

## **The Indonesian Guerrilla Strategy During the Indonesian National Revolution to Combat Dutch Aggression in 1949**

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**Abstract**

The Second Dutch Military Aggression of 1948–1949 placed the Republic of Indonesia under significant power asymmetry due to Dutch conventional military superiority and the disruption of centralized authority and support systems. This study aimed to analyze the configuration of Indonesia's guerrilla posture in countering Dutch aggression. The research employed a qualitative descriptive-analytical method with a process-tracing approach, using semi-structured interviews, document and archival analysis, and data triangulation. Stufflebeam's CIPP Model was used as the evaluation framework, while Bunn's (2004) Force Posture Framework was employed as the analytical lens. The findings demonstrated that territorial and command structures implemented through the Wehrkreise system generated organizational resilience; TNI–people unity fostered societal resilience; and non-conventional logistics based on local resources, including Dapur Umum (public kitchens), generated sustainment resilience. Together, these three dimensions formed an integrated and resilient Indonesian guerrilla posture. The study concluded that the integration of military organization, territorial control, civilian support, and national resources sustained resistance and prevented Dutch military superiority from becoming strategically decisive.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Guerrilla warfare is an adaptive military strategy commonly employed when a significant asymmetry exists between opposing forces. Rather than relying on large-scale conventional engagements and advanced weapon systems, guerrilla warfare emphasizes operational flexibility, decentralized command, environmental exploitation, and prolonged resistance. Through ambushes, sabotage, intelligence networks, and disruption of adversary supply lines, materially weaker forces can undermine the operational effectiveness of stronger opponents. Consequently, guerrilla warfare functions not only as a tactical method but also as a strategic equalizer in asymmetric conflicts (Suciati et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, guerrilla warfare developed within a broader historical context of colonial exploitation, political marginalization, and nationalist resistance. Dutch colonial policies intensified economic inequality and dependency, gradually strengthening anti-colonial awareness among indigenous communities (Wati, 2022). The Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945 subsequently contributed to the militarization of Indonesian society by providing military training and organizational experience through auxiliary and paramilitary forces. Following Japan's surrender and Indonesia's proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesian forces sought to acquire weapons and consolidate military capabilities. However, the arrival of the Allied Forces Netherlands East Indies (AFNEI), accompanied by the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA), revealed Dutch efforts to restore colonial

authority and transformed the postwar transition into an armed struggle against recolonization (Dahlan, 2017; Safitri, 2023).

The most critical phase occurred during the Second Dutch Military Aggression, launched on December 19, 1948. Dutch forces occupied Yogyakarta and captured President Sukarno, Vice President Mohammad Hatta, and several cabinet members in an attempt to eliminate the Republic's political and military leadership. Despite this apparent tactical success, the aggression did not terminate Indonesian sovereignty. Instead, it accelerated the transition from conventional defense to a more decentralized and resilient system of total guerrilla warfare. The establishment of the Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia preserved governmental legitimacy, while continued military resistance demonstrated that the Republic remained operational (Permana, 2020; Amalia et al., 2026).

Under General Sudirman's leadership, Indonesian forces dispersed into rural and mountainous areas and conducted mobile operations against Dutch positions and logistical networks. His decision to continue leading the guerrilla campaign despite deteriorating health carried both military and political significance. The continued presence of the Indonesian National Armed Forces demonstrated to the international community that the Republic maintained *de facto* sovereignty. However, this resistance depended not only on formal military forces but also on extensive civilian participation, local intelligence networks, informal logistical systems, and regional leadership (Rizal, 2021).

The integration between military forces and civilian communities became a central component of Indonesia's guerrilla posture. Indonesian resistance involved regular military units, irregular Laskar forces, local administrations, traditional authorities, and community resources. Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, for example, utilized his authority and regional networks to support resistance activities in Dutch-occupied areas. Villages served as sources of intelligence, shelter, food, communication, and logistical support, enabling dispersed guerrilla units to survive despite Dutch blockades and disruptions to centralized supply systems. This military-civilian integration transformed society into an active component of national defense rather than a passive element of warfare (Yanto et al., 2024).

