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REGIME CHANGE Military Factionalism and Suharto's Fall

The introduction to this book has presented a number of theoretical approaches to explain possible complications in establishing democratic controls over the armed forces in transitional states. Most of these models suggested that historical legacies play an important role in prefiguring the shape of civil-military relations in post-authoritarian polities, which made it necessary for the first part of this study to examine the historical roots of both military politics and intra-civilian conflict in Indonesia. The introduction also emphasized, however, that the character of regime change is an especially crucial element of the “initial conditions” of civil-military reform processes, and thus deserves separate discussion. For example, the violent overthrow of a repressive regime by popular protests can have a different impact on post-authoritarian polities than a pacted transition, in which the transfer of power occurs as a result of elite negotiations. In discussing the nature of regime change and its repercussions for military reform in democratic transitions, the role of the armed forces in the handover of authority from the previous government to its successor is of particular interest. In Indonesia, the engagement of the armed forces in the events leading to Suharto's resignation has been critical in two aspects. Both of these aspects are closely related to the dynamics of military factionalism, but concern different analytical areas.

In more general terms, the success of compromise-oriented military officers in negotiating an intra-systemic transfer of authority from Suharto

to his deputy helped to prevent the very breakdown of the regime that is typically associated with the fall of sultanistic systems. Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 70) asserted that sultanistic polities “present an opportunity for democratic transition because, should the ruler (and his or her family) be overthrown or assassinated, the sultanistic regime collapses”.¹ One possible explanation for the fact that this total disintegration of the regime infrastructure did not occur in Indonesia is Aspinall’s proposition that Suharto’s system was not purely sultanistic but included strong authoritarian features. Aspinall (2005c, p. 269) suggested that the combination between sultanistic and authoritarian characteristics resulted in a democratic transition that occurred in a tumultuous way and witnessed “dramatic breakthroughs”, but was also marked by “a high degree of continuity between the new democratic politics and those of the authoritarian past”. This chapter will argue, however, that in addition to such structural factors, the political behaviour of military leaders willing to desert Suharto was equally crucial in producing a regime change that avoided the complete collapse of the existing system. Consequently, the first post-Suharto government consisted of figures associated with the New Order regime, impacting on the pace and depth of reform efforts in the early phase of the transition, including in the area of civil-military relations.

The second important influence of military factionalism on the character of the 1998 regime change is related to societal perceptions of the armed forces during the political crisis leading to Suharto’s overthrow. The failure and eventual dismissal of hardline military officers such as Prabowo, who had proposed a crackdown on oppositional forces and demanded that martial law be declared, not only defused political tensions and paved the way for the intra-systemic regime change discussed above. The outcome of the factional dispute also gave rise to the public impression that the post-New Order military leadership was in the hands of those officers who had endorsed the people’s call on Suharto to retire, while the most hawkish generals associated with Prabowo and his circle had been successfully marginalized. This perception of an effective “cleansing” of the military of its most notorious Suharto loyalists and human rights abusers temporarily satisfied some of the immediate societal demands for change in the post-authoritarian armed forces. Public pressure for more wide-ranging reform decreased as a result, and the majority of generals groomed under the New Order were allowed to keep their posts. The following chapter develops the two main arguments outlined above by discussing the factionalism that marked the political behaviour of the military and its individual officers during the crisis of 1997 and 1998. Interpreting military politics within the context of Suharto’s rapid political decline, the chapter points to the consequences of the intra-military conflicts



for the nature of Indonesia's regime change and the evolution of civil-military relations in the early phase of the post-authoritarian transition.

COMPETITION AND LOYALTY: MILITARY FACTIONALISM IN THE NEW ORDER

In his work on the role of militaries in praetorian states, Muthiah Alagappa (2001*b*, pp. 51–52) asserted that splits between the governing generals and the field commanders are an inevitable consequence of the inherent tension between the military as government and the military as institution. In many cases, the ruling military junta even creates further splits in order to stay in power. For much of his thirty-two year rule over Indonesia, Suharto was a skilful strategist of military factionalism and patronage, using already existing cleavages to his advantage and creating new ones in order to extend his grip on power. In this context, numerous intra-military divisions related to ethnicity, unit membership, functional role, and religion offered Suharto plentiful opportunities to apply his tested tactics of *divide et impera*. To begin with, there were important ethnic differences, with Javanese officers and those from the Outer Islands competing for key posts. Rivalries also occurred between soldiers attached to the various regional commands, especially the Siliwangi, Diponegoro, and Brawijaya units in Java.² Moreover, generational differences created tensions between the “generation of 1945”, the transitional officers, and the “younger” generals trained in the military academy in Magelang. Also, officers from the intelligence services were engaged in conflicts with the rest of the armed forces as well as among themselves. Furthermore, the “financial” officers, who spent most of their time and energy on running business-related and political operations, had major differences with more “professional” military leaders. Religio-political divisions were equally relevant, as was evident in the controversy over *abangan* “syncretism” in Suharto's inner circle in the 1970s, the prominence of Christian officers in the 1980s, and the perceived split between “Islamic” and “nationalist” commanders in the 1990s. Finally, personal patronage networks were also important, such as the close ties of some officers to the palace that marked most of the intra-military rivalries in the mid-1990s.

In many other states with military-backed governments, similar cleavages within the armed forces have played an important role in the destabilization, and ultimately degeneration, of authoritarian rule. The divisions within the Brazilian armed forces between moderates and hardliners, for example, contributed significantly to the erosion of the military government in the early and mid-1980s (Koonings 2001, pp. 147–48). In the same vein, severe



regional splits within the Nigerian and South Korean militaries accompanied the rise and fall of several authoritarian regimes in these countries (Nwagwu 2002, p. 73; Jun 2001, p. 124). In Indonesia's New Order, on the other hand, Suharto was mostly able to manage the ethnic, regional, and generational divisions by centralizing the command structure and increasing the frequency of reshuffles in the officer corps (Kammen and Chandra 1999, p. 83). In fact, by the early 1980s, factionalism in the Indonesian armed forces had largely turned into an instrument used by Suharto to consolidate his rule. The creation and cultivation of intra-military competition ensured that no camp within the armed forces grew strong enough to challenge Suharto's presidency. This competitive atmosphere also encouraged rival groups to report indications of disloyalty on the side of their opponents directly to Suharto, feeding the intelligence network developed by the president with invaluable material on potential threats to his regime. The positions of ABRI commander and army chief of staff were at the centre of Suharto's efforts to engineer conflicts over authority and resources, with the incumbents in both posts seeking presidential backing to decide the competition in their favour. In major reshuffles, Suharto paid careful attention to the "equitable" distribution of key positions among competing factions, balancing their interests and ensuring their loyalty to his government.

One of the most important elements of New Order military factionalism was the formation of strategic alliances between competing officers and civilian socio-political forces. Military leaders sought to advance their interests by cultivating civilian support groups, hoping that their attachment to and influence on key political constituencies would convince Suharto of their indispensability in mobilizing support for the regime.³ These attachments were not necessarily of an ideological nature, but reflected perceptions within the competing military groups of Suharto's changing political priorities. The formation of alliances between senior officers and ultra-modernist Islamic organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, was a direct reaction to Suharto's campaign against Murdani. Other officers believed, however, that Suharto had no intention of "Islamizing" the armed forces and instead was determined to keep a stable balance within the military. Accordingly, these officers aligned themselves with civilian opponents of modernist groups, largely in the traditionalist Muslim community. Geoffrey Robinson (2001, p. 239) has maintained that the formation of civilian-military alliances caused by intra-military factionalism has "enhanced the power of civil society", and sometimes even allowed civilians to "challenge the military or the regime itself". This enhancement of civil society may have occurred occasionally as a by-product, but in most cases, the alliances



focused on promoting the interests of both partners within the regime by gaining access to Suharto's patronage system. In the very few instances that civilian-military alliances carried ideas of reform, these were largely aimed at weakening competitors within the New Order state rather than at presenting conceptual alternatives to Suharto's rule.

It was this successful isolation of reformist ideas from intra-military competition that had allowed Suharto until very late in his rule to avoid the kind of regime-destructive repercussions of military factionalism that had undermined the praetorian regimes of Brazil, Nigeria, and South Korea. Instead, he had been able to use factionalism in the armed forces as an instrument of regime maintenance. While criticism of Suharto's sultanistic leadership emerged in the lower and middle ranks in the mid-1990s, it was not part of the competition within the elite. The various factions in the top brass, despite their concerns about the military's loss of political influence and widespread dissatisfaction with the government, still viewed Suharto as the key to advancing their careers, and feared the complete collapse of the Dual Function should he be removed from office. Accordingly, it required a change in the substance and quality of intra-military divisions for them to pose a serious threat to the regime. Suharto's control over the armed forces was in danger if one or more of the competing factions utilized reformist ideas, and ultimately notions of regime change, as instruments of inter-elite conflict, and if alternatives to Suharto's leadership began to offer higher rewards than continued loyalty. The increasing social and political tensions of the late New Order provided the platform for such a scenario, but it needed the dramatic shock of the crisis unfolding in the second half of 1997 to elevate previously isolated discourses on political reform to the centre of intra-military rivalries.

THE INTRA-MILITARY DEBATE ON THE 1997 ELECTIONS

The political landscape of Indonesia ahead of the 1997 elections showed classic indicators of an autocratic regime that was approaching its end. To begin with, Suharto's age (he had turned seventy-five in 1996) played a crucial role in fuelling expectations that his political departure was near. In addition, while still exercising tight and effective control, Suharto suffered from a number of personal and political setbacks from the beginning of 1996 (Fealy 1997). Crucially, his wife and key political confidante Siti Hartinah, popularly referred to as Tien Suharto, died in April 1996. Shortly afterwards, Suharto spent some time in Germany for medical treatment, sparking



speculation about his health and possible succession scenarios. The sudden vulnerability of Suharto's rule encouraged critical forces both within and outside the government to intensify their political activity. Most significantly, the chairwoman of the secular-nationalist PDI, Megawati Sukarnoputri, openly challenged her replacement by a regime-appointed party official. With public protests against Megawati's removal providing a platform for criticism of Suharto's leadership, many previously cautious dissidents began to demand a clear schedule for the president's exit from the political scene. In July 1996, after several weeks of anti-regime speeches in front of Megawati's PDI headquarters in Jakarta, the military mobilized thugs and supporters of the new, government-backed chairman to storm and occupy the party offices. The attack led to the worst rioting in the city since 1974, leaving at least five people dead and sending hundreds of Megawati followers to prison.⁴

The unrest not only indicated the increasing opposition towards the repressive methods of the regime, but created cracks within the political system of the New Order. Megawati's call on PDI members to ignore the instructions of the new party leadership was largely obeyed, undermining the very three-party system that had supplied Suharto's regime with a modicum of formal legitimacy. In addition, a series of ethnic, religious, and social riots and clashes occurred throughout 1996 and 1997, with government offices, banks, and Chinese businesses being the primary targets (Purdey 2006; Sidel 2007; van Dijk 1997, p. 12). The power erosion typical for late sultanistic regimes, coinciding with ruptures in the previously static polity and increasing levels of social unrest, challenged the key components of the New Order, including the armed forces, to define their level of commitment towards the embattled ruler. With the 1997 general elections approaching, these political protagonists faced the difficult task of having to make decisions that would neither threaten their position in the regime nor exclude them from participation in a possible post-Suharto government.

Military Factionalism Ahead of the 1997 Elections

The internal military discourse on the 1997 general elections provided the first indication that political reform was about to become an element of military factionalism in the late New Order. The controversy did not yet lead to the establishment of clear-cut factions, but individual officers began to take on ideas of change to compete for influence in the armed forces. Catalyzing already existing differences between senior generals, the debate concerned the extent to which the armed forces were prepared to support Golkar in the upcoming polls. In this dispute, some officers



demanded unconditional military support for Golkar's electoral machine and viewed any criticism of Suharto's leadership as an act of subversion. Blaming the increasing societal dissatisfaction with the New Order on internal and external provocateurs, these officers proposed that the security forces prepare for an uncompromising crackdown on dissidents. Guided by a militaristic paradigm of solving political conflicts, their conceptual thinking rejected institutional changes to the New Order system for the foreseeable future and saw a reduction of military engagement in politics as neither necessary nor appropriate. While not aligned in one faction and even frequently engaged in deep personal conflicts among themselves, officers who subscribed to such hawkish views included Army Chief of Staff General Hartono, a close confidant of Suharto's daughter and leading Golkar politician Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana; ABRI Commander General Feisal Tanjung; and the head of Kopassus (Special Forces) Major General Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law.⁵ The three generals had separate and often antagonistic patronage networks below them, with a large number of regional commanders, staff officers, and intelligence operators depending on their favours and protection. Despite their fierce rivalry over appointments and resources,⁶ however, there were also important connections between these highly conservative officers. One important bond was their cooperation with ultra-modernist Muslim organizations, aimed at building up constituents willing to defend the regime against mounting societal dissent. In addition, they were strongly opposed to former ABRI chief Benny Murdani and his patronage of non-Muslim officers, a policy that many of them felt had hampered their careers in the past.

