

TNI Bill and Regional Autonomy: Implications for Central-Regional Relations in Security Management

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Abstract

Following the 1998 reforms, Indonesia experienced a significant transformation in the security sector, marked by the elimination of the dual function of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) and the strengthening of civilian supremacy. However, the current discussion of the Draft Law on the Indonesian National Armed Forces (RUU TNI) has raised concerns about the return of military dominance in civil affairs through military operations other than war (OMSP). This study analyzes the potential impact of the RUU TNI on central-regional relations in security management. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through literature study, this study examines the normative provisions in the RUU TNI and compares them with the principles of democratization and decentralization. The findings show that expanding the role of the TNI in domestic affairs without a civilian oversight mechanism and coordination with local governments has the potential to blur the boundaries between civil defense and security functions, weaken regional autonomy, and create institutional tensions. Central dominance through the military also increases the risk of human rights violations and reduces accountability for security governance. Therefore, the revision of the RUU TNI needs to consider the principles of civilian supremacy, military professionalism, and regional participation in national security policies to prevent the decline of democratic reforms and maintain inclusive and equitable national integration.

Keywords: TNI Bill; Regional Autonomy; Security Management

Introduction

After the 1998 reforms, the direction of development of Indonesia's security sector underwent major changes, one of which was the elimination of the dual function of the ABRI which during the New Order era gave the military a dual role in defense affairs as well as politics and civil government. This change was part of the democratization and civil supremacy efforts aimed at limiting military interference in non-defense affairs. However, post-reform dynamics show that the security sector reform process has not been fully completed. In this context, the Draft Law on the Indonesian National Armed Forces (RUU TNI) currently being discussed raises concerns about the possibility of the re-emergence of old patterns of military involvement in civil affairs under the pretext of military operations other than war (OMSP), including in the management of regional security (Sarjono, 2021).

These concerns are not without foundation. Several provisions in the TNI Bill that open up space for direct TNI involvement in domestic areas have the potential to create overlapping authority with civilian institutions, especially the police and local governments. In a democratic country, domestic security management should be under civilian control and through accountable mechanisms, in accordance with the principles of security sector reform (Gunawan, 2024). The return of the military to civilian affairs, especially without strong



civilian supervision, has the potential to blur the boundaries between defense and security, and weaken the principles of democracy and decentralization that have been fought for. Therefore, the discussion of the TNI Bill must be viewed not only from the aspect of state resilience, but also from its impact on central-regional relations and the future of democracy in Indonesia.

Decentralization that began with the implementation of Law No. 22 of 1999 and strengthened by Law No. 23 of 2014 provides broad space for regions to regulate their own affairs, including in aspects of security and public order which are part of general government affairs. However, in practice, the relationship between the center and the regions is often still marked by inequality, especially in strategic sectors such as security. The TNI Bill which gives the military broader authority to be directly involved in domestic areas without a clear coordination mechanism with the regional government can actually erode the spirit of autonomy. This raises concerns that the central government is using the TNI as an instrument of control over the regions, especially in areas that are considered "vulnerable" or have complex local political dynamics (Apandi et al., 2025).

In addition, the direct involvement of the TNI in the regions without a local civilian mandate also threatens accountability and transparency in security management. Local governments, which are legally responsible for the order and security of their citizens, are marginalized in strategic decision-making. This not only undermines the principles of good governance, but also obscures the checks and balances mechanism between the central government, regions, and state security institutions. In the context of a democratic state that adheres to a decentralized system, central domination through military power has the potential to re-emerge the New Order-style centralist pattern with a new face wrapped in a narrative of national stability. Therefore, the discussion of the TNI Bill needs to be criticized by considering its implications for regional capacity and authority in managing security independently and democratically (Prayudi, 2021).

