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TNI's Reshuffle: Jokowi's Strategic Move

By Chaula Anindya and Satrio Dwicahyo

Synopsis

The recent rotation of senior officers carried out by Indonesia's new military chief Hadi Tjahjanto is seen as a strategic move by President Joko Widodo to secure his men for the top posts in the Army (TNI AD) amid a looming presidential election next year.

Commentary

SHORTLY AFTER his inauguration as the new commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto took the unprecedented step of annulling a reshuffle of senior officers initiated by his predecessor, General Gatot Nurmantyo. The reshuffle was carried out just four days before Gen Gatot was to formally hand over the commandship of the military to his successor on 8 December 2017.

In the last three months of 2017, Gen Gatot did two reshuffles: one on 27 October and the other on 4 December. Unlike the reshuffle of 27 October, the 4 December leadership changes were puzzling. The second reshuffle involved 85 officers consisting 46 from the army, 28 from the Navy and 11 from the Air Force. It was baffling why Gen Gatot shifted some officers who previously held strategic appointments to lesser positions. For example, Maj Gen Imam Edy Mulyono, formerly Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic and Reserve Command (Kostrad), was reassigned as "Special Staff to the Army Chief of Staff". Another rotation which attracted public attention was the replacement of Lt Gen Edy Rachmayadi as Kostrad commander by Maj Gen Sudirman who was the Security Assistant to the Army's Chief of Staff.

Why the Puzzlement

The 4 December reshuffle raised questions for at least two reasons: the timing and

ACM Hadi's decision to reverse it. The timing was considered sensitive because Gen Gatot issued it shortly before he stepped down as commander-in-chief. A defence expert from the University of Indonesia, Connie Rahakundini Bakrie, even called it a "time bomb" from Gen Gatot to ACM Hadi.

Watchdogs and NGOs, for instance Imparsial, considered Gen Gatot's decision to carry on with the reshuffle as an unethical step. Both comments were based on an interpretation that Gen Gatot's move could create internal conflict and obstruct ACM Hadi's path by placing the outgoing chief's men in key positions.

In what was seen as a tit-for-tat move on 19 December 2017, ACM Hadi removed 16 high-ranking army officers from the reshuffle list. This unexpected step evoked more questions. Since ACM Hadi revoked only 16 out of 46 army officers, including Lt Gen Edy's resignation, the spotlight was mostly directed on ACM Hadi's attitude towards the replacement for the most strategic positions such as the Kostrad commander from Lt Gen Edy to Maj Gen Sudirman.

Speculation was rife about whether ACM Hadi saw Maj Gen Sudirman as Gen Gatot's man and therefore decided not to give him a strategic position within the army. It is worth remembering that the Kostrad commander functions as the most strategic three-star officer tasked with leading joint annual exercises and other combined services activities.

ACM Hadi's official statements following the reversal of the 4 December reshuffle by Gen Gatot merely underlined career development as justification for his move. His subsequent reshuffle on 4 January 2018, however, may have the effect of confirming some of the speculation.

4 January Reshuffle: Positioning for Army Chief?

On 4 January 2018, ACM Hadi issued the Commander's Decree (*Keputusan Panglima TNI*) which rotated 20 high-ranking officers. The main highlight was the appointment of Lt Gen Agus Kriswanto, formerly head of the Army's training school (Kodiklat AD) as the commander of Kostrad. Another highlight was that of Maj Gen Andika Perkasa, an area commander, to replace him as head of Kodiklat AD. These positions are said to be stepping stones for an officer to become a strong candidate for Army Chief of Staff (KSAD).

Aside from these positions, there is also the Deputy KSAD (Wakasad), currently held by Lt Gen Tatang Sulaiman. There are other three-star positions from outside the army structure which could also be stepping stones to KSAD, such as the Secretary General of the Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Menkopolhukam) and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence (Kemhan).

Gen Mulyono will retire in January 2019, the year of the presidential election; thus his successor might be appointed sometime this year to prepare for the upcoming election. Nevertheless, Lt Gen Agus is unlikely to succeed Gen Mulyono as KSAD because he too will be retiring, in August 2018. The appointment of Lt Gen Agus as Kostrad commander might therefore be a strategic move by ACM Hadi and President

Joko (“Jokowi”) to buy time before finding the right person or probably, groom a trusted officer.

New Chief of Army on the Horizon?

Maj Gen Andika Perkasa is believed to be groomed for the position of KSAD in the near future. His career has soared under the Jokowi presidency due to his personal relationship with the Megawati confidant AM Hendropriyono. Aside from being a retired general himself, Mr Hendropriyono is also a trusted adviser of President Jokowi.

Maj Gen Andika is, interestingly, the son-in-law of retired general Hendropriyono. He came into prominence after his promotion as commander of the Presidential Security Detail (Paspampres) from 2014 to 2016. His credentials for this position were, however, questioned as he spent most of his military career studying overseas, thus lacking operational experience. His recent rotation as the head of Kodiklat AD also means that he has been promoted as lieutenant general, becoming the most senior officer among his cohort.

Maj Gen Andika’s accelerated promotion to KSAD could draw criticism within TNI AD circles and raise public concerns. The path from Kodiklat head to KSAD is not straightforward. But Gen Gatot and Gen Mulyono both served in Kodiklat AD as head and deputy respectively before rising to Kostrad commander and finally KSAD.

Andika Perkasa’s Road to KSAD

If the paths taken by Gen Gatot and Gen Mulyono to becoming KSAD are followed, Maj Gen Andika may likely replace Lt Gen Agus Kriswanto as Kostrad chief when he retires. Shifting Maj Gen Andika closer to the centre of the command structure is a strategic move to prepare him to become KSAD.

We might expect more names to move up, such as the young colonel Maruli Simanjuntak, who is the son-in-law of another retired general, Luhut Pandjaitan, a cabinet ally of President Jokowi. As the president is eyeing a second term, having “his man” as KSAD will help strengthen his grip over the military while he focuses on other presidential agendas.

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