While many officers pleaded for a repressive approach to the emerging societal criticism of the regime, other generals favoured a more compromise-oriented strategy. Although they shared their fellow officers' intolerance towards the militant fringes of the opposition, some commanders believed that there were legitimate complaints over the static nature of the New Order and its inability to accommodate public calls for institutional change. Believing that political problems needed political solutions, these officers also had a mixed opinion on the role of the armed forces in the regime. While they agreed that regime participation was important for political stability and the institutional interests of the military, they feared that too close an identification with the government could damage the reputation of the armed forces. Accordingly, such officers argued against open support for Golkar in the 1997 elections, insisting that it was not the mission of the armed forces to back a particular political party. There was no factional association between generals who supported this view, and they included



officers with such diverse personalities as Chief of Staff of Socio-Political Affairs Muhammad Ma'arif; Chief of Staff of General Affairs Soeyono; and Wiranto, then commander of Kostrad. Wiranto's position on this issue was particularly important, given his influence in the ranks and exclusive access to Suharto. Having served as Suharto's adjutant for four years, he was seen as destined to replace Feisal Tanjung as head of the armed forces when the latter's term expired in 1998.⁷ Wiranto felt a deep personal affection for Suharto, but understood that the longevity of his rule was a source of concern among ordinary Indonesians. The fact that even presidential loyalists such as Wiranto and his inner circle proved susceptible to societal pressure turned them into a good barometer of the political mood in the military and the country as a whole. If societal resistance to the continuation of Suharto's rule remained low or manageable, these officers were certain to continue their support for him; on the other hand, a possible drop in public backing for the president was likely to reduce their willingness to defend the regime at all cost.

In addition to the hawkish and more restrained generals, there was also a small number of officers who developed sharp critiques of the New Order government and its policies. Arguing that the armed forces needed to return to their professional roots, these officers were mainly interested in shielding the military from the growing discontent with Suharto's government. Expecting that regime change would most likely occur through the president's death or voluntary resignation, this tiny minority of military "reformers" projected its idea of opening up the tightly controlled political system into the post-Suharto polity. While stopping short of proposing an unrestricted democratic system, the "reformist" officers were prepared to introduce more political rights and greater institutional transparency. Regarded as "intellectuals", many of them had served for long periods at the military's staff and command schools in Bandung, providing them with the time, resources, and distance to reflect on the future of ABRI's engagement with the regime (Honna 2003, pp. 74–81). Furthermore, they also tended to have extensive foreign experience, including study in the United States, and most had begun their careers in the seventeenth airborne infantry brigade of Kostrad in West Java.⁸ Despite their similar views, however, these younger officers were far from forming a coherent and solid faction. Ironically, some of the most antagonistic relationships in the armed forces occurred among the "reformers", which included Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the regional commander in South Sumatra; the assistant to the ABRI commander, Agus Widjojo; and another staff officer, Agus Wirahadikusumah. Mostly occupying junior staff positions, the "intellectuals" had little influence on the policies of the military elite,



with their opinions voiced in military seminars, discussion circles, and private conversations rather than at official leadership meetings that determined ABRI's political strategy vis-à-vis Suharto and his regime.

The Intra-Military Debate on Golkar

The dispute over the role of the armed forces in the 1997 general elections brought the differences within the armed forces into the open. Lieutenant General Soeyono, then chief of staff of general affairs, recalled how the two diametrically opposed opinions on ABRI's relationship with Golkar clashed at an armed forces leadership meeting in October 1995. At that gathering, Chief of Staff of Socio-Political Affairs Muhammad Ma'ruf openly challenged Hartono's proposal to support Golkar in the upcoming ballot. Demanding that the military remain neutral, Ma'ruf's remarks triggered an angry response by Hartono, who argued that ABRI had a historical obligation to support the party it had helped to create. The debate became so tense that other senior officers had to mediate between the two.⁹ The incident did not convince Hartono to moderate his views, however. On the contrary, he subsequently stepped up his efforts to strengthen ABRI's institutional ties with Golkar. In March 1996, he declared his "personal allegiance" to Siti Hardiyanti in her capacity as deputy chairwoman of the Golkar central board. He began to tour several *pesantren* at Siti Hardiyanti's side, wearing Golkar's yellow uniform jacket, and giving campaign-like speeches (Supriatma 1996, p. 158; Butarbutar 2003, p. 113). In late 1996, he played a significant role in organizing the reconciliation between Abdurrahman Wahid and Suharto, and successfully lobbied the NU leader to open his community to the Golkar campaign. By early 1997, the army chief of staff was seen as a key political player, skillfully balancing his contacts to the Muslim community, Golkar politicians, and the presidential family.

The controversy between proponents of political neutrality and officers propagating institutional support for Golkar provided invaluable insights into the politics of factionalism within the armed forces. Most importantly, officers on both sides exercised considerable pressure on their subordinates to endorse their individual viewpoints. They offered speedy promotion in case of obedience, and threatened to obstruct the careers of disloyal commanders. Djadja Suparman, then chief of staff at the South Sumatran Sriwijaya command, reported that the pro-Golkar generals were particularly active in calling up influential officers to demand loyalty and explain possible sanctions if they did not sign up to their political agenda.¹⁰ The second element in the intra-military competition was association with civilian partners in order to



build societal support and launch attacks against rivals. Hartono, for example, supported the Center for Policy Development Studies (CPDS), a think tank staffed largely with researchers from a modernist Islamic background. Ahead of the 1997 elections, the organization published a paper that accused Wiranto of planning Suharto's downfall.¹¹ Wiranto, for his part, commented that the paper "contained nothing but lies and garbage".¹² The bad-mouthing of competitors had, as the incident showed, turned into an important feature of internal factionalism in the armed forces in the late 1990s.

The militancy of some of the pro-Golkar generals convinced the more critical and "intellectual" officers to intensify their activities and turn their thoughts into coherent concepts. Wirahadikusumah, for example, organized an army seminar in June 1996, at the height of the PDI crisis and Hartono's campaign for Golkar. The seminar criticized the political "superstructure", i.e. the government, for its excessive intervention in socio-political life, nepotistic and corrupt practices, and inconsistency in policies. Significantly, papers presented at the seminar suggested that the armed forces mediate between the "superstructure" and society, effectively defining ABRI as a non-participant in the New Order regime (Honna 2003, pp. 81–86). Based on this analysis, some of the reform-minded officers, including Yudhoyono, developed a new doctrinal concept for ABRI, which was discussed within the ranks in the first half of 1997. The concept contained four points: first, ABRI had to accustom itself to the idea that it was not always to be at the forefront of political developments; second, the concept of "occupying" would be transformed into a concept of "influencing"; third, ABRI's method of exerting influence would be changed from a direct to an indirect way; and fourth, ABRI was ready for political role-sharing with civilian forces.¹³ The four suggestions added up to what its authors called the "New Paradigm of ABRI's Dual Function". While the paradigm was drafted to undermine the pro-Golkar officers, many of their adversaries, such as Wiranto, did not endorse the concept. Despite their deep antagonism towards Hartono and other proponents of ABRI's role as the guardian of Golkar's political predominance, Wiranto and his circle saw no reason to reformulate the military's doctrine. The political and economic situation still seemed sufficiently stable, and as long as this did not change, officers close to Wiranto chose the status quo over the uncertainty associated with a possible revision of ABRI's role.

The marginality of reformist thinking in the officer corps was reflected in the military's preparations for and its conduct of the general elections. In February 1997, shortly before the polls, Feisal Tanjung emphatically rejected the results of a study conducted by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI, *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia*), in which it had



proposed the gradual disengagement of the military from political affairs.¹⁴ In addition, the continued dominance of repressive security paradigms in the military elite also became apparent at an ABRI leadership meeting in April 1997. There, the military top brass condemned the emergence of new social organizations with leftist orientations, the uncontrolled circulation of pamphlets, the publication of books not in line with Pancasila, and the proliferation of NGOs with a tendency to “political adventurism”.¹⁵ Apparently, none of the criticisms raised at the 1996 seminar had made it into ABRI’s official language. The only success at this gathering for the “intellectual” officers and the proponents of the military’s political neutrality was the abortion of Hartono’s campaign for direct electoral support of Golkar. Announcing the compromise between the various viewpoints, Feisal Tanjung suggested that the relationship between individual officers and the government party was of a personal rather than an institutional nature. The armed forces subsequently extended indirect support to Golkar, however, by helping to remove one of the greatest obstacles to another landslide victory for the regime: the “Mega-Bintang” movement.¹⁶ The initiative, which was strongest in Central Java, had been launched by PPP officials who hoped to attract the support of pro-Megawati voters determined to endorse neither the government-sanctioned PDI nor Golkar. The movement gained considerable momentum in the national media and some urban centres, but the security apparatus dispersed Mega-Bintang crowds wherever they emerged (Thoyibi 1999, p. 43). Towards the end of the campaign, the initiative had largely collapsed, and the way was open for Golkar to claim its sixth successive triumph in New Order electoral history.

Triumph or Decline? The Post-Election Landscape

The result of the 1997 general elections exposed the growing gap between the political sentiments in large sections of the population and the “theatre politics” performed by the New Order establishment. Despite high levels of social unrest, widespread criticism of corruption, and the inability of the elite to absorb demands for reform, Golkar won 74 per cent of the votes and the largest majority in parliament since the creation of the New Order. Golkar chairman Harmoko presented the outcome of the polls as an unprecedented vote of confidence in the regime, but in reality it delivered the ultimate proof of its inherent failure to accommodate change (Srengenge 1998). The clearest indication of this failure was not the ridiculously inflated result for Golkar, however, but the almost complete disappearance of the PDI. Only 3 per



cent of the electorate supported the party, a decline of almost 12 per cent. Evidently, the majority of nationalist voters had expressed their resentment of the government intervention in PDI's affairs by withdrawing their support not only for the proxy backed by the regime, but for Suharto's restricted party system as a whole. Even the president appeared to be uncomfortable with the election results and the way several government officials claimed credit for them. Only one week after the elections, Suharto dismissed Harmoko from his post as minister of information, and filled the vacancy with General Hartono.

Hartono's departure from the army was followed by the most extensive reshuffle in the armed forces since early 1995. The reshuffle improved the position of those officers who had opposed supporting Golkar in the general elections, with Hartono replaced by Wiranto as army chief of staff. Subagyo H.S., who was appointed as Wiranto's deputy, and Sugiono, who became commander of Kostrad, had also propagated ABRI's neutrality in the polls, although they held rather hawkish views on other political and social issues. The defenders of a repressive approach to regime opposition maintained their grip on key positions, however, with Feisal still in command of ABRI headquarters and Prabowo retaining his control of Kopassus. In addition to balancing diverse patronage networks and different political viewpoints, Suharto had once again used personal loyalty to him as the most crucial criterion for promotion. Officers who had served in the palace either as adjutant (Wiranto), in the presidential security squad (Subagyo), or both (Sugiono) were elevated in the reshuffle,¹⁷ and Prabowo together with the head of the national police, former presidential adjutant General Diby Widodo, remained central figures in the security apparatus. Hence there was no doubt that despite their severe factional and personal divisions, the armed forces were in the hands of officers with long-standing personal ties to the Suharto family and its cronies.¹⁸

The contrast between the mechanical conduct of the elections and the general mood in the country pointed to signs of decay within the regime. The cracks in the elite that O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 19) have identified as the major cause for degenerating authoritarian systems were clearly visible. In addition, the destruction of the PDI in the elections exposed ruptures not only in the elite, but in the political framework as a whole. With the credibility of the New Order's political system at an all-time low, Suharto's re-election through the MPR scheduled for March 1998 was overshadowed by uncertainties concerning his future. Moreover, the divisions in the armed forces over their political stance in the 1997 elections had, for the first time, triggered the emergence of a reformist discourse at the fringes of the officer



corps that even involved images of an Indonesia without Suharto. While unable to penetrate the decision-making process of the military elite in 1997, these ideas had the potential of attracting officers in the army mainstream who had opted for neutrality in the Golkar dispute and appeared to prefer a political approach to regime opponents over sheer repression. These officers, which included generals as influential as Wiranto, had so far extended firm support to Suharto, but a further destabilization of the New Order polity was likely to change that.

MILITARY FACTIONALISM IN A DECLINING REGIME: ABRI AND THE CRISIS

The New Order state of mid-1997 was crippled by inter-elite conflict, social unrest, and political stagnation. Despite old divisions and newly emerging ruptures in its political system, however, the Suharto regime appeared stable enough to neutralize serious threats to its rule. The single most important factor in this was continued economic growth. The New Order's rise to power in 1966 had been underpinned by promises of political stability and economic development, and for most of the time, the government had delivered. Anne Booth (1999, p. 129) contended that "whatever its exact dimensions, a prolonged and broad-based improvement in living standards under the New Order did take place". In the eyes of many Indonesians, the robust economic growth had justified restrictions on political activities and individual freedoms, and even supported certain levels of tolerance towards corruption in the elite. The economic strength of the regime, however, made it politically vulnerable. With the legitimacy of the government tied to its economic performance, any significant disruption in the economy was certain to alter the political attitudes of Indonesian society.

The view that economic development legitimized non-democratic forms of governance was a central theme in the political thinking of the armed forces elite, but it played an even more important role in the logic of Suharto's sultanistic rule. With the armed forces slowly disengaging from formal politics since the 1980s, it was Suharto who personally exercised almost absolute control over political institutions, society, and the economy. Consequently, the public was much more likely to identify Suharto as the main cause of economic difficulties than any other component of the regime. The business empire of the presidential family had been exposed to sharp criticism for some time, but was certain to become the focus of societal outrage if economic conditions deteriorated (Habir 1999, p. 86). The emergence of a regime-critical discourse in segments of the armed



forces provided the public with additional reasons for differentiating between the president and the institutions he used to stabilize his government. Thus, when the economic crisis began to affect Indonesia in July 1997, following the float of the Thai baht and the fall of the Malaysian ringgit, Suharto was the most vulnerable target in the search for the causes of this downturn (McIntyre 1999). The crisis, which initially appeared to have hit the monetary sector only, soon spiralled into political dimensions. Economic observers noted that Suharto's anachronistic system was incompatible with the requirements of global markets, and pointed to the uncertainty of Suharto's succession as a major reason for the massive capital outflow. The dramatic drop in the stock market and the Indonesian currency paralysed the real sector, with foreign debts increasing, investment projects cancelled or postponed, and consumption declining. Unemployment rose, the numbers of corporate bankruptcies exploded, and inflation reached levels last seen in the mid-1970s. By the end of the year, the free fall of the economy was accelerated by a severe drought that led to a disastrous decline in agricultural production (McLeod 1998, pp. 37–38).

