

CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS

CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN POST-SUHARTO INDONESIA AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY TODAY

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

OFFICER CADET IAIN HENRY

Since President Suharto's fall from power in May 1998, the Indonesian armed forces have continued their participation in politics. However, while the military has remained a strong political force for much of the post-Suharto era, a program of reform is now under way in Indonesia that may see the armed forces withdraw entirely from the political process. The central issues in Indonesian civil–military relations can be clearly understood by analysis of the careers of former Generals Wiranto and Yudhoyono, both of whom participated in the 2004 presidential election. This article examines the role of the armed forces in Indonesian politics since the fall of Suharto and illustrates how the nation is undergoing a process of reform that will result in greater civilian control over the armed forces, especially if current trends continue.

DWI FUNGSI: THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES

Under Suharto's rule, senior officers of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI) were integral participants in any decision-making within the Indonesian Government. The concept of *dwi fungsi*—dual function—that ABRI officers could fulfil both military and political roles simultaneously, was altered to Suharto's exact specifications. Suharto decided that 'ABRI's representation at the national, regional and local levels should be strengthened for the sake of security and stability'.¹ While this increased Suharto's power, it also satisfied ABRI's desire to maintain a degree of political power after the coup of 1965. Suharto's action was an assurance to the military that they would remain a significant force, and that a coup to consolidate their position was unnecessary.

The establishment of ABRI representation in the Indonesian Parliament secured their position further. However, it also raised new challenges, and in order to prevent factionalism within ABRI, members of the armed forces were denied the right to vote.² These moves were designed to dissuade ABRI from launching a coup against Suharto, but by 1993 his effective control of the political machinery had weakened to the point where a military member of the parliament 'bluntly stated that the military would be the arbiter of presidential succession'.³ The political power of ABRI at this time is well documented, but in some important areas there was also a high degree of civilian control of the military. A good example of this power was the decision made in 1993 to purchase a number of East German vessels at a cost of over \$US10 million. The influential Minister of Technology, Professor Dr Baharuddin Jusuf (B.J.) Habibie, who controlled the ship-building and aeronautical industries, made this purchase without input from, or discussion with, the military.⁴

PRESSURES FOR REFORM

In the mid-1990s, as Indonesia's economic hardship worsened, due in part to Suharto's siphoning of funds to off-shore accounts,⁵ ABRI could be loosely divided into two groups: the pro-Suharto 'green' faction (led by General Prabowo) and those who desired reform (led by General Wiranto). After the disastrous riots at Trisakti University in 1998, the split in ABRI became glaringly obvious. The Marines, under the command of Wiranto, refrained from taking action against the student demonstrators and in some instances even encouraged them.⁶ Sections of the military loyal to Prabowo (notably KOPASSUS—the Indonesian Special

After the disastrous riots at Trisakti University in 1998, the split in ABRI became glaringly obvious.

Forces) kidnapped some student leaders, but the majority of ABRI tolerated the demonstrations. Besieged by protesting students, the parliament began to issue calls for Suharto to resign. In this chaotic environment the demonstrations only worsened, to the point where even military figures expressed their dissent, with Major-General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (now the President of Indonesia) delivering a letter from former Generals to the then Commander-in-Chief, General Wiranto, requesting Suharto's resignation.⁷ Terence Lee believes that confusion regarding the position of ABRI in this instance placed 'doubt on the armed forces' claims to fulfilling their self-assigned dual function role in the country'.⁸ However, there were also indications that other high-ranking officers within the military had grown tired of *dwi fungsi*. Suharto originally sought to hand power over to Wiranto, but the latter refused, proffering his support for B. J. Habibie on the proviso that democratic elections would be held quickly. Wiranto later observed that he could have easily launched a coup at this time, but his hand was stayed by 'a desire for a smooth transition to a more stable post-Suharto period, and by a respect for the 1945 constitution'.⁹

