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Judul : Race heats up for next TNI commander
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House of Representatives waiting for President Jokowi's nomination

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The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Speculation over the next Indonesian Military (TNI) commander to succeed Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto, who will retire in November, has intensified, with lawmakers saying they expect President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo to soon nominate his candidate of choice to the House of Representatives.

The 2004 TNI Law stipulates that its chief can be rotated among flag officers who hold or have held chief-of-staff positions within the three military services: the Army, the Air Force or the Navy. The 2004 law also mandates the President to seek the House's approval before inaugurating the new TNI commander.

House Speaker Puan Maharani has emphasized that Jokowi had the "prerogative right" to nominate the next TNI commander.

"The House hopes that whoever is nominated by the President as the TNI commander is the best candidate for the TNI and for the people," Puan, who is also an Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) politician, said in a statement on Monday.

She went on to add that she expected Jokowi to send an official letter soon to the House nominating his TNI commander candidate, given that the House will enter into a recess period on Oct. 7.

Separately, House Deputy Speaker and Gerindra Party politician Sufmi Dasco Ahmad also said on Monday that the House had yet to receive the President's nomination letter.

Analysts believe it will be a two-horse race between Army chief of staff Gen. Andika Perkasa and Navy chief of staff Adm. Yudo Margono.

Air Force chief of staff Air Chief Marshal Fadjar Prasetyo, meanwhile, has an outside chance of earning Jokowi's nomination because of a post-New Order tradition that rotates the highest TNI position among the armed services.

The post-New Order convention was for the TNI chief to be rotated in an Army-Navy-Army-Air Force pattern, after the top post had been filled by Army generals for the entirety of former president Soeharto's 32 years in power. Jokowi broke the convention in 2015 when he nominated then-Army chief of staff Gatot Nurmantyo to succeed Moeldoko, who also came from the Army.

Adm. Yudo Margono

Date of Birth : Nov. 26, 1965
Previous Posts :
- Graduated from the Navy Academy, 1988
- Chief of staff of the Navy's Western Fleet Command, 2016-2017
- Commander of the Navy's Sea Military Command (Kolinlamil), October 2017-March 2018
- Commander of the Navy's First Fleet Command (Koarmada 1), March 2018-September 2019
- Commander of Joint Defense Area Commands (Kogabwilhan 1), based in Riau Islands, September 2019-May 2020
- Appointed as the Navy chief of staff, May 2020

Gen. Andika Perkasa

2016-2018
- Head of the Military Education and Training Command (Kodiklat) in Bandung, West Java, 2018
- Commander of the Army Strategic Reserves Commander (Pangkostrad), July-November 2018.
- Appointed Army chief of staff, November 2018.

Source: Compiled from various sources



JP/Swi Handono

Defense analyst of research institute LAB 45 Andi Widjajanto pointed out that the 2024 election would likely cast a long shadow over Jokowi's decision to nominate a particular candidate.

"Jokowi will rely on [the next TNI commander] being able to carry out operations to maintain political stability [in the period leading up to the 2024 elections] alongside the police," said Andi, who is also an adviser to the Executive Office of the President (KSP).

"Normally, this would go to the Army as it has more depth in controlling territory."

However, he pointed out that Andika would reach the mandatory retirement age of 58 years old at the end of 2022, meaning his service, if appointed by the President and approved by the House, would be shorter than that of Yudo, who is due to retire at the end of 2023.

Andi said a scenario in which the TNI commander had to be replaced as political tensions rose with the approaching elections was "less than ideal".

Khairul Fahmi, military expert of the Institute for Security and Strategic Studies (ISESS), concurred with Andi, saying that that trust was likely to be "a deciding factor" for Jokowi in picking someone to lead such a strategic institution as the armed forces.

Andika, who was the Presidential Security Detail (Paspampres) commander in Jokowi's first term, was promoted by the President as the Army chief of staff in 2018, ahead of the 2019 presidential and legislative elections.

He is the son-in-law of former State Intelligence Agency (BIN) chief Hendropriyono, a confidant of Jokowi and long-time friend of PDI-P chairwoman Megawati Soekarnoputri.

Yudo, meanwhile, was a Joint Defense Area Command (Kogabwilhan) 1 chief based in Riau Islands between 2019 and 2020. He was in charge of transforming the former athletes' village in Kemayoran, Central Jakarta, into an emergency hospital for COVID-19 patients and briefly managed the hospital in the early months of the pandemic last year.

Regardless of who will earn Jokowi's nomination, military expert of Paramadina University Anton Aliabbas said that the new TNI commander would have a tough challenge overseeing the modernization of the country's aging defense equipment amid pandemic-related budget constraints.

"The new TNI commander and defense minister will need to work out schemes to modernize the primary weapons system in the midst of a pandemic," Anton said.