Crisis and Competition: The Wiranto-Prabowo Rivalry

While critics largely focused on the institutional inflexibility of Suharto's rule, the economic decline also affected the legitimacy of military participation in politics. The armed forces had traditionally presented their role in securing economic growth as a key reason for their political engagement, but the sudden downturn in the economy challenged this claim. The tight control of society, previously viewed as an important factor in containing political conflicts, was now widely blamed for the lack of creativity and competitiveness of Indonesian businesses. With central components of ABRI's doctrine eroded by the crisis, senior officers and their patronage networks were confronted with difficult strategic choices as far as their relations with Suharto were concerned. For the time being, unconditional defence of the president appeared as the only realistic option for most generals, regardless of whether they supported uncompromising repression of dissidents or pleaded for less draconian responses. From their perspective, the risk that Suharto's fall would end the Dual Function was seen as more harmful than the political cost of maintaining the regime. The "intellectual" officers, on the other hand, were not in a position to influence the decision-making in the top brass. Yudhoyono was promoted in August 1997 to the post of assistant to the chief of staff of socio-political affairs, but was still unable to implant ideas of substantial reform into the political attitudes of the most senior military



elite. Agus Wirahadikusumah, then deputy assistant of general planning, felt frustrated by the conservatism of his superiors:

The world was collapsing around them, but the military leadership did nothing. Nothing! They just could not connect the dots. Suharto was clearly responsible for what was happening, but all they talked about was giving him his fifth star, an honorary star for all his extraordinary achievements! I couldn't believe it.¹⁹

Before conferring a fifth star on Suharto and declaring him a "Grand General" in early October,²⁰ the ABRI leadership had announced in August that it would re-nominate Suharto for the presidency. Outgoing Chief of Staff of Socio-Political Affairs, Lieutenant General Syarwan Hamid, explained that ABRI had decided to put its trust in the president as the majority of Indonesians wanted to see a continuation of his rule.²¹ At the same time, ABRI backed Suharto's request for the restitution of a 1988 MPR decree giving the president special powers to deal with security threats in emergency situations.²² Furthermore, ABRI rejected suggestions to limit presidential terms to two periods, the idea coming closest to public criticism of Suharto at that early stage of the crisis.²³

The caution exercised by generals from diverse factional backgrounds suggested that the system built by Suharto was still strong enough to detect and prevent disloyalty towards him. Evidently, the norms and rules of that system continued to dictate the dynamics of intra-military conflict. In the second half of 1997, competition within the armed forces focused on the position of ABRI commander. Feisal Tanjung was expected to be replaced soon, and there were only two prospective candidates for the job: Wiranto, the army chief of staff, and Prabowo Subianto, who was still only a two-star general, but had significantly more influence within ABRI than his rank suggested.²⁴ Obviously, this competition was not only a personal rivalry, it also concerned the future attitude of the military to regime opposition and the continuation of Suharto's rule. Throughout August and September, rumours supported Prabowo's hopes of a promotion to chief of staff of general affairs and a third star, therefore qualifying him for the top post.²⁵ But the promotion never came. Prabowo later reported that the chemistry between him and the army chief of staff was bad, blaming the stark contrast between Wiranto's Javanese village background and his own origin from a Western-educated, intellectually sophisticated family.²⁶ Despite the relevance of Prabowo's observation, it appears that their antagonism had less to do with cultural or educational differences than with the high stakes involved in the appointment



of the ABRI chief: as Suharto rarely changed ABRI commanders before the end of their five-year term, only one of them could make it to the top, with the loser likely to be sidelined under the leadership of the winner.²⁷

The competition between Wiranto and Prabowo over the armed forces leadership was accompanied by the same features of military factionalism that had marked the intra-military conflicts of the 1990s: the promotion of loyalists to key positions, the establishment of links with civilian supporters, and the bad-mouthing of competitors. The crisis, however, catalyzed the political relevance of the rivalry. It was obvious that Suharto would look favourably upon military officers whose political activities and interactions assisted him in addressing the growing problems. Prabowo apparently believed that Suharto wanted to shift the blame for the crisis to Chinese tycoons and confront his critics with repression rather than persuasion. Accordingly, Prabowo strengthened his links with Islamic groups on the far right of the political spectrum, and encouraged them to promote their traditional views that Chinese rent-seekers undermined the Indonesian economy.²⁸ At the same time, he ordered a special unit in Kopassus to prepare for the kidnapping of several political activists who had spoken out against the re-election of Suharto. Wiranto, on the other hand, consolidated his relationship with the main opponent of Prabowo's civilian allies, Abdurrahman Wahid. Wiranto viewed the alliance with the moderate Muslim leader as an effective instrument to appease the critics of the regime and demonstrate its openness towards ideas of change. According to Wahid, Wiranto was not convinced that Suharto endorsed Prabowo's tactics of political radicalization and physical violence against opponents to re-stabilize the regime. Wiranto thus sent envoys to Wahid, asking him to help the president restore order by calling on Indonesians to remain calm.²⁹ Despite their close ties with Suharto, however, neither Wiranto nor Prabowo could predict with absolute certainty the strategies and methods the president had in mind for overcoming the mounting difficulties. For that reason, the political manoeuvres of both officers were conducted in secretive ways for most of the first period of the crisis between July and December 1997.³⁰

The divisions between Prabowo and Wiranto were not, despite claims by many observers, an indication of a religious split within the military. Robert Hefner (2000, p. 151), for example, suggested that Prabowo was a member of the "ascendant 'Islamic' wing of the armed forces". Opposed to this "green" faction was the "red-and-white" group, which Hefner identified as "nationalist". It appears, however, that the political alliances both Prabowo and Wiranto built were to a much larger extent shaped by their divergent views on how to deal with regime opposition than by individual religio-ideological



preferences. The major difference between these two paradigms was the degree to which the military was prepared to nurture and mobilize militant societal elements in defence of the regime, and was only superficially related to the role of Islam in society or politics. Prabowo was hardly an Islamic radical, with his family rooted in the former PSI (*Partai Sosialis Indonesia*, Indonesian Socialist Party), ideals of Western education, and acceptance of non-Muslims.³¹ Prabowo had learnt, however, that Islam could be a powerful instrument of political engineering, using it in the early 1990s to confront the remnants of the Murdani group.³² Wiranto, on the other hand, was a practising Muslim, and not opposed to a greater role of Islamic groups in political life. What the two officers fought over at this stage of the crisis was the most suitable strategy to contain the mounting opposition to Suharto's presidency, and they were bitterly opposed in their competition for the armed forces leadership. So far, neither Prabowo nor Wiranto had contemplated political alternatives beyond Suharto's rule to advance their interests. It needed a further escalation in the crisis to not only raise the stakes of the intra-military conflict, but to also link the rival officers with Suharto critics both inside and outside the armed forces.

THE CRISIS ESCALATES: BETWEEN REPRESSION AND DIALOGUE

The second phase of the crisis, beginning in December 1997, saw a serious deterioration in economic and political conditions. Suharto suffered a mild stroke in early December, sparking fresh speculation on the issue of his succession.³³ The news led to negotiations between oppositional forces over forming an alliance in case sudden opportunities should arise, with several prominent figures coming forward to question Suharto's continued rule. Amien Rais had already declared his willingness to run for president in September, breaking the New Order taboo against proposing Suharto's replacement. By January, Megawati joined the chorus, offering to lead the country if nobody more appropriate was found. While his re-election was openly challenged, Suharto aggravated the economic decline by presenting a highly unrealistic state budget in early January.³⁴ The subsequent free fall of the rupiah caused widespread panic, with supermarkets emptied by customers worried about the escalating prices of basic food items. Only days later, the IMF intervened, forcing Suharto to sign a second letter of intent after he had failed to meet the benchmarks set in a similar document agreed upon in October (Eklöf 1999, pp. 122–23). At the same time, Suharto shocked the political elite by announcing his vice-presidential



candidate for the 1998–2003 term: B.J. Habibie, his minister of research and technology, who was well known for spending big on ambitious, but dubious development projects. Domestic political actors were stunned at this choice, as were international investors, who sent the rupiah to another all-time low (Schwarz 1998).

Blaming the Chinese: Prabowo's Strategy of Radicalization

The nomination of Habibie sharpened the factionalism within the officer corps. While he was disliked by the armed forces mainstream for his interference in ABRI's procurement procedures and his political affiliation with Islamic groups, Habibie had several military associates. Feisal Tanjung, Syarwan Hamid, and the then Chief of Staff of Socio-Political Affairs Yunus Yosfiah were known to be close to Habibie, but his most influential ally was Prabowo. Their relationship was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, Prabowo opened access for Habibie to ABRI's formal command structure, helping him to mitigate deeply entrenched sentiments in the officer corps against the civilian technology expert. He also provided Habibie with an additional link to the presidential family, as some of Suharto's children did not approve of the close relationship between their father and his favourite minister. On the other hand, Prabowo hoped that the vice-presidential candidate would pave his way to the top post of the armed forces, either through input given to Suharto or by succeeding the latter. According to Prabowo, Habibie used to dream aloud of his future presidency, under which Prabowo would be "armed forces chief, you'll be four-star" (Tesoro 2000). It was this promise that formed the core of their alliance. It provided a crucial incentive for Prabowo to secure Suharto's re-election and, inseparably linked to it, the installation of his associate in the vice-presidency. Significantly, Habibie supporters sent out public signals that seemed to confirm Prabowo's hopes. A.M. Saefuddin, a close Habibie confidant in the PPP faction and later minister of agriculture in his cabinet, predicted during the crisis that Suharto would use special powers handed to him by the MPR to make Habibie president in 2000, with Prabowo filling the then vacant vice-presidency.³⁵

Opposition to Habibie's nomination was strong, however, and Prabowo played an active role in regime efforts aimed at defusing it. The international and domestic business community, especially Chinese conglomerates, objected to Habibie's lack of economic credentials and his open support for indigenous, Muslim entrepreneurs. The campaign against Habibie was initiated by Sofyan Wanandi, a leading Chinese businessman and a central



figure at the think-tank CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), in which the retired Benny Murdani still maintained an office.³⁶ One week after Habibie's likely nomination made headlines, Sofyan's name was suddenly implicated in a bomb explosion in a low-class apartment in Central Jakarta. In the course of the investigations under Prabowo's friend Sjafrie Sjamsuoddin, "evidence" was found that linked the incident to Sofyan. Sofyan was investigated, but the widely expected questioning of Benny Murdani was called off.³⁷ Violent demonstrators appeared at the CSIS building for two consecutive days, on 26 and 27 January, demanding that Sofyan be brought to court and CSIS shut down. According to one leading CSIS executive, the demonstrations only stopped after he called Zacky Anwar Makarim, Prabowo's associate in command of the military intelligence agency, BIA: "We knew who was behind the mobilization of the crowds that threw stones at our office, and I told Zacky that this madness had to end, otherwise we would make the involvement of senior officers in the whole affair public."³⁸ If Prabowo and his associates had cornered CSIS, Wiranto pledged to protect it. Wiranto ordered the police to secure the CSIS offices, and the protests quickly died down.

The campaign against CSIS signalled the beginning of Prabowo's accelerated efforts to mobilize the Muslim majority against what he portrayed as a Chinese conspiracy to bring down the New Order. On 23 January, Prabowo and his ABRI associates met with prominent modernist intellectuals and *kiai* at a large fast-breaking gathering at the Kopassus headquarters. While his staff distributed books containing data on the Chinese dominance of the Indonesian economy, Prabowo called on the participants to unite against those who threatened the stability of the nation (Cohen 1998a).³⁹ After the sharp devaluation of the rupiah in the first week of January, Suharto had privately spoken of machinations of the financial markets to undermine his authority, but after the next rapid drop following Habibie's nomination, the president made his suspicions public. Officers close to Prabowo interpreted Suharto's remarks as an endorsement of his son-in-law's confrontational approach, and they acted accordingly. Feisal Tanjung phoned thirteen ethnic Chinese tycoons in mid-January, asking them for "donations" in order to overcome the economic crisis,⁴⁰ and he led the anti-Sofyan chorus in ABRI headquarters.⁴¹ Prabowo's double strategy of aggravating political conflicts and conducting covert operations to confront the opponents of the regime was gradually adopted by other officers in the military elite, particularly those with a reputation for hardline views and an immediate interest in Habibie's ascension to the vice-presidency.