The tension between centralization and decentralization of security is increasingly acute when the TNI Bill provides space for military involvement in domestic security operations without going through licensing procedures involving local governments or legislative institutions. This shows a tendency towards recentralization of power, which is actually contrary to the spirit of decentralization reform. According to Lathifah et al (2024), one of the important achievements of decentralization is the ability of regions to adapt policies to local contexts, including in responding to social and security dynamics that are unique to each region. When security policies are pulled back to the center through military intervention, the adaptive capacity of the regions weakens and the space for local participation in strategic decision-making narrows. This not only has the potential to cause coordination conflicts between institutions, but also creates distrust between the center and the regions.

Furthermore, the practice of centralizing security through military institutions can pose a risk of human rights violations, especially in areas with a history of conflict or separatist movements. The TNI, as a defense institution, is not designed to carry out civil security functions that require a humanistic and human rights-based approach as mandated to the police. The assignment of the TNI in a domestic context without strong accountability opens up room for abuse of authority and disproportionate violence, as has happened in Aceh and Papua in the past. Therefore, it is important to ensure that any regulations related to the TNI's role in domestic security are drafted with the principle of caution, effective civilian oversight, and consider the framework of decentralization as part of a democratic governance system.

In the context of regional governance, the presence of the TNI in local security affairs that are not regulated transparently and accountably can create institutional uncertainty and disrupt the authority of regional heads as holders of public mandates. Regional governments, which have direct electoral legitimacy, can lose their autonomy and capacity to respond to security issues in their own regions if the role of the TNI is not subject to civilian coordination mechanisms. This not only has implications for the blurring of jurisdictional boundaries

between institutions, but can also cause political tension at the local level, especially if military intervention is considered to violate regional sovereignty. As explained by Irianto & Jurdi (2022), local political stability in a country undergoing democratic consolidation is highly dependent on vertical harmony between the center and the regions and respect for the decentralized structure that has been built.

Furthermore, the involvement of the TNI without clear boundaries can also have an impact on public perception of security institutions and the government as a whole. When the public witnesses repressive practices or military domination in civilian space, trust in the state as a protector of the rights and freedoms of its citizens can be eroded. This can deepen social fragmentation and weaken the legitimacy of the government, both at the central and regional levels. Indonesia's history shows that long-term stability cannot be built on a coercive approach, but rather through participatory, transparent, and trust-based governance (Afandi M & Afandi SA, 2018). Therefore, the TNI Bill must be analyzed not only from the perspective of operational efficiency, but also from how it contributes to or hinders the process of democratization and sustainable institutional development at the regional level.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive literature study approach. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the study is to analyze the discourse and normative content of the Draft Law on the Indonesian National Army (RUU TNI) and its implications for central-regional relations in security management. Literature studies allow researchers to examine in depth various relevant written sources, including laws and regulations, previous research results, academic journal articles, international organization reports, and expert opinions in the fields of security politics, decentralization, and defense sector reform.

The data collection procedure was carried out by tracing and reviewing official documents such as the draft of the TNI Bill, Law Number 34 of 2004 concerning the TNI, Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, and various regulations related to the management of national security and regional autonomy. In addition, this study also uses secondary sources such as academic books (for example, works by Jun Honna, Vedi Hadiz, and Marcus Mietzner), national and international scientific journal articles published from 2015 to 2025, and reports from institutions such as Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through content analysis techniques, focusing on identifying patterns of authority relations, potential institutional conflicts, and normative implications for democratic and decentralized security governance. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, namely by comparing various views and findings from various credible literature, especially those from scientific publications in the last decade.

Result and Discussion

Reorientation of the Role of the TNI in the Bill and its Challenges to Security Sector Reform

1. Expansion of OMSP Functions in the TNI Bill: Threat to Civil-Military Demarcation

One of the crucial issues in the discussion of the TNI Bill is the expansion of the function of Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP) which now includes areas that were previously civilian domains, such as handling horizontal conflicts, domestic security disturbances, and assistance to local governments. This expansion of functions raises serious concerns because it has the potential to blur the institutional boundaries that have been painstakingly built since the 1998 reforms, namely the clear demarcation between military and civilian roles. Since the reform era, Indonesia has normatively adhered to the principle of civilian supremacy, where the TNI is focused on dealing with external threats to the state, while domestic security is the

exclusive domain of the Police. However, by opening up space for the TNI to be involved in domestic affairs without rigid legal parameters and without adequate democratic oversight mechanisms, this bill actually opens up a gap for the remilitarization of public space—an authoritarian practice that should have been buried with the New Order regime.

