

PERSPECTIVE

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Tensions Among Indonesia’s Security Forces Underlying the May 2019 Riots in Jakarta

*Made Supriatma**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On May 21-22, riots broke out in Jakarta after the official results of the 2019 election were announced. These riots revealed a power struggle among retired generals and factional strife within the Indonesian armed forces that has developed since the 1990s.
- The riots also highlighted the deep rivalry between the military and the police which had worsened in the post-Soeharto years. President Widodo is seen to favour the police taking centre-stage in upholding security while pushing the military towards a more professional role. Widodo will have to curb this police-military rivalry before it becomes a crisis for his government.
- Retired generals associated with the political opposition are better organized than the retired generals within the administration, and this can become a serious cause of disturbance in Widodo’s second term.

** Made Supriatma is Visiting Fellow in the Indonesia Studies Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian election commission announced the official results of the 2019 election in the wee hours of 21 May 2019. Supporters of the losing candidate-pair, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno, responded to the announcement with a rally a few hours later. The rally went on peacefully until the evening but did not show any sign of dispersing after the legal time limit for holding public demonstrations had passed. Police attempts to negotiate an end to the rally failed. After 11pm, clashes broke out between the police and the masses. Rioting continued till the following day.

The riots were the worst Indonesia has witnessed since the May 1998 riots that toppled President Suharto. In fact, many of the names considered to be the masterminds behind the 1998 riots were in the media spotlight for their participation in the recent riots.¹

The trigger for the riots was unhappiness over the election results. There were however more deep seated reasons. First, they stemmed from a power struggle among retired generals who supported the different presidential candidates. This resembled the ideological factionalism during the final years of Suharto's rule, more distinctly between the "green" and "red and white" factions. The green faction refers to Muslim-oriented officers. While the red and white faction represents officers from nationalist and secular quarters, and from religious minorities (Christians, Hindus, and Buddhism).

Most members of the 'green' faction supported Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno while the 'red and white' faction were in the Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin camp. In fact, the recent constellation of these retirees is a complicated one in that several generals who had not been in the green faction are now in Prabowo's camp, and vice versa.

Second, the riots brought to the fore the increasing tension between the police and the military. The rivalry between these institutions had plagued Indonesia's security sector since the early days of *Reformasi*. The separation of the police from the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI, *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*) had contributed to those tensions.² With Mr Widodo allying himself more with the police, the police elite has had greater access to him than had the army elite has had. For this reason, during the first term of Joko Widodo's presidency, there was a feeling within the military, especially in the Army, that they were being excluded from power.

Factionalism among retired generals, increasing rivalry between the military and police, and the feeling within the army that they are being excluded from power, carry significant consequences for Jokowi's second term. Given the strong culture of patronage within the Indonesian military, the President has to deal with retired generals, especially those supportive of the opposition, in a way that does not jeopardize his relations with active duty generals. He must be able to manage conflicts and competition between the police and the military and prevent tensions from becoming open conflicts. The President also needs to communicate better with the Army in a way that does not make key generals feel that they are being sidelined.

PATRONAGE AND THE IDEOLOGIES OF RETIRED GENERALS

The support of retired generals for presidential candidates in the 2019 election is similar to the factionalism that occurred during the last days of the New Order when the military was divided into the 'green' and the 'red and white' factions.

The reality, then, was more complicated. There was also rivalry between the conservatives and those who wanted reforms.³ The conservatives wanted to keep the military in power after Suharto's era while the reformists were eager to limit the role of the military and wished to focus instead on military professionalism.

Rivalry also arose between officers who supported Suharto by strengthening Golkar⁴ and those who wanted to separate the Army from Golkar. Those who supported Suharto were known as the 'green' faction while those who wanted a more independent military were known as 'red and white' faction. It was not too strange that the 'green' group supported Suharto, for he had made special effort to cultivate Islamic groups to counter-balance oppositional elements within the military.

In 1997, and immediately after the general election, Suharto overhauled the leadership of the army. He put officers who had previously worked as his close assistants such as General Wiranto (personal adjutant for 4 years) and General Subagyo Hs. (presidential guard commander) into strategic positions. Suharto was very skillful in creating factionalism and in maintaining the balance between factions. While he appointed his close confidantes to the highest military offices, he also elevated his son-in-law, Lt. General Prabowo Subianto, to become commander of the army's strategic command (*Pangkostrad*). Prabowo was backed by the conservative faction. This was the beginning of the rivalry between Prabowo and Wiranto which has lasted till the present day.