Organizationally, the resistance was supported by the *Wehrkreise* system, a decentralized territorial command structure that enabled military units to operate autonomously while remaining connected to broader strategic objectives. This system reduced dependence on centralized command and allowed resistance forces to adapt to local geographical, social, and operational conditions. Combined with non-conventional logistics, including community kitchens known as *Dapur Umum*, this structure enabled Indonesian forces to sustain prolonged resistance despite shortages of weapons, transportation, funding, and formal supply mechanisms. By utilizing territorial familiarity and community support, Indonesian forces restricted Dutch mobility and prevented technological superiority from producing a decisive strategic victory (Maulidiyawan et al., 2025).

The 1949 guerrilla posture subsequently became an important historical foundation for Indonesia's Universal People's Defense and Security System (*Sistem Pertahanan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta* [Sishankamrata]). This doctrine positions national defense as an integrated responsibility involving military power, territory, citizens, and national resources (Muksinin, 2020; Murfi & Suharyo, 2024). Nevertheless, previous discussions have generally examined individual dimensions of the struggle, such as General Sudirman's leadership, military

operations, emergency government, or civilian participation. Therefore, a more integrated examination is required to explain how territorial command, TNI–people synergy, and locally based logistics collectively formed a resilient guerrilla posture during the 1949 resistance.

Accordingly, this study analyzed the Indonesian guerrilla posture during the 1949 resistance against Dutch aggression. It specifically examined how territorial and command structures sustained decentralized yet unified resistance, how cooperation between the TNI and civilians created a total war environment, and how local resources and non-conventional logistics maintained military operations when centralized governmental and logistical support was disrupted. The study also sought to explain how these interconnected elements transformed Indonesia's material limitations into strategic resilience and contributed to the development of Sishankamrata. The findings are expected to enrich defense studies and provide relevant historical insights for defense planners, military education, and the development of national resilience in addressing contemporary hybrid and irregular threats. This research contributes to the growing literature on asymmetric conflict by demonstrating how institutional design, societal mobilization, and logistical adaptation can collectively enable weaker actors to mitigate conventional military superiority.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative historical method with a descriptive-analytical and process-oriented design to reconstruct and critically interpret Indonesia's guerrilla posture during the 1949 National Revolution. The method enabled the study to examine guerrilla warfare as a dynamic strategy shaped by Dutch military operations, territorial constraints, limited weaponry and logistics, decentralized command, geographical conditions, leadership, and civilian participation. The research integrated military history and strategic studies to explain how materially weaker forces utilized asymmetric tactics, territorial advantages, operational flexibility, and popular support to resist a conventionally superior adversary.

The research followed four stages of historical inquiry: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Heuristics involved identifying and collecting relevant primary and secondary sources. External and internal source criticism were applied to evaluate the authenticity, origin, context, credibility, and reliability of historical evidence. The verified historical information was then interpreted and synthesized into a coherent, evidence-based narrative through historiographical analysis (Daliman, 2014; Gottschalk, 1986; Tosh, 2015). Bunn's (2004) Force Posture Framework was used as the primary analytical framework to examine the configuration of military and non-military capabilities. The CIPP model, consisting of Context, Input, Process, and Product components, supported the analysis of the strategic environment, available national resources, organization and implementation of guerrilla operations, and their resulting strategic outcomes.

The research focused on Indonesia's historical guerrilla defense system, particularly the Wehrkreise territorial command structure, TNI–civilian integration, and community-based logistical networks such as Dapur Umum. The study utilized archival and academic resources from institutions in Jakarta and Bogor that provided access to historical records, military documents, and strategic perspectives related to the Indonesian National Revolution. Data collection was conducted from March to April 2026 through institutional sources and relevant historical informants.

**Table 1.** Key Informants and Institutional Sources

| X | Informant                                                  | Institution and location                        | Time       |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Director General of Defense Strategy                       | Ministry of Defense Headquarters, Jakarta       | March 2026 |
| 2 | Head of the TNI History Center                             | TNI History Center, Jakarta                     | March 2026 |
| 3 | Head of the Total War Strategy Study Program               | Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Bogor | April 2026 |
| 4 | Head of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia | ANRI Headquarters, Jakarta                      | April 2026 |