Mitigating Tensions: Wiranto and the “Intellectuals”

Wiranto countered Prabowo’s strategy of radicalization and mobilization with an approach of mitigation, offering the critics of the regime dialogue and ordinary Indonesians empathy for their suffering caused by the crisis. This did not reflect a particular “soft-line” element in Wiranto’s political character, but rather the insight that Suharto had a greater chance of staying in power by defusing than by fuelling societal tensions. While Wiranto had previously made few efforts to conceptualize his thoughts and reflect on their political consequences, Prabowo’s divisive strategies for defending the regime convinced Wiranto that he needed to consolidate both his strategic thinking and his team of advisers. It was in this environment of competition with Prabowo that Wiranto began to link up with the military “intellectuals”, who in the past had isolated themselves from the army mainstream by propagating ideas of reform and long-term regime change. Wiranto now began to seek their advice, and slowly but steadily their language and argumentation started to impact on Wiranto’s:

Of course the crisis changed us a lot. It forced us to reconsider the principles of our political beliefs. I include myself in this.... We had to go out to people and signal that we understood their problems, and that we were ready for change. That did not mean toppling Suharto, but constituted an invitation to society to work with us to overcome the crisis — not pinning the blame on certain groups and then taking profit from it. That was certain to lead to disaster.⁴²

The paradigmatic difference between Wiranto’s conciliatory approach and Prabowo’s strategy of escalation was reflected in the meetings that the army chief of staff organized with influential society figures. In discussions with Muslim leaders on 18 and 25 January, Wiranto stressed the necessity to defuse tensions, asking the *kiai* to assist the government in fighting against what he called “destructive rumours”.⁴³ One of Wiranto’s allies, Chief of Staff of General Affairs Lieutenant General Tarub, even launched an indirect attack on Prabowo and Feisal by suggesting that their accusations against the Chinese tycoons were baseless. Alluding to Feisal Tanjung’s remark that Chinese corporations had done nothing at all to help stop the economic decline, Tarub asserted that the media simply might not have covered the advice given by leading tycoons on how to solve the crisis.⁴⁴ Stating that there should be no differential treatment of the Chinese entrepreneurs as the crisis called on all Indonesians to do their duty, Tarub could not have drawn a sharper demarcation line to Prabowo and his circle.



In addition to Wiranto's efforts to convince important societal constituencies to be patient and allow the government to overcome the economic difficulties, some of his associates established contacts with critics of the regime. Major General Agum Gumelar, then chief of the Wirabuana command in Sulawesi, spoke regularly with Amien Rais:

We exchanged information with Amien. He told us things, we told him things. For instance, when some within the government thought Amien should be arrested for treason, we told him to slow down. [Yudhoyono] also knew Amien well, so we had pretty good relations with him.⁴⁵

The polarization between those officers determined to suppress oppositional groups by force, and other military leaders prepared to open a dialogue with dissidents, pointed to the rapidly changing nature of intra-military competition. In the past, the logic of New Order military factionalism had required competing generals to demonstrate maximum levels of loyalty towards Suharto. The divisions emerging amidst the political and economic decline of the regime in 1997 and 1998, however, had much stronger conceptual features, and none of them looked particularly promising for the president. Prabowo's manoeuvres in defence of the regime were aimed at securing the election of Habibie to the vice-presidency, and he offered few indications about his plans beyond that date. Wiranto, on the other hand, believed at that stage that Suharto's regime was reformable, and he was determined to win wide-ranging societal support for this view (Sulistyo 2002, pp. 190–92). Given Suharto's fierce resistance towards reform, however, the officers around Wiranto increasingly opened up to the very ideas of political change that had been discussed by the military "intellectuals" since 1996. The ultimate conclusion from this gradual adaptation process within the Wiranto group was instinctively felt by the officers associated with it, but they were reluctant to express it openly: Suharto had to resign, and the main task of the armed forces was to secure an honourable and orderly departure of their patron.

FINAL ELECTION, FINAL RESHUFFLE

Military factionalism had been a major element of regime stabilization throughout Suharto's rule. Balancing rival groups and distributing important positions among them, Suharto granted rewards and punished disloyalty. The fact that Suharto did not deem it necessary to sideline either of the two major patronage networks competing for hegemony in early 1998, and



used the last reshuffle of his presidency to allocate key posts proportionally between officers associated with Wiranto and Prabowo, indicated that the embattled leader was still convinced of the continued loyalty of his military elite. Suharto appeared to trust the public assurances given by both Wiranto and Prabowo that they were determined to keep him in power, and seemed unaware of Prabowo's understanding with Habibie on the one side and the growing influence of the idea of regime change in Wiranto's circle on the other. Consequently, he appointed Wiranto as ABRI chief and Prabowo as commander of Kostrad in February 1998. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who as one of the "intellectuals" felt closer to Wiranto's approach to the crisis than to that favoured by Prabowo, became chief of staff of socio-political affairs, handing compromise-oriented officers a crucial military portfolio to begin negotiations with regime dissidents. As compensation, however, Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono replaced his friend Prabowo as head of Kopassus. Subagyo H.S., for his part, was promoted to army chief of staff.⁴⁶ The reshuffle left supporters of Wiranto and Prabowo with roughly equal control networks within the armed forces: Wiranto headed ABRI headquarters, with key allies holding important regional commands and most positions in the military's socio-political branch. Prabowo, on the other hand, had direct control of, or influence over, the brigades of the capital, Kopassus, the ABRI intelligence agency, and his own unit, Kostrad.

The reshuffle pointed to Suharto's inability to adapt to the radically changed political context created by the crisis. In the same way that he applied conventional strategies to address untraditional economic and political threats to his regime, he appeared to believe that the well-tested approach of engineered factionalism in the military would carry him through the turmoil (Mietzner 1999). Suharto had obviously failed to notice that the character of this factionalism had changed substantially, and that it, for the first time, included scenarios of a post-Suharto military. The paradigmatic shift became evident in Wiranto's first major policy speech after his appointment on 23 February. Openly contradicting the position of his hawkish predecessor Feisal Tanjung that the country's problems had been instigated by "provocateurs",⁴⁷ Wiranto conceded that Indonesia faced a political, economic, and security crisis. The complexity of this crisis, Wiranto explained, affected all aspects of life. The middle class was losing its competitive talents and its vitality, while the lower classes saw their purchasing power declining. Unemployment was up, social inequality widened, and crime was increasing, with the vast majority of Indonesians experiencing a drastic drop in living standards. In such a situation, Wiranto said, it was understandable that the people felt helpless in facing realities.⁴⁸ While he signalled that ABRI was

prepared to stop potential “troublemakers” from exploiting the crisis for political gains, Wiranto’s empathy for those socially affected by the crisis marked a significant breach with Feisal’s approach to security politics. His analysis of the problems echoed many of the critical ideas discussed in the 1996 army seminar, and indicated how far the thinking of the “intellectuals” had penetrated the views of Wiranto and his circle. It was this increasing susceptibility to rising societal demands for change that slowly eroded Wiranto’s institutional loyalty to Suharto, and not, as O’Rourke (2002, p. 113) suggested, the predilection of the ABRI chief for Javanese “tales of kings being overthrown by their trusted advisors, lieutenants or even their own brothers”.

Frustrated Hopes: Suharto’s Inability to Reform

The mounting tensions caused by the factional differences in the officer corps came into the open on the day of Wiranto’s speech. During the handover ceremony of the post of army chief of staff from Wiranto to Subagyo, Agum Gumelar asked his fellow regional commanders as well as the heads of Kostrad and Kopassus to join him in declaring an oath of loyalty to Wiranto.⁴⁹ Agum was one of the core members of Wiranto’s circle, and his dislike for Prabowo was well known.⁵⁰ The oath was a clear warning to Prabowo and his associates, with Agum keen to “make sure that everybody understood who the new commander was, and that was Wiranto”.⁵¹ The now publicly exposed splits within the military provided strong indications for the political elite and the broader population that some elements in the armed forces were prepared to reconsider their support for Suharto. This perception had a significant impact on the character of subsequent events leading up to Suharto’s fall. The removal of the president had been the primary target of oppositional forces for some time, but now these groups turned to lobbying military leaders to achieve their goal. Marking the beginning of the third phase of the crisis, students began to organize and demonstrate in late February against Suharto’s re-election, but at the same time they distributed flowers to soldiers and police officers who showed a much less repressive approach to their protest than some had feared.⁵² Wiranto’s concept to contain and de-escalate the protests rather than to violently disperse them helped to convince key government critics that the political attitude of some senior military officers was indeed undergoing substantial change. That other elements in the military still favoured the traditional security approach only reinforced the interest of regime dissidents in establishing contact with commanders thought to be more open towards the idea of regime change.



The public interpretation of the intra-military conflicts as a competition between moderate officers and more hardline generals favoured Wiranto's group as far as societal support for its approach was concerned. The kidnappings of student activists, labour leaders, and other dissidents, starting in February and widely linked to Prabowo, accelerated this polarization and provided Wiranto with further arguments for his policy of de-escalation. It was unclear, however, whether Suharto would appreciate Wiranto's non-confrontational approach as much as large segments of society did. Given the risk that the president might view Wiranto's tolerance of societal protest as an indication of declining loyalty towards him, the ABRI commander had to strike a delicate balance between accommodating public discontent and maintaining the political hegemony of the regime.

The intra-military debate on Habibie's nomination for the vice-presidency delivered a welcome opportunity for Wiranto to express his continued loyalty to Suharto. The press had speculated that Wiranto would overturn Feisal's earlier decision to back Habibie, with many retired officers publicly encouraging him to do so. Wiranto, however, made it clear that ABRI stood by its endorsement of Habibie.⁵³ The armed forces leader saw little value in seeking an open confrontation with Suharto, and Wiranto also did not believe that Habibie's election would significantly alter the power balance in the military. In fact, he insisted that his personal relationship with Habibie was good. They had become acquainted during Wiranto's time as presidential adjutant, when they discovered some similarities in their family's origins: Wiranto's wife was from Gorontalo, as was Habibie's father, and Habibie's mother was from Yogya, like the ABRI chief himself.⁵⁴ Discounting the warnings from colleagues that Habibie would promote Prabowo's interests in the armed forces if elected as Suharto's deputy, Wiranto assured Habibie of his support. Habibie's appointment as vice-president was confirmed by the MPR in mid-March, and Suharto was handed his seventh term in office. Many observers believed that Suharto had no intention of resigning any time soon, and therefore did not view Habibie's election as a final decision on the matter of succession. Some even suspected that Suharto had chosen a controversial deputy in order to deflect demands for his departure from politics. If that was indeed Suharto's intention, it provided further evidence for his declining political instincts. Despite the smooth procession of Suharto's re-election in the MPR and the theatrical celebrations of his achievements, the political cynicism in both the elite and the general population continued to grow.



The officers supporting a non-repressive approach to the crisis had hoped that Suharto would use his re-election to begin reforms aimed at overcoming the stalemate and stabilizing the political situation. Even the most progressive and liberal of the “intellectuals”, who were deeply sceptical about Suharto’s ability to bring about major change, examined the president’s every statement and political manoeuvre for possible signals of his willingness to reform. However, their search returned nothing, as Wirahadikusumah recalled:

We thought he still might have a last chance, if he just offered something to calm down the protesters. Anything, really. More political parties, more freedoms, maybe early elections. Or a clear plan for his retirement. But there was just a big zero.⁵⁵

Suharto, in delivering both his accountability and acceptance speech at the MPR, had not only failed to offer concrete reforms, but had presented an analysis of the situation that indicated his increasing isolation from political realities. Against the background of economic crisis, political stagnation, social riots, and demonstrating students, Suharto read out economic statistics that compared the 1993–94 period with that of 1997–98, stressing the successes of his government in raising per capita income, life expectancy, and the value of exports.⁵⁶ Mentioning air crashes, train and ship accidents, as well as the ongoing drought, he described the events of 1997 as a chain of unfortunate incidents, ultimately culminating in the economic crisis, which he largely blamed on the IMF. Suharto promised to serve out his full term, and made no reference to political reforms or a controlled transfer of power to his successor. The president’s political immobility came as a great disappointment to the officers around Wiranto. Agum Gumelar, asked by the ABRI faction to present the response of the armed forces to Suharto’s accountability report, declined because “people would hate me for that sort of hypocrisy”.⁵⁷ ABRI’s response to the president, eventually read out by the police chief, reflected a compromise between Suharto’s view of the economic crisis as a technical matter and the position of the compromise-oriented officers that political change was inevitable. According to ABRI’s official statement, two things were important: first, overcoming the economic crisis, and second, reform of the political system, the economy, and the judiciary. While the first agenda was of an “actual” and “situational” character, the second was more “fundamental, structural, and cultural”. In other words: while solving the economic crisis was the priority, political reform was only a long-term project.⁵⁸



Wiranto and the Inevitability of Regime Change

The image of Suharto's progressing political calcification was aggravated by the announcement of the new cabinet shortly after the MPR session. Filled with loyalists, the cabinet featured the president's decades-long friend and tycoon Bob Hasan in the crucial department of industry and trade. In addition, Siti Hardiyanti became minister for social affairs, in a promotion that many saw as the initial step to a dynastic solution to the succession problem (McBeth 1998*b*).⁵⁹ The hawkish former general Hartono was appointed minister of home affairs, and Wiranto Arismunandar, the brother of Tien Suharto's brother-in-law and notoriously harsh rector of the Bandung Institute of Technology, became minister of education.