After the fall of Suharto, the military indicated their intent for a gradual withdrawal from the political sphere, 'in an apparent response to the growing tide of public discontent towards their presence in politics'.¹⁰ In October 1998 a document titled *ABRI in the 21st Century* was published; it frankly admitted that ABRI had become a political tool under Suharto. The import of this momentous confession was quite considerable, as the dual-function role of ABRI still existed. ABRI now faced a 'new paradigm'. The 'new paradigm' catchphrase, first put forward by Yudhoyono in November 1996, was based on four principles: that the military would no longer be 'in the forefront of politics', that they would only influence the political process indirectly in the future, that the military would 'shift its sociopolitical position from that of occupier to that of influence' and that some of these roles would be transferred to civilians.¹¹ In this same spirit, there would be a significant reduction of military officers appointed to positions within the civilian power structure (this arrangement was known as the *kekaryaan* system).

During this period, there was some downgrading of military political power. There were also concerted efforts (most notably by Wiranto) to rebuild the armed forces into an effective fighting force. In an effort to reform ABRI, the upper echelons

After the fall of Suharto, the military indicated their intent for a gradual withdrawal from the political sphere, 'in an apparent response to the growing tide of public discontent towards their presence in politics.'

were culled of any ‘green’ officers who were blatantly unwilling to submit to civilian control.¹² In January 1999, some 100 officers were removed from their posts and reassigned in an effort to rid ABRI of those who belonged to the ‘green’ faction and considered themselves Muslims first and nationalists second.¹³ A deal brokered by Yudhoyono also saw ABRI representation within the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (DPR) or People’s Representative Council reduced by 50 per cent to thirty-eight seats, with ABRI seats at the regional level also reduced by 50 per cent to ten seats. The military head of *GolonganKarya* (GOLKAR—the main political party) was replaced with a civilian, and at the next GOLKAR congress a civilian was supported by ABRI over an ex-military candidate.¹⁴ Although ABRI was seemingly trying to distance itself from politics, some of its senior members (most notably Wiranto and Yudhoyono) were still heavily involved in the *reformasi* movement. The aim of this movement was the reform of the Indonesian political system in order to end the abuse of power that was such a noticeable feature of the Suharto era. A specific move in this regard was Yudhoyono’s call to restrict future presidents to a maximum of two terms.¹⁵

In one particular area, however, the status quo continued. ABRI remained firmly entrenched in many industries and businesses in Indonesia. Discussing this issue, Bilveer Singh treats ABRI quite sympathetically. He justifies ABRI’s involvement in commercial activities as vital ‘in supplementing its income as well as keeping its key personnel knowledgeable about business practices in the country’.¹⁶ This reasoning (while perhaps practical) does not excuse the fact that, if ABRI were a truly professional military force, there would be little need for such specialised knowledge. In further efforts to reform, Wiranto organised public apologies for the excesses of ABRI in Aceh and during the Trisakti riots. Responding to specific incidents, the government made great efforts to punish ABRI offenders, and the disciplinary process was open to public scrutiny.¹⁷ These efforts towards *reformasi* on behalf of the military were clear indicators that key figures such as Wiranto and Yudhoyono recognised the need for stronger civilian control and took whatever steps they could to achieve such reforms.

THE PRESIDENCIES OF J. B. HABIBIE AND ABDURRAHMAN WAHID

Civil–military relations were strained under the lacklustre presidency of B. J. Habibie. Dissatisfied with his governance, the university students of Jakarta rioted again in November 1998. Despite a direct command from Habibie, Wiranto refused to order his troops to quell the riots. Habibie offered the position of Commander-in-Chief to Yudhoyono if he would quash the riots, but he too refused. Kingsbury stresses that ‘Yudhoyono remained loyal to Wiranto, not to Habibie’ and that ‘Wiranto’s refusal to resign indicates that Wiranto was probably, in practical terms,

the most powerful individual in Indonesia at that time.¹⁸ The conflict between Habibie and Wiranto would come to a head over the East Timor referendum.

