A return to the past or a new geopolitical future? The implications of past communal conflict for contemporary security debates in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper explores the links between communal violence in Poso at the onset of democratisation in Indonesia and contemporary politico-security dynamics. Poso regained national attention in recent years when East Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT) jihadis set up a base in the region and declared allegiance to ISIS and joint police-military operations ensued. This paper argues that scale and “performance” of the security operations – to weed out a small group of poorly-resourced armed men – connects local-national-global dynamics and keeps the threat of terrorism and insecurity and at the forefront of public discourse in Indonesia. This has served the interests of those advocating for a greater role for the Indonesian military in domestic affairs through proposed revisions to the Anti-Terrorism Law and for better resourcing for the military. Yet, the evidence suggests there has been little local support for the ideology of MIT in Poso and the risk of wide-spread engagement or violence is low, especially given that the local discontent which initially drove the conflict has dissipated. Such developments raise questions as to whether Indonesia risks a return to the illiberal past when the military dominated many aspects of civic and political life and in some cases acted with impunity.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethno-religious violence, Illiberalism, Democratisation, Counter-terrorism, Security

Introduction

On October 28, 2015, 1000 police and 700 military personnel descended on the Poso district in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, as a part of a joint operation to capture a small group of armed militants that had declared allegiance to ISIS two years prior. The group, mobilising under the banner of the East Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT) established in 2012, was led by its self-proclaimed ‘amir’, Santoso, also known as Abu Wardah as-Syarqi (Jones and Solahudin 2014). Santoso was both born in Poso and was a former combatant in its well-known communal conflict that broke out at the onset of *reformasi* (the reform era) in Indonesia. He gained notoriety for declaring an oath of allegiance to ISIS in 2014 after returning to his homeland and, in-line with the ISIS ideology, planned to establish a caliphate with its base in the Poso region. The police claim he had access to funds through ISIS networks (Tempo.co 2016a), that he had conducted small-scale jihadi trainings in the Poso highlands and that he had mobilised a small number of ethnic Uighurs from Xinjiang, China (three seem to have made it to Poso – IPAC 2015b). The group is also alleged to have organised a number of attacks aimed at the police - killing two policemen in the provincial capital, Palu, in 2011, and six more in Poso in 2012 - and to have organised a bungled attempt to bomb the Poso police command in 2013 (Jones and Solahudin 2014; IPAC 2015b; Sunudyantoro et al. 2016).

The 10-week joint security forces campaign which began in October that year - Camar Maleo IV – constituted the fourth phase of the special operations conducted in 2015.² Until Camar Maleo IV, each phase of the security operations involved different configurations of personnel from police command divisions and police special forces, predominantly without the involvement of the Indonesian military.³ Even though the second in command of the group, Daeng Koro – a former military Special Forces (Kopassus) trainee – was killed during a gun battle with the elite Mobile Brigade (Brimob) battalion of the police force earlier in April of that year, overall the Camar Maleo operations were generally considered to be unsuccessful as they only managed to arrest, wound or kill a small number of the militants. Santoso and most of his band of followers had managed to evade capture, despite what

² The first phase of Operation Camar Maleo involved 1600 police personnel, including members of the Densus 88 counter terrorism squad, a Mobile Brigade battalion from Jakarta and members of the provincial and district police commands. Camar Maleo II and III predominantly involved police personnel from Central Sulawesi and the Brimob battalion from Depok, amounting to 1000 in each phase, with an additional 100 military personnel assisting in the third phase (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016; IPAC 2016).

³ Approximately 100 military personnel assisted in Operation Camar Maleo III (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016).

seemed to be poor resourcing for their own campaign. At their height the group appears to have totalled around 50 people⁴, with each of the first three phases of the Camar Maleo operations retrieving but a handful of weapons along with a greater number of homemade bombs (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016). The significant involvement of the military in the efforts to weed out MIT changed with Camar Maleo IV and subsequent operations. On January 10, 2016, just as President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) power was beginning to consolidate following his first cabinet reshuffle (Warburton 2017), joint police-military operations were reconfigured and scaled up through Operation Tinombala I with Jokowi's backing (Tempo.co 2016b).

This time, more than 3000 members of the security forces, made up of almost equal numbers of the police and military⁵, descended on Poso to the disgruntlement of many members of the Poso community who were somewhat fatigued from the extended operations in the region. The operation included the most elite branches of the security forces - the Densus 88 counter terrorism squad, the Army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) and Kopassus. In the first phase of Operation Tinombala, 10 members of the group were killed (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016). In July 2016, during the second phase of Operation Tinombala, Santoso himself and four members of his group came under fire from the Alfa 29 team from Kostrad in the hills of Tambarana village. Santoso, along with another prominent MIT figure, Muktar, were killed, and nine other followers were arrested (ibid.). Throughout the remainder of 2016 and 2017, other members were captured or handed themselves in. Special funding for the operation continued to be extended in three-month phases. As of late March 2018, the operation remained in place and is expected to continue (Interview with the Regional Police Chief, March 2018), even though only seven members of the group remained at large in September 2017 (Kompas 2017).

Alongside the extensive military operations in Poso, throughout 2016-2017 a Special Parliamentary Committee debated revisions to the Anti-Terrorism Law (Law No 15/2003), including considerations to extend the jurisdiction for domestic counter-terrorism operations to clearly include a role for the military, which had been limited to only joining operations on the invitation of the police and the President. Press statements by members of the

⁴ Accounts of the numbers vary. Early estimates put this number at 29 (Arnaz 2016), 30 (Jones 2015), 41 (Ahad 2016), while other later estimates drawing on police figures and the growth in group numbers put this figure at 49 (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016).

⁵ 1,543 police and 1,791 military (Sunudyantoro et al. 2016). IPAC (2016) puts this number at 2400, but other sources agree the operations were larger.

committee, military and police officials, state officials and other advocates for an expanded role for the military in counter-terrorism operations, frequently cited the Poso operations as an example of a successful joint counter-terrorism effort. The deliberations reached their final stages in March 2018, concluding that the military will have a designated role in counter-terrorism operations in a ratified draft, however, the specific details on the mechanisms for military involvement will be dealt with through a presidential regulation (Erdianto 2018a, 2018b).

It is unsurprising in the present era of global concern with the threat of terrorism that the Indonesian state launched security operations to curb the actions of a group claiming allegiance to ISIS. However, the scale of the operations and their continued extension, raises questions as to why an armed but seemingly poorly-resourced group of less than 50 people elicited such a heavy-handed response from the state and whose interests this serves. The developments in Poso also raise questions as to whether the region, with its history of communal violence at the onset of democratisation, has indeed posed a more recent security threat - as national discourse would suggest - and if, from local perspectives, there has been a significant risk of new forms of mobilisation emerging or a re-ignition of violence in the region. To help answer these questions, this paper seeks to situate the present security dynamics in the historical context of communal violence and the inter-related ebbs and flows of securitisation in Poso.

Significant scholarship has explored the early escalation of the communal violence in Poso and its local politico-economic dynamics at the onset of *reformasi* (the reform era) in Indonesia. It identifies how the escalation in violence was rooted in the local dynamics of inter-group inequalities, other grievances and politico-economic opportunity seeking that surfaced with the changes in Indonesia's politico-economic structures in the early years of *reformasi* (Aragon 2001; Diprose 2009, 2012; McRae 2008, 2013; Sangaji 2007; Sidel 2006; Tajima 2014; and van Klinken 2007). Most of this work (with perhaps the exception of Van Klinken) elucidates how these local dynamics evolved and escalated into the armed inter-religious group violence involving a variety of armed jihadi fighters and other militias for which Poso is now so well known. Some research investigates in detail the growth of terrorist networks specifically in Poso and more widely in Indonesia (see the extensive work of the

ICG, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010) and the 2007 counter-terrorism special operations launched to weed out the hardliner groups in the region (ICG 2007; McRae 2013). Other analysis – on which this article also draws – explains how tensions de-escalated with the efforts of a variety of actors to redress the relational dimensions and underlying local drivers of the conflict, alongside the wider security-focussed interventions (see in particular Diprose 2009, 2012; Maddison and Diprose 2017).

Yet, there has been less focus in the conflict literature on the intersections between local and supra-local politico-economics dynamics and how these have evolved over the first two decades since the end of authoritarian rule to the present-day security operations. The story of Poso detailed in this paper highlights how, during the initial instability that characterised democratising Indonesia, these intersections shifted what was a localised, sub-national conflict into one with national and even global significance, with continued relevance today. Our research draws on multiple rounds of qualitative fieldwork conducted by the authors over the past 15 years in Poso, Palu and beyond, most recently in October 2016.⁶ Over this period, hundreds of interviews have been conducted with a range of actors, including former combatants, villagers, journalists, civil society organisations, local politicians, bureaucrats and others. Perceptions surveys were also conducted in 2006 and 2009 to garner wider views.

