Indonesia-South Korea Security Cooperation: Progress, Problems, and Possibilities in Defence Diplomacy

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Abstract

Aside from economic and socio-cultural aspects, Indonesia and South Korea maintain intense and mutually beneficial cooperation in security affairs. As middle powers, both countries share aligned views on regional and global peace and security with ample capacity to play more influential roles. This article describes how Indonesia and South Korea uphold security cooperation by conducting defense diplomacy. Findings show that since bilateral relations were upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2006 until 2023, Indonesia and South Korea have made significant progress in aerospace and naval defense industry cooperation, strategic communications and consultations, and joint military exercises and security exchanges. However, issues in financing, technology transfer, and geopolitical dynamics have caused obstructions in those fields. Furthermore, several avenues of cooperation may be explored further and deeper in the future, including maritime security, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and multilateral engagement.

Keywords: Indonesia, South Korea, defense diplomacy, security cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia and South Korea share similar characteristics as middle powers and common aspirations for the future of regional and international security. To this day, Indonesia is the only Southeast Asian country to maintain a “special strategic partnership” status with South Korea. While the United States remains its closest ally in the Indo-Pacific region, South Korea has recognized the rapidly growing importance of Southeast Asian countries—especially Indonesia as ASEAN’s “first among equals”—as like-minded alternative partners in the face of an increasingly competitive regional landscape. Beginning with its *New Southern Policy* (NSP) introduced in 2017 and continued under the *Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative* (KASI) alongside its Indo-Pacific Strategy announced in 2022, South Korea has gradually increased and intensified cooperation across a variety of sectors with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries, including in defense and security.

Amidst various rising security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region over the past two decades—chief among them the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China as well as growing nuclear threats

from a concerningly ambitious North Korea—regional states aspire to increase their military capabilities to appropriately tackle such challenges (Dewey, 2024). Pushing for self-reliance in the defense industry and pursuing security cooperation with more diverse partners are essential steps in acquiring improved capabilities without having to overly depend on certain external providers. This understanding motivated Indonesia and South Korea to agree upon and sign the *Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership to Promote Friendship and Cooperation in the 21st Century* in December 2006. This was followed by another significant milestone in 2012 when the two countries agreed to jointly conduct research and development for an advanced fighter jet under the KF-X/IF-X (Korea/Indonesia Fighter eXperimental) program.

Bilateral relations between Indonesia and South Korea have flourished in many fields since it was formally established in September 1973. However, most popular and scholarly attention in Indonesia remains concentrated on the economic and socio-cultural aspects of the bilateral relationship, including Indonesians' immense interest in Korean consumer products, pop culture, travel destinations, and education opportunities. In part, this was due to *Hallyu* or "Korean Wave", a phenomenon occurring since the 1990s in which the global popularity of South Korea's popular culture drastically increased. Meanwhile, the security dimension of Indonesia–South Korea relations still offers ample room for further extensive studies.

This study seeks to answer two research questions. First, what are the progress and problems in Indonesia–South Korea's bilateral security cooperation from 2006 to 2023? Second, what possibilities for further cooperation could be explored in the future? The article will first elaborate on defense diplomacy as the conceptual framework to analyze the research topic. It will then describe the observable progress reached in the bilateral relationship and the problems both states face in various aspects of defense diplomacy, followed by exploring possible fields in which Indonesia and South Korea could mutually benefit from further collaboration. Finally, it will conclude the study's findings and offer recommendations.

Defence Diplomacy

Defense diplomacy is a relatively recent concept that appeared in the context of post-Cold War global dynamics, aimed at creating stable, long-term international relations as part of an effort to move past the use of force (Muniruzzaman, 2020). It could generally be defined as a foreign policy instrument based upon peaceful activities and the non-violent use of security

institutions and military forces to advance diplomatic relations, and international agendas, and support national security (Drab, 2018; Muniruzzaman, 2020). Instead of coercion through deterrence or intervention, states use their military forces and related defense infrastructure as a tool of persuasion or “soft power”, in a similar manner to wielding economic or cultural influence. By pursuing defense diplomacy, states could create more conducive strategic environments and strengthen overall security cooperation.

Contemporary defense diplomacy is an ever-evolving concept as new practices and traditions are introduced over time. It covers many areas, including but not limited to bilateral and multilateral cooperation; education and military training; joint military exercises; intelligence cooperation and information exchanges on the military-political situation; cooperation in the defense industry; activities related to arms control and confidence-building measures; and military assistance for other states’ armed forces (Drab, 2018). The most important defense diplomacy activities include bilateral and multilateral contacts between the highest civilian and military representatives; appointing and maintaining defense attachés in other countries; maintaining regular contacts between military personnel and warships visiting ports; developing international agreements in defense cooperation; supplying equipment, armaments and other military materials; and participating in bilateral and multilateral military exercises and training (Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Whichever instruments that states choose to utilize, defense diplomacy would be most effective when synchronized with other diplomatic efforts, such as trade, political relations, and people-to-people cultural contacts (Muniruzzaman, 2020). When conducted effectively, defense diplomacy contributes towards the strengthening of mutual trust and understanding between states, building and reinforcing perceptions of common interests, and paving ways for cooperation in other areas. In some contemporary cases, contrary to their traditional use of militaries as a means of counterbalancing adversaries, military cooperation and assistance are being used to help build cooperative relationships with former or potential enemies (Cottey & Forster, 2004), thus reducing the risk of conflict. Additionally, defense diplomacy is generally accepted to be designed to “influence the change of position of partners” and support the implementation of legal regulations on broad security issues (Drab, 2018).