The composition of the cabinet signalled Suharto's unwillingness to reform the political system, and it had an immediate, radicalizing effect on the student movement and other oppositional forces. Amien Rais, who had earlier softened some of his criticism of the regime following Habibie's selection as vice-president,⁶⁰ resumed his role as the intellectual leader of the reform movement, travelling to campuses and providing political guidance to the previously disorganized student groups. The new radicalism not only facilitated the spread of the student protests from the cities of Java to other areas of the archipelago, it also questioned the effectiveness of Wiranto's concept of de-escalation. Wiranto's approach had been based on efforts to convince the protesters of the inherent ability of the New Order to reform itself, and had offered dialogue as a way of integrating the critics back into the regime. However, by insisting that no political reform was necessary, Suharto eroded the most important precondition for the successful implementation of Wiranto's strategy. With Suharto incapable of delivering prospects for change, and the students determined not to give up before the president resigned, the outbreak of violent confrontation was only a matter of time. The escalation of the conflict would, eventually, expose as unworkable and outdated the attempts of officers in Wiranto's circle to offer change within Suharto's political framework. Thus the resignation of the president, both unthinkable and unacceptable for many officers close to Wiranto only a few months ago, increasingly appeared to them as the only possible solution to the crisis.

The generals in favour of negotiations with the opposition moved closer to dissociating themselves from Suharto after the escalation of violence on the campuses in mid-March 1998. On 17 March, 103 students were seriously injured during a confrontation with security personnel in Solo. As a result, universities in Jakarta, Lampung, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar saw the number of protesters increasing by the day. Wiranto



had earlier signalled that the armed forces would tolerate demonstrations on the campuses, but were determined to prevent them from taking to the streets. This warning was increasingly ignored, aggravating the tensions between student leaders and the local security apparatus.⁶¹ In early April, apparently violating Wiranto's orders, security forces attacked the Gadjah Mada University campus in Yogyakarta, leaving scores wounded and seriously damaging ABRI's reputation. The clashes increased fears within Wiranto's circle that the strategic goal of the protests might shift once again, and this time include the role of the armed forces as a major focus of criticism. Suharto's removal had become the main theme of the protests, but the more the armed forces were viewed as being inextricably tied to the regime, the more likely they were to be targeted by the oppositional demands for change. Wiranto was well aware of this risk, and responded by offering an open discussion forum between ABRI and the student movement on political reform issues. Student leaders, however, were in no mood to compromise and boycotted the ABRI-sponsored dialogue scheduled for 18 April. It was at this juncture of the crisis that Wiranto realized the failure of his conciliatory approach and, by implication, the impossibility of defending Suharto:

Frankly, I thought we had reached a dead end. The students were very stubborn, and there was no movement on the political side either. I told my staff that all we could do was try to prevent people from getting killed. Because once a student gets shot, they will have a martyr, and then we will lose control.⁶²

Wiranto's impression was confirmed by his intensifying contacts with NU leaders and Amien Rais, mostly through Yudhoyono. NU was publicly calling on ABRI by mid-April to "support the reform process", and Amien left no doubt about his intention to continue the criticism of the regime until substantial change had been achieved.⁶³

The gradual separation of reform-minded generals from Suharto's political interests was in no sense a linear process, however. Suharto's system of patronage and personal loyalties had been weakened, but still proved forceful enough to prevent officers from openly demanding his resignation. Confronted with the choice of assisting in Suharto's removal or applying the coercive force of the military to contain the opposition, Wiranto avoided a clear-cut decision. He tried to combine both approaches in order to buy time, and temporarily damaged his reputation as a result. But just as the paradigmatic demarcation lines in the military between the proponents of change and the supporters of a repressive approach began to



blur, Prabowo and some similarly hawkish generals reinforced them once again. Throughout the month of April, victims of the kidnapping campaign ordered by Prabowo re-emerged and identified the latter publicly as the brain behind the operation (McCohen 1998*b*). In addition, Hartono and Feisal Tanjung, now coordinating minister for political and security affairs, underscored their hardline images by openly sabotaging Wiranto's initiative for dialogues between students and the government. Asked in late March why Suharto was ready to meet farmers while refusing to receive student representatives, Feisal Tanjung replied that if the students would behave themselves like the farmers, they would get a chance to see the president.⁶⁴ In early April, Hartono opined on the same topic that a meeting between Suharto and students would create the false impression that the students had aspirations worth listening to.⁶⁵ By contrast, Wiranto's ally Agum Gumelar called the student's aspirations "right, pure, and positive, and representative of the society as a whole".⁶⁶ If there had been any doubts about the existence of fundamental intra-military differences between consensus-seeking officers and those propagating a crackdown, such statements served to both confirm and aggravate the cleavages.

While the students were critical of his swaying between dialogue and regime loyalty, Wiranto remained the best hope for those oppositional forces that tried to encourage the armed forces to side with the movement. This view was also shared by most of the "intellectual" officers who advised Wiranto during the crisis. Yudhoyono, for instance, recalled that although Wiranto "was close to the power centre", he "wanted to seek a wise solution to this hard political conflict" (Chrisnandi 2005, p. 52). Significantly, Suharto also contributed to this public perception of Wiranto's position. On 16 April, Suharto threatened to send Kopassus troops to deal with the unrest, implying that security forces so far had been too soft in their approach to the protesters.⁶⁷ The prospect that Kopassus soldiers under the command of an officer known for his hardline views could replace organic troops on the ground put the sharp criticisms of Wiranto into a wider context, and helped to repair some of the damage he and his circle had suffered as a result of the increasing violence. In this regard, William Case's assessment (2002, p. 62) that Wiranto had "retreated to a more hard-line posture" neither captured the grave tensions between the ABRI chief and those officers demanding a security crackdown nor Wiranto's growing awareness that repression alone would not be able to address the reasons for the protest.

With the country locked in a stalemate between calls for Suharto's departure and the intransigence of the president, the compromise-oriented generals in the armed forces suddenly saw a tiny glimpse of hope for a



breakthrough when Suharto ordered Indonesia's political elite to the palace on 1 May for a major policy speech.⁶⁸ Many no longer believed that Suharto would finally offer reforms, but others expected him to launch a last-minute effort to save his presidency. According to Zarkasih Nur, the chairman of the PPP faction in the DPR who was present at the meeting, the atmosphere in the palace was one of tense expectation:

Personally, I did not have much hope. But I thought "Who knows? Suharto had saved his head so many times in the past, why not this time?" ... But he offered nothing. Actually, it was worse than nothing.⁶⁹

Much to the disappointment of the audience, Suharto suggested that Indonesians start thinking about political reforms for the time after 2003. This announcement provided the final confirmation of Suharto's failure to grasp the urgency of the crisis that had engulfed him. It also served as a further motivation for the officers around Wiranto to increase their engagement with the opposition in order to assess the chances of granting Suharto a graceful departure from office. This approach was in line with what William Liddle (1999*a*, p. 28) called Wiranto's "pattern of reaction instead of action", with growing societal pressure forcing the ABRI chief into the gradual endorsement of regime change. Even within Prabowo's circle, however, preparations for a post-Suharto regime were under way. Prabowo and his associates expected that a possible Habibie presidency might facilitate their rise to the helm of the armed forces, and they began to use their contacts with Islamic groups to prepare the necessary societal support for this scenario. The nature of military factionalism — initially created by Suharto to sustain his rule — had ultimately been transformed in a way that encouraged competing officers to develop political plans for a future without him. When the crisis approached its next, and final, phase of escalation, none of the patronage groups in the armed forces was prepared to follow Suharto into the political abyss.

NEGOTIATING SUHARTO'S EXIT: WIRANTO PREVAILS

After the 1 May announcement had underlined Suharto's unwillingness to offer reform, the crisis entered into its fourth and, as far as the New Order was concerned, its last phase. On 4 May, the government announced that fuel subsidies would be drastically reduced, fulfilling one of the conditions set by the IMF for further financial assistance. The subsequent sharp rise in electricity and petrol prices led to violent demonstrations in Medan, escalating



into three days of rioting in the North Sumatran capital. The clashes in Medan triggered a chain reaction, radicalizing the student demonstrations in the rest of the archipelago (Denny J.A. 2006, pp. 112–14). The unrest involved more and more non-academic protesters, ranging from small traders and workers to street criminals who hid behind a political agenda to loot unprotected shops. With Medan in flames, important elements of the regime made their first public moves to desert Suharto. Harmoko, now chairman of the DPR and MPR, declared on 4 May that the parliament welcomed the students' aspirations and would therefore consider revising the political laws on which the New Order regime was based.⁷⁰ In the same vein, ICMI called for a special session of the MPR on 6 May.⁷¹ The non-governmental elite, in turn, also accelerated its dissociation from the regime. NU stated on 11 May that it was preparing its own reform agenda, and Amien announced on the same day that he would form a *Majelis Kepemimpinan Rakyat*, a People's Leadership Council, by the end of May.⁷² With alternative political institutions in the making, the various patronage groups in ABRI had to respond quickly. On 7 May, Wiranto announced the establishment of an ABRI team under Yudhoyono to work out concrete proposals for reform. While officially still rejecting a special session of the MPR to replace Suharto, Wiranto opened the door for "gradual and constitutional change".⁷³

Despite the vagueness of their public references to reform, the officers around Wiranto worked intensely behind the scenes to win societal approval for their efforts to allow Suharto a graceful departure from office. The input from non-military groups on this matter was not only designed to increase the acceptability of ABRI's proposals, but also to shield the compromise-seeking officers from possible retaliation by Suharto. Accordingly, Yudhoyono consulted various intellectuals and asked them to prepare concepts for political reform. Among them was Nurcholish Madjid, who enjoyed Suharto's respect and was therefore well placed to develop a schedule for the latter's retirement. Nurcholish, for his part, saw the armed forces as the key to solving the stalemate:

Just look at Thailand, the Philippines, and South Korea. There the cooperation of the military was crucial in initiating democratic change. So we had to win ABRI's support for reform. If they remained obstructive, no change would have been possible.⁷⁴

The president, meanwhile, took the risky step of leaving the country on 9 May for an international conference in Egypt, demonstrating, according to Robert Elson (2001, p. 290), that he "was still unable to grasp the significance



of the mounting movement against him". His absence gave both formerly loyal associates and fierce opponents the chance to draft a political map for a future without Suharto. With the travelling head of state cut off from his network of informants and thus largely dependent on Wiranto's telephone reports, ABRI headquarters could promote Yudhoyono's initiative without the fear of presidential intervention. The dynamics created by Yudhoyono's project and Nurcholish's input would play a crucial role in shaping the events leading to the president's resignation.

Before Nurcholish could present his proposal to ABRI headquarters, however, developments took yet another escalating turn. The conflict between officers associated with Wiranto and Prabowo erupted in dramatic fashion, and the chaos arising from this split made Suharto's position increasingly vulnerable. When Suharto cut short his trip and returned to Jakarta in the early morning of 15 May, the New Order was in ruins.

The Regime Disintegrates: Trisakti and the May Riots

The escalation of violence in Jakarta began with the fatal shooting of four students during a demonstration at Trisakti University on 12 May 1998. Public speculation immediately connected the incident to army units loyal to Prabowo who was already widely known to have masterminded the kidnappings of activists. Obviously aware of the accusations against him, Prabowo visited the parents of one of the Trisakti victims on 17 May, explaining that he felt the duty to pay his respects because the student's father was a military veteran. He insisted that he be allowed to prove his innocence by pledging an oath on the Qur'an, and after the distressed parents had refused three times, the victim's mother finally gave in. Prabowo subsequently swore that he "knew nothing about the incident nor had given any orders" (Pattiradjawane 1999, p. 163). For many, however, the fact that Prabowo deemed it necessary to issue a public denial of his involvement in the shooting only added to the widespread suspicions (Hadikoemoro 1999, p. 141). The Trisakti tragedy led to the eruption of long-established intra-military conflicts, with Wiranto apparently suspecting that Prabowo aimed at escalating the situation in order to convince Suharto that the ABRI chief was incapable of securing the capital:

I do not know who was behind the shootings and the violence that followed, but one thing was obvious: I was commander of the armed forces, Suharto was away. If anything happened during his absence, it was clear that my opponents would try to blame it on me.⁷⁵



The riots that broke out on the day after the Trisakti killings were accompanied by city-wide looting, burning, and occasional rapes. The carnage went on for nearly two days, on 13 and 14 May, leaving up to 1,200 people dead and Chinese business centres devastated. Other cities, mostly on Java, were affected as well. Solo, for example, experienced one of the worst riots in its long violent history.⁷⁶ While even ten years after the unrest Indonesians continue to seek final clarity about the actors and motivations behind the events, public opinion at that time saw Prabowo and his associates as the main beneficiaries of the turmoil (McBeth 1998*a*). The chaos in Jakarta cornered Prabowo's rivals in the military and brought him one step closer to a Habibie presidency, under which he could expect to be "four star" and eventually chief of the armed forces.

The suspicion that Prabowo had an active interest in the spread of violence was largely based on the inactivity of the security forces vis-à-vis the rioters. Troops from the Jakarta garrison, Kostrad, and Kopassus, all under the command of Prabowo or officers associated with him, remained conspicuously indifferent towards the unrest sweeping through the city. Prabowo later gave conflicting explanations for the insufficient number of troops and their reluctance to face the rioters, which contrasted sharply with his previous insistence on stern measures against regime opposition. On the one hand, Prabowo recalled his surprise at noting the absence of troops on Jakarta's streets, and claimed to have reminded his friend and commander of the Jakarta garrison, Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, that "there are no troops" (Tesoro 2000). According to Prabowo, Sjafrie and he then inspected Jakarta's main protocol road, and upon establishing that there was indeed an acute lack of soldiers, decided to move some troops from the defence ministry to the city centre. On the other hand, Prabowo maintained that the soldiers were hesitant to "fire at housewives and children looting the shops" because they shared the same low-class background: "I think that was psychological."⁷⁷ Most confusingly, despite admitting that he ordered the transfer of troops from the defence ministry to other parts of Jakarta, he insisted during most of his later testimonies on the riots that he had no influence over, or knowledge of, troop deployments during the unrest, pointing at Sjafrie and Wiranto instead.