Furthermore, military involvement in the civilian sphere is not only a legalistic problem, but also an epistemic problem that disrupts the principles of democratic governance. Academic literature has provided early warnings of this danger. Suropati (2019) explains how the TNI strategically maintains its influence post-reformation through informal channels, including in local politics and regional security. Adri (2025) even clearly states that the Indonesian military often rejects subordination to civilian authorities as part of its resistance to democratization. These studies emphasize that military involvement in domestic affairs tends to have authoritarian consequences, not because of the institution's bad intentions alone, but because the military's structure and culture are not designed to guarantee accountability to civilians in the context of a state of law.

This condition is even more worrying if we refer to the case studies in Papua and Poso, where the involvement of the TNI in security operations actually worsened the escalation of violence and resulted in serious human rights violations. For example, in the case of Papua, the militaristic approach to the separatist conflict has been repeatedly criticized by Komnas HAM and international organizations due to the lack of transparency and the absence of legal accountability for the actions of the authorities. This phenomenon shows that without a clear delineation of functions and strict civilian control, the involvement of the TNI in domestic security affairs is prone to abuse, and strengthens the impunity of the authorities in areas that actually require a civilian and dialogical approach (Haripin, 2019).

Thus, the expansion of OMSP in the TNI Bill not only raises normative issues related to the division of authority, but also becomes a structural threat to Indonesia's democratization. Instead of strengthening national resilience, this provision can actually weaken the building of constitutional democracy that places civilians as the main actors in state governance. Therefore, efforts to include civilian functions within the scope of OMSP must be rejected, unless accompanied by strict, transparent regulations and effectively supervised by democratic institutions.

2. Overlapping Authority between the TNI and Polri: A Threat to the Effectiveness of Security Governance

The provisions in the Draft Law on the TNI raise serious concerns about overlapping authority between the TNI and Polri, especially in the context of handling non-military security disturbances. The unclear delineation of roles between the two institutions creates a legal gray area that not only disrupts the effectiveness of national security governance, but also has the potential to threaten the basic principles of democracy and civil supremacy. Normatively, the concept of "Military Operations Other Than War" (OMSP) which is the basis for military participation in non-combat tasks still contains interpretive ambiguity. In Indonesian military doctrine, OMSP includes handling terrorism, social conflict, and securing vital objects, but is not accompanied by rigid and accountable legal parameters. This allows the TNI to enter civilian areas without clear procedures and strong civil supervision, thus violating the principle of checks and balances which is the foundation of a state based on law.

Empirically, this overlap is not only potential, but has occurred repeatedly in practice. One relevant case study is the involvement of the TNI in handling social conflicts in Papua, where the military not only took over the role of the Police, but also carried out intelligence, law enforcement, and even territorial development functions that directly intersect with civil society. In various operations in Papua and Aceh, the absence of civilian accountability and weak transparency actually increased the risk of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings. When the TNI was given too much space to

operate in domestic affairs, not only did coordination conflicts occur, but also a shift in role from a defense actor to a dominant internal security actor, a phenomenon that many experts call a form of "remilitarization" of civil space (Wanzira, 2022; Tapsell, 2015)

Furthermore, this overlapping role also results in duplication of functions between the TNI and Polri, which not only impacts institutional inefficiency, but also strengthens sectoral egos and institutional rivalries. In the study of public administration science and democratic security governance theory, the existence of two actors working in one domain without systemic integration creates what is called "fragmented governance", namely a management system that is not consolidated, full of overlaps, and risks creating incoherent policies. This rivalry has peaked in several incidents, for example in the case of the arrest of terrorists by Special Detachment 88 (Polri) which received resistance from military elements in several regions, indicating that the division of roles is not only not yet normatively complete, but also a source of practical tension in the field.