By drawing on longitudinal field research and the wider literature, we explain how the situation in Poso has changed over time, how sub-national and national dynamics and interests are interwoven with national and global shifts in security discourse, and how the developments in Poso have fed into other national agendas. This helps to elucidate the extent of contemporary “insecurity” in Poso and what benefits accrue to actors from security operations in the region. Revisiting the initial conflict dynamics and tracing the developments over the past two decades also provides insights into the more recent indications of growing illiberalism in contemporary Indonesia and the connections between past and present. Indeed, Diprose, McRae and Hadiz (2019) argue that there are indications of a wider ‘illiberal’ turn in Indonesian politics and society, which gained ground in President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s second term and have intensified under the Joko Widodo presidency.

⁶ A brief field visit was also conducted in March 2018.

In the first section of this article we briefly revisit the fractious national civil-military relations and security sector dynamics of the early reform years. We then provide a snapshot of the initial conflict dynamics in Poso and the different types of militias involved, focussing in particular on the growth of the Mujahidin networks that underlie the present security concerns and the competition between the police and the military for power and authority. We also situate the analysis of the conflict escalation in Poso within the wider national processes of democratisation, identifying intersections between local and supra-local developments. We then explore both the efforts to de-escalate the conflict and the past and present security operations in the region, incorporating local views from the field research. We demonstrate that while the embers of trauma from the conflict remain in Poso, there are few indications of wide-spread support for the MIT or a significant risk of a return to wide-spread violence in the region.

The analysis in the final sections of this article concentrates on the performative aspects of the recent security operations in Poso and how this intersects with other political developments in Indonesia, including the debates on the revisions to the Anti-Terrorism Law. We contend that the global discourse on anti-terrorism has provided domestic security and political actors⁷ with forums and mechanisms for prioritising and “performing” security and order to seek popular legitimacy and extend their power or authority. We also argue that the joint counter-terrorism special operations serve the interests of those who are advancing strategies to garner support for the military to have a greater role in internal security affairs—a role that was rolled back with the end of Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime. These developments are occurring in concert with other indications of the growing illiberalism in Indonesia in recent years, such as the use of exclusivist religious campaign platforms in elections by mainstream candidates with once pluralist views, the use of regulatory frameworks to disband societal organisations (albeit fringe organisations), weakened protections for minorities and growing hypernationalism (see for example Diprose, McRae and Hadiz 2019; Laksmana 2019; McGregor and Setiawan 2019; and Bouchier 2019).

Violence at the onset of democratisation: instability and the role of the security forces

⁷However, this paper predominantly explores the geopolitical interests of state and security actors in “performing” security, as we could find little evidence in the fieldwork that non-state actors were significantly involved in the hunt for Santoso or that they had established their own groups with a “security” function alongside the special operations (cf. Wilson and Bakker 2016).

Many scholars highlight that changes to opportunity structures and constraints, particularly those created by regime change, can provide the space for groups to mobilise and act collectively to challenge the status quo distribution of power and resources (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Bertrand 2004; Brass 1997; Tarrow 1998, 20). In some cases, such mobilisation results in violence. Indeed, with the onset of democratisation in 1999 in Indonesia, changes to the politico-economic structures and the distribution of power between the centre and periphery that had been entrenched under authoritarianism were dramatic (for a discussion see Diprose, McRae and Hadiz 2019).

Such changes were accompanied by a significant upsurge in violence;⁸ the dynamics and scale of which have been detailed in various in-depth studies and wider analyses of patterns of violence in the literature (Aspinall 2009; Azca 2003, 2005; Bertrand 2004; Davidson 2003; Diprose 2009; Herriman 2012; HRW 2002; McRae 2013; Tajima 2014; Sidel 2006; Sangaji 2007; Smith 2014; Varshney et al. 2004; Wilson 2005, 2008). These works and others explore the riots, protests and clashes with security forces in Jakarta and other capital cities which culminated in Suharto's resignation; the violence accompanying East Timor's vote for independence; the upscale of insurgent activity in Aceh and Papua; vigilante killings in Java, South Sumatra, and other regions; and the escalation of communal conflicts at the onset of democratisation in various districts in West Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan provinces, North Maluku province, and in Poso in Sulawesi and Ambon in Maluku. Yet, violence did not break out everywhere. Efforts by state and non-state actors to redress intergroup inequalities and prevent intergroup tensions and competition from escalating into violence had some success, even in places where there was a demographic base – be it religious, ethnic, organisational or otherwise – large enough for political mobilisation along group lines (see for example Diprose 2009, 2012).

The communal conflicts that did take place were not only underpinned by broader processes of democratisation which opened up new opportunities to reorganise the sub-national structures of power, but also by two specific sets of structural changes. First, the decentralisation of significant fiscal powers and authority to the sub-national level intensified the competition for sub-national leadership positions that, in turn, provided the

⁸ Major outbreaks in violence began to occur just prior to Suharto's downfall, particularly in West Kalimantan, at a time when there were signals that Suharto's grip on power was waning.

impetus for contending elites to mobilise their support bases (Diprose 2009; Van Klinken 2008). Second, contentious national-level civil-military relations and competition for authority over domestic security between the police and military in Indonesia had implications for conflict escalation. We discuss the background to these security sector changes immediately below, and then we ground these dynamics and the national-level structural changes in the discussion of the Poso conflict to demonstrate the national–sub-national linkages.

The ‘dual functions’ (*dwi fungsi*) of the military in security and politics and economic life - the hallmark of Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime and one of his primary instruments of exercising power - were significantly reduced with *reformasi*. In 1999, the first steps were taken to formally separate the functions of the police from that of the military, although the police initially remained under the direction of the Ministry of Defence. Military businesses were prohibited, military appointments to the legislature at all levels were abolished, and their role in domestic security was constrained to assisting in disasters and other states of emergency, or in special security operations with civilian oversight. Organisational relations between the military and Suharto’s Golkar party were cut (Nusa Bhakti et al. 2009). Where once the military had the power, resources and capacity to institute violence directly or through paramilitary groups (Barker 2001; Bouchier 1990; Fuller Collins 2002), or to quell dissent (Nusa Bhakti et al. 2009), its power was curbed when the authority for domestic security was transferred to the police under President Abdurrahman Wahid.

In 1999, civil-military tensions at the national level intensified following the first post-New Order general elections⁹, alongside which violence escalated in a number of provinces. While the relationship between then Commander of the Armed Forces, General Wiranto, and transitional President Habibie had been generally symbiotic and based on mutual benefits (Crouch 1999), Wiranto’s relationship with the newly elected President Wahid was fractious (Said 2001).¹⁰ Wahid weakened Wiranto’s position by replacing some of his allies in the senior leadership of the security forces and backing the military reformer Major General Agus Wirahadikusumah and his plan to dismantle the army’s territorial structure,

⁹ This was also complicated by then President Habibie’s endorsement of a referendum on independence for East Timor.

¹⁰ Wahid was elected by the members of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) following the general parliamentary elections in 1999.

although this plan did not materialise (Editors 2001; Mietzner 2001; Said 2001). In February 2000, Wahid suspended Wiranto over allegations of rights abuses in East Timor (Wiranto formally resigned in May of that year – Said 2001) and in July 2000 he shifted the authority over the police force from the Ministry of Defence and to that of the President. Factions within the military opposed to Wahid later backed his impeachment by the parliament in February 2001 (Said 2001).

The aforementioned research on the sub-national conflicts in Indonesia, particularly the work on Poso and Maluku (in the Moluccan islands), identifies how sub-national violence escalated during those initial years of democratisation from 1999-2001 amidst the heightened tensions in civil-military relations and the vacuum in functioning institutions of law and order. This was particularly the case when the police – weakened under the New Order military regime and ill-equipped to deal with large-scale violence (Tajima 2014) – failed to reign in conflicting forces. Meanwhile the military, which often had command or observation posts situated near to outbreaks in violence, took little action either by deliberate design – to demonstrate the relevance of the military for maintaining security and order given the national civil-military tensions (Sangaji 2007) – or in some cases due to capacity constraints (Tajima 2014). It is here that we start to see how national and sub-national dynamics began to interact amidst the unstable political order in both arenas. The institutions tasked with enforcing law and order were politicised at one level and then failed to perform their functions at the other.

Indeed, the Indonesian polity had been so accustomed to the presence of the military in much of political and civilian life under the New Order, that it came as quite a shock when their expectations – that the military would step in to halt the growing violence – went unmet, and the police were unable curb the unrest. As one district politician in Poso explained in July 2006:

District elites in Poso were certainly involved in inciting violence for political gain to detract from the corruption of the funds provided for relief during the economic crisis and to mobilise political support by tainting the reputation of their opponents during the violence. This was an old strategy used under the New Order where violence was used as a political weapon. The ability to incite and then rein in any unrest demonstrated their power—it was a show of force. I don't think they [the

district elites] had any idea of the beast they had unleashed nor just how far things would escalate when the military initially didn't step in.