Regardless of the reasons and motivations for the inactivity of ABRI's troops, Prabowo clearly understood that the riots could accelerate Habibie's rise to the presidency, and therefore lead him to the top post in the armed forces. At the height of the rioting, Prabowo went to see Habibie and discussed possible succession scenarios and, most importantly, what they meant for him. Habibie seemed ready to claim the presidency, but was



less forthcoming about his plans for Prabowo. In contrast to previous talks between the two men, Habibie no longer promised to make Prabowo ABRI commander. Describing the conversation with Habibie, Prabowo stated that “I should have noticed the shift.... He said: ‘If your name comes up, I will approve.’ There’s a big difference there” (Tesoro 2000). The mounting public criticism of Prabowo and his hawkish friends in the armed forces was probably the main reason for Habibie to reconsider his alliance with the Kostrad chief. However, Habibie’s changing position on Prabowo’s future role was only the first in a series of setbacks for the latter that would tip the power balance decisively in favour of Wiranto and his plans for Suharto’s orderly and self-determined departure.

The dramatic change in Prabowo’s fortunes was caused by a combination of factors. First of all, Wiranto had the advantage of delivering regular telephone briefings to Suharto in Egypt, conveying his version of events before the president could gather information from other sources. Moreover, the ABRI chief was able to blame the indolence of the troops on Sjafrie and appear as a decisive leader when he intervened on 14 May to order the immediate deployment of new units. According to Wiranto, he threatened to dismiss Sjafrie and take direct control of all troops if his directives were not heeded.⁷⁸ Wiranto also won the support of several regional commanders, among them Djadja Suparman in Surabaya, Djamari Chaniago in Bandung, and Ryamizard Ryacudu, the chief of the Kostrad division in Malang. Marines were flown in from Surabaya on 14 May, helping to end the riots within a day and supporting the perception that the situation had only stabilized after Wiranto had assumed authority over the operation. Moreover, Prabowo’s support base in the civilian realm was disintegrating rapidly. Amien Rais, whom Prabowo counted among his allies in the modernist Muslim constituency, distanced himself publicly from the Kostrad commander.⁷⁹ Habibie, for his part, had ended the cooperation with his former key partner in the military, and Muslim student groups that had previously thought about cooperating with Prabowo now threw their support behind Amien. Desperate to recruit new political friends, Prabowo even visited his long-time critic Abdurrahman Wahid, but after allowing the three-star general to massage his feet for a while, the NU leader sent him home without promises of support.⁸⁰

Suharto’s Path to Resignation

Prabowo and his associates in the military sought to counter the erosion of their political power base by trying to convince Suharto that Wiranto was about to betray him. The reform proposals developed by Nurcholish



for Yudhoyono delivered one such opportunity. In his report, Nurcholish recommended fresh elections in January 2000 and a special session of the MPR three months afterwards, implying that Suharto should not stand for re-election. Furthermore, Nurcholish demanded that Suharto return his illegally obtained wealth and apologize to the nation for his mistakes:

Yudhoyono really liked the concept. But he suggested that I drop the demands related to Suharto's wealth and the apology... Prabowo, on the other hand, called the paper "crazy". And I am sure he let Suharto know what Wiranto's people were doing behind his back.⁸¹

Besides reporting the Nurcholish initiative to the president, Prabowo also informed Suharto about a statement issued by ABRI headquarters on 16 May, which seemed to indicate that the armed forces supported calls for the resignation of the president.⁸² Although the statement had clearly not intended to endorse demands for Suharto's departure, Prabowo presented it to his father-in-law as final proof for Wiranto's hidden plans to get rid of him. In addition, Prabowo and his circle also raised questions about Wiranto's trip to Malang on the morning of 14 May, taking with him almost the entire military leadership, including Prabowo, at a time of rioting and political turmoil (Zon 2004, p. 117).⁸³ The accusations launched by Prabowo caused serious doubts on Suharto's part about Wiranto's intentions, encouraging the president to investigate the claims and call his former adjutant in for clarification. In this encounter, Wiranto offered his resignation, which Suharto rejected (Wiranto 2003, p. 81). While the information supplied by Prabowo was insufficient to convince Suharto that he had to sack his top general, it nevertheless persuaded him to consider ways of preventing Wiranto from concentrating too much power in his hands (Hafidz 2006, p. 92).

Suharto's attempt to limit Wiranto's authority, however, only provided additional evidence of the extent to which the riots and their political implications had strengthened the position of the compromise-oriented officers in the armed forces. The president told his advisers on 15 May that he planned to establish a new security command that was to play a role similar to that of Kopkamtib in the 1970s and 1980s. The idea of reinstating one of the most notorious New Order instruments of repression signalled Suharto's determination to apply a more confrontational approach towards the unrest. Suharto stressed that he intended to hand the top post of this new body to a military officer other than Wiranto, as the latter was "too busy" (Wiranto 2003, p. 77). The creation of a dual hierarchy within the armed forces would have weakened both Wiranto and the military as an institution,



allowing the president to gain more direct control of the security operations against the protesters. Wiranto, however, opposed the plan, and Subagyo, whom Suharto proposed as head of the agency, declined the offer (Sukmawati 2004, p. 174). Subagyo, although very tempted, was apparently aware that leading a security body specifically tasked with quelling popular protest to defend a doomed regime carried high risks for his career, and he was also not prepared to confront Wiranto over the issue. The incident confirmed that Suharto's authority over the military and its officer corps was declining dramatically. Rebuffed by his senior generals, Suharto called off Subagyo's already scheduled inauguration and instead drafted a presidential instruction on 18 May that appointed Wiranto to lead the agency, while Subagyo was only named as its deputy head.

The diminishing of Suharto's influence was accelerated further when student activists occupied the parliament complex in the early morning of 18 May. The symbol of the New Order's manipulation of formal democracy was now in the hands of disrespectful youths who camped on its roof and bathed in its decorative fountains (Aritonang 1999, p. 204). How exactly the initially moderate influx of protesters was able to pass ABRI's security apparatus remains unclear. Prabowo later claimed that Wiranto had promised student leaders to provide them with transportation for their planned march to the parliament, and Sjafrie confirmed that he was asked by two Wiranto aides to prepare military vehicles for the demonstrators (Tesoro 2000). While most of the students refused to accept the free ride, Sjafrie allowed them to enter the DPR complex as long as they came on wheels. On the morning of the occupation, Amien Rais addressed a public hearing at parliament, repeating his demand that Suharto handover his mandate.⁸⁴ This was followed in the afternoon by a press conference in which the DPR leadership, "encouraged" by hundreds of fanatical students, called on Suharto to resign. The fact that Syarwan Hamid, the deputy speaker of parliament and most senior military legislator, endorsed the statement was interpreted by many within the political elite as the official termination of ABRI's support for Suharto, triggering a series of defections of long-time loyalists from the New Order state (Sinansari 1998, p. 83). It is likely that Syarwan only sought to disengage himself individually from a polity with little prospect of survival, but the societal repercussions of his move were tremendous. Although Wiranto denounced the DPR statement as an "individual opinion", Suharto's regime was now in a process of rapid disintegration (Hamid 1999, pp. 92–96; Luhulima 2001, p. 150).

Suharto's failure to push the armed forces into a more confrontational stand against the protest movement — coinciding with the decay of the regime



from within — forced the president to launch a final promise of reform. He received Nurcholish Madjid to discuss the timetable for political change the latter had presented to Yudhoyono, and arranged for a meeting with several Muslim leaders to announce his plan for early elections and the establishment of a “reform council”. The gathering of Muslim figures at the palace on 19 May did not bring the breakthrough that Suharto had hoped for, however. Nurcholish, who was part of the group, thought that his own proposals had already been overtaken by new developments, and now demanded elections within six months. Suharto, for his part, only agreed to the formulation “as soon as possible”, provoking the Islamic leaders to rule out their participation in the reform council or the new cabinet the president planned to form (Pour 1998, pp. 131–32). During the next two days, Suharto’s office contacted numerous societal leaders with the offer to join the council, but only received rejections. In addition, fourteen of his ministers sent a letter to Suharto, declaring their resignations and refusing to serve in the next cabinet if it was still led by him. With oppositional forces unprepared to cooperate, and regime loyalists deserting their patron, Suharto’s position had become untenable.

The gradual demise of Suharto further undermined the influence of those officers in ABRI who were in favour of a security crackdown. With the president increasingly deprived of his tools of political intervention, it seemed less and less likely that he would be willing or able to order the suppression of the protest movement. Despite his weakened position, Prabowo on 18 May tried to convince Siti Hardiyanti for a last time that her father had to dismiss Wiranto or declare martial law. Suharto, however, neither had the intention nor the political power to take such a huge and possibly disastrous step. Although both Wiranto and Yudhoyono feared that they could be arrested if Suharto decided to accept Prabowo’s proposal (Usyam 2004, p. 341), there are no indications that the isolated president seriously considered it. The successful opposition to his plans of recreating Kopkamtib had demonstrated to Suharto where the new power centre in the armed forces was located, and had made him realize that he was in too vulnerable a position to challenge it. The prospect of martial law did not offer a realistic chance of stabilizing his regime either, with the inevitable escalation of violence certain to close the option of a negotiated withdrawal from the political stage. Wiranto, on the other hand, was loyal enough to Suharto to shield him from threats to his personal safety and ensure that his interests were considered when arrangements for the transfer of power were made. On 20 May, Wiranto concluded that Suharto had to resign immediately:



I knew since April that Suharto had to announce his resignation at some stage in order to calm down the protesters. But I had hoped for a transitional period... After the meeting with the Muslim clerics, however, and the public reactions to it, I knew it was a matter of days rather than months or years. But at the same time, Suharto's dignity had to be maintained.⁸⁵

The concern for Suharto's "dignity", based on years of personal attachment and the ingrained military sentiment against popular uprisings, led Wiranto to ban a mass demonstration planned for 20 May, which was supposed to be headed by Amien Rais and bring millions of protesters to the streets. Amien ultimately called the rally off after receiving strong hints from within the military that it could result in massive bloodshed. At the same time, however, Wiranto worked towards Suharto's retreat. On the same day, he convened a meeting of several academic experts in his office, making it clear that within three hours he expected from them a convincing concept for Suharto's resignation.⁸⁶ Several options were discussed, from endorsing Suharto's reform committee to military intervention, but only one looked politically and constitutionally reasonable: Suharto had to resign in Habibie's favour.⁸⁷ With this concept, Wiranto left to see Suharto.

The Final Act: Suharto's Exit

The conversation that took place between Suharto and the head of his armed forces on that night of 20 May 1998 has been the subject of much speculation, focusing on the question of how much this discussion contributed to Suharto's decision to lay down the presidency. Takashi Shiraishi (1999, p. 82) claimed that after the meeting with Wiranto, "Soeharto chose not to test the military's resolve and resigned the following day." It is more likely, however, that Suharto had already made up his mind to resign when Wiranto, together with Subagyo and the Commander of the Presidential Security Squad Endriartono Sutarto, arrived at Suharto's residence. The DPR had set Suharto an ultimatum for 23 May to step down or face impeachment, and he had unsuccessfully tried to form a new cabinet and establish the reform council. Against this background, Wiranto explained to Suharto that the use of violence in order to defend the government would most likely make matters worse:

Personally, I think he agreed with this assessment. He didn't want a repetition of Tiananmen either... Did my reminder play a role in his resignation? I don't know. I believe he was tired and had enough, he just wanted to get it over with.⁸⁸



Suharto's immediate acceptance of both Wiranto's political analysis and the recommendation it implied suggested that the president had arrived at the same conclusion. More than three decades earlier, Suharto had witnessed the fruitless attempts of an ailing and politically doomed president to regain control over the military and the political system, ending in disgrace and personal decline. Suharto must have been well aware of the historical parallels between Sukarno's eroding powers in 1966 and his own loss of authority in the last days of his regime. Rather than being stripped of his presidency by the MPR (a procedure that Sukarno had suffered at the initiative of his eventual successor), Suharto agreed to surrender the presidency to Habibie and retire from political life. And as if to further highlight the similarities with the beginnings of the New Order, Suharto handed both Wiranto and Subagyo letters that would have allowed them to take power — evoking memories of March 1966, when Sukarno had been forced to give Suharto a comparable letter to legalize his takeover. Neither Wiranto nor Subagyo ever made use of the letters, however, instead sticking to the previously agreed solution of allowing Habibie to assume the presidency (Sukmawati 2004, p. 176).

Suharto publicly announced his resignation the following morning at the palace, and Habibie was sworn in only minutes later. When the ceremony was over, Wiranto informed the nation that ABRI supported the new president fully, but warned that the armed forces were determined to guarantee the “dignity” of “all former presidents and their families”. The warning pointed to Wiranto's conservative understanding of the regime change that he had helped to negotiate: the transfer of power facilitated the replacement of the political leadership in order to accommodate demands for reform, but did not constitute a complete break with or denunciation of the New Order regime. This view had placed him among the politically moderate generals in the lead up to Suharto's fall, but set him on a path of conflict with more radical oppositional forces in the post-authoritarian transition. Before facing the difficulties of the post-Suharto era, however, Wiranto was forced to engage in a final struggle with his adversaries in the New Order military.

