

LETTER

Defence and political developments in Indonesia

Indonesia puzzles many Western observers. Certain recent changes seem encouraging; others less so.

In 1985, aware the main threat to its national security was in the South China Sea, Indonesia established defence radar units in the west. It did little more until its recent focus on the Natuna Sea and its establishment of an 'eastern command', as Dr David Leece noted in his excellent editorial in March [*United Service* 70 (1), 4, March 2019]. Although its 1994-2019 defence reform plan began slowly, TNI now has a tri-service capability, which was not possible until generational change in the senior leadership was effected. Transfer of the army's 'internal security' and 'business' functions to the police also is encouraging.

Government responses to emerging radicalism, though, have been less encouraging, especially in

counteracting the efforts of some to get rid of Pancasila¹. It would be particularly disquieting if Pancasila were to be abolished. Even a change in the first precept from 'a Supreme Being' to '**the** Supreme Being' could signal an end to the freedom that officials have to choose one of the six recognised religions, a freedom heretofore exercised by many senior military and civilian officials. A mandatory belief in a single religion might eliminate the safety valve that has made Indonesia theologically and politically moderate.

Ian Ingleby

Bayview NSW, 8 March 2019