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## Indonesia's military creeps back into civilian affairs

BY KANUPRIYA KAPOOR AND RANDY FABI  
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Nearly two decades after Indonesia's military was squeezed out of civilian affairs with the downfall of strongman leader Suharto, President Joko Widodo is drawing the army more closely into his wars on drugs, terrorism, and corruption.

Palace and military officials say Widodo's move is partly designed to counterbalance senior police officers who have crossed swords with him and who, critics say, are trying to undermine the agency leading the campaign against graft.

The police acknowledges "problems" in its relationship with the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), but says it is working with the agency to tackle graft.

The prospect of a greater role for the military in civilian matters does not presage a return to the authoritarianism of army General Suharto, when it oversaw government policy as well as providing national security, the officials said.

Indeed, military chief Moeldoko has sought to quell such concerns.

"As long as the military is needed by the country to safeguard the national development carried out by ministries, then go ahead," Moeldoko, who retires in July, told reporters this month. "But nobody should try to drag the military into politics."

Nevertheless, critics of Widodo's move fear it sets a dangerous precedent in a country where the military has a long tradition of involvement in politics and which directly elected a president for the first time only 11 years ago.

"While symbolic engagement with the military is important to get things done and to send a signal of stability, we're treading a dangerous line here," said Tobias Basuki, political analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a local think-tank.

"In the long term it will create a new Goliath within Indonesian politics if the military doesn't steer clear of civilian life."

## POWER PLAY

A senior government official with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters that Widodo, the first president from outside the country's political elite or armed forces, has struggled to assert himself over the police force and its political patrons, who include senior figures in his own party.

He trusts the military more than the police, the official said, and sees it as a potentially counterbalancing force.

The army's expansion into civilian affairs began last month, with the first major counter-terrorism operation since the response to a spate of hotel bombings in Jakarta in 2009. Anti-terrorism efforts are traditionally the domain of the police.

Approved by Widodo, who came to power in October, the military launched the six-month exercise to crack down on militants with suspected links to Islamic State. [ID:nL4N0HDDA]

Then, this month, the armed forces signed a memorandum of understanding to help the country's main anti-narcotics agency with its war on drugs, a top priority for Widodo.

Government officials said they are now considering legislative changes that would allow serving military officers to work in state ministries and agencies.

The ministries of transportation and fisheries, which handle projects and industries steeped in corruption, have asked that military personnel join their staff.

"If these requests are to be fulfilled, they should not violate any law," Cabinet Secretary Andi Widjajanto told reporters recently.

### BATTLE OVER CORRUPTION AGENCY

The KPK has taken the unprecedented step of seeking the military's assistance after being severely weakened by a tit-for-tat dispute with the police.

General Moeldoko said he already had two officers in mind to join the KPK after they retired from service in a few months.

The agency, popular with ordinary citizens for going after Indonesia's moneyed elites, hopes the military's inclusion will protect it from police intervention.

KPK officials were not immediately available for comment.

Since the KPK declared a prominent police general a corruption suspect in January, the police has launched a series of investigations against the agency that have led to the suspension of two of its commissioners.

The KPK has since dropped its case against police general Budi Gunawan, who was subsequently named deputy police chief.

The police do not see the expansion of the military's powers as a threat.

"We don't at all think the military is a threat to us or our role in society. We don't think there is any sort of balancing going on," said Agus Rianto, national police spokesman.

He also said the police would investigate complaints of corruption made against it, and added: "To say there is a public perception that the police is corrupt is not accurate."

Activists say allowing the military to help fight corruption may be an effective stop-gap measure to shore up the KPK, but it threatens to leave the military immune to graft investigations itself.

The military has a history of acquiring strategic assets, especially in the resources sector. Suharto was reported to have a sprawling business empire worth \$15 billion when he resigned in 1998.

"The consequence is that the military will be untouchable in corruption investigations," said Adnan Topan Husodo of Indonesia Corruption Watch.