Retired military generals are now divided just as in the past. Although we can say ideology is not the sole reason for the retired military elite to take sides in the presidential election, some of the generals do pick a side because of patronage based on military cohorts in the academy and in the corps, or even on seniority. Some simply do it for economic interests.

Some prominent retired generals are in Jokowi's administration, such as General Wiranto (coordinating minister for politics, law, and defense), General Luhut Binsar Panjaitan (coordinating minister for maritime affairs), General Moeldoko (president's chief of staff), and General AM Hendro Priyono (former Indonesian intel czar).⁵

Prabowo Subianto, on the other hand, is supported by several former generals who were either his ex-subordinates or conservative former generals. These retirees want the Army to play a role in government and politics just like in the days of the New Order. A former army general himself, Prabowo has nurtured his own network.⁶ Among his supporters are former commanders of TNI such as Gen Djoko Santoso⁷ (also his campaign manager), General Gatot Nurmantyo, Admiral Widodo Adi Sutjipto, and Admiral Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno⁸ (former Navy chief of staff).

Prabowo's retirees have been more organized than Jokowi's. Most of them joined the National Sovereignty Front (FKB). Former army chief of staff, General Tyasno Sudarto,⁹ led this organization. Sudarto is former army chief of staff and one of the most vocal critics

of the Jokowi administration. FKB organizes around more than one hundred retired generals, and seems to have grown after the presidential election. For example, the Eid al-Fitr celebration (*Halalbihalal*) celebration which they held on June 26 was followed by 7,000 military officers and around 700 generals.¹⁰

Not all of Prabowo's supporters are from the 'green' faction or are Muslims. Some are Christians. However, one thing is clear: Prabowo's supporters are typically unsympathetic to the idea of reforming the military. Their ideology is akin to the ideology of the conservative generals in the 1990s. But now they do not have Golkar, which in the *Reformasi* era had transformed into a full-fledged political party. Their support for Prabowo can be seen as pragmatic steps to gain a share in political power.

There is no doubt that these retired officers played roles in Prabowo's protests over election fraud. They provided significant political aid to his civilian supporters. They were active in organizing protests, giving speeches at demonstrations, and actively organizing themselves as opposition to the Jokowi government. They have no official power but do retain influence as former warriors of the country. Their criticism of the election results do question the legitimacy of the Jokowi administration. The Indonesian media also alleged the involvement of several retired military officers in a number of cases of violence related to the election.¹¹ One of them concerns Major General Sunarko, a former Kopassus commander, and another concerns Major General Kivlan Zen, another Prabowo loyalist. The cases against them are described below.

MILITARY-POLICE RIVALRIES

The rivalry between the military and the police was very visible in the days immediately before and after the riots. On May 21, the police detained Major General Sunarko on a charge of smuggling firearms from Aceh.¹² Sunarko, a Javanese born in North Sumatra, was also accused of treason.¹³

Major General Kivlan Zen, a conservative military general, was accused of planning to assassinate several members of President Jokowi's cabinet and some civilians. The police arrested those suspects. Zen was accused as the mastermind of the plot, which was allegedly funded by a politician from PPP (United Development Party).

Zen is a controversial figure, and is very popular among Muslim hardliners. However, his arrest did not spark criticism from the retired generals. But it was different where Sunarko was concerned. At first, the military generals inside Jokowi's administration were silent about Sunarko's arrest. However, as criticism of Sunarko's arrest mounted among retired generals, some of Jokowi's backers also began asking for his release, considering the police action as harassment and defamation of the military. The Minister of Defense, Retired General Ryamizard Ryacudu, played down the charge that Sunarko had smuggled firearms from Aceh, saying that the firearms were old weapons and had been around for a long time and were from Aceh war combatants. Sunarko, according to Ryacudu, was a general who had fought many wars and it was therefore not strange that he had many weapons.¹⁴

The riots have put the police at front and centre of Jakarta's security. Interestingly, army troops were nowhere to be found in the city's streets during the riots. Instead, the military

deployed units from the Marines (Navy) and the Air Force Special Forces (Paskhas TNI-AU). Reportedly, the Army was placed merely as backup, the soldiers were confined in their barracks where their presence was checked five times a day to avoid desertion. Apparently, some members of the administration were worried that the soldiers might join the demonstrations and start a revolt.¹⁵

