

How 'militarized' is Indonesia's COVID-19 management?

Indonesian analysts have recently debated whether Indonesia's handling of the COVID-19 management has been "securitized" or even "militarized" as Indonesian Military (TNI) officers appear to be at the forefront of both national and local mitigation efforts.

There is an extensive, even if arguably inconclusive, literature on "securitization" and "militarization" in general. We focus on the latter and operationalize it as the degree to which military officers are in positions of influence with regard to both policy decision-making and implementation. This conception leads to at least three ideal-typical forms of militarization of public policy: maximalist, partial and minimalist.

We argue that in the context of Indonesia's COVID-19 management, we are witnessing partial militarization thus far. When assessed at both the national and local levels, we demonstrate that the TNI organization as a whole has not been fully mobilized to take over civilian policy decision-making and implementation.

At the national level, about two dozen retired and active-duty officers are in key government positions—some of which are salient to COVID-19 management. The various TNI operations thus far in support of the government's COVID-19 management only utilized a small number and localized military assets and personnel.

At the local level, hundreds of TNI officers are assigned as deputy chiefs of local COVID-19 task forces—but they do not dominate them. Local chief executives still control decision-making, the police remain part of the local task forces, and the TNI provides support in implementing mitigation efforts.

At the national level, active duty and retired military officers are involved—some directly more than others—in the management of COVID-19. First, at the Cabinet level, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo employs several retired generals, including Terawan Agus Putranto (health minister), Prabowo Subianto (defense minister), Luhut Pandjaitan (coordinating maritime affairs and



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investment minister), Fachrul Razi (religious affairs minister), Moeldoko (presidential chief of staff), and Wiranto (Presidential Advisory Council chair). They have been playing different roles throughout the pandemic, with Terawan leading the way.

Second, Jokowi created the national Coronavirus Disease Response Acceleration Taskforce on March 13 headed by current National Disaster Agency chief, and former commander of the Army's Special Forces (Kopasus), Lt. Gen. Doni Munardo. The taskforce coordinates the government-wide efforts to mitigate the pandemic. Although it employs active duty officers, it also has dozens of medical and public health experts as part of its expert council. The taskforce's executive council includes two senior generals: the assistant to TNI commander for operations and the secretary general of the National Resilience Council.

Third, the TNI has engaged in various operations to assist with the mitigation efforts. The TNI created four integrated joint task commands in Jakarta, Natuna, Sebaru Island and Galang Island. These units, comprising elements from the military, police, civilian agencies and volunteer groups, seek to assist the TNI's localized mitigation efforts (filed under its "military operations other than war"). The commander of the Joint Regional Defense Command 1 controls these four task commands.

Along with these commands, the TNI has deployed more than 1,000 personnel to assist with various COVID-19 related tasks, from helping build emergency hospitals, providing maritime and airborne medical evacuations, quarantine patrol and management, to transporting and distributing medical supplies and

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other efforts.

Overall, we have at least 21 retired and active duty officers directly involved in the decision-making process of the various mitigation efforts at the national level. But these officers, while certainly significant in shaping policies, are part of an overall system outside of the TNI structure or chain of command. In other words, they do not take orders from or are working at the behest of the TNI leadership.

Our data records 236 individual police officers and 225 individual military officers listed as part of the hundreds of local COVID-19 task forces created across Indonesia. The Army dominates the local taskforces, which is unsurprising given its extensive territorial command structure and local engagement activities as well as its overall size relative to the other services.

We also found that senior mid-rank officers, especially lieutenant colonels and colonels, provide the leadership backbone of the TNI's support of local COVID-19 taskforces. These are officers who have suffered the brunt of the various promotional logjams plaguing the TNI over the past decade.

As such, they are likely to take this opportunity to assist with COVID-19 mitigation seriously as the ability of their localities to overcome the pandemic could be an important promotional benchmark in the future.

Most of those assigned to local taskforces (about 70 percent) come from the post-New Order academy generation—those who graduated in 1998 and after. Many have placed their hopes in this generation as these officers did not cut their teeth under a highly politicized military organization backing an authoritarian rule. The local pandemic manage-

ment is a crucial test of whether the next generation of TNI leaders can work well with their civilian counterparts in a democratic setting.

It is also a test of whether local civilian leaders can perform admirably in dealing with local COVID-19 cases. How local civilian and political institutions and leaders perform will determine whether the next generation of TNI leaders develops trust in those democratic-era institutions.

The spatial distribution of the local COVID-19 taskforces across Indonesia also shows that TNI officers do not dominate all of them. These officers were listed as the deputy chiefs on 35 percent, 31 percent and 30 percent of local COVID-19 task forces at the provincial, regency and city levels, respectively.

The military officers are also not "alone" in assisting the local governments as the police are also almost always part of the local task force. There is thus a relative "balance of local coercive power" in that regard.

Overall, despite the significant roles individual retired and active-duty officers have played in the management of COVID-19, the TNI as an organizational actor is not yet fully mobilized. As far as we know, there has yet to be a specific directive for an organization-wide TNI taskforce to be mobilized to deal with the pandemic. This is not to suggest that the TNI leadership has no influence whatsoever—they clearly shape the policy options available to the government.

But the balance of evidence thus far suggests that most of the organizational role has been concentrated in providing support for the national and local governments' mitigation efforts, rather than taking over policy formulation from civilian authorities.

It is unclear however whether this partial militarization for COVID-19 will last. If the government's mitigation efforts are proven to be simply too little too late, and major domestic political and economic instability ensues, we are likely to see more calls for the military as an organization to step in and fill the void.