In a theoretical framework, this problem can be analyzed through the security sector reform (SSR) approach, which emphasizes the importance of professionalizing the security forces and strictly separating the functions of the military and police. SSR emphasizes that the military must focus on external threats, while the police are at the forefront of law enforcement and domestic security. When this boundary line is blurred, not only is efficiency threatened, but also the legitimacy of the institution in the eyes of the public. Without strict regulatory reforms, such as strict restrictions on the role of the military in civilian affairs and strengthening oversight by civilian authorities, Indonesia is at risk of experiencing a democratic setback, with the military's role in politics and public life strengthening again. Therefore, the revision of the TNI Bill is not just an administrative issue, but concerns the direction and future of democracy itself, whether we want to strengthen civilian supremacy or allow the military to return to the heart of civilian life without adequate control.

3. Absence of Civilian Oversight Mechanism in the Bill: Weakening the Direction of Security Sector Reform

One of the most crucial issues in the TNI Bill is the absence of a firm civilian oversight mechanism in the process of deploying military forces, especially for domestic interests. In a constitutional democratic system, civilian oversight of the military is a fundamental principle that affirms the supremacy of civilian authority over armed forces as a form of protection for human rights values and the rule of law. Unfortunately, in a number of strategic articles of the TNI Bill, there is no clause that explicitly requires parliamentary procedures or approval from civilian authorities—either at the central or regional levels—before deploying troops to handle domestic affairs. The absence of this mechanism is not merely a vacuum of administrative law, but reflects a restorative tendency towards the dominant role of the military as occurred during the New Order era.

This phenomenon is very contrary to the mainstream literature on security sector reform (SSR) which emphasizes the importance of civilian control as an absolute requirement for military democratization. In the study of Ng.J & Kurniawan (2024), civilian supervision is not only a formal control tool, but also part of the cultural transformation of military institutions to operate within the framework of democratic values, transparency, and accountability. Without such control, the military risks becoming an autonomous actor politically and operationally, as has happened in a number of democratic transition countries that have failed to effectively control the military—for example, Thailand after the 2014 military coup where the absence of civilian control has resulted in a militaristic and authoritarian government, while marginalizing civilian institutions.

In the Indonesian context, the impact of weak oversight of TNI deployment for domestic affairs can be seen in several case studies—for example, military operations in Papua. In the report by Priesdiantoro et al (2024), it was revealed that TNI involvement in handling social

conflicts and separatism in Papua often did not go through effective coordination with local civil authorities and resulted in serious violations of human rights, including violence against civilians. This was exacerbated by the procedural ambiguity between pure military operations and operations to assist the police, which opened up a grey area in terms of accountability.

Furthermore, this lack of assertiveness in civilian oversight can create institutional disincentives to military professionalization. When the deployment of the TNI to the domestic sphere is not accompanied by strict control and accountability mechanisms, there is no structural incentive for the TNI to limit itself to external defense functions as stipulated in the 2004 TNI Law. Thus, the revision of the TNI Bill that does not include strengthening civilian control actually risks undoing the achievements of reform over the past two decades, and leading to the reconstruction of a military-centered state security model.

On a broader level, the elimination or weakening of the civilian oversight mechanism cannot be separated from the global trend of democratic backsliding, where military actors are given back political space under the pretext of national stability and security. Therefore, a critical reading of the TNI Bill is important, not only as a legal-formal discourse, but as part of the struggle to ensure that the armed forces of the state remain subject to the principles of democracy, human rights, and public accountability.

Implications of the TNI Bill on Decentralization and Central-Regional Relations in Security Governance

1. Centralization of Security Authority: A Threat to the Spirit of Regional Autonomy

The point regarding the centralization of security authority in the TNI Bill highlights the symptoms of recentralization of power by the central government, especially through provisions that allow the deployment of military forces without consultation or approval from local governments. Such provisions are not only normatively contrary to the spirit of decentralization mandated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, but also indicate a regression of democracy in terms of the distribution of authority. Theoretically, decentralization is not only intended to bring public services closer to the community, but also to strengthen local capacity in handling strategic issues, including security. Governance theory states that the effectiveness of government is highly dependent on horizontal collaboration between institutions, not vertical domination (Basri et al., 2024). Thus, by ignoring the position of regional heads in decision-making regarding military deployment, the state is actually weakening the principles of participatory and contextual governance.

