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“Armada Jaya XXX/11” Naval Exercise: Indonesia’s Naval Strategy

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Synopsis

Indonesia recently concluded a naval exercise close to disputed waters. This serves as a hint of Indonesia’s future naval contingency planning and broader military strategy.

Commentary

THE INDONESIAN Navy (TNI-AL) has just concluded a naval exercise codenamed “*Armada Jaya XXX-11*” (AJ XXX/11) in waters off Sangatta, East Kalimantan, roughly 330 nautical miles (nm) south of the disputed Ambalat waters with Malaysia. The exercise, which started from 31 October to 18 November 2011, involved over 4000 naval personnel, including 2500 marines; 23 vessels, 11 aircraft, and 93 military vehicles.

The exercise was intended to enhance the TNI-AL’s sea control and amphibious capabilities, which have recently been upgraded with new platforms and weapon systems. Given the proximity of the exercise to disputed waters, and its location at the Makassar Strait used for international navigation, what does this tell us about the TNI-AL’s future contingency planning? And how does it fit into the broader Indonesian military (TNI) strategy?

Armada Jaya XXX/11

AJ XXX/11 began with a scenario that an enemy seaborne task force had infringed Ambalat waters and cut through the TNI’s Tarakan-Sangatta line of communications. In response, TNI-AL mobilised its assets to retake Ambalat and mounted an amphibious landing at Sangatta to round-up the enemy’s ground forces. TNI-AL also conducted sea control exercises en route to the area, such as anti-surface, anti-submarine, and anti-air warfare drills.

This exercise correlates with the TNI-AL strategy of “Archipelagic Sea Defence Strategy” (*Strategi Pertahanan Laut Nusantara*, SPLN), which puts an emphasis on “strategic funnels” (*corong strategis*). Simply defined, “strategic funnels” refer to the bodies of water located at both ends of Indonesia’s three north-south archipelagic sea lanes (ASLs). The AJ XXX/11 was conducted at the northern end of the second ASL, which runs from the Lombok Strait to Makassar Strait and ends in the Sulawesi Sea.

The TNI-AL has perceived the strategic funnels as potential future flashpoints, considering its proximity to neighbouring countries, abundant marine resources, and unresolved maritime boundary disputes. They are also where naval forces can be effectively concentrated to interdict any enemy fleet. Apart from Ambalat, TNI-AL is equally wary about the Natuna Sea where China’s “nine-dash” line claim overlaps with Indonesia’s Exclusive

Economic Zone (EEZ). Also flanked by Malaysia on both east and west, the Natuna Sea, with all the hydrocarbon reserves it contains, is geostrategically Indonesia's northern underbelly.

The Natuna and Sulawesi Seas were the main TNI-AL deployment areas in the first TNI quadrennial *Yudha Siaga* (Ready for War) tri-service exercise in 2008, conducted along the Batam-Natuna-Singkawang-Sangatta northern defence perimeter. The AJ XXX/11 was also a preparation for the second *Yudha Siaga* scheduled for mid-2012.

Indonesian Naval and Military Strategy

As an archipelagic country, Indonesia's strategic attention is divided between its external and internal maritime security environments. This makes TNI-AL force deployment different from the navies of continental and island states. By virtue of their geographical conditions, the latter can deploy their naval assets exclusively for EEZs and external sea lines of communications (SLOCs) protection, while TNI-AL's attention remains confined to ASLs and archipelagic waters security. There is almost negligible attention to Indonesia's external SLOCs. As such, TNI-AL strategy remains solely focused on sea control and power projection within Indonesia's territorial seas and archipelagic waters.

When facing a stronger fleet, TNI-AL also has its own anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) concept. This concept envisages a substantial deployment of naval mines and, in deeper waters, submarines, in and around the strategic funnels to interdict an enemy's SLOCs in Indonesian waters, prevent enemy seaborne forces from mounting amphibious landings, and deny the enemy a beachhead access. Hence, in the TNI-AL 2005 "Green-Water-Navy" blueprint, mine-laying vessels and submarines are among the top priorities to be acquired by 2024.

But, how does the SPLN fit into the broader TNI strategy? The TNI-AL and the Air Force (TNI-AU) will form the spearhead to interdict any hostile adversaries heading toward Indonesia's strategic funnels. They make up the first layer of Indonesia's concentric defence circles where "strategic offensive" (*ofensif strategis*) operations will be mainly conducted. In Ambalat's case, for example, TNI-AU jet fighters from Sultan Hasanuddin Air Force Base in Makassar can provide air support for naval forces deployed in Sulawesi Sea.

A Maritime Defence Strategy

The TNI-AL strategy is essentially defensive. It does not adhere to the Mahanian concept of command of the sea, nor does it attempt to project naval assets beyond Indonesian waters. Rather, it is skewed toward sea control and amphibious operations conducted within Indonesia's EEZs and archipelagic waters. However, it is assessed that TNI-AL is preparing the stage for potential contingencies in strategic funnels as far as Indonesia's traditional threats are concerned. Considering the maritime nature of these threats, it is perhaps more relevant for the TNI-AL to have a more robust posture and deployment based on the following considerations:

Firstly, TNI-AL could be tasked solely for EEZs and external SLOCs protection. TNI-AL attention is currently divided between protecting external SLOCs and EEZs, and policing the ASLs and archipelagic waters. To address this problem one alternative would be to enhance the Coast Guard capability for gradually taking over TNI-AL's role for ASLs and archipelagic waters security.

Secondly, Indonesia must formulate a maritime defence strategy. This strategy should guide TNI-AL and TNI-AU operations in the strategic funnels and beyond. Accordingly, both services must be tailored for long-range maritime interdiction enabled by more and better in-flight refuelling and naval replenishment capabilities.

Lastly, the TNI Law No. 34/2004 needs to be revised since it limits TNI-AL deployment to only within "national jurisdictional waters." The revised TNI Law must legally sanction regular deployment of TNI-AL units for external SLOCs protection and other naval operations to support Indonesian national interests abroad.

A maritime approach to defence strategy that encompasses its ASLs, EEZs and SLOCs will enhance Indonesia's capability to protect its extensive archipelagic interests and broaden its maritime horizons well into the Indian and Pacific oceans.

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