Data were collected through archival examination, document analysis, and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The documentary sources included official military archives from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and the TNI History Center, historical policy documents, academic literature, and other relevant records. Interviews explored the implementation of the Wehrkreise command system, TNI–people synergy (Kemanunggalan), community-based logistics, archival verification, and the relevance of guerrilla concepts to contemporary Indonesian defense doctrine. With the informants’ consent, interviews were recorded digitally, supplemented by field notes and photographic documentation, and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analyzed thematically by repeatedly reviewing the documents and interview transcripts, assigning codes to information relevant to the research focus, and grouping the codes into recurring themes. The principal themes concerned decentralized territorial command, civil–military synergy, non-conventional logistics, the maintenance of de facto sovereignty, and the historical foundation of Indonesia’s total defense doctrine. Similarities and differences among archival evidence, scholarly literature, policy documents, and expert accounts were examined to refine the thematic structure and develop a comprehensive interpretation of the 1949 guerrilla posture (Heriyanto, 2018).

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source, method, and theoretical triangulation. Archival records, historical documents, scholarly literature, and expert interviews were compared to reduce bias and address the incomplete or politically influenced nature of historical evidence. Cross-verification between primary and secondary sources ensured that the resulting interpretation was supported by multiple forms of evidence and remained consistent with the research objectives (Zamili, 2015).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General Overview

Indonesia’s guerrilla posture during the Second Dutch Military Aggression of 1948–1949 constituted an integrated national resistance system rather than a collection of isolated irregular tactics. The Dutch occupation of Yogyakarta and the capture of the Republican leadership created a severe political and military crisis, but did not eliminate the Republic. Political authority continued through the Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PDRI), while General Sudirman and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) maintained armed resistance through dispersed territorial operations. The interaction of military organization, political continuity, civilian mobilization, intelligence, local logistics, communication, and diplomacy prevented Dutch conventional superiority from producing decisive political control.

The findings were derived from historical and archival evidence and interviews with four informants representing contemporary defense policy, TNI operational history, Total War strategy, and national archival management. Cross-informant analysis revealed complementary perspectives. Archival evidence demonstrated continuity of governmental functions; military-historical evidence explained the organization of territorial resistance; strategic analysis clarified the effectiveness of asymmetric adaptation; and the contemporary defense perspective connected the historical experience with the Universal People's Defense and Security System (Sishankamrata). The findings were organized around three research questions concerning the Wehrkreise system, TNI–people synergy, and local non-conventional logistics.

### **The Wehrkreise System and Decentralized Resistance**

The first finding shows that the Wehrkreise system enabled decentralized but strategically unified resistance. Following the occupation of Yogyakarta, the TNI shifted from linear defense toward territorial warfare under Perintah Siasat No. 1 of 1948. Military forces were organized through territorial defense areas, mobile headquarters, regional commanders, local units, and Sub-Wehrkreise. This structure reduced dependence on a single command center and allowed operations to continue when communication with higher headquarters was constrained. Decentralization therefore represented a deliberate mechanism of organizational survival rather than an improvised retreat or fragmentation of military authority.

The Wehrkreise structure gave local commanders sufficient operational autonomy to adapt their actions to terrain, enemy movement, available resources, and local social conditions while remaining oriented toward the national objective of defending the Republic. It increased command survivability, facilitated territorial intelligence, and enabled dispersed forces to coordinate military action. The organization of Wehrkreise III and its Sub-Wehrkreise in the Yogyakarta area, including their role in supporting the General Offensive of 1 March 1949, demonstrated that territorially dispersed units could still conduct coordinated operations. Thus, strategic unity was maintained through shared objectives even when operational execution was delegated.

General Sudirman's mobile leadership strengthened the balance between centralized strategic direction and decentralized execution. Excessive centralization under disrupted communications could have caused paralysis, whereas unrestricted decentralization could have produced fragmentation. The Indonesian posture avoided both risks by combining national strategic direction with regional operational flexibility. Viewed through Bunn's (2004) Force Posture framework, the Wehrkreise system represented the territorial disposition, command arrangement, and employment of forces adapted to strategic asymmetry. Geography became an operational resource that prevented the Dutch occupation of cities and command centers from eliminating organized resistance.

### **TNI–People Synergy and the Total War Environment**

The second finding demonstrates that civilian communities were active components of the resistance system rather than passive recipients of military protection. Local populations provided food, shelter, transportation, medical assistance, labor, intelligence, and knowledge of terrain and enemy activity. These contributions expanded the TNI's operational capacity beyond its formal military resources and allowed dispersed units to remain mobile, concealed, informed, and sustained within occupied territory. Civilian networks therefore functioned as an operational force multiplier.