Further, tensions between the military and police became increasingly apparent at the sub-national level, particularly when the material interests of the military were at risk. With authority for domestic security transferred to the police under *reformasi*, many of the military's sub-regional territorial commands and businesses were consequently dismantled. This disrupted their access to the licit and illicit rents they were able to garner through a variety of means, including more legitimate activities such as military businesses and securing vital national assets, and through the local private enterprises (owned by individuals in the military) or illicit activities undertaken by those situated in the regional commands (Aditjondro 2002; Sangaji 2007). It also created the opportunity for police actors to take over these activities. Roosa (2003) highlights that police-military tensions in some cases resulted in outright clashes (see also Nusa Bhakti et al. 2009; Kurniawan 2017).¹¹ Paradoxically, the competition for both command authority and the associated access to rents saw the security forces become a source of wider insecurity, with the IPAC (2015b) detailing various incidents in 2013-14.

Communal conflict in Poso

Early communal conflict dynamics in Poso: Inequalities and politico-economic exclusion

Poso district – located at some distance from the Central Sulawesi provincial capital, Palu – has long had a sizeable population of Muslims and Christians. Towards the end of the New Order, there was growing public complaints in Poso of political domination by Muslim elites and the exclusion of Christians from access to economic opportunities and representation by the state (Diprose 2009). In the years preceding the end of the New Order, much of the land that had been owned by ethnic groups such as the Pamona and the Moro, many of whom were Christians, had been sold to migrants, a large proportion of whom were Muslim. These lands were planted with cash crops such as cacao—one of the few commodities that remained unaffected by the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s (Aragon 2001). Further, there were complaints of favouritism for Muslim groups in the distribution of positions in the legislature (through parties, particularly Suharto's Golkar party) and the bureaucracy,

¹¹ Military-police competition and even clashes have occurred in many regions of Indonesia such as in the Moluccas, West Kalimantan and Aceh, among others.

particularly given the New Order administration had appointed the same Muslim leader as Poso District Head over two successive periods in the 1990s.¹² Since Indonesian independence, this position had traditionally been rotated between Muslim and Christian leaders, and to a degree among ethnic groups (Diprose 2012). The re-appointment was perceived locally to constitute a breakdown in long-standing power sharing relationships in the region (ibid.).

Differential economic opportunities together with claims of political exclusion, strengthened the discourse on inequalities at the elite and grassroots level, providing a base for mobilisation (Diprose 2012).¹³ Violence thus erupted alongside key political moments in the locality. For example, political tensions mounted in December 1998 when the district head announced his resignation and the lobbying of parliamentarians involved in the district head pre-selection process began, with some advocating for a Muslim to be appointed for a third period.¹⁴ Not only was the position symbolic for group representation in the region, but a number of interviewees outlined the lucrative gains to be made from occupying key civil service positions, such as the illicit rents that could be derived from private sector contractors and from extorting state funds earmarked for development programs, poverty alleviation projects and subsidies. Benefits would be distributed through patronage networks.

It was in this context that violence, triggered by a clash between youths of different faiths, broke out on Christmas Eve in December 1998, just a few days before the end of the Muslim fasting month. As the violence escalated over four days (much of it located in areas where civil servants lived) significant injuries were incurred, stores were looted and houses razed, with the losses mainly incurred mainly among Christians.¹⁵ Tensions continued in 1999 – a time when the first post-New Order national elections were held, and the decentralisation laws were ratified – as the discourse of politico-economic favouritism intensified in Poso. For example, the positions of the Speaker of the House, the District Head and his Deputy were all held by Bungku Muslims, which reinforced a widely-held view of “*semua dapat*

¹² During this period, district legislatures would send a short list to the central government, via the provincial administration, and the Ministry of Home Affairs would determine the selected candidate. Law No. 5/1974 specified a two-term limit.

¹³ A 2001 survey conducted by Muslim intellectuals, found that 67% of respondents attributed the conflict (particularly during Phase 3) to competition for elite level civil service positions, with only 6% attributing it to religious differences (Mappangara 2001).

¹⁴ The appointment did indeed go to a Muslim, following alleged payments to district parliamentarians (by 1999).

¹⁵ There were also efforts target those civil servants (or their property) with knowledge of large-scale corruption among government officials in the first phase of the conflict.

Bungku” (the Bungku get everything), and the distribution of parliamentary seats favoured Muslims. Inter-group competition was complicated by the change in district demographics following the carving out of Morowali in 1999 from Poso under decentralisation, rendering the proportion of Christians and Muslims in the region almost equal (BPS Jakarta 2000).

Violence did not occur again until April 2000 in Poso, alongside another key political moment – the competition for the District Secretary position. This was also at a time when national civil-military tensions had heightened under the Wahid administration mentioned previously. An orchestrated riot between youths saw violence escalate, again resulting in significant property destruction, the razing of houses of worship and predominantly Christian casualties (Diprose 2012; McRae 2013). What distinguishes this violence from the previous phase is that Poso residents were well aware of the significant inter-religious group violence that had occurred in Maluku and elsewhere over the prior year, which many interviewees argued heightened their perception of risk, fuelled action and more generally inflamed inter-religious group tensions the region.

In the third phase in between May and June 2000 (noting that at the national level Wiranto resigned in May and in June the Ministry of Defence lost its authority over the police), violence became more organised on both sides and changed form – much of it was shaped by retribution for prior acts and this time was largely led by the Christian side. From this point forward, the scale and the reach of the conflict significantly shifted into supra-local domains: combatants, arms and financing and other support began to flow from outside the district through networks of actors on both sides, first from other provincial actors, then from other islands and beyond.

For example, there was a significant influx of external support, initially from within the province: informally, networks within the Al Khairat Muslim association and the Central Sulawesi Christian Church [GKST] facilitated mobilisation (interviews 2005, 2006; HRW 2002). After the killing of a significant number of people taking refuge from the violence in a Walisongo Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*) (for which three Christians were given the death penalty), increasing numbers of combatants arrived from conflict sites in Maluku and North Maluku, and from Java (see the discussion of militias below). The fighting was eventually brought under control with an additional 1500 military troops sent to the region as police were unable to rein in the violence. By June 2000, both the police and military had

established separate operations, respectively the Sadar Maleo and the Cinta Damai, under the operational command of the Central Sulawesi police as per the police's new-found authority for security. Given the heightened police-military tensions, there seems to have been little coordination between the two – Sangaji [2007]. It was during this period that claims arose of security forces not being entirely neutral in their activities in Poso (Sangaji 2007 – see further discussion below).

With few signs of the episodes of violence dissipating in Poso in August 2000, there were top-down attempts at peace-building through the *Situwu Maroso* (Together we are Strong) agreement signed by the Governors of Central, South and North Sulawesi (Ecip 2002; Basyar et al. 2003; HRW 2002). A peace ceremony was performed to reconcile both sides, with the participation of the embattled President Wahid. However, these peace-building efforts did not emanate from the initiatives of the key local communities and their leaders, undermining the robustness of the peace efforts and violence continued in subsequent phases. Nor did they address the issues of politico-economic competition, inclusion and exclusion described above.

In fact, inequalities grew during the conflict. For example, the distribution of key civil servant positions shifted to clearly favour Muslim elites. Diprose (2012) found that from 1994 – 1999, before the conflict commenced, Muslims held the top job of district head and 58 of the leadership positions (accounting for rotations) within the civil service (in the senior executive, department heads and deputy heads), while Christians held 51.¹⁶ This roughly matched the population distribution of the two largest religious groups, but the top jobs and key positions in the legislature favoured Muslims. By 2004, after a second round of re-districting under decentralisation (Tojo Una-Una District was carved out of Poso in 2003) and after many phases of violence, 38 senior positions were held by Muslims and 20 by Christians (accounting for rotations of the same people).¹⁷ Within the new district boundaries, Christians accounted for two thirds of the total population but relative to population size, Muslims were two times more likely to be represented in the senior positions of the bureaucracy (Diprose 2012). Further, the impunity with which some elites and combatants acted (many interviewees described a bias that saw the arrest and prosecution of

¹⁶ Muslims also held a slight majority of parliamentary seats and the position of Speaker of the House.

¹⁷ Redistricting reduced the number of positions available and many Christian senior bureaucrats (living or seeking refuge in the Poso highlands) who could not come to work during the violence lost their jobs.

more Christian than Muslim leaders) only further fuelled grievances and saw violence escalate.

