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THE TNI'S ROLE IN COVID-19 MANAGEMENT IN RIAU ISLANDS PROVINCE

Policy Report

February 2023

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Executive Summary

The Indonesian military (TNI) was widely involved in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the Riau Islands province (KEPRI) by providing additional manpower, health infrastructure, and transportation for vaccines and medical kits. The dependence on the TNI's facilities revealed the deficiencies in the KEPRI local government's key apparatus, notably its medical infrastructure and the connectivity platforms linking it to the rural areas and outer islands. Meanwhile, the existence of new defence structures in KEPRI, such as the Joint Regional Defence Command I (Kogabwilhan I), did not automatically make them close partners for the KEPRI government in managing the pandemic in the province. Instead, KEPRI local authorities mostly worked with lower military commands based in the region as the involvement of Kogabwilhan I was mainly directed by the central government. This shows the limited influence that KEPRI government authorities have over Kogabwilhan I, and potentially over the newly relocated Navy First Fleet Command (Koarmada I), through the structures located in the province.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the Indonesian military (TNI) played a central role in the Indonesian government's efforts at battling the COVID-19 pandemic. TNI has assisted both the central government and various regional authorities managing the pandemic across the archipelago. In Riau Islands (Kepulauan Riau or KEPRI, for short), TNI's assistance in managing the pandemic was crucial not only for the provincial government but also for the central government. TNI had a central role in establishing the emergency hospital in Galang, KEPRI, which was one of the Indonesian government's early initiatives in managing the pandemic.

We employ KEPRI as the focus of this policy report for two reasons. First, the Indonesian military had made some strategic redeployment of its major forces to KEPRI. In addition to the establishment of Joint Regional Defence Command I (Kogabwilhan I) at Tanjung Pinang in 2019, the TNI relocated the headquarters of the Navy First Fleet Command (Koarmada I, formerly the Western Fleet Command) to KEPRI in December 2022.¹ However, notwithstanding the fact that Kogabwilhan I is located in KEPRI, at the height of the pandemic, the command's COVID-19 management duties were mainly guided by the central government. Thus, the existence of new military structures in KEPRI, notably Kogabwilhan I, presents new dynamics in the interactions between the civilian and military authorities in the province. Second, KEPRI is considered a strategic province for Indonesia since it is one of the outermost provinces, shares sea borders with Malaysia and Singapore, and hosts a special economic zone.

¹ Adhi Priamarizki, "New Defence Structures in Riau Islands: Implications and Challenges", IDSS Paper, 8 November 2022, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip22063-new-defence-structures-in-riau-islands-implications-and-challenges/#.Y7zzh3ZBxPY>.

Against this backdrop, this policy report analyses the role of the Indonesian military in supporting COVID-19 management in KEPRI. How did the military participate in COVID-19 management in KEPRI? In what ways did the existence of new military structures in KEPRI affect civil-military cooperation in managing the COVID-19 outbreak in the province? We answer these questions by examining various COVID-19 management initiatives conducted by the military in KEPRI. We begin by providing a brief overview of TNI's roles in the central government's COVID-19 management before diving into the KEPRI case. The concluding part of the report ponders over the lessons learnt and potential implications for the future of civil-military relations in KEPRI. Information for this report was derived from desktop research and media monitoring.

TNI and COVID-19 Management

On 13 March 2020, the government of Indonesia established the COVID-19 Response Task Force (COVID-19 Task Force), charged with responsibility for coordinating policies and actions related to the national pandemic management. President Joko (Jokowi) Widodo appointed as its head an active-duty three-star army general, Doni Monardo, who was the head of the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB). Furthermore, the president directed that the TNI, the National Police (POLRI), the Ministry of Health, the National Resilience Council, and Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises assist Lieutenant-General Monardo in his duties.²

From this point onwards, TNI has been a constant player in the Indonesian central government's strategy to manage the COVID-19 outbreak. Subsequently, the president appointed the then army chief, General Andika Perkasa, as deputy head of the National Economic Recovery and COVID-19 Management Committee (KPCPEN), the successor agency to the COVID-19 Response Task Force, which was dissolved five months after its formation.³

The Indonesian government has not only involved TNI at the institutional level. On 23 March 2020, the commander of Kogabwilhan I, Vice Admiral Yudo Margono (2019-2020), formed four Integrated Joint Task Commands (Komando Tugas Gabungan Terpadu, or Kogasgabpad for short), which worked under the COVID-19 Task Force.⁴ The formation of kogasgabpads was aimed at supporting and expediting COVID-19 management within the jurisdiction of the particular TNI regional structure to which each was attached (see table 1).