This synergy was sustained by the political legitimacy of the Republican struggle. The continuation of governmental functions through the PDRI and regional administrations ensured that armed resistance remained connected to a legitimate political authority rather than becoming isolated insurgency. Military resistance, state continuity, and civilian participation consequently reinforced one another. The population supported military survival, the TNI protected the continuing struggle for sovereignty, and the functioning government preserved the political purpose of resistance.

The findings support Nurbantoro et al. (2022), who emphasize the integration of citizens, territory, and national resources within Total People's Defense. However, the present research extends this interpretation by showing that civil–military integration operated as a practical wartime mechanism, not merely as a doctrinal principle. Under Bunn's (2004) framework, the population formed part of the personnel, intelligence, territorial, and supporting resources of the guerrilla posture. Accordingly, the effective strength of the Republic cannot be measured only through the number of formal TNI units; it must also include the societal networks that enabled those units to operate and survive.

### **Local Resources and Non-Conventional Logistics**

The third finding concerns the decisive role of decentralized logistics. The occupation of urban centers and disruption of conventional supply routes made centralized military logistics highly vulnerable. Dispersed guerrilla units required not only ammunition but also food, shelter, transportation, medicine, information, and human assistance. These needs were met through community-based resources and support networks, including Dapur Umum. Local communities consequently became part of the resistance's logistical infrastructure.

Territorial decentralization required a corresponding decentralization of sustainment. A dispersed force could not remain operational if it continued to depend exclusively on a vulnerable central supply system. Community-based logistics reduced this dependency and connected material support with intelligence, transportation, shelter, and knowledge of the operational environment. These findings are consistent with Sumaryadi et al. (2025), who associate material limitations with decentralized adaptation, and with Cahyono (2022), who demonstrates the importance of alternative financing and resource mobilization during the revolutionary period.

From a force-posture perspective, non-conventional logistics constituted the supporting resources and infrastructure that connected available forces with operational endurance. Its strategic effect was the extension of resistance over time. For a materially weaker actor, endurance itself became a strategic resource because prolonged resistance prevented conventional occupation from developing into permanent political control. Local resource mobilization therefore did more than compensate for shortages; it enabled the Republic to sustain the wider military, political, and diplomatic struggle.

### **Strategic Effects of the Integrated Guerrilla Posture**

The interaction of the three components produced an integrated and resilient posture. The Wehrkreise system provided territorial organization and command continuity; TNI–people synergy expanded the human, informational, and social capacity of resistance; and non-conventional logistics maintained dispersed operations. The failure or disruption of one node did not automatically collapse the entire system. When the political center was occupied, alternative governmental authority continued; when conventional military positions were lost,

guerrilla units remained operational; and when centralized supplies were disrupted, communities provided alternative support.

This integration explains why Dutch tactical and operational successes did not become strategically decisive. The Dutch possessed superior weaponry, mobility, organization, air power, and control of major urban areas. Indonesia did not attempt to achieve conventional parity, but altered the conditions of conflict through dispersion, terrain exploitation, local intelligence, civilian support, mobile command, and prolonged resistance. The strategic achievement of the weaker actor was therefore not the destruction of every Dutch formation, but the denial of the Dutch political objective of eliminating the Republic.

The General Offensive of 1 March 1949 illustrates the interaction between military action and strategic signaling. Its significance exceeded the temporary control of territory because it demonstrated that the TNI retained the capacity for coordinated operations and that the Republic still existed as an organized political and military entity. Combined with the continued operation of the PDRI, the offensive strengthened Indonesia's position in international diplomacy and supported the process leading to the restoration of the Republican government, the Round Table Conference, and the transfer of sovereignty. These findings correspond with Kuswandi (2019) and Pratama (2023), who connect military resistance with diplomatic and sovereignty outcomes.