Encouraged by Habibie's ascension to the presidency, Prabowo and his associates believed that they now had a unique opportunity to reverse their misfortune of the past weeks and sideline Wiranto once and for all. Despite the growing distance between the two men, Prabowo apparently hoped that Habibie could be convinced to promote him and his allies to higher posts in the armed forces. For that reason, Prabowo went to see Habibie only hours after his inauguration, and according to the latter's chief of staff,



Prabowo came straight to the point. He proposed to promote Subagyo as ABRI commander, and leave Wiranto only with his ministry. Of course, he thought of himself as the next army chief. He said all this in such an intimidating manner that Habibie began to have concerns about having such a guy in his military — at all.⁸⁹

Following this tense meeting, the new president received information that Prabowo was moving his troops around the capital, and that some of them were marching towards the palace and Habibie's private residence (Habibie 2006, p. 102). Now completely convinced of his unreliability, Habibie not only decided to deny Prabowo the promotion he sought, he also had him relieved of his Kostrad command. Habibie instructed Wiranto to ensure that Prabowo handed over command authority within a day, and that all Kostrad troops immediately returned to their bases. It appears that Habibie, Wiranto, and the Suharto family had all agreed that Prabowo could not stay on. Suharto's children believed that it was Prabowo who had provoked the unrest that had led to their father's ouster (Rinakit 2005, pp. 87–88); Habibie viewed the ill-tempered officer as a potential source of instability for his government; and Wiranto used the welcome chance to remove his most serious competitor for the military leadership.

When Prabowo learnt of his dismissal on 22 May, his allies in the armed forces encouraged him to disobey the order and lead an open challenge against Wiranto:

I met some generals who were my supporters. Their message was: Let's have a confrontation. I said: Just keep quiet... I knew that many of my soldiers would do what I say. But I did not want them to die fighting for my job. I wanted to show I placed the good of the country and the people above my own position (Tesoro 2000).

While Prabowo obviously had at least contemplated resisting his removal, it remains unclear how far he and his associates were prepared to go. Undisputed is the fact that Prabowo went to see Habibie at his home to receive a personal explanation for the decision to dismiss him, and that his appearance was so threatening that Habibie had his family airlifted to the palace. Habibie indicated in his 2006 autobiography that Prabowo may have intended to launch a coup against him, but it is more likely that the notoriously hot-blooded general simply wanted to extort concessions from a man he once considered his political ally. Had Prabowo seriously planned a coup, he would have been better prepared and would not have given up so quickly: after Habibie rejected repeated requests to leave him in command



for “another three months or at least three days” (Habibie 2006, p. 102), and after Subagyo endorsed his dismissal, Prabowo offered no further resistance. He was assigned to head the ABRI staff and command school in Bandung, leaving him without troops and isolating him from political events in Jakarta. The conflict between the two major patronage groups within the armed forces that had marked many of the political events during the final months of the Suharto regime had come to a dramatic and abrupt end.

The outcome of the factional dispute within the military in favour of Wiranto and the compromise-seeking officers was determined by a combination of internal and external factors. Most importantly, the growing intensity of popular protest since March 1998 had made an effective hardline response to the crisis virtually impossible. The economic collapse drove more and more ordinary citizens onto the streets, joining a student movement determined not to relent before Suharto resigned. By May, the societal protest had spread throughout the archipelago, and even if Suharto had decided to violently confront it, the overstretched resources of the military would have been incapable of managing all trouble spots at one time. Moreover, Prabowo’s circle of officers was increasingly isolated from the political elite and influential societal forces. As the media accused Prabowo of involvement in severe human rights violations, regime figures such as Habibie and oppositional leaders like Amien Rais began to distance themselves from the Kostrad commander and his faction. With only tiny ultra-modernist Islamic groups left to provide societal legitimation for a possible declaration of martial law, such an option had become unsustainable. Finally, Suharto’s decision not to order a last crackdown on his opponents and to hand in his resignation instead played an important role in deciding the intra-military competition. Although his political instincts had failed him throughout the crisis, he sensed correctly on 20 May that there was no way out for him. He knew that his power had all but evaporated, and had little interest in clinging to his office as Sukarno had unsuccessfully tried three decades before him. The inevitability of regime change, the public discrediting of Prabowo, and Suharto’s relatively quick surrender gave the officers supporting a political solution to the crisis the decisive edge over their opponents.

MILITARY FACTIONALISM, REGIME CHANGE, AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

In the introduction to this book, the review of the academic literature on transitional civil-military relations suggested that the character of regime



change plays a significant role in creating the “initial conditions” for military reform processes in democratizing states. One of the major issues in this regard is the extent to which the old repressive order is able to extend some of its features into the new polity. States in which the authoritarian infrastructure of the predecessor government collapses during the regime change seem to have better chances of short-term successes in their democratic transition and consolidation than countries that begin their reform efforts with much of the autocratic system intact. Aspinall (2005*c*) argued that Indonesia’s regime change of 1998 resulted in both fundamental changes and considerable continuity between the New Order and its successor regime, which he explained by pointing to the fact that Suharto’s state had exposed a mixture of authoritarian *and* sultanistic characteristics. Complementary to Aspinall’s structuralist argument, however, this chapter has shown that divisions within the armed forces during the late New Order period were equally responsible for the ambiguous character of the 1998 regime change, which despite widespread social unrest ended with the controlled transfer of power within the constitutional format of the regime. To a significant degree, it was a circle of compromise-seeking officers that negotiated the handover from Suharto to Habibie, sidelining more hawkish generals in the process. Pursuing a pacted transition that aimed at the involvement of the opposition rather than its destruction, the steps taken by some senior generals avoided the complete breakdown of the New Order system and instead assisted some of its key figures in entrenching themselves in the first post-authoritarian government.

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of this intra-systemic regime change on the early phase of Indonesia’s political transition and its efforts to establish democratic civilian control over the armed forces. As a direct result of the rise to power of Suharto’s handpicked successor, core elements of the New Order, including the armed forces, were able to defend and maintain many of their institutional privileges throughout the first years of the democratic polity. This aspect of the victory by “dovish” officers becomes evident if contrasted with the potential consequences of a triumph by those generals who had favoured a repressive approach to the mounting regime opposition. The declaration of martial law, as demanded by Prabowo, would have almost certainly led to a further escalation of protests and increased use of military coercion against demonstrators. This scenario was unlikely to prolong the life of the New Order, with more deaths on the side of the protesters set to increase the radicalism and popularity of the opposition while irreversibly discrediting the government and its security agencies. Despite the undoubtedly higher number of victims and



the more chaotic nature of the regime change, however, the violent overthrow of the New Order would arguably have created more favourable “initial conditions” for Indonesia’s political transition than the relatively smooth transfer of power within the framework of the authoritarian system. The disintegration of New Order institutions would have been faster, and the armed forces in particular would have found it much more difficult to recover from the damage to their reputation caused by an ultimately unsuccessful crackdown on the democratic movement. Most importantly, the complete breakdown of the old regime would have allowed members of the opposition to form the first post-Suharto government, presumably leading to a cabinet with less interest in preserving the privileges of the military than shown by the eventual Habibie administration.

Instead, the defeat of the military hawks created the impression within society and the political elite that reforming the armed forces in the post-Suharto era was less urgent than initially thought. The removal of those officers viewed as responsible for the kidnappings and the May riots temporarily satisfied public demands for change in ABRI and eased societal pressure for a more wide-ranging replacement of the New Order military leadership. Wiranto and his associates had, after all, helped to negotiate Suharto’s resignation, and thus were initially not counted among the most challenging hurdles for a successful democratic transition. This interpretation distracted from the fact, however, that there were substantial fissures in the group of officers now in charge of the post-Suharto military. Wiranto had only in the escalating stages of the political crisis integrated ideas of regime change into his conceptual thinking. Before that, he had viewed the reform-oriented officers, or the “intellectuals”, as helpful allies in the competition with Prabowo, but had considered their ideas of political liberalization and disengagement from the regime as too radical. For Wiranto, the leap from defending his patron to assisting in his resignation had exhausted much of his willingness to accommodate political change. Beyond that, he had not paid much thought to the political format of a post-authoritarian system and the way the military would operate in it. Some of the reform-minded officers around Yudhoyono, Wirahadikusumah, and Widjojo, on the other hand, had developed ideas for political reform since the mid-1990s, and despite the suddenness of Suharto’s demise, they appeared better prepared than Wiranto to engage with the new polity. The dividing lines between officers in support of different degrees of reform would define newly emerging military factions in the post-Suharto era, with each group developing highly diverse responses to the political change occurring around them.



Notes

- ¹ Linz and Stepan (1996, pp. 52–53) explained that the low level of institutionalization in sultanistic regimes makes them particularly vulnerable to violent overthrows, and power is typically transferred to provisional governments composed of non-regime forces. In contrast, the stronger roles of political institutions under authoritarian rule, both within and outside the regime, provide the preconditions for a negotiated, institutional transfer of power to a successor government.
- ² These regional rivalries did not always coincide with ethnic identities, however. In the Siliwangi command of West Java, for example, many non-Sundanese officers occupied central positions.
- ³ Officers were under strong pressure, however, to provide evidence to Suharto that their alliances with civilians served the interests of the regime and were not designed to undermine it. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, Suharto was highly suspicious of military officers who built support bases outside the military to pursue their own interests more than those of the government. The increased integration of civilian groups into the New Order in the 1990s eased some of these concerns, but Suharto remained alert to indications that officers might turn their cooperation with civilians against him.
- ⁴ The number of victims who died in the actual attack on the party offices remains in dispute. According to estimates from the PDI faction led by Megawati, twenty-three people were “unaccounted for” after the incident. See “Alex Litaay: Kasus 27 Juli, Ada Korban yang Hilang”, *Kompas*, 5 September 2003, and Luwarso (1997, pp. 14–42).
- ⁵ Prabowo had a reputation of being a highly professional but ill-tempered soldier. Coming from a well-connected political and diplomatic family, he had grown up abroad and spoke several languages fluently. His tendency for emotional outbursts, however, was the subject of extensive discussion within the ranks and the political elite. In 1974, he graduated from his military academy class with a one-year delay because of a conflict with a superior. After marrying into the Suharto family, he became widely known as the president’s “special envoy” for sensitive political and military tasks, dealing with officers and affairs way above his rank. For Prabowo’s reputation in the political elite, see Friend (2003, p. 324).
- ⁶ The most important of these divisions was that between Feisal and Hartono. Despite their very similar views on how to deal with opposition to the regime, they cultivated an intense personal rivalry over the position of ABRI commander. Hartono was widely known to be interested in the job, and with his retirement age approaching, he needed a quick decision on the matter. Feisal, on the other hand, was determined to stay on at least until March 1998, when he could expect a cabinet appointment.



- ⁷ Wiranto had been presidential adjutant between 1989 and 1993. After his term in the palace, his career skyrocketed. The soft-spoken, low-profile officer became chief of staff of the Jakarta command in 1993, its commander in 1995, and commander of Kostrad in 1996.
- ⁸ Interview with Agus Widjojo, Jakarta, 15 August 2007.
- ⁹ According to Soeyono, besides himself and Ma'ruf, officers who supported ABRI's neutrality against Hartono in the meeting included the head of ABRI Intelligence (BIA, *Badan Intelijen ABRI*), Major General Syamsir Siregar, and the Governor of Lemhannas, Lieutenant General Sofian Effendi. Interview with Lieutenant General Soeyono, Jakarta, 15 October 1998.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Lieutenant General Djadja Suparman, Bandung, 21 June 2000.
- ¹¹ "Analisis Perkembangan Sosial-Politik Menjelang Pemilu 1997 dan SU-MPR 1998", unpublished paper.
- ¹² Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ¹³ "Paradigma Baru Dwifungsi ABRI", *Tiras*, 24 April 1997.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, Jakarta, 23 September 2003. Bhakti was a member of the research team.
- ¹⁵ "Rapim ABRI Bahas Pemantapan Stabilitas Menjelang Pemilu", *Pikiran Rakyat*, 4 April 1997; "Ada Kelompok yang Mencoba Bangkitkan Paham Komunisme", *Kompas*, 4 April 1997.
- ¹⁶ The term "Mega-Bintang" suggested an alliance between Megawati's PDI and PPP. The Islamic PPP had adopted the "Bintang" (Star) as its party symbol in the 1980s.
- ¹⁷ Subagyo had been in the presidential security squad since 1986 and left the service only in 1993 as commander of its Group A. In 1994, he was appointed to head Kopassus before becoming commander of the Central Java Diponegoro command in 1995. Sugiono, also a former presidential adjutant, commanded the presidential security squad from 1995.
- ¹⁸ In a separate reshuffle a month after Hartono's replacement, Syarwan Hamid left his post as chief of staff of socio-political affairs. He was sent to parliament and finally became deputy speaker of the House in October. Syarwan's replacement in ABRI was Lieutenant General Yunus Yosfiah, an officer with an openly expressed admiration for Habibie who, like him, originated from Sulawesi. He thought that Habibie's contribution to the nation's development was "extraordinary". Interviews with Lieutenant General Yunus Yosfiah, Jakarta, 22 November 1997 and 6 December 2006.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Major General Agus Wirahadikusumah, Jakarta, 12 November 1998.
- ²⁰ "Penganugerahan Bintang Lima: Tidak Ada Motif Politik", *Kompas*, 3 October 1997.
- ²¹ "ABRI Juga Dukung Pak Harto", *Kompas*, 2 September 1997.
- ²² "Pak Harto Hanya Minta Dipertimbangkan", *Kompas*, 16 August 1997; "Pangab: 'Tap VI Hanya untuk Berjaga-jaga'", *Jawa Pos*, 15 August 1997.