In both Poso and other regions such as Ambon, the failure to stop further escalation in the violence and to redress the underlying drivers of conflict in the early phases of the communal conflicts saw violence escalate through several phases amidst the inaction by the military or ineffective action by either branch of the security forces, as local opportunists sought to capitalise on the unrest and mobilise for political gain (Azca 2003, 2005; Diprose 2009; McRae 2013). Significant casualties in each phase only contributed to local grievances and retribution seeking, resulting in further violence and a greater influx of combatants, including jihadi militias (Azca 2003, 2005; Diprose 2009; McRae 2013). A culture of impunity also developed in these regions between 1999-2003, with ICG (2005, 15) arguing that with a few exceptions, the perpetrators of violence were “either not identified, went unpunished or received only light sentences and were quickly released”, and those who received light sentences or questionable acquittals for violent acts often went on to commit further violence. In Poso and Ambon in particular, the initial failures have had far reaching consequences for contemporary politics and the growth of terrorist networks in Indonesia as is evident in the discussion below.

Militias in Poso

After the famed Walisongo incident and the May-June 2000 violence mentioned above, there was an influx of external militia groups to Poso. While Christian militias (e.g. the Christian Militia [*Laskar Kristus*] and the Manguni Brigade [*Brigade Manguni*]) predominantly from North Sulawesi participated, the Muslim militias far exceeded these in number. They included various Mujahidin militias (holy warriors, usually supporting an ideology of the promotion of an Islamic state). Most notably, the Mujahidin Action Committee for Crisis Response (*Mujahidin KOMPAK*) established a base in the region, recruiting local members and bringing in combatants from Maluku and elsewhere.¹⁸ It was not uncommon over the next few years that jihadi combatants from Poso and Maluku would travel back and forth between the two regions (ICG 2005). The ICG (2004, 4) states that the *Mujahidin KOMPAK*, since the beginning:

¹⁸ Other Muslim militias included the Jundullah Militia (*Laskar Jundullah*, from South Sulawesi), the Wadhah Islamiyah Militia (*Laskar Wadhah Islamiyah*, also from South Sulawesi), the Red Crescent Militia (*Laskar Bulan Sabit Merah*, led by a *Darul Islam* figure from West Java, which worked closely with the Jundullah Militia (multiple Muslim interviewees, June-October 2006; ICG 2004).

Had one foot in radical violence and one foot in the Muslim establishment...after Ambon [the capital of Maluku] exploded it became a conduit for funding jihad [holy war] activities, purchasing arms, and producing videos of Muslim victims of violence that were then used to raise funds among Muslims abroad, reportedly with the help of men with Al Qaeda connections.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) also arrived, initially to provide training support (ICG 2007). JI was famed for carrying out the Bali bombings in October 2002, many later bombings and attacks and had developed significant links with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao (Arianti 2016). It is also alleged to have links with the Al Qaeda terrorist network, deemed responsible for the late September 11 attacks in New York in 2001. While the relationships among the *Mujahidin KOMPAK*, JI and their affiliated groups were complex and at times tense (see for example, ICG 2004; 2007), nonetheless they could be described as having a loose affiliation, one which would contribute to the wider network of mujahidin jihadis in Indonesia well into the future.

In July 2001, another well-known militia group *Laskar Jihad* (the Jihad Militia) arrived from Java and from conflict-affected Ambon after 14 Muslims (mainly women and children) were killed in Buyung Katedo, near Sepe village in Poso. *Laskar Jihad's* ideology was decidedly different from the other mujahidin groups such as JI and *Mujahidin KOMPAK* that supported an Islamic state. It sought to protect fellow Muslims but remained loyal to the Indonesian state and is alleged to have received special training from the military when the group was formed in Java (HRW 2002, 10). *Laskar Jihad's* arrival marked a spike in violence during the first year of Megawati's Presidency in 2001 (HRW 2002) and territorial disputes ensued with the *Mujahidin* groups who had been present in the region for a longer period of time (ICG 2004). For example, these two larger forces clashed in September 2001 in Kayamanya village (ICG 2004; interview with combatant involved 25 February 2009).

While *Laskar Jihad* disbanded in 2002, many actors in the Mujahidin-affiliated groups continued their activities well into the future through groups and networks which disbanded and then reorganised as is discussed below. This partly explains the contemporary geopolitical relevance of Poso today compared with other regions. Amidst the national discourse of Indonesian sovereignty and nationalism, their anti-state ideology has sustained

the attention the Indonesian state and their declaration of allegiance to ISIS in 2014 unsurprisingly drew the focus of the security forces.

Building peace?

In the wake of the September 2001 attacks in New York and the growing global discourse on the risks of the spread of terrorism, increased efforts were undertaken to halt the violence in Indonesia's conflict regions. In Poso in December 2001, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, then Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security under the Megawati administration with a background as a military General, initiated a joint military-police Security Restoration Operation (*Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan*) in Poso. At the same time, the National Human Rights Commission, together with top security and cabinet officials, initiated the Malino peace process in December 2001 in Poso, and in Ambon in February 2002. Jusuf Kalla, then the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, was key to orchestrating the agreement. He also had growing business interests in the region.¹⁹ Maintaining the peace was important to both his business interests and for establishing his political credibility for the Presidential elections in the subsequent years – he went on to be the President Yudhoyono's Vice President (2004-09) and he has since also joined Jokowi as his Vice President (2004-19). However, many interviewees from Poso believe that the top-down peace-building efforts were rushed, and that insecurity continued in the years that followed as many of those responsible for the early phases of violence were either never or only partially held to account (with short prison sentences), with these same actors to continue to instigate violence in the subsequent years.

After the Malino Peace Accord was signed at the end of 2001, many 'mysterious' killings, bombs and shootings occurred. Multiple interviewees (2005, 2006, 2009) from both sides attributed these actions primarily to the military special forces – Kopassus, which locals argued sought to instigate violence to maintain insecurity – and to the *Mujahidin KOMPAK* and the Tanah Runtuh militia (*Anak Tanah Runtuh*, predominantly made up of youth from the Tanah Runtuh neighbourhood) that had received some training from outside, for example by JI (see also ICG 2004). Indeed, Aditjondro (2002) argues that as democratisation began to take hold, there was a larger conspiracy underway on the part of the military to allow violence to escalate in different parts of the archipelago, and even to restore territorial

¹⁹ By 2003, a large-scale hydroelectric scheme had been established in the Poso highlands near to Tentena, run by his family's conglomerate, The Kalla Group.

commands. Under the New Order, in the 1980s, the number of territorial commands were reduced from 16 to 10 in Indonesia. Escalating violence discredited the performance of the police and provided a basis for the military to agitate for a renewed role in politics and domestic security affairs (see also Sangaji 2007; Interviews in 2006).

Conspiracies aside, interviewees for this research and Sangaji (2007) provide plenty of examples of the inaction, partisan alliances, and the benefits for security forces from the conflict in Poso and other conflict regions. They highlight how security forces did not intervene in cases of violence of which they had knowledge, they deliberately participated in the violence (particularly in Phase 3), they were likely responsible for sniper and other attacks which maintained insecurity, and that they were weak in preventing the spread of firearms and ammunition (some of which were military grade or were found to be from military stocks). Further, Aditjondro (2002) points out that the military supported groups that entered Poso on both sides of the conflict (such as the *Laskar Jundullah* from Makassar and the *Laskar Kristus* from Manado).

In addition, in the early post-New Order period from 1998 to 2001, the numbers of non-territorial troop battalions stationed in areas such as Papua, Aceh, Maluku and Poso, increased considerably from 24 to 57 (Kammen 2003, 6-7). A Brimob battalion company was also permanently stationed in Poso. Often these forces were given special status, affording higher salaries and ranks for military personnel posted to the region, and later promotions after being stationed in such areas (Aditjondro 2002; Sangaji 2007). Indeed, in both Poso and Ambon, the permanent commands of both the police and military were later headed by Major Generals, in contrast to Brigadier Generals at the onset of the conflicts. Further, under decentralisation, new sub-regional commands of both the police and military were established in both Morowali and Tojo-Una following district splitting in Poso.

The number of higher-level territorial commands in Indonesia increased from 10 at the end of the New Order, to 15 as of 2017. While Pattimura military command in Ambon was re-established (upgraded from a sub-regional command – Korem – to a territorial command) in 1999, the reinstatement of the military command did not manifest in Sulawesi until November 2016 (covering North and Central Sulawesi), after Operation Tinombala had killed Santoso and caught or killed many of his group. With global concerns focussed on the growing agitation of ISIS in the Philippines to the north of Sulawesi, the Kodam

XIII/Merdeka was re-established in Manado (there are now two territorial commands in Sulawesi). This, however, is a part of a wider pattern: military territorial commands have also been (re)established in Pontianak (covering Central and West Kalimantan where communal violence took place), Aceh, and Manokwari (West Papua; split from the Cenderawasih command based in Jayapura, Papua).