² Formally, President Jokowi assigned deputy positions in the COVID-19 Task Force to both the TNI Commander-in-Chief's Chief of Operational Staff (Asisten Operasi, Asops Panglima TNI) and the Chief of POLRI's Chief of Operational Staff (Asops Kapolri).

³ The Jakarta Post, "Jokowi picks army chief as National COVID-19 Committee's vice chairman", The Jakarta Post, 11 August 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2020/08/10/jokowi-picks-army-chief-as-national-covid-19-committees-vice-chairman.html>.

⁴ Antara News, "Pangkogabwilhan I: Empat Kogasgabpad dibentuk untuk Tangani COVID-19 [Commander of TNI's Joint Defence Area Command I: Four Integrated Joint Task Force Commands are formed to handle COVID-19]", Antara News, March 23 2020. <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/1375182/pangkogabwilhan-i-empat-kogasgabpad-dibentuk-untuk-tangani-covid-19>.

Table 1: Kogasgabpad Duties⁵

Unit	Regional Structure	Duties
Kogasgabpad 1	Greater Jakarta Regional Military Command (Kodam Jayakarta)	Managing Wisma Atlet COVID-19 emergency hospital, Jakarta
Kogasgabpad 2	Air Force First Operations Command (Koopsau I)	Developing quarantine facility in Natuna Islands, KEPRI
Kogasgabpad 3	Navy First Fleet (Koarmada I)	Providing health care and isolation and quarantine facilities in Sebaru Island, Thousand Islands Regency, Jakarta
Kogasgabpad 4	Bukit Barisan Regional Command (Kodam Bukit Barisan)	Managing Galang Island COVID-19 emergency hospital, KEPRI

The government's decision to utilise the TNI in pandemic management was quite unusual and legally problematic. First, the military is not supposed to have a pivotal role in medical and public health affairs since its major function involves dealing with defence affairs. Second, the existing constitutional framework – encapsulated in the Defence Law (Law 3/2002) and the TNI Law (Law 34/2004) – does not give the military the mandate to be involved in the management of non-natural disasters.

However, the TNI continues to hold a vast array of military installations and assets across the archipelago that might be useful in helping the government during emergencies. In addition, some of these military installations are embedded in territorial commands that operationally report to the respective larger *kogabwilhans*.⁶ This consideration led the government to produce an “emergency” ordinance that allows the deployment of the military for mitigating the pandemic.

⁵ Antara News, “Pangkogabwilhan I: Empat Kogasgabpad dibentuk untuk Tangani COVID-19”.

⁶ Tiola, “New joint command faces first test under COVID-19”, The Jakarta Post, 20 May 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/05/20/new-joint-command-faces-first-test-under-covid-19.html>.

One observer of the Indonesian military suggests that the government could deploy the TNI in three scenarios during the pandemic.⁷ In the first scenario, the government could involve the TNI in a civic action (*operasi bakti*) when the government has the spread of the virus under control and there is political stability and social cohesion. The trigger for the second scenario would be spikes in infection, leading to the probability of social crisis. In this scenario, the TNI operates under the umbrella term of assistance operation (*tugas perbantuan*) in support of civilian authority. Particularly, this would involve assistance in medical care, transportation, customs and immigration affairs, as well as policing the observance of established health protocols. The third scenario involves the conduct of an internal security operation (*operasi keamanan dalam negeri*) with the aim of quelling domestic unrest owing to the pandemic.

Apart from those nation-wide scenarios, civilian authorities at the regional levels normally coordinate with leaders of the security apparatus using a formalised coordination channel called Forkopimda (Regional Leaders Coordination Forum). The channel serves as a crucial means of coordination between civilian leaders and military as well as police officers at the regional level. For example, Kodam Jayakarta, the regional military command in Jakarta, often conducts a health protocol socialisation event together with the Jakarta regional police (POLDA Metro Jaya).⁸

In general, the military's participation in COVID-19 management at the regional level revolved around the building of emergency medical infrastructure, campaigning to raise public awareness, and enforcing health protocols. Furthermore, TNI also could act independently to mitigate the spread of the virus within its ranks and undertake civic actions. Among other activities, TNI was observed to hold charity and blood donation events and even set up public kitchens (*dapur umum*) in tandem with POLRI.

⁷ Iis Gindarsah, "Operasi Militer Selain Perang (OMSP) di Masa Pandemi COVID-19 [Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic]", in Indonesia dan COVID-19: Pandangan Multi Aspek dan Sektoral [Indonesia and COVID-19: Perspectives on Multiple Aspects and Sectorals], ed. Fajar B. Hirawan (Jakarta: CSIS, 2020).

⁸ Kodam Jaya, "Forkopimda DKI Jakarta launching penerapan pendisiplinan prokes COVID-19 berbasis komunitas [Jakarta's Forkopimda launches community-based health protocol implementation]", Kodam Jaya, 11 September 2020.