The riots clearly showed a high level of distrust between the military and the police. There are strong perceptions within the military that President Jokowi has allied himself with the police, and that the police have been helping the government to control the opposition, for example, by applying the ITE Law (Law on Electronic Information and Transaction; No. 11/2008).¹⁶

To be sure, President Jokowi has never been a popular figure among the military and their families. In the 2019 election, for example, he reportedly lost in polling stations in military barracks, and even within the Presidential Guard (Paspampres) complex in Jakarta.¹⁷

This general resentment in the military was, for example, exploited by a former general who had joined the opposition. General Gatot Nurmantyo, a former TNI Commander under Jokowi who retired barely a year before the presidential election, complained publicly about the small budget for the TNI. He misleadingly claimed that TNI, which has to manage 455,000 personnel, hundreds of aircrafts, tanks, and other heavy military equipment, receives much less funds than the police as a whole.¹⁸

Army Chief of Staff General Andika Perkasa, in an interview with a Jakarta magazine played down the issue of rivalry with the police and rejected a question about whether or not he supported the police in the cases involving Major General Sunarko and Major General Kivlan Zen.¹⁹

CONSEQUENCES FOR WIDODO'S SECOND TERM

The way President Jokowi handled the May 21-22 riots showed that he is increasingly dependent on the police on matters of security. He trusts the chief of the police, General Tito Karnavian, to deal with security and has expanded police power simply by using it to resolve political issues. In that sense, the police to Mr Widodo is like the Army to Suharto's New Order government.

Meanwhile, in order to deal with the military, Mr Widodo relies on several retired generals who are aligned with him before he became president, especially Retired General Luhut Panjaitan and Retired General AM Hendro Priyono.²⁰ He also gives prominence to former TNI commander, Retired General Moeldoko, who is now the President's chief of staff and is increasingly influential.²¹

Although information on the riots was mostly delivered by Retired General Wiranto, the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security, his influence is actually diminishing, especially after the election. The political party associated with Wiranto, the People's Conscience Party (Hanura) obtained only 1.54% of the vote in the legislative elections and thus failed to pass the threshold into Parliament.

A split between the military and the police has been apparent in President Jokowi's cabinet. Military aides to Mr Widodo have lobbied for Major General Sunarko to be released — Wiranto, Luhut Panjaitan and Ryamizard are the guarantors for Sunarko's release. They have however not lobbied for the release of Major General Kivlan Zen who is a Prabowo loyalist who often contradicts these generals.

The next challenge for Mr Widodo may come from retirees who have joined the Nation Sovereignty Forum (FKB). This forum has broad influence among retired officers.²² Problems within the military, such as the issue of tour of duty, are very likely to be exploited by this group. For President Widodo, the problem is increasingly complicated with the problem of the many generals who do not have jobs inside the military at this time.

¹ *Tempo* weekly magazine, for example, issued two important reports about these riots over two weeks. The first report contained the role of pro-Prabowo former generals in inciting the riots. The second report was about the involvement of 'Tim Mawar' (Rose Team), a team from Kopassus which kidnapped pro-democracy activists in 1998. Prabowo Subianto was dismissed from military service because he was accused of forming the Rose Team.

² The term of ABRI was then abolished and the Indonesian military began using TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) again.

³ See Adam Schwarz (2000), *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in Search for Stability*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

⁴ During Suharto's rule, Golkar was not a political party. It was known as a collection of 'functional groups' that represented peasants, workers, fishermen, artists and others in the society. Suharto was able to stay in power for 32 years by maintaining a triangle of power: Golkar, the bureaucracy and the army, all of which had structures that ran from the national to the village level.

⁵ Hendropriyono has no formal position in the government but is very influential. His son-in-law, Gen. Andika Perkasa is the current Army chief of staff. His son, Diaz Hendropriyono, is a special staff to the president.

⁶ Most of Prabowo's networks was built from the elite corps of Kopassus and Battalion 326 Airborne Kostrad.

⁷ Djoko Santoso (Military Academy 1975) is not a stranger to Prabowo. He was Prabowo's subordinate in Kostrad's elite 328th Airborne Battalion.