In practice, this inequality has created tension between the center and the regions, as seen in the case of conflict management in Papua. The central government often uses a militaristic approach through the deployment of the TNI without actively involving the local government. A study conducted by Sudira et al (2021) shows that the top-down security approach in Papua actually worsens the alienation of local communities towards the state, and increases distrust of the central government. Regional heads are often not involved substantively in the decision-making process, even though they have a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of their region. This phenomenon makes it clear that the absence of coordination with local governments not only weakens the effectiveness of conflict management but also has the potential to harm the legitimacy of the state as a whole in the eyes of citizens.

Moreover, the recentralization approach in the security sector also reflects internal contradictions in the institutional design of the state. On the one hand, the constitution and the Regional Government Law emphasize the importance of real and responsible autonomy, but on the other hand, legal instruments such as the TNI Bill open up loopholes for centralistic practices that erode local sovereignty. From a critical legal studies perspective, this is a form of legal ambiguity that functions to maintain the dominance of central state power over peripheral regions under the pretext of national stability. If there is no correction to this kind

of legal norm, there will be a structural imbalance in the government system that is not only detrimental to the regions, but also threatens the principle of a democratic unitary state.

Thus, the provisions in the TNI Bill that ignore the role of regional heads in security affairs must be reviewed critically, not only from a legal-formal aspect, but also from the perspective of substantial democracy and territorial justice. A deliberative and binding coordination mechanism is needed, so that central-regional relations are not merely hierarchical, but collaborative. Only with this kind of approach can the state maintain national stability without sacrificing the foundation of regional autonomy that has been fought for since the reformation.

2. Institutional Friction between the TNI, Polri, and Regional Government

Institutional friction between the TNI, Polri, and local governments represents a structural problem in the design of Indonesia's national security governance, which until now is still shrouded in normative ambiguity and implementation disharmony. Legally, Law Number 34 of 2004 concerning the Indonesian National Armed Forces and Law Number 2 of 2002 concerning the Indonesian National Police explicitly separate the roles of external defense (TNI) and internal security (Polri). However, in practice, this division of functions is often blurred, especially when the central government uses its authority to deploy the TNI in domestic security operations without transparent coordination with local governments. The lack of involvement of local actors in the planning and execution of security policies creates structural dissonance, dwarfs the function of local governments, and weakens the principle of regional autonomy which should guarantee contextual policy responses to local dynamics (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the placement of the TNI in domestic security situations also creates an epistemological dilemma. The TNI was formed and trained to deal with military threats through a coercive approach based on enemy logic, while the Polri works within a civil legal framework that emphasizes due process and human rights protection. This difference in institutional character creates a space for conflict when both are involved in the same situation without a clear chain of command and coordination. A study by Rizal et al (2024) shows that the failure to clearly separate the roles of the military and the police in the context of transitional democracy contributed to the formation of a dual security apparatus that is inefficient and poses a high risk to public accountability. In the Indonesian context, this is clearly seen in the case of Papua, where the involvement of the military in operations to deal with separatism is often carried out behind closed doors, ignoring civilian mechanisms and leading to increased reports of human rights violations, such as in the case of the shooting of civilians in Intan Jaya (2020) which has not yet received adequate judicial resolution.

In addition to Papua, the Poso riots in the early 2000s also became a classic case study regarding the overlapping authority between the TNI and Polri. When the conflict escalated, the central government deployed military troops to strengthen security restoration operations. However, weak coordination between the TNI and Polri commands resulted in failure in handling this community-based conflict, and exacerbated social tensions at the local level. The local government, in this case, was only a passive spectator because it was not involved in the conflict resolution strategy, even though they had a deeper cultural and social understanding of the root of the problem. This confirms that a centralized and elitist security approach is counterproductive in the context of Indonesia's plurality and social diversity.