De-escalation: Weeding out hardliners, addressing inequality and issues of exclusion and representation

By 2004, the bulk of the large-scale collective violence subsided in Indonesia, with the exception of continued contestation in Papua (Smith 2014), although widespread, low-levels of vigilante and other forms of violence have continued since 2003 (Barron et al. 2014).²⁰ There are many indications that the state, together with non-state actors, sought to respond to the underlying drivers of these communal conflicts, including the concerns that predatory interests were benefiting from the conflicts and that issues of inclusion and popular representation needed to be improved at the sub-national level. The introduction of direct popular election of sub-national executive and legislative leaders in 2004 through the suite of decentralisation laws and their various revisions, helped to appease tensions around demands for local representation, and overall the scale of collective violence was reduced across the archipelago.²¹

In Poso, a series of actions by civil society, religious organisations, community leaders and the state from 2003 had sought to deescalate tensions by improving intergroup relations and addressing inequalities which had underpinned the local drivers of the conflict (see Diprose 2012; Diprose and Maddison 2017). In one initiative for example, in the 2005 elections for the highly prized District Head and Deputy District Head positions, the local Elections Commission and the local leadership instigated a strategy of twining pairs of candidates from different faiths to bridge cleavages and signal greater inter-group cooperation (Brown and Diprose 2009), which is an approach which continues to date.

²⁰ New forms of conflicts – over resources and in response to dissatisfaction with governance processes have more recently emerged as two of the most common forms of violent conflict (Pierskalla and Sacks 2017).

²¹ In reviewing the links between patterns of conflict, decentralisation and direct elections in Indonesia, Pierskalla and Sacks (2017) find mixed effects of these reforms over time. Diprose (2009) finds similar mixed results in her comparison of contestation in Poso and Donggala.

Efforts were introduced to share development initiatives both centrally and locally. The central government introduced initiatives to improve education in Poso as part of its strategy to advance the district's recovery from conflict.²² Despite the presence of established Islamic boarding schools in Poso, Gontor Pesantren – associated with the Gontor Pesantren in Java renowned for its moderate and progressive teaching²³ – was established in Poso in 2007, with the aim of reducing the 'hardliner' groups in Poso (interviews with Christian and Muslim leaders, March 2009). A number of Christian leaders at the time called for 'fairness', requesting that Christian community be provided with something comparable to the Gontor Pesantren. Thus, with special permission from the central government Ministry of Education, a Christian University was built in Tentena in the Poso highlands where most of the Christian communities reside—although a state university is already present in the district, and normally a district is limited to only one state-funded university.²⁴ These efforts were also supported by an unofficial local government policy of equally allocating development resources between the Muslim and Christian communities (Poso Deputy District Head 2009; Muslim Leader 2009).

Yet, among the communal conflict areas, Poso was the region where a degree of insecurity continued for many years after the early collective violence due to the presence of hardliner groups described above. In January 2007, after years of continued instability resulting from small-scale acts of terror (despite security operations) – and following eight months of only partially successful efforts through local leaders to get remaining hardliners to hand themselves in – the national police Special Forces (including the Densus 88 Counter Terrorism Squad and Brimob) conducted a special operation in the Tanah Runtuh area of Poso town, an area where the *Anak Tanah Runtuh* (many of whom had ties to JI) were situated.²⁵ The group was renowned for its militancy and weapons stockpiles, and associations with other Mujahidin forces. Not unlike the most recent special operations discussed later in this paper, the Densus 88 operations attracted widespread national media attention and heightened public support for (successful) operations tackling insecurity and

²² Presidential Decree No.14/2005.

²³ Gontor Pesantren is an Islamic boarding school established in 1926, located in Gontor Village in Ponorogo district on Java island. Gontor is known to have paved the way for combining modern education curriculum with traditional religious teachings (ICG 2002).

²⁴ Interviewees in 2008 and 2009 stated that Jusuf Kalla, then Vice President of Indonesia, had provided personal funds to support this University.

²⁵ The raids resulted in two deaths on 11 January 2007, and then 13 deaths of combatants, as well as the death of one police officer on 22 January 2007.

terrorism. This 2007 raid led to weapons seizures and many arrests in Poso and other parts of the country (ICG 2007, 2008).

By the end of 2008, there were fewer incidents of violence and both the state-led and grassroots peace-building initiatives, particularly those efforts instigated by civil society organisations, were no longer disrupted by the hardliner groups (interviews with Muslim and Christian sources, February 2009). The District Head from 2005 - 2015, Piet Inkiriwang, with a background in the police, sought to improve the situation for former combatants by supporting small businesses in agriculture, animal husbandry and other development projects (interviews February 2009; interviews October 2016). Diprose (2009) also shows how 40% of survey respondents in Poso in 2006 (n=300) perceived the chances of government jobs being affected by religious identity (this view was shared across respondents from different wealth deciles but was particularly strong among the middle classes). However, when the survey was repeated in 2009 in Poso (n=500), only 17% of respondents held this view and fewer again perceived this to be the case in other aspects of socio-economic and political life. Thus, there was significant evidence of reducing tensions by 2010.²⁶

Continuity between past and present

The above discussion demonstrates that significant efforts were undertaken to reduce the local drivers of conflict in Poso and to reduce the presence and influence of hardliner groups. How then have the dynamics morphed to the degree that security operations were again scaled up in 2015? We argue that indicators of discontent or small incidents of violence provides a convenient bellwether for reinvigorating discourse on insecurity in the region given its history of violence, especially when former combatants with kith and kin ties in Poso, such as Santoso, return to the region. We also argue that Poso has remained in the spotlight to a greater degree than other former communal conflict regions due the advantages of its highlands geography – which long provided a base for training jihadi groups during the conflict and in its aftermath – and the differentiation in the type (ideology) and strength of jihadi networks that were significantly present in Poso until the 2007 special operations mentioned above.

²⁶ Even so, the degree to which religious affiliation and demographics tend to shape political contests sub-nationally remain evident – in the 2010 District Head elections, paired candidates from across religious groups again ran for office, however, in this round all candidates were led by a Christian, with predominantly Muslim deputies, and the Christian incumbent was re-elected.

The Mujahidin-affiliated groups in particular spent an extended period of time (from mid-2000 until January 2007) familiarising themselves with the Poso highlands, intermittently conducting training operations, directly recruiting combatants from local populations or building networks with smaller local groups made up of members whose families had been directly or indirectly impacted by the violence joining the ranks. The Mujahidin espouse an ideology supporting the establishment of an Islamic state, which connects these groups with global jihadi networks such as ISIS. The ICG (2005, i) argues that regions such as Poso had “the potential to develop into a *qoidah aminah*, a secure area where residents can live by Islamic principles and apply Islamic law...such a base could then serve as the building block of an Islamic state Indonesia. Little wonder former combatants from Poso such as Santoso – embedded in the wider Mujahidin networks in Indonesia – returned to this familiar region in later years to attempt to establish a base for a caliphate, given its abundant resources, its location (beyond the easy reach of security surveillance), and their interpersonal networks.

Laskar Jihad in contrast, with an ideology that supported the Indonesian state, was a late arrival to Poso (in July 2001). The group had greater influence in Maluku (arriving there in April 2000) than in Poso, whereas the reverse was arguably the case for the dominant Mujahidin groups such as *JI* and *KOMPAK*. *Laskar Jihad* was active for a far shorter period of time, disbanding in 2002, whereas the Mujahidin groups continued their activities well into the future (ICG 2004; Azca 2006). In Maluku, Mujahidin training and attacks did take place during the conflict on, for example, Ambon, Buru and Seram islands, but there was less continuity in these activities in the province over time compared with Poso. Large-scale special security operations led by Densus 88 managed to weed out hardliner groups in Maluku in 2005 following an attack on the Brimob post in the village of Loki on Seram island. Many involved in the attacks and others in the mujahidin networks were captured in places such as Ambon and Buru, although some combatants evaded capture and sought refuge in Poso (ICG 2005). It was not until nearly two years later when Mujahidin activities were significantly disrupted in Poso in 2007 by the Densus 88-led operations (despite the presence of other security operations in the region), which led to the killing or capture of a significant number of jihadis. The intelligence gained from detainees led to further arrests in other parts of Indonesia.

A few managed to evade capture continued to operate elsewhere in places such as Java, albeit in weakened jihadi networks (ICG 2010). When under increasing police pressure,

jihadi groups have tended to disband and regroup in Indonesia (ICG 2012), with kith and kin ties being important in this process (IPAC 2015a). For example, factional splits in JI resulted in the formation of the radical organisation Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) in 2008.²⁷ Their activities were particularly prevalent throughout Java, and in Aceh (where there was a failed attempt to establish what Arianti [2016] describes as a cross-jihadi training initiative) before many of the activities were interrupted by security operations.

