

The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due recognition to the authors and RSIS. Please email to Editor IDSS Paper at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

No. 080/2022 dated 19 December 2022

Yudo Margono as Panglima TNI: Organisation, Interoperability and Continuity

Adhi Priamarizki

SYNOPSIS

*Admiral Yudo Margono is expected to be the next commander of the Indonesian armed forces (Panglima TNI) after he cleared the fit-and-proper-person test in Parliament earlier this month. The admiral has outlined his plan to enhance organisational development and intensify interoperability between the various military services. **ADHI PRIAMARIZKI** addresses some of the challenges that the new Panglima will face.*

COMMENTARY

The Indonesian Parliament's Commission I, which oversees foreign policy, defence and communication, announced on 2 December 2022 that Admiral Yudo Margono, the current chief of the Indonesian navy (KSAL), had cleared [the fit-and-proper-person test](#) for the position of *panglima* (commander) of the armed forces or TNI. Yudo is therefore poised to replace General Andika Perkasa as Panglima TNI when the latter retires on 21 December.

Yudo will be the first navy officer to become Panglima TNI under the Jokowi presidency. Prior to his KSAL appointment, he was commander of the Joint Regional Defence Command (Kogabwilhan) I from 2019 to 2020. In 2020, Yudo headed [an ad-hoc unit called the Integrated Joint Task Command](#) (Kogasgabpad), a taskforce set up for coordinating the military's COVID-19 management efforts. These experiences would have given him exposure to the challenges of coordinating units across TNI's services.



Yudo Margono will be the first Panglima TNI under the Jokowi presidency who hails from the Indonesian Navy. [Image](#) courtesy of Wikimedia.

At his fit-and-proper-person test hearings before the parliamentary commission, Yudo underlined the need for [continuing defence modernisation](#) under the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) scheme. He also flagged as an area for attention internal security issues, especially the situation in Papua and stability in the South China Sea. But Yudo will only have approximately 330 days as Panglima TNI if there is no extension of his tenure beyond the retirement age for TNI officers. Such a short tenure could be a constraint on the admiral's ability to implement his agenda.

Organisational Development and Interoperability

Yudo has [four primary objectives](#) that he hopes to achieve during his tenure as Panglima TNI: (1) Accelerating human resources development based on professionalism and strong spirit; (2) Ensuring the readiness of TNI personnel and military platforms; (3) Enhancing joint-doctrine implementation, which has been applied through the joint-command system; and (4) Solidifying bureaucratic and cultural reform within the TNI.

Based on these four objectives, the admiral seems intent on further developing TNI organisation and improving the interoperability of the various military services. The Indonesian military recently developed new structures, notably the Kogabwilhan in September 2019 and, more recently, the Republic of Indonesia Fleet Command (Koarmada RI) and the National Air Operation Command (Koopsudnas). This expansion seeks to improve the efficacy of joint military operations. For example, [the formation of Koopsudnas](#) replaced the Air Force Operations Command (Koopsau) and the National Air Defence Command (Kohadnudnas), which consequently streamlined the chain of command.

One way to improve interoperability is through joint services military exercises. TNI itself has done numerous joint services military exercises (Latgab), including the

annual Latgab TNI. The author's media monitoring database indicated that the number of Latgab conducted by Kogabwilhan is still minimal. For example, since April 2020, Kogabwilhan I, which is located in Tanjung Pinang city, Riau Islands province, has conducted only one war-gaming exercise, although several other exercises have been performed within the regional command's jurisdiction, such as the multinational Super Garuda Shield 2022 exercise.

TNI personnel welfare — primarily, housing and other incentives for TNI officers — was another issue highlighted by Yudo during his fit-and-proper-person test hearings. Yudo acknowledged the need for improving TNI human resources through education and training. Manpower expenses have already taken the lion's share of the defence budget from time to time. This could mean that it would be difficult to seek additional budgetary allocations for manpower expenditure, which could be a major constraint on Yudo's ability to achieve his planned objective of improving personnel welfare.

Prospects for Defence Modernisation under Yudo

One item on Yudo's agenda is ensuring the continuity of TNI defence modernisation. Progress of the military transformation and modernisation programme under the aforesaid MEF scheme, which was scheduled to be completed in 2024, has been slow. As of 2022, only about [60% of the target has been met](#). The Ministry of Defence (Kemhan) has unveiled some defence procurement plans, which include the acquisition of at least six of Dassault's Rafale jetfighters in 2026 and five Lockheed Martin C-130J military transport aircraft in 2023. Kemhan has also been hoping to land a couple of F-15 jetfighters and ex-Qatar Mirage 2000-5 jetfighters as well as France's Scorpene-class submarines and Germany's TKMS submarines.

Mastery of cutting-edge technology and budget availability are the Indonesian government's main considerations in acquiring new military platforms. But there are some important contextual elements that can affect the progress of the modernisation agenda during Yudo's tenure.

First, Indonesia is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the COVID-19 situation remains volatile as the number of infections keeps fluctuating. The Indonesian government may need to devote a major part of its financial resources to post-COVID-19 recovery.

Second, the likelihood of an economic recession in the near future will force Jakarta to adopt a more prudent approach to government spending. This will affect the budgetary allocations for weapons acquisition.

Third, prior to Yudo's appointment, Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto had outlined the procurement plans mentioned above. This could mean that the available funds could have been channelled to realise this existing procurements list, which could limit Yudo's ability to acquire any additional weapons on his wishlist.

Fourth, Yudo's short tenure as Panglima TNI would give him little time for procurement-related decision-making. On the one hand, Panglima TNI is an important stakeholder in the procurement process. On the other hand, he is not the only actor in making procurement-related decisions. Kemhan, in fact, has considerable authority in

procurement decisions, which in reality reflects the [institutional strength of the defence ministry](#), and to some extent civilian control over the military.

Fifth, Indonesia will hold its next general elections in February 2024. This means that the political heat will intensify in 2023, particularly in the second half of the year when electioneering will be in full swing. Such circumstances require a prudent approach to procurement as sitting legislators would not want to endorse weapons acquisitions that could attract heavy criticism and consequently jeopardise their popularity and electability.

Against this backdrop, focusing on organisational development and improvement of interoperability becomes a more viable target for the new Panglima TNI to achieve. Moreover, Yudo has expressed his desire [to continue and improve upon what his predecessor](#), General Andika, has achieved. Based on Yudo's statement to Parliament, during his command we can expect to see more continuity with existing defence policies than divergence.

*Adhi **PRIAMARIZKI** is a Research Fellow with the Indonesia Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).*