Thus, this friction is not merely a technical issue of coordination between institutions, but rather a symptom of the absence of adaptive and democratic institutional design. Policy reformation is needed that places synergy not only as bureaucratic jargon, but as a substantive framework that simultaneously unites national and local security visions. Security sector reform must be directed at strengthening civilian supremacy, clarifying the boundaries of function between institutions, and building horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms

that guarantee the active involvement of local governments in every process of handling domestic security. Without such structural improvements, friction between state institutions will continue to recur, and civilians will remain the main victims of security policies that fail to read local complexities.

3. Erosion of Good Governance Principles and Local Participation in Security Governance

The final point reviews how the design of the TNI Bill that minimizes the role of regions reflects a weakening of the principles of good governance, especially transparency, accountability, and public participation. In the framework of modern governance, regional governments should have a deliberative role in designing security strategies that are in accordance with the social and geographical characteristics of each region. When regions do not have the space to participate in the strategic decision-making process—especially regarding the deployment of military forces—then the space for public participation narrows. As a result, security policies become top-down, non-contextual, and potentially rejected by local communities. This is in stark contrast to the post-reform agenda of democratization and locally-based institutional development. The third point highlights how the design of the TNI Bill that reduces the role of regional governments in security affairs reflects an erosion of the principles of good governance, especially transparency, accountability, and public participation. In the literature on governance, as explained by Firdaus (2020), good governance requires the involvement of multiple actors in the decision-making process, including local actors, in order to create participatory, adaptive, and contextual policies. However, the design of the TNI Bill that strengthens centralism in strategic decision-making—without opening up consultative space for regional governments—instead shows a normative decline in democratic practices. When the central authority monopolizes the authority to deploy military force, not only is local participation space marginalized, but also the potential for ignoring the social sensitivities inherent in each region. This raises a real risk of top-down, non-contextual, and even counterproductive security policies for stability itself.

The Papua case study is a concrete illustration of how a security approach that does not involve local actors actually creates horizontal and vertical tensions. In several military operations in the region, a repressive approach with minimal consultation with local governments and indigenous communities has actually deepened distrust of the state, exacerbated conflicts, and widened the gap between the center and regions. Iskandar (2021) in his book emphasizes that security policies that are not sensitive to the local context can lead to human rights violations and delegitimize state institutions in the eyes of the public. The lack of regional involvement in formulating such policies is contrary to the spirit of security sector reform that emphasizes military professionalism, civilian supremacy, and democratic governance.

Furthermore, the weakening of the position of regional governments in security strategies also contradicts the logic of decentralization stipulated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. This law emphasizes the importance of the role of regions in matters of public order and security. By ignoring this role, the TNI Bill has the potential to create overlapping jurisdictions and weaken the effectiveness of policies in the field. In fact, in the framework of multi-level governance, synergy between central and local actors is an absolute requirement for successful governance, especially in a highly sensitive field such as security. When this bill moves in the direction of consolidating security power in the hands of the center, what will happen is not the strengthening of the state, but rather the decay from within of the principles of democracy that have been fought for since the reformation. Therefore, it is important to view the revision of the TNI Bill not only as a technical issue of military institutions, but as a crucial indicator of the direction of the decline of Indonesian democracy

Conclusion

The draft TNI Law currently being discussed reflects the potential for regression in Indonesia's post-1998 security sector reform. There are a number of crucial issues that raise concerns, such as the expansion of the military's role into the civilian realm through OMSP, the potential for overlapping authority with the National Police, and the weakness of civilian oversight mechanisms. In addition, the tendency to recentralize power and ignore the role of local governments in security policy risks violating the principles of regional autonomy and good governance. The unclear delineation of roles between security actors, minimal local participation, and a top-down approach that ignores the local socio-cultural context can increase the potential for conflict and human rights violations. Therefore, the revision of the TNI Bill must be carried out comprehensively by emphasizing the principles of civilian supremacy, military professionalism, strengthening civilian oversight, and the establishment of a deliberative coordinating mechanism between the center and regions. Without firm corrections, this bill not only threatens the direction of democratic reform, but also endangers national integration based on justice, transparency, and participation.

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