Santoso was imprisoned briefly from 2004 to 2007 and on release he joined the JAT and began to seek recruits in Poso in late 2009 (IPAC 2015b), establishing a wider base there in late 2010. Santoso's ties with Poso were strong. A native of Poso of Javanese descent, he initially joined the network of jihadi activists because members of his family were victims of the conflict (Interview, Poso, October 2016). He became a leading combatant for the *Mujahidin KOMPAK* and was later engaged by JI under the leadership of Hasanuddin (an early leader of JI in Poso; arrested and jailed in the mid-2000s). Hasanuddin trained in Mindanao for two years and married the daughter of Adnan Aarsal, a prominent religious leader in Poso associated with the Amanah Islamic boarding school in Tanah Runtuh and with an alleged degree of influence over the *Anak Tanah Runtuh*. We can see here the kith and kin ties being important in building the networks of Mujahidin jihadis.

By 2011, JAT's larger activities were underway in Poso, including the attacks on the police described in the introduction. By 2012 the JAT outpost, the East Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT) was firmly established. In 2014, JAT split again when its leadership claimed allegiance to ISIS. This move was not uniformly supported by JAT's ranks, however, the MIT splinter cell under Santoso's leadership supported the allegiance. His pledge to ISIS further connected MIT at its allies to the global network, thereby giving MIT greater geopolitical significance. The declaration, together with the growing global concern with ISIS, provided the impetus for the launch of the 2015 special security operations in Poso and 41 people in MIT, including Santoso, were placed on police's most wanted list (Ahad 2016).²⁸

²⁷ JAT was established by the former leader of JI, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir who was jailed for terrorism offences. Many JI and other affiliate members followed Baasyir to JAT (ICG 2012).

²⁸ As of April 4, 2016 under Operation Tinombala, 29 people were on Indonesia's most wanted suspect list (Arnaz 2016).

Contemporary dynamics: Military operations in Poso and the security threat

Compounding the geopolitical significance of Poso is its location on Sulawesi island in Indonesia's periphery, which is situated at the intersection of the maritime border with the Philippines. This strategic location has provided a corridor for the flow of arms and fighters by sea, particularly from Mindanao, via Talaud and Bitung islands in North Sulawesi. Sulawesi formed a transit route for support to combatants in Poso during the communal conflict, for similar support to Maluku, and later for the flow of arms or jihadis into other regions. The flow of arms from the conflict regions of Mindanao, and between islands of the Moluccas and Sulawesi, is painted as a particular risk by the Indonesian state given the recent ISIS incursions in Marawi. This in part explains the re-establishment of the territorial command in Manado in the north of Sulawesi island in 2016.

It is unlikely that any government would not undertake serious operations to counter suspected terrorist activity when a group declares support for ISIS, given the global concerns with its influence and the incidents of violence that have taken place across the world. However, at the centre, both the police and military also have vested interests in presenting a picture of continued insecurity in Indonesia's prior conflict regions. While this may not be in the form of a 'grand master plan' for the return of the military to Indonesian politics, security forces have made the most of the opportunities which have arisen, both in the past and in recent years. Local people in Poso are also aware of this and it drives their scepticism of security operations generally, with one explaining:

The conflict in Poso is not merely about the community conflict, but it is also about projects that are focused on securitisation...Many people benefit from the conflict and get promotions in the military and policy for operations in this area. (Youth leader, Poso, October 2016)

"Performing" security in contemporary Poso

The performative power of the scale of the operations in Poso, we argue, has served other purposes in strengthening wider public perceptions of threat and insecurity in Indonesia and asserting the importance of the role of security actors in domestic affairs. Indeed, Tambiah (1996) argues that such 'spectacles of power' are a part of the 'repertoire of violence', which send powerful signals to the public and in so doing sustains and even escalate tensions. State actors have frequently linked the activities of Santoso's group to global terrorist concerns in

public discourse, despite the few casualties that resulted from MIT activities in Poso.

For example, the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNTP) head Ansyaad Mbai stated in 2013 that “if police let the terrorist network multiply, Indonesia would become like Pakistan, which has groups like the Taliban that employ terrorist tactics” (Tempo.co 2013). Likewise, just prior to the scale up of operations in January 2016, Anton Charliyan, the National Police's Head of Public Relations Division, depicted the developments in Poso in a similar vein to the insurgency in Mindanao in the Philippines, stating that “We fear Poso will become another Moro. Don't let them use Poso as the stronghold of their struggle” (Tempo.co 2016a).

Yet, local people in Poso were nonetheless sceptical of the need for such a response and the motives for the operation. As one interviewee in Poso (October 2016) explained:

If we count the personnel, the physical might, and the huge amount of funds spent, to face a small group that moves like a lizard, then it is actually pretty embarrassing. They [the joint operation] have personnel, much heavy artillery including planes, boats, and so on, not to mention the fuel they are using, and they can launch missiles into the forests...this operation seems quite extreme.

Interviews in Poso carried out in October 2016 revealed that even Muslim leaders with links to the hardliner groups were astounded at the scale of the operations and that they continued to be extended. This however, is a part of a larger pattern. Security operations, even in periods when there are few incidents of violence, are not new in Poso. The Sintuwu Maroso joint security operations in post-2001 Poso were extended seven times, in which Sangaji (2007) argues there was a clear pattern: each extension of the operations was preceded by a (planned) troop withdrawal and then a short burst of violence. After the 2007 Densus 88 raid and tensions had subsided in Poso, the Restoration of Security and Order Operation was nonetheless established, well before Santoso began his recruitment efforts. However, many of the operations were not of the scale and spectacle of the more recent operations and had more limited involvement of the military.

The Camar Maleo operations that commenced on 26 January 2015 were predominantly carried out by the police in and around Poso Pesisir—an area that was controlled by Muslim militias during the communal conflict and where Santoso was thought to be hiding. However, early during the first phase of the operations there were already indications of

competition between the police and military for influence, as has been the case in the past. The military sought to access Poso (without the invitation of the police) through the “training exercises” they conducted in March 2015 in Poso Pesisir, with the backing of the President. They claimed the exercises were a part of security preparations for a major tourist event in the region (IPAC 2015b). Observers contend their ultimate goal was to capture Santoso and his affiliates so as to highlight the deficiencies of the police operation:

Poso was selected as a site for combat practice by the military’s elite Rapid Reaction Strike Force (PPRC). Some 3,222 military personnel from the air force, navy and army were sent to Mount Biru for the exercise. At least 283 families, or 933 individuals, were forced to leave their homes for three weeks while the military scarred the terrain with artillery fire...Although the military claims it is conducting training, there is a widespread perception that its real intention is to capture Santoso. (Badrah 2016)

While the training exercises do indicate a degree of strategic planning on the part of the military and an effort to circumvent due process, they were nonetheless constrained by, and operated within, Law No. 2/2002 on Defence (which requires Presidential permission for such exercises), and Law No. 34/2004 on the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI), which limits their participation in domestic security operations unless invited.

The failure of the police to capture Santoso in the subsequent months saw President Jokowi support a scale-up of the operations through Operation Tinombala, which entailed a formal role for the military in the operations. Two interviewees for this research also explained that some Poso elites had appealed to Vice President Jusuf Kalla to send in military support. They argued Santoso’s activities were disrupting local livelihoods in the highlands and that some villages felt a degree of intimidation. Although others argued this was a part of a strategic effort by pro-military actors in the region and that villagers were pressured to say on film that they felt under threat and the police could not protect them.

Santoso was killed in July 2016 under Operation Tinombala and many others were also captured or killed, particularly in later phases of the operations. Many interviewees in Poso (October 2016; March 2018) noted that there were various opportunities prior to his death for the military to capture Santoso. Yet, as one interviewee explained “even when a group of soldiers was near the suspects, they were prevented from launching an attack by their higher-level commanders who wanted to extend the operations by delaying his capture.”

Indeed, the operations have continued to be extended to March 2018 and are expected to continue, even though as of early 2018 only seven members of the group remained at large (Kompas 2017; Sohuturon 2018).