TNI and COVID-19 Management in KEPRI

The Indonesian military worked together with civilian authorities at the provincial, city, and municipality levels, as well as the regional branch of POLRI (POLDA) and the regional office of the state intelligence agency (BINDA) in managing the pandemic in KEPRI. KEPRI's Forkopimda played an important role as an avenue for coordinating these various stakeholders. However, there were differences in operational methods due to differing agendas. In the early stages of the pandemic, the military and BINDA focused on enforcing health protocols. The military conducted health protocol education and helped local authorities administer protocols such as social distancing and mask usage. It also provided welfare aid for those affected by the pandemic.⁹ In addition, the TNI provided logistical support, primarily to transport vaccines and medical kits to rural areas.¹⁰ To do so, the military employed its military posts in the rural areas and outer islands, such as the navy's Ranai naval base (Lanal) in Natuna regency.¹¹

As the outbreak subsided, the focus shifted to vaccination programmes. BINDA mainly worked with regional government institutions and targeted both rural and urban areas. The military, on the other hand, adopted a slightly different approach. It worked with regional government agencies, but also launched its own vaccination initiatives, primarily aimed at communities surrounding a particular local military compound or the military's extended family. For example, Military Resort Command (Korem)/033 Wira Pratama launched its own vaccination programme, called Gurindam Mobile Vaccination. The programme was aimed at establishing mobile vaccination centres across the area under Korem/033's jurisdiction. Interestingly, the local Indonesian Entrepreneurs Association (Apindo) supported the army's mobile vaccination programme on several occasions.¹²

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- ⁹ "Penyaluran bantuan sosial peduli COVID-19 KODIM 0316/Batam, [Social aid distribution 'Peduli COVID-19' by KODIM 0316/Batam]", Kodam1-BukitBarisan.mil.id, 22 September 2021, <https://kodam1-bukitbarisan.mil.id/penyaluran-bantuan-sosial-peduli-covid-19-kodim-0316-batam/>
- ¹⁰ Official records state that KEPRI consists of more than 2,400 islands. "Tentang KEPRI: Profil Singkat Kepulauan Riau [About KEPRI: Short Profile for KEPRI]", Pemerintah Provinsi Kepulauan Riau. <https://kepriprov.go.id/aman/tentang-kepri>.
- ¹¹ "Tim Vaksinator TNI AL Ranai susur masyarakat maritim di Kepulauan Natuna [TNI AL's Ranai seaport conducting vaccination for locals in Natuna Islands]", Koarmada 1, 26 August 2021, <https://koarmada1.tnial.mil.id/artikel/detail/586-tim-vaksinasi-tni-al-ranai-susur-masyarakat-maritim-di-kepulauan-natuna>.
- ¹² "Tim Vaksinas Mobil Gurindam 12 bersama Apindo terus gencarkan vaksinasi booster di Batam [Mobile Gurindam 12 Vaccination team launched booster vaccination with Apindo in Batam]", Warta KEPRI, 20 March 2022, <https://wartakepri.co.id/2022/03/20/tim-vaksinasi-mobil-gurindam-12-bersama-apindo-terus-gencarkan-vaksinasi-booster-di-batam/>

Another challenge for KEPRI was the handling of returning Indonesian migrant workers. The Indonesian government designated Galang Island, located near Batam, as a transit point for Indonesian migrant workers who were evacuated from overseas, especially from Singapore and Malaysia. Kogabwilhan I established a dedicated COVID-19 emergency hospital and isolation site in Galang Island.¹³ The existence of such a facility created an issue for KEPRI as the hospital handled a large number of COVID-19 patients.

The return of migrant workers led to a spike in the overall number of COVID-19 cases in the province. Subsequently, the provincial government rejected the inclusion of COVID-19 cases in Galang Island into the overall case numbers in the province. The high number of COVID-19 cases meant the province had to implement higher levels of restriction.¹⁴ Galang became a special case where the military in the region, in this case Kogabwilhan I, worked under the direction of the central government, not the regional authorities.

The army's Korem 033/Wira Pratama, the regional command that oversees Tanjung Pinang, Batam, Tanjungbalai Karimun, and Ranai Natuna, became an important partner for the KEPRI provincial government. The governor of Riau Islands, Ansar Ahmad, appointed the commander of Korem/033 Wira Pratama, BG Jimmy Ramoz Manalu, as head of Transit Area COVID-19 Management Special Taskforce (Satgassus Penanganan COVID-19 Daerah Perlintasan) in April 2021.¹⁵ The formation of the taskforce was related to the establishment of Galang Island as a transit area for Indonesian migrant workers.

