled out exercising and training with foreign forces. There were small professional benefits for both armed forces, and New Zealand probably gained politically in its dealings with a government enjoying significant military backing.

Changes in the NZDF force structure and pressure on New Zealand defence expenditure make a substantial bilateral cooperation programme unlikely in the medium term. Because Indonesia is seeking greater influence in its region and in the world, it is important that New Zealand, a partner of Indonesia in many international settings, develops its own appreciation of TNI capabilities and standards. This cannot be done satisfactorily without the knowledge and experience gained through military interaction.

While there are grounds to be skeptical about the extent to which military to military ties encourage respect for civilian supremacy, democratic values and human rights, foreign examples can be helpful to armed forces in newly democratic societies. Lack of contact certainly means lack of influence.