As an indication of the scale of the operations, according to an interview with the Head of Planning and Control the operation (October 24, 2016), Phase three of Operation Tinombala involved 800 national military personnel, 1018 national police personnel, and 1172 regional police personnel, amounting to 3000 people in total.²⁹ Special task forces included intelligence and community relations, suspect pursuit teams involving both Brimob and the military, a police-led investigations team, and those tasked with community development. The estimated budget for the operation was approximately Rp.13 billion (AUD1.3million) for each 3-month phase (according to government officials interviewed), indicating the size and strategic importance of each mission. Meanwhile, at the national level, the defence budget has steadily and significantly increased, more than doubling since 2009.³⁰

Performing violence: sub-national views of conflict risks

Yet, our field research found little evidence of wide-spread support for Santoso's project in Poso and, we argue, the present evidence would suggest there is not significant risk of large-scale inter-religious group violence returning to the district.³¹ This is for several reasons. First, it was clear in the 2016 interviews that a degree of conflict fatigue remains among the population in Poso together with a strong living memory of the violence. Many interviewees (both Christian and Muslim) argued that while there may be a small number of militants in the region, the politics and general discourse of unification remain strong.

Second, during the extensive efforts to rebuild community relations after the communal violence, awareness among the population grew of the political benefits from, and the manipulation of, early conflict dynamics in Poso and of the benefits that accrue to the security forces from sustained conflict in the region (Diprose 2012; Diprose and Maddison 2017). The interviews revealed that Poso residents were also aware of the risks of their actions and from being deemed to have an affiliation with hard-line groups. They were

²⁹ The operation covered four areas: North and South Poso Pesisir and the central part of these two regions, along with the Lore highlands.

³⁰ <https://tradeconomics.com/indonesia/military-expenditure/forecast>

³¹ That is unless, as history would suggest, there are significant changes to sub-national power structures and predatory elite practices, or rising inequalities among groups at both the grassroots and elite level, which would tie sub-national dynamics to supra-local interests and power struggles.

sceptical of the political game played by security actors, and by political and economic elites to depict Poso as a region of insecurity—history tells them that many benefit from conflict (even CSOs who remain politically relevant through their peacebuilding role) and while ever there is a perceived risk, financing and other resources continue to flow. Villagers were frustrated with the security operations when their every-day affairs and livelihoods were disrupted; for example, at one stage the operations prevented farmers from accessing their crops before 9am and after 3pm. Even in 2018 in the small Tamanjeka hamlet a checkpoint jointly manned by the police and military remained. The degree of concern for the actual “security threat” was limited and there was little evidence of community efforts to form their own security operations for protection, or to join the counter-terrorism efforts (this, in fact, was prohibited - Interview with a military official, March 2018).³²

Third, field research revealed that Santoso had limited resources, networks and manpower. Christian and Muslim interviewees observed that the efforts by Santoso group to incite violence or recruit MIT members had been met with little response from the public, and civil society organisations also supported this resistance.³³ This was particularly after MIT’s allegiance to ISIS was publicly expressed. One observer with close family ties to Santoso (24 October 2016), who was a key leader among Muslim militia groups and deeply implicated in the communal violence, argued that allegiance to Islamic State has not been significantly popular among Muslims in the region, with the exception of a small minority. He also argued - with a somewhat more moderate view than he espoused in the early reform era - that Santoso and his allies changed the meaning of jihad, from one of “defence” when Islam is under threat (and one that constructively assists in development), to one where jihad is an instrument of violence and terror, which is counterproductive without clear direction. He explained that the call for the implementation of Sharia Law by Santoso’s group had no widespread basis in people’s social realities and bore no relationship with their needs as adherents to the Muslim faith.

That is not to say there was not a degree of sympathy among some in the region for Santoso and his group – interviewees explained “he was an icon defending the exclusion and

³² The work of Bakker (2016) shows how non-state *ormas* – mass civil society organisations – located in Kalimantan, North Sulawesi and Jakarta also seek legitimacy by ‘performing’ security and Wilson and Bakker (2016) also explore how the discourse on the threat of terrorism also supports the interests of such *ormas*.

³³ There was greater sympathy for the group from residents of Tamanjeka neighbourhood located at the bottom of the Biru mountain where the group was located.

injustices experienced by Muslims”, and in his frequent appearances in the press and public, locally he “demanded fairness and development to support Muslims” (Interview with a former combatant, October 2016). Indeed, hundreds of people attended his funeral and some provided Santoso and his group with food and shelter (Multiple interviews, October 2016).

Fourth, communal violence initially spread in Poso at a time of high politico-economic instability and changing opportunity structures nationally and locally and when there was evidence of both perceived and real inequalities among groups with a large enough base to mobilise, as discussed above and elsewhere (Diprose 2009; 2012). Nowadays, the population distribution in Poso district is two thirds Christian given re-districting under decentralisation which saw population proportions shift. Those groups who had been previously marginalised prior to and during the conflict in the early years of democratisation were later accommodated in district power structures, with a Christian (with a background in the police) taking up the District Head position in 2005 and being re-elected in 2010 (each time with a Muslim Deputy). A Christian District Head (with a background in the military) and a Muslim were again elected in 2015. At only the elite level were there indications of a degree of inter and intra-religious group competition. There were a handful of complaints that the very top jobs now tend to be held by Christians, and within the Muslim establishment there are divergent views on what should be prioritised for development in the region (the influential Al Khairat organisation did not, for example, support the establishment of the Gontor Pesantren - interviews 2009; 2016).

One aspect that does remain contentious and may present future challenges, some former combatants argued, is addressing the economic integration of former combatants who face a degree of economic instability as government efforts to give former combatants access to economic opportunities and projects had been short-term. However, more widely, significant efforts to share power and economic resources have been made and there are few indications that deep inter-religious animosity remains, particularly not of the sort that would warrant mobilisation and the risk of death. Following the instability brought about by democratisation and decentralisation, sub-national politics in Poso seems to have found a new equilibrium.

National political agendas: Proposed revisions to the Anti-Terrorism Law

The “performance” of the special operations can also be viewed in light of other political developments in Indonesia, which together indicate aspects of the growing illiberalism in Indonesia in recent years. In 2015, Jokowi returned the defence portfolio to the military through the appointment of General Ryamizard Ryacudu (a well-known military ‘hardliner’, who has been linked to allegations of human rights violations in Papua). Jokowi’s second cabinet saw General Wiranto (once ousted by President Wahid in the early reform years) become the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs. IPAC (2016) details other efforts undertaken by Jokowi to extend the remit of the military in internal security affairs, particularly as their popularity grows amidst distrust of the civilian and political leadership. Meanwhile, there has been a parallel influx of active duty officers into civilian ministries, although Laksmana (2019) argues is due to internal operational challenges rather than part of a master plan for the return of the military to politics.

Amidst the global discourse on threat of terrorism and the activities of hard-line groups, a Draft Law on Anti-Terrorism was tabled in parliament on in May 2016. The new law will replace Law No. 15/2003 on the Eradication of Terrorism (known as the Anti-Terrorism Law). Legislators aimed to finish deliberations by the end of 2017, although final deliberations were still wrapping up in March 2018. This was despite some pressure from President Jokowi to speed up the finalisation of the bill (Hakim 2017), particularly in light of the suicide bombing at a Jakarta bus station, two days into the 2017 Muslim fasting month (Nugroho 2017).

One of the key aspects debated by the Special Committee set up to deliberate the law centred on whether the military would have a legislated role in counter-terrorism operations under the Law, or whether it would be constrained to acting on the invitation of the police or President. The push for revisions to the Law and a clearer legislated role for the military in counter-terrorism efforts first strengthened in 2009 (Jones 2012), however, the performative power of the operations in Poso, its geopolitical proximity to the tensions in the Philippines and the global discourse on ISIS, provided renewed emphasis. The special operations in Poso were frequently mentioned by those wanting revisions to the 2003 law more generally, but especially by those advocating for an explicit role for the military in domestic security – Santoso was killed after the military joined the operations. Supporters claimed that the joint

operations in Poso constituted an example of best practice, with one military official stating that “Not just the TNI or Police [were successful in the operations], but both of them. So if we say that we can’t learn from this, we only need to [draw from] from experience” (Fachrudin 2017a).

Coordinating Minister Wiranto argued that explicitly designating a role for the military in such operations through the revisions to the law would help synergise efforts between the military and the police so as to constitute best practice in the fight against terrorism, which, he contends, the police cannot do alone (Ismail 2017). He also couched the terrorist activities in terms of a threat to national sovereignty by highlighting that in other countries such experiences were labelled as a “war” and that their militaries were utilised in counter-terrorism activities. He lamented the limited military involvement in Indonesia (Tashandra 2017). Similar views are shared by military commanders, such as the recent Commander of the TNI, General Gatot Nurmantyo (Sutrisno 2017) and some politicians have also connected the aspirations of jihadis to establish an Islamic state with threats to national sovereignty (Hakim 2017). Others argue that even though the role for the military in counter-terrorism is already listed as a functions of the military in Article 7, Line 2 of the current Law No 34/2004 on the TNI, clarifying a specific role in the Anti-Terrorism Law revisions will help synergise police and military efforts (Retaduari 2017), as relying on Law No.34 first requires a Presidential Instruction or Presidential Regulation for the military to act (Erdianto 2017d).