The CIPP framework further clarifies this strategic relationship. The Context consisted of Dutch conventional superiority, the occupation of Yogyakarta, and the disruption of central institutions. The Input comprised TNI forces, political leadership, civilian participation, territorial resources, local intelligence, and community logistics. The Process operated through the Wehrkreise system, TNI–people synergy, and non-conventional sustainment. The Product was the continuation of organized resistance, preservation of political existence, denial of decisive Dutch control, and maintenance of conditions for diplomatic engagement and sovereignty transfer (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

### **Relationship with Previous Studies**

The findings are consistent with earlier studies but differ in their analytical integration. Sumaryadi et al. (2025) examine technological and material adaptation; Asy-Syamil et al. (2024) explain guerrilla warfare as national resistance; Nurbantoro et al. (2022) discuss Total People's Defense; Kuswandi (2019) and Pratama (2023) connect military operations with sovereignty; Cahyono (2022) examines war financing; Saputra and Azmi (2021) emphasize geography; Rizal (2021) highlights General Sudirman's leadership; and Yanto et al. (2024) explain the contribution of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX. The present research synthesizes these elements into one guerrilla-posture framework, demonstrating that leadership, territorial organization, civilian participation, logistics, political continuity, and diplomacy operated as mutually reinforcing components.

This synthesis constitutes the study's principal analytical contribution. Indonesian guerrilla warfare was not effective because of one tactic, commander, event, or support mechanism. Its strategic effectiveness emerged from the configuration of military and non-military capabilities into a resilience-based national defense system. Consequently, the findings broaden the understanding of guerrilla warfare from irregular battlefield action to an integrated posture designed to preserve state, military, societal, and territorial continuity under severe disruption.

## **Contemporary Relevance to Sishankamrata**

The contemporary relevance of the 1949 experience lies in its strategic principles rather than the literal replication of historical guerrilla tactics. Modern threats include cyberattacks, electronic warfare, unmanned systems, information operations, attacks on critical infrastructure, and other forms of hybrid and multidomain competition. In this environment, the historical principle of distributed command can inform resilient command-and-control architecture capable of maintaining operations when primary headquarters, communication networks, satellites, or digital systems are disrupted.

The principle of territorial resilience suggests that regional defense capabilities, infrastructure, and supporting resources should remain able to contribute to national defense when centralized systems are degraded. Logistical redundancy requires critical supplies, energy, transportation, communications, and defense-support networks to possess alternative regional mechanisms. Societal resilience translates historical civilian participation into a whole-of-society capacity involving citizens, communities, private organizations, and public institutions. Political continuity requires governmental and administrative functions to survive severe crises, while information resilience requires trusted, redundant, and distributed communication and decision-making capabilities.

Accordingly, the 1949 guerrilla posture provides a historical foundation for Sishankamrata as a system integrating the TNI, citizens, territory, government, infrastructure, information, and national resources. Its enduring lesson is that technological modernization must be accompanied by organizational resilience and redundancy. A defense system remains strategically vulnerable when the loss of a limited number of critical nodes can paralyze the entire national system. The Indonesian experience therefore demonstrates how distributed capability, societal legitimacy, territorial organization, and sustainable local support can transform material limitations into strategic resilience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concluded that Indonesia's guerrilla posture during the 1948–1949 Dutch Military Aggression constituted an integrated national resistance system rather than merely a collection of irregular battlefield tactics. The Wehrkreise system distributed operational authority across territorial commands while maintaining a common strategic objective, enabling decentralized yet unified resistance despite the disruption of central command structures. At the same time, TNI–people synergy created a total war environment in which civilian communities supported resistance through intelligence gathering, shelter provision, transportation, labor, and territorial knowledge. Community-based resources and non-conventional logistics, including Dapur Umum, compensated for disruptions to centralized supply systems and enabled dispersed guerrilla forces to maintain operational endurance.

The interaction among territorial organization, civil–military integration, and decentralized logistics generated organizational, societal, and logistical resilience. This integrated posture enabled the Republic to preserve organized resistance, political continuity, and strategic legitimacy, preventing Dutch conventional military superiority from becoming a decisive political victory. Viewed through Bunn's (2004) Force Posture Framework, the findings demonstrated that a materially weaker actor could achieve asymmetric effectiveness

by configuring limited military and non-military capabilities into a mutually reinforcing system rather than attempting to achieve conventional parity with a stronger adversary.

The 1949 experience remains relevant to Indonesia's contemporary Sishankamrata doctrine at the level of strategic principles rather than through the direct replication of historical guerrilla tactics. Its primary lessons involve distributed command, territorial resilience, logistical redundancy, societal participation, information security, and continuity of government. These principles can contribute to strengthening modern national defense against cyberattacks, electronic warfare, infrastructure disruptions, supply chain shocks, and other hybrid or multidomain threats.

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