Habibie obviously felt indignant about Wiranto's insubordination. In retaliation he did not consult Wiranto about the East Timor referendum before presenting it to the cabinet. According to Kingsbury, this affront set Wiranto

'on the path of at least allowing, if not actively planning, for the undermining of the coming East Timor ballot',¹⁹ even though the number of troops in East Timor had been reduced in an effort to 'discard the old security-driven paradigm'.²⁰ Although it was disastrous for Indonesia on the world stage, the 'aftermath of the ballot would be the point at which the newly reorganised Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI) developed a new sense of cohesion, representing both an affront to the core 'nationalist' values held by the army and, in practical terms, a defeat for the army by a section of the civilian population'.²¹ Wiranto appointed Major-General Makarim as the Liaison Officer to the United Nations Assistance Mission East Timor (UNAMET). Because he had the allegiance of other key military figures, Wiranto was able to arm militias and disrupt the referendum. Wiranto and twenty-one other officers were later tried as war criminals. These trials were an obvious setback for the military and engendered further resentment towards Habibie because he was breaking one of the Pancasila principles of the unitary state.²² With his chances of re-election rapidly declining, Habibie invited Wiranto to run for Vice-President, an offer that Wiranto publicly refused.²³ Shortly after, Wiranto was removed from the position of Commander-in-Chief and Habibie withdrew from the electoral process.

Civil–military relations during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) were characterised by his repeated attempts to bring the military under firm civilian control.²⁴ Wiranto was dismissed as the Commander-in-Chief in 2000, but was granted a cabinet position and still held considerable sway within the TNI.²⁵ At the same time Wiranto was removed, President Wahid also transferred seventy-four commanders and staff officers in a reshuffle reminiscent of the Suharto era.²⁶ Some commentators have even referred to this reshuffle as the 'dewirantisation' of the TNI.²⁷ After details emerged of Wiranto's questionable involvement in assisting the militias in East Timor, Wahid asked him to resign his cabinet post and ultimately, end his role in *reformasi*. Wiranto refused, and 'briefly, Abdurrahman Wahid appeared to accede. But then the president did an abrupt about-turn and on 14 February 2000 relieved Wiranto of his Cabinet position'.²⁸ This action led many observers to 'conclude that the president had cleverly outmanoeuvred the military and secured a degree of civilian control'.²⁹

Civil–military relations
were strained under the
lacklustre presidency of
B. J. Habibie.

While Wiranto was now theoretically powerless, Kingsbury is quick to emphasise the role he still played, including exercising a ‘guiding—if not controlling—hand in Cabinet meetings.’³⁰ Although the key players such as Wiranto and Yudhoyono were seemingly eager to relinquish control, situations arose (through coincidence or design) in which ‘the balance of political power in Indonesia seemed to lie just as firmly, or even more so, with the TNI as it had done during the latter part of Habibie’s presidency.’³¹ After public condemnation following a cabinet report on the misappropriation of funds, Wahid endeavoured to secure support from the military and enact martial law. However, the TNI refused and their ‘withdrawal of support for Wahid was certainly a key element in his political downfall.’³² Although there were again murmurs about the feasibility of a coup, the TNI stayed its hand and tacitly supported Megawati Sukarnoputri’s election as President in July 2001.

PRESIDENT MEGAWATI SUKARNOPUTRI AND THE 2004 ELECTIONS

Under Megawati, who was viewed as ‘politically pliable’, the TNI was free to conduct the business of *reformasi* in a manner and to a timetable of its own making. Megawati offered the military a ‘welcome degree of predicability and stability after Wahid’s erratic leadership.’³³ As Vice-President under Wahid, she had built solid relationships with many senior military officers. She now used these contacts and appointed many TNI officers to cabinet positions. These appointments represented a setback for civil–military relations, especially at a time when the armed forces were attempting to become depoliticised.

Due to the political power that the TNI wielded, ‘elites therefore continue to seek the support of TNI, paradoxically ensuring that the military retained its central role in politics precisely at a time when segments of civil society were calling for civilian supremacy and demilitarisation.’³⁴ At a conference in August 2001, the TNI discussed the dismantling of the territorial command structure. This process would be quite complex and intricate, especially as the local command structure would ‘need to be replaced with a civil security system, such as the police, a proper functioning judiciary and greater regional autonomy’—concepts foreign to most Indonesians.³⁵ TNI leaders decided that, for the immediate future, the territorial system would need to remain, if only to ensure economic stability, ‘but without excessive military intervention in politics, law and order issues or the economy.’³⁶ Despite the approval of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Widodo,