Meanwhile, the National Police Chief, Tito Karniawan (formerly the police chief in Poso), agreed to work with the military in counter-terrorism efforts, given its capabilities and resources to reach remote areas, as is evidenced, he argues, by the Poso operations. He stated on May 29, 2017 that he had “...discussed it with the Coordinating Minister and the TNI Commander. What matters is the fight against terrorism has to be comprehensive. It cannot be performed by one agency” (Kuwado 2017).

While there was limited consultation on the law by the Special Parliamentary Committee, some consultations were held in Poso to gain local perspectives since so much of the Committee’s deliberations drew on examples from Poso.³⁴ The concerns about the wide

³⁴ In a meeting held at the office of the District Head, members of the central government’s Special Parliamentary Committee discussed the proposed revisions with representatives from Poso. Some 50 participants in meeting included representatives from the district executive and legislature, local police and military officials, provincial government officials and representatives from Operation Tinombala, religious leaders, youth leaders, and civil society organisation representatives from most of the major organisations in

interpretation of “terrorism” by residents in Poso and by other groups, particularly civil society organisations and Muslim groups (who see the unclear definition to easily misappropriated to target religious organisations) have had bearing on the Committee who at the end of March 2018 were discussing the definition of the term (Nadlir 2018). However, the scepticism and concerns about military involvement seem to have not had significant influence on the centre. It is evident that agreement has been reached between the contending elites in Indonesia, in both political and security circles, to revise the law to include a clear role for the military in counter-terrorism.

This is despite the concern from academics and civil society organisations such as KontraS about the risks of increasing the powers of the military, particularly if the law allows counter-terrorist operations to take place without civilian oversight or accountability (Erdianto 2017a, 2017b). Before agreement had been reached on the role of the military, the Deputy Head of the Human Rights Commission argued that the counter-terrorism operations should remain the purview of the police (Fachrudin 2017b). The Coalition of Civil Society also objected to military involvement (Putri 2017). KontraS cites the 2016 Global Torture Day Report, which identifies that the military was the second most likely group to undertake acts of torture (Erdianto 2017c).

There is also a history of the military involvement in rights abuses in the New Order period for which perpetrators have had minimal accountability (McGregor and Setiawan 2019). They were for example, involved in the mysterious shootings (*petrus*), when thousands of people labelled as criminals were killed or disappeared under the *petrus* campaign (Bourchier 1990; Barker 2001). The concern that the military could use the law to justify any military involvement is therefore understandable, as is scepticism of the argument that they will only use such powers in an emergency situation or at the last resort (Erdianto 2017c). Such justifications have also been used in past situations that have resulted human rights violations (Nadlir 2017). Advocates from Imparsial sum up the view of most civil society organisations:

the region, as well as journalists. One interviewee described the lively discussion of many issues, in particular why the language of “terrorism” was used by the central government in reference to Poso and “separatism” in reference to Papua. There were concerns that the interpretation of “terrorism” used by the centre was too wide and would be used to target those designated to be “close to” or “supporting” terrorism when this was unlikely the case. Further, concerns were raised that Poso would deliberately be used by the central government to safeguard their “terrorism project”.

Such a shift in approach is dangerous and potentially catastrophic, as it will lead to a much more repressive and excessive way of countering terrorism...Such pernicious involvement, unaccompanied by military obligation to abide by the general judiciary system, would cause serious problems in the accountability of its operations...What we really need...is to ensure the principle of human rights is guaranteed and reinforced in our counter-terrorism measures. (Araf and Budiawan 2017).

The devil may be in the detail of the Presidential Regulation needed to outline the mechanisms for military involvement in counter-terrorism operations, as this will not be covered by the revisions to the Anti-Terrorism Law. Given that the revisions to the Law aim to extend the powers of security forces to prevent terrorism offences (rather than to only react to incidents as they occur)³⁵, it seems important for Indonesia to undertake measures to prevent the misappropriation of these powers and ensure accountability of both branches of the security forces to the civilian leadership and within the wider Indonesian justice system. It remains to be seen as to whether those civil society actors, academics and others opposed to the military's role can influence Jokowi (and future presidents who may revise or issue new presidential regulation) to ensure oversight and accountability.

Conclusion

In the context of a major financial crisis, profound structural change to Indonesia's political system (including significant, wide-reaching security sector reforms), and heightened tensions in civil-military relations at the onset of *reformasi*, mobilisation frames that bridged the interests, grievances and some cases ideologies of actors in different arenas and at different scales, escalated small incidents of violence into multi-phased conflicts in some parts of the country. Through the case of Poso we see how in this process, local politico-economic tensions intersected with supra-local dynamics, including growing combatant networks and national and global discourses of threat and insecurity. Weak interventions and actions to halt violence, particularly by the security forces, were a part of this story, as was

³⁵ Several crucial aspects were detailed in the Draft Law, including the possibility of arresting and imprisoning returned foreign fighters involved in terrorism; the prohibition of civil groups from recruiting trainees or participating in military training, paramilitary training or other training domestically or overseas with the purpose of participating in terrorist crimes; using illegal weapons; selling chemicals in stores that can be used for bomb making; and spreading hate or hostility along SARA (Ethnic, Religious, Race or Class) lines. The reference to SARA also hails back to the language of the New Order, "SARA"-labelled tensions elicited a strong response from the military and when civil society activities and forms of expression that related to SARA (for example, in the press) were outlawed using a variety of state instruments.

the insecurity produced by competition between the branches of the security forces for power and rents and their occasional partisan involvement in the conflicts.

With the bulk of large-scale collective violence subsiding after the first five years of *reformasi* (with a few exceptions), the instability that characterised the initial years is treated as a blip in Indonesia's history of democratic transition. However, scholars caution against uncritically applying the Indonesian model as the gold standard of liberal democratic transition from authoritarianism (Mietzner 2012; Pepinsky 2014). As Diprose, McRae and Hadiz (2019) highlight, the Suharto's authoritarian regime so deeply controlled civilian life that its legacy continues "to shape the contours of state and society relations in Indonesia" even two decades after its demise. While the initial democratic reforms made significant inroads to changing Indonesia's politico-economic structures and winding back the role of the military, now that two decades have passed we can see the way actors old and new have sought to reconfigure the political order.

This article highlighted some of the ways in which the military and Indonesia's contending elites have sought to increase the influence of the military in providing domestic security since the transfer of domestic security to the police, especially through joint and special security operations in situations of high "insecurity". The most recent of these operations – the joint security forces counter-terrorism operations in Poso – are one significant example. Of course, in the age of the global "War on Terror" any government would likely target action against jihadi networks that espouse anti-state ideologies. Yet, exploring the history of local conflict dynamics in Poso, their supra-local intersections, and how these have evolved over the first two decades of *reformasi* have helped to critically evaluating the contemporary responses to the risk of "insecurity". We find that even though small numbers of hard-liners espousing extremist anti-state views set up base in Poso in recent years, the evidence suggests there was little interest among the conflict-fatigued local population in joining their cause. Moreover, the local dimensions of discontent that erupted in violence with the onset of *reformasi* had been addressed, notwithstanding the remaining trauma of the violence itself.

Despite this, the intersecting global and national discourse on the threat of "insecurity" and terrorism seems to have created new opportunity structures for the military in Indonesia. Operation Tinombala was no quiet affair – more than 3000 police and military troops

descended on the hills and plains of Poso and this was well covered in the media. “Performing” security in regions such as Poso – where there is a history of violence and security operations, where actors with historical and, in some cases, current links to terrorist networks are located – connects the past experience of insecurity with the present concern of the spread of terrorism. This maintains the geopolitical significance of Indonesia’s prior conflict regions and keeps the importance of safeguarding domestic security at the forefront of public discourse; a discourse which is bolstered by public statements from state and security officials and media coverage of “the hunt for terrorists”. Together other developments, “security risks” have seen defence budgets and other relevant budgets increased, once-abolished military commands restored (and new commands created), and opportunities for promotion created within both branches of the security forces.

The “performative” aspect of the *joint* counter-terrorism operations has undoubtedly demonstrated the power of the security forces, particularly of the military (Santoso was captured on their watch), to the wider populace. This intersects with the interests of advocates for a greater role for the military in domestic security, which have been apparent in the renewed efforts to designate a clear role for the military counter-terrorism operations through revisions to the Anti-Terrorism laws – the operations in Poso were frequently cited as an example of success and a justification for the involvement of both agencies in the future. However, the ways in which these actions are carried out are an important consideration in democratic institution building. The question remains as to whether the Indonesian state ensure there are clear accountability mechanisms in place to hold the military (and the police) to account and avoiding a return to the past in which to avoid a return to the past in which some in the security forces were able to act with impunity.

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