- ²³ “Pangab: ‘ABRI Tak Ikut-ikutan’”, *Jawa Pos*, 30 August 1997. Suharto himself made his rejection of any restriction on presidential terms very clear. Like ABRI, he referred to the constitution that included no such limits.
- ²⁴ In September, Prabowo’s close friend Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin had been promoted to Jakarta commander, and other Prabowo allies led several regional commands. Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin was a classmate of Prabowo, graduating from the military academy in 1974. From 1974 to 1984, Sjafrie served in the presidential security squad, and returned to command its Group A in 1993. Another Prabowo ally in an important position was Zacky Anwar Makarim as head of the military intelligence agency BIA, who was appointed in August 1997.
- ²⁵ “Wajar jika Prabowo Kasum ABRI”, *Suara Merdeka*, 7 September 1997.
- ²⁶ Jose Manuel Tesoro, “The Scapegoat?”, *Asiaweek*, 3 March 2000.
- ²⁷ ABRI commanders were typically replaced shortly before or after the five-yearly sessions of the MPR. That was the case with M. Yusuf (1978–83), Benny Murdani (1983–88), and Try Sutrisno (1988–93), with the only exception of Edi Sudradjat, who spent a short time in the post in 1993 before being transferred to the department of defence and security.
- ²⁸ According to Fadli Zon, one of the key contact persons between Prabowo and Islamic groups, Prabowo increased the frequency of his meetings with ultra-modernist organizations as the crisis intensified, citing his “concern for the future of the nation”. Interview with Fadli Zon, Jakarta, 14 April 1999.
- ²⁹ Interview with Abdurrahman Wahid, Jakarta, 17 December 1997.
- ³⁰ Interview with Abdurrahman Wahid, Jakarta, 17 December 1997. Wiranto asked Wahid to keep their communication and cooperation confidential until the MPR session scheduled for March 1998.
- ³¹ Prabowo’s Islamic allies frequently noted his rather erratic observance of Muslim rituals, and wondered why he had chosen them as political associates. They agreed, however, that such considerations were secondary as long as Prabowo protected their interests. See “Mengapa Prabowo Mendekat?”, *Sabili*, 2 September 1998.
- ³² Interview with Lieutenant General (ret.) Z.A. Maulani, Jakarta, 5 December 1997.
- ³³ “Mensesneg Moerdiono: Presiden Perlu Istirahat Penuh”, *Kompas*, 6 December 1997. A few days later, there were even rumours that Suharto had died. See “Presiden Tersenyum Saat Diisukan Wafat”, *Kompas*, 10 December 1997.
- ³⁴ Suharto announced that economic growth would slow down to four per cent in the year 1998–99, while most observers expected zero growth or even a contraction. The rupiah was calculated at 4,000 to the dollar, although the currency was close to double-digit figures. See “Disiapkan 7 Program Reformasi Ekonomi”, *Suara Merdeka*, 7 January 1998.
- ³⁵ “Hanya Sekali Yang dengan Catatan”, *Jawa Pos*, 3 March 1998.
- ³⁶ CSIS was founded in the early 1970s by intellectuals of largely Catholic-Chinese descent and intelligence officers close to Suharto, among them Ali Murtopo

and Sudjono Humardhani. It was widely viewed as being behind the anti-Islamic policies of the government of the 1970s and much of the 1980s. The relationship between CSIS and the regime declined drastically, however, after Suharto marginalized Benny Murdani in the late 1980s.

- ³⁷ The press had speculated about a possible investigation of Murdani after Prabowo's private talk about it had been leaked to journalists. See "LB Moerdani tidak akan Diperiksa", *Kompas*, 5 February 1998; "Wartawan Terkecoh Isu Klarifikasi LB Moerdani", *Republika*, 5 February 1998.
- ³⁸ Interview with J. Kristiadi, deputy executive director of CSIS, Jakarta, 3 September 1998.
- ³⁹ Kholil Ridwan, chairman of BKSPPI (*Badan Kerjasama Pondok Pesantren Indonesia*, Cooperation Forum for Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia), gave the main speech of the evening. In line with Prabowo, he stressed that if ABRI and the Muslim community united, this would create a power capable of overcoming any element that tries to destabilize the country. See "Umat Islam dan ABRI harus Bersatu", *Republika*, 26 January 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Feisal argued that the tycoons had received government facilities for the last thirty years, and that it was now time for them to return the favour. See "Panglima ABRI Telepon 13 Konglomerat", *Kompas*, 15 January 1998.
- ⁴¹ "Pangab: Sofyan tak Bertanggung Jawab", *Republika*, 5 February 1998.
- ⁴² Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁴³ "KSAD Minta Ulama dan Santri Tenangkan Masyarakat", *Media Indonesia*, 19 January 1998; "KSAD Minta Ulama dan Umara, Harus Saling Menasihati", *Media Indonesia*, 26 January 1998.
- ⁴⁴ "ABRI Sumbang Uang dan Emas kepada Pemerintah", *Kompas*, 27 January 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Lieutenant General Agum Gumelar, Jakarta, 8 June 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Yudhoyono, Prabowo, and Muchdi were to take up their new positions after the session of the MPR, while Wiranto and Subagyo were installed in their new posts shortly after the announcement was made.
- ⁴⁷ On 7 February, Feisal had spoken in front of 25,000 security personnel in Senayan. Using traditional New Order rhetoric, he threatened to deal harshly with those who wanted to disturb national stability and the proceedings of the MPR session. He claimed that the phenomena of the current crisis, such as unrest, mass movements, radicalization, and terror were all products of instigation by those who aimed to obstruct the MPR session. See "ABRI Siapkan 25 Ribu Personel", *Jawa Pos*, 8 February 1998; "ABRI Chief Warns of Mass Unrest", *Straits Times*, 8 February 1998.
- ⁴⁸ "Seluruh Panglima Dukung Pangab", *Kompas*, 24 February 1998.
- ⁴⁹ "Seluruh Panglima Dukung Pangab", *Kompas*, 24 February 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with Lieutenant General Agum Gumelar, Jakarta, 8 June 1998.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Lieutenant General Agum Gumelar, Jakarta, 8 June 1998.



- ⁵² The 3,000 students rallying at the campus sang “Do not hurt us. We are your friends. We are on the same side.” See “Students Urge Riot Troops to Join Demonstration”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 February 1998.
- ⁵³ “ABRI Denies it was Forced to Nominate Habibie”, *Straits Times*, 26 February 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Major General Agus Wirahadikusumah, Jakarta, 12 November 1998.
- ⁵⁶ “Pidato Pertanggungjawaban Presiden/Mandataris Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, Di Depan Sidang Umum Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 1 Maret 1998”, *Media Indonesia*, 2 March 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Lieutenant General Agum Gumelar, Jakarta, 8 June 1998.
- ⁵⁸ “F-ABRI: Reformasi dan Restrukturisasi Ekonomi Suatu Keharusan”, *Kompas*, 10 March 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Siti Hardiyanti produced a comical moment when she claimed that the new cabinet was in line with Golkar’s commitment to “anti-corruption, anti-collusion, and anti-nepotism”. See “Tutut: Saya Memang Antinepotisme”, *Kompas*, 18 March 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Amien and Habibie had cooperated closely in the 1990s in ICMI. Their relationship, and Amien’s changing attitudes towards the regime, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
- ⁶¹ The students of the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB, *Institut Teknologi Bandung*), one of the most prestigious universities in the country and therefore one of the most watched by both the media and the military, left their campus for the first time on 9 April.
- ⁶² Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁶³ Amien got Yudhoyono into trouble by claiming that the latter had “asked” him to continue his criticism, insinuating that ABRI was happy with his attacks on Suharto. Yudhoyono clarified Amien’s statement the next day, saying he had only expressed ABRI’s appreciation for academic criticism as long as it remained academic. Interview with Amien Rais, Surabaya, 10 May 1999; “Kassospol Minta Amien Tetap Kritis”, *Jawa Pos*, 28 March 1998, and “Kassospol: Kritis Boleh, Kebablasan Jangan”, *Jawa Pos*, 29 March 1998.
- ⁶⁴ “Tak Ada Dialog dengan Presiden”, *Jawa Pos*, 27 March 1998.
- ⁶⁵ “Mendagri Tolak Dialog Mahasiswa-Presiden”, *Jawa Pos*, 6 April 1998.
- ⁶⁶ “Pangdam Wirabuana: Aspirasi Mahasiswa Benar dan Mewakili Masyarakat”, *Suara Pembaruan*, 25 April 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Suharto delivered the warning in a statement read out at the forty-sixth anniversary celebrations of Kopassus. The president expressed “hope” that “the people, local officials, and police can maintain national security and order without the involvement of Kopassus troops”. See “ABRI Can Now Take ‘Repressive’ Action”, *Straits Times*, 18 April 1998.

- ⁶⁸ Invited to the “consultative” meeting with Suharto were the DPR/MPR leadership, the leaders of the DPR factions, officials of the political parties, ministers related to political and security issues, the chiefs of staff of the three military services, and the head of the police.
- ⁶⁹ Interview with Zarkasih Nur, chairman of the PPP faction in the DPR, Jakarta, 10 February 1999; “Reformasi Politik Tahun 2003 ke Atas”, *Kompas*, 2 May 1998.
- ⁷⁰ “Harmoko: DPR Siap Ubah UU Politik”, *Jawa Pos*, 5 May 1998. These laws, mostly passed in the 1980s, concerned the general elections, political parties, the composition of the DPR and MPR, and mass organizations.
- ⁷¹ “Buka Kesempatan Sidang Istimewa dan Reshuffle”, *Jawa Pos*, 7 May 1998.
- ⁷² “Amien Rais: Tunggu Akhir Mei”, *Bernas*, 12 May 1998.
- ⁷³ “Army Moves to Defuse Unrest”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Interview with Nurcholish Madjid, Jakarta, 27 May 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁷⁶ The most prominent target of the Solo riots was the house of Harmoko in the elite area of Solo Baru. See “Terakhir, Harmoko Menginap Desember Lalu”, *Bernas*, 17 May 1998.
- ⁷⁷ See Prabow’s testimony to a team of investigators in September 1998, in Sinansari (1999, p. 184).
- ⁷⁸ Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁷⁹ Amien rejected a suggestion by ABRI’s ailing “elder statesman” Nasution, who had proposed that Amien and Prabowo take the lead in reforming the country. In front of some of his Christian friends, who were particularly suspicious of Prabowo, Amien insisted that he had never made any political arrangement with the former, earning him enthusiastic applause from the audience. See “Para Tokoh Bentuk Majelis Amanat Rakyat”, *Kompas*, 15 May 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Interview with Abdurrahman Wahid, Jakarta, 26 May 1998, and Al-Zastrouw Ng, Jakarta, 26 May 1998.
- ⁸¹ Interview with Nurcholish Madjid, Jakarta, 27 May 1998.
- ⁸² Wiranto later disclosed the background of the press release. After a meeting with NU chairman Abdurrahman Wahid, Wiranto had asked the Assistant for Socio-Political Affairs Major General Mardiyanto to draft a press release about the outcome of the discussion, namely an agreement of mutual support between ABRI and NU. Mardiyanto drafted the paper, expressing ABRI’s backing for a lengthy NU statement issued the day before, unaware that one of the points in the NU declaration could be read as an implicit call for Suharto’s resignation. Mardiyanto gave the ABRI release to the press without consulting Wiranto. Prabowo got hold of the paper long before it reached the newsrooms of the media, leading Wiranto to believe that officers from his own staff had brought the release to Prabowo’s attention. Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.



- ⁸³ The question of why Wiranto insisted on leaving for Malang in the morning of 14 May remains one of the many mysteries of the May riots. Prabowo claimed to have reminded the ABRI chief several times that it would be wiser to stay in the capital. While the Prabowo supporters continue to interpret Wiranto's stubborn insistence on leaving Jakarta as an indication that he planned to blame the spreading riots on Prabowo, Wiranto's associates explained that the ABRI commander went to Malang in order to bring loyal troops from the Brawijaya command with him back to the capital. Wiranto himself insisted that it was Prabowo who had asked him to go to Malang to preside over a ceremony that marked the transfer of regional command authority from the first Kostrad division to the second, and claimed he had received no warnings from Prabowo to cancel the trip. Wiranto also saw no problem in leaving the capital for three hours as the command was in the hands of the Jakarta commander and the police chief. Wiranto did indeed order marine troops from East Java into the capital on 14 May, but insisted that this was done through phone communication. Interviews with General (ret.) Wiranto, 13 October 2000, and Major General Agus Wirahadikusumah, Jakarta, 12 November 1998.
- ⁸⁴ "Amien Rais Minta Presiden Serahkan Mandat", *Bernas*, 19 May 1998.
- ⁸⁵ Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁸⁶ Interview with Salim Said, Jakarta, 23 November 1998. Salim was one of the academics consulted by Wiranto.
- ⁸⁷ The military option would have seen Habibie resigning with Suharto, bringing in a triumvirate of ministers, with Wiranto as minister of defence and security in effect dominating the new government until new elections could be held. Wiranto rejected this option, and he later often referred to this decision as the moment when he could have taken power easily but did not do so in order to avoid a bloodbath (Roestandi 2003, p. 132).
- ⁸⁸ Interview with General (ret.) Wiranto, Jakarta, 13 October 2000.
- ⁸⁹ Interview with Lieutenant General (ret.) Z.A. Maulani, Jakarta, 26 May 1998.



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