⁸ Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno was coordinating minister for politics, law, and defense in the first Jokowi's cabinet (October 2014 - August 2015). He was fired and replaced by Gen. Wiranto, and is now aligning himself with Prabowo. Some of Jokowi's former ministers switched sides to oppose him after they were no longer serving in the administration.

⁹ When he became Kabais, Sudarto handled the operation to win pro-integration with Indonesia in the 1999 poll. This operation failed miserably. Sudarto reportedly paid for militias in East Timor by printing fake money.

¹⁰ <https://indopos.co.id/read/2019/06/26/179371/semprot-dipersulit-akhirnya-ribuan-purnawirawan-tnipolri-gelar-halal-bihalal-di-masjid-at-tin>

¹¹ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1207406/pensiunan-tni-polri-pro-prabowo-deklarasi-tolak-hasil-pemilu-2019/full&view=ok>

¹² Sunarko once served as commander of the Iskandar Muda Military Command in Aceh (2008-2009). He is also an Aceh war veteran. He has built his political network among local politicians in Aceh. Sunarko is deeply involved in Aceh's politics. Presently, he is sitting as Chairman of the Nanggroe Aceh Party (PNA) Supervisory Commission (2017-present) and Member of the Nanggroe Aceh Party (PNA) High Council (2017-present). His connection with local politicians in Aceh was widely touted as a factor that helped Prabowo Subianto win a landslide in the 2014 and 2019 elections in Aceh.

¹³ North Sumatra has a large Javanese population. They inhabit areas previously known as the plantation belt. They came to North Sumatra as contract labourers in the colonial era. In several districts in North Sumatra, especially in the eastern part, the Javanese population is the majority.

¹⁴ <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/05/29/16070881/kata-ryamizard-soal-penyelundupan-senjata-dan-keterlibatan-soenarko>

¹⁵ Various communication with journalists who covered the riots in the field on 21-23 May 2019. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Andika Perkasa acknowledged that the army was not deployed on Jakarta's streets. However, around 350 Kopassus personnel were readied as back up.

https://en.tempo.co/read/1221175/tnis-army-chief-of-staff-i-have-no-reason-to-distrust-polri?TerkiniUtama&campaign=TerkiniUtama_Click_1

¹⁶ Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, the leader of the Islamic Defenders Front, and one of President Widodo's fiercest critics, was charged with spreading pornography under ITE law after his personal chats with a woman were revealed to the public. He was exiled to Saudi Arabia.

¹⁷ <https://politik.rmol.id/read/2019/04/23/387216/ternyata-jokowi-kalah-di-kompleks-paspampres>

¹⁸ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4507975/di-acara-prabowo-gatot-buka-bukaan-soal-anggaran-tni-dan-pencopotan-anak-buah>. Nurmantyo claimed that the TNI only received a budget of 6 trillion rupiah. Nurmantyo's claim is actually not true. In 2018, the Indonesian military received a budget of US \$ 12 billion compared to the police which received US \$ 6.7 billion. See, <https://ekonomi.kompas.com/read/2017/10/26/092826726/kemenhan-dan-polri-dapat-anggaran-paling-besar-pada-apbn-2018> Nurmantyo also complained that most of his men were dismissed from their posts after his retirement. He referred to the head of TNI's the Strategic Intelligence Agency, Maj. Gen. Ilyas Alamsyah Harahap, and several generals in strategic positions who were removed from their posts after he finished his tenure as the TNI Commander.

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/04/12/19572391/gatot-nurmantyo-jabatan-strategis-di-tni-diisi-orang-orang-bermasalah>

¹⁹ https://en.tempo.co/read/1221175/tnis-army-chief-of-staff-i-have-no-reason-to-distrust-polri?TerkiniUtama&campaign=TerkiniUtama_Click_1

²⁰ Luhut Panjaitan and Hendropriyono both have their relatives hold strategic position in the army. Luhut's son in law, Maj. Gen. Maruli Simanjuntak, is the commander of the presidential guard. Meanwhile, Hendro's son-in-law, Gen. Andika Perkasa, is now the army's chief of staff.

²¹ Journalists I interviewed during and after the riots told me that most of their source of information about the riots came from the office of the presidential chief of staff.

²² <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/05/article/ex-top-brass-bent-on-bringing-down-widodo/>

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