Megawati offered the
military a ‘welcome degree of
predicability and stability after
Wahid’s erratic leadership’.

many senior officers felt that the conference ‘was trying to push the reform agenda too hard, and that it lacked consultation’.³⁷ However, some commentators believe that, at this point, without pressure from Megawati, the reform process stalled or even ended. With Wiranto no longer having an official position and Yudhoyono stuck in a cabinet post, the main reformers within the military had lost the initiative and the power needed to push for further reform of the TNI. There were also signs that the former ‘green’ faction within the armed forces was ‘operating with impunity in many of Indonesia’s trouble areas, often fomenting trouble’ and as a consequence of this unauthorised activity, had ‘reclaimed as its own prerogative the right to determine policy both in conflict areas and in regard to Indonesia’s status as a unitary state’.³⁸

Interestingly, both Wiranto and Yudhoyono became involved in politics after they retired from the TNI. While both men actively sought to reform the TNI, Kingsbury argues that only Yudhoyono pushed for its withdrawal from politics. Wiranto agreed, but although he supported the concept in principle, he still ‘continued to play his political hand’, with aspirations of a ‘Cabinet position, the vice-presidency or even the presidency’.³⁹ Yudhoyono can be seen as the more genuine advocate of *reformasi*, whereas Wiranto can be considered to have acted only when the circumstances favoured the increase of his personal power, or as Kingsbury notes, Wiranto ‘played godfather to the reform process while also managing to effectively quarantine it from his own activities’.⁴⁰

Leaning on his considerable ministerial experience and influence, Yudhoyono continued to advocate reform, but ‘never at the expense of the TNI’s self-appointed core political functions of security and stability’.⁴¹

Yudhoyono has come under fire for refusing to resign his TNI commission when he was appointed as a minister. Kingsbury’s assessment is that ‘Yudhoyono promoted the idea that the TNI should disengage itself from the political process; Wiranto agreed with this in theory ... [but] pushed a ‘nationalist’ line, with a slightly reduced but continuing role for the TNI in the political process’.⁴² Despite Yudhoyono’s efforts, Megawati’s reliance on the TNI to aid in the formulation of policy ensured that ‘the TNI was again in the central position of the politics of the state’.⁴³

Leaning on his considerable ministerial experience and influence, Yudhoyono continued to advocate reform, but ‘never at the expense of the TNI’s self-appointed core political functions of security and stability’.

Dissatisfied with Megawati's failure to eradicate corruption, the Indonesian people sought a new leader with the strength and wisdom to stop speculation, increase economic prosperity and combat terrorism. Yudhoyono formed the Democratic Party in order to run in the 2004 general election. In a somewhat surprising result, Wiranto narrowly won the nomination of GOLKAR over the party's serving leader, Akbar Tanjung. The willingness of the Indonesian people to support former generals may indicate a desire to return to the stability of the Suharto period, but primarily it reinforces the conception that it is military figures who wield true power in Indonesia.

Even under democratically elected presidents such as Wahid and Megawati, the TNI has exercised its power and proven vital in ensuring the unity of the Indonesian nation. In the second-last round of elections, Wiranto was defeated by both Yudhoyono and Megawati. This result is perhaps a reflection of concern over allegations of human rights abuses in East Timor. In the final round of elections, Yudhoyono won 61 per cent of the vote, giving him a clear mandate to carry on with the reform process.

CONCLUSION

The election of a former general has potentially serious implications for the democratic process in Indonesia. Although Yudhoyono has repeatedly expressed his desire to aid democracy by cooperating with both houses of parliament, his election does represent the desire of the Indonesian people for a strong leadership, capable of ensuring stability within the turbulent country. The Democratic Party's 'foundation is religious nationalism, while its policy position is similar to that of the TNI, to defend the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia based on the state ideology of Pancasila and the 1945 constitution.'⁴⁴ Most Indonesians will support a return to the principles of the Pancasila and the 1945 constitution, but under Megawati the TNI 'reclaimed as its own prerogative the right to determine policy both in conflict areas and in regard to Indonesia's status as a unitary state.'⁴⁵ Surrendering this prerogative to a strong civilian leader may cause friction between Yudhoyono and the TNI. However, any dissent by the TNI would be glaringly undemocratic as the armed forces have recently lost their remaining thirty-eight seats in the parliament. Alternatively, Yudhoyono's status as a former TNI senior officer may enable him to bring the armed forces under firm civilian control. The majority of the TNI would be comfortable submitting to him. Observers will watch Yudhoyono's actions quite carefully in the hope that the *reformasi* will be completed under his presidency.