The issue of managing returning migrant workers during the pandemic in KEPRI was tackled through two channels: the central government worked with Kogabwilhan I to manage the quarantine facility; the provincial government worked with Korem/033 to manage the transport of the workers to other parts of Indonesia after they had completed their quarantine.

¹³ "Kesiapan rumah sakit darurat COVID-19 Pulau Galang Sudah 96 Persen, [The readiness of COVID-19 emergency hospital in Galang Island reached 96%]", BNPB, 3 April 2020, <https://bnpb.go.id/berita/kesiapan-rumah-sakit-darurat-covid19-pulau-galang-sudah-96-persen>

¹⁴ "Satgas keberatan data pekerja migran positif COVID-19 masuk ke KEPRI [Local taskforce rejected the inclusion of migrant worker's COVID-19 cases data to KEPRI Data]", Antara News, 26 December 2021. <https://kepri.antaranews.com/berita/112345/satgas-keberatan-data-pekerja-migran-positif-covid-19-masuk-ke-kepri>

¹⁵ "Danrem pimpin Satgassus COVID-19 Daerah Perlintasan KEPRI [Resort Commander Leads COVID-19 Transit Area Special Task Force]", Batampos.co.id, 23 April 2021, <https://batampos.co.id/2021/04/23/danrem-pimpin-satgassus-covid-19-daerah-perlintasan-kepri/>.

Thus, it is evident that the role of the Indonesian military in COVID-19 management in KEPRI was mainly to patch the infrastructure gap needed for curbing the pandemic. TNI's role in assisting the local government in KEPRI was attributed to three factors: the availability of TNI manpower, TNI's network of health infrastructure, and its logistical assets to transport and distribute medical and non-medical equipment and to support other activities. TNI's logistical assets, such as the KRI Semarang-594 navy hospital ship, proved critical in transporting goods and people during the COVID-19 emergency.

The use of TNI's manpower and health infrastructure in pandemic management is not exclusive to KEPRI. In fact, TNI assets were also used in other parts of Indonesia, including at the national level. However, KEPRI's archipelagic setting provides a connectivity challenge. Here the TNI was able to bridge the connectivity gap by transporting and distributing medical goods to rural areas. TNI posts in the outer islands acted as the spearhead, similar to what the TNI navy's Ranai naval base did in Natuna.

Meanwhile, the existence of Kogabwilhan I created a different situation for civil-military cooperation in KEPRI's pandemic management. Kogabwilhan I's participation in COVID-19 management was mainly guided by the central government. The provincial government often worked with lower-level military commands based in KEPRI, such as the army's korem and the naval base in the province.

Policy Implications

What can we learn from the involvement of the Indonesian military in KEPRI's pandemic management? What are the potential implications of such involvement for civil-military relations in the province? There are three key takeaways from the case of TNI involvement in pandemic management in KEPRI.

First, TNI's assistance during the pandemic revealed the weakness of the KEPRI local government's key apparatus. Media reports showed public hospitals across KEPRI being rather overwhelmed by the spike in COVID-19 cases.¹⁶ In addition, the provincial government lacked the capacity to transport vaccines and other medical items as well as logistical aids to remote areas due to KEPRI's archipelagic nature. As a result, the KEPRI government had to rely on the TNI's health infrastructure and transportation assets to compensate for such deficiencies.

Second, in managing the pandemic, the provincial government mainly worked with military structures that specifically oversee the province or areas within the province. It is in fact the central government that has the authority for deploying the military. Nevertheless, cooperation between regional bureaucracies and the military structures in their respective provinces is possible, notably for handling disaster emergencies. However, the KEPRI government has limited engagement with upper-level military structures located in the province, such as Kogabwilhan I and potentially the newly relocated Koarmada I. The COVID-19 case illustrated that deployment of such upper-level military structures in times of disaster emergency heavily depends on the central government's disposition.

Third, TNI's assistance to the KEPRI provincial government provided an avenue for deepening collaboration on non-defence issues with Indonesia's neighbouring military counterparts. As one of the economically strategic gateways to Indonesia, Riau Islands province has received considerable foreign investment, especially from Singapore. During the pandemic, both private companies and the Singapore government sent medical and logistical aid to KEPRI, which was received by the TNI. Such interactions can open up opportunities for future collaboration between the armed forces of the two countries, particularly for disaster relief missions.

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¹⁶ "Satgas: Banyak RS di KEPRI minim tempat tidur untuk pasien COVID-19 [Task Force: Hospitals in KEPRI lack the capacity for COVID-19 patients]", Antara, 22 May 2021, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/2169818/satgas-banyak-rs-di-kepri-minim-tempat-tidur-untuk-pasien-covid-19>.

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