Many observers are quick to lament the slow process of democratic reform in Indonesian politics. However, considerable progress has been made since the fall of Suharto. The TNI has evolved from the strict dual-function role that it held under Suharto and was even instrumental in his (relatively) peaceful downfall. Civil–military relations were stretched to breaking point under President Habibie, but the democratic election of President Wahid marked a significant shift in the TNI's traditional role in national politics. Wahid consistently tried to bring the TNI under civilian control, but he was hampered by TNI leaders such as Wiranto and Yudhoyono, who made it clear that *reformasi* would be conducted according to the timetable of the TNI. By withholding their support, the TNI ensured that Wahid would fail to be re-elected; he was replaced by Megawati, who was more amenable to the assumption by the armed forces of a greater role in government and the formulation of policy.

Megawati's failure to tackle the problem of corruption ensured her political demise and the democratically contested 2004 presidential elections resulted in the ascendancy of former TNI general, Yudhoyono. The results of the 2004 poll brought the future of civil–military relations in Indonesia to a critical point. Western observers fervently hope that President Yudhoyono will complete the *reformasi* process, rather than allow the armed forces, either directly or indirectly, to continue to rule Indonesia and determine policy direction in many critical areas. Given Yudhoyono's personal history and his track record as a supporter of the reform movement, high hopes for the future of a peaceful and democratic Indonesia are in all probability not amiss.

The results of the 2004 poll brought the future of civil–military relations in Indonesia to a critical point.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bilveer Singh, *Civil–Military Relations in Democratising Indonesia: The Potentials and Limits to Change*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2001, p. 106.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 3 Damien Kingsbury, *Power Politics and the Indonesian Military*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York, 2003, p. 159.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

- 8 Terence Lee, 'The Nature and Future of Civil–military Relations in Indonesia', *Asian Survey*, vol. 40, no. 4, p. 692.
- 9 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- 10 Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 699.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 699–700.
- 12 See Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
- 13 Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 18 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 700.
- 21 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
- 22 The Pancasila principles were five principles on which the Republic of Indonesia was founded in 1945.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 24 In April 1999 the police force became independent of ABRI, though it remained under the command of the Minister of Defence and Security. In further restructuring reforms, the senior defence leadership proposed that the name 'ABRI' be reverted to the 1947 title of Tentara Nasional Indonesia—the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI). This move was supposed to 'unify all the armed units in the country and prevent them from being used by various politicians or political groupings'. See Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
- 25 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*
- 26 Angel Rabasa and John Haseman, *The Military and Democracy in Indonesia: Challenges, Politics, and Power*, RAND Report, 2002, at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1599>>, p. 41.
- 27 Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
- 28 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 168–9.
- 29 Siddharth Chandra and Douglas Kammen, 'Generating Reforms and Reforming Generations: Military Politics in Indonesia's Democratic Transition and Consolidation', *World Politics*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2002, pp. 96–134.
- 30 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 168–9.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 32 Angel and Haseman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 34 Chandra and Kammen, *op. cit.*
- 35 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

- 36 ICG Asia Report, 'Indonesia—Next Steps in Military Reform', no. 24, Jakarta/Brussels.
- 37 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 186–7.
- 39 Damien Kingsbury, 'The Reform of the Indonesian Armed Forces', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 22, August 2000, p. 302.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 186–7.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

THE AUTHOR

Officer Cadet Iain Henry joined the Australian Army in January 2003. He is currently posted to the Australian Defence Force Academy, where he is studying a Bachelor of Arts. He hopes to complete an honours degree in Indonesian Language and serve in the Intelligence Corps upon graduation from the Royal Military College, Duntroon.