As a country with inherent susceptibility to regional geopolitical

tensions, Indonesia routinely utilizes defense diplomacy as its “first line of defense” according to the *2002 Defence White Paper* (Gindarsah, 2015). In practice, Indonesia focuses on three agendas, which are confidence-building, harnessing military capability, and developing indigenous defence industrial bases (Syawfi in Gindarsah, 2015). The updated *2008 Defence White Paper* further establishes Indonesian defense diplomacy as being three-layered: the first layer being military-to-military ties with ASEAN countries; the second layer involves military cooperation with external powers, including South Korea; and the third layer being force deployment in United Nations peacekeeping operations (Gindarsah, 2015). An important pattern in defense diplomacy of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian states involves multilateral networks centered on ASEAN-led mechanisms to promote security cooperation among member states and external partners, e.g. the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM), and ADMM-Plus. Furthermore, the blurred distinction between traditional security (related to national defense) and non-traditional security issues also constitutes a distinctive pattern in regional defense diplomacy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is descriptive and seeks to describe the characteristics of a specific social phenomenon. The qualitative approach as a method to understand the meaning that individuals and groups ascribe to a problem (Creswell, 2014) is chosen. In this study, three areas of defense diplomacy will be thoroughly explored and analyzed to describe the level of progress, problems, and potentials of security cooperation between Indonesia and South Korea in defense industry cooperation, information exchanges, and joint military exercises and personnel exchanges. Data utilized for this study was obtained through both primary and secondary sources in the period 2006–2023. Primary data was collected from official government documents and reports accessible online, including agreement documents, memos, and press releases. Meanwhile, secondary data was gathered through the review of books, scholarly articles, and research reports related to security cooperation between Indonesia and South Korea.

DISCUSSION

The establishment of the strategic partnership in 2006 through the Indonesia-South Korea *Joint Declaration* enabled the beginning of new cooperation in the defense and security sector in defense industry and procurement by promoting and facilitating

joint production, high technology transfer, and other cooperation schemes through a joint committee. In addition to that, the two countries also agreed to increase contacts and exchange of visits between their respective defense officials, hold periodic defense policy talks at the senior officials' level, and increase cooperation in non-traditional security sectors, namely combating terrorism and transnational organized crimes. The latter is to be conducted by consistently implementing existing international conventions as well as bilateral and regional agreements, and exploring possibilities to establish a consultation mechanism.

Several reasons support Indonesia's and South Korea's decision to engage in bilateral defense diplomacy. Firstly, South Korea's willingness to conduct transfers of technology and knowledge strengthens Indonesia's mastery of future defense technologies that it could not previously acquire (Armandha, 2016: 79). Secondly, defense diplomacy could pave the way for deeper joint research and development with South Korea, through which Indonesia hopes to build self-reliance in the defense industry sector while contributing for economic growth (Armandha, 2016: 81). Indonesia also aims to fulfill its "Minimum Essential Force" by 2024, a military modernization agenda dependent on the procurement of new defense platforms, some of which South Korea could provide as an emerging defense exporter.

On the other hand, South Korea holds defense-building ambitions and seeks to increase interoperability with a more diverse range of partners in the Indo-Pacific aside from the United States (Kwon, 2023). The two countries also share common negative experiences related to over-reliance on one security partner. Indonesia's defense capability was heavily impacted by the American arms embargo in the 1990s–2000s, while South Korea's dependence on strictly regulated US defense equipment prevented it from independently developing more advanced derivative technologies. Both Indonesia and South Korea are middle powers and thus stand on equal ground (Teo et al., 2016). Both countries' strategic visions in pursuing greater defense capabilities to reduce and prevent future overreliance on certain great powers are aligned.

This section will elaborate on findings based on the aforementioned three areas of defense diplomacy: defense industry cooperation, information exchanges, military exercises, and personnel exchanges.

Aerospace and Naval Defence Industry Cooperation

Over the past two decades, Indonesia has accounted for 55% of total South Korea's defense exports to Southeast Asia (Broad & Laksmana, 2023). Although Indonesian law mandates that fulfillment of military equipment prioritize sourcing domestically, i.e. the local defense industry, the usage of foreign-sourced products is allowed under the requirement that domestic industry is still involved through mechanisms like joint production. Indonesia's PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI) at the time was capable of locally producing CN-235 transport aircraft, the maritime patrol variant of which had been exported for the South Korean Coast Guard in 2012 (Kemhan RI, 2012). In the previous year, Indonesia had acquired 16 T-50 supersonic trainer aircraft from Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI). However, Indonesia lacked the technological capacity and technical know-how to develop indigenous fighter aircraft as a necessary backbone of the air force, thus requiring cooperation with foreign firms to acquire them.

Two institutions spearhead the pursuit of cooperation: Indonesia's defense ministry and South Korea's Defence Acquisition Program Administration ("DAPA"). In March 2009, both countries signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) to collaborate on a "co-development project" for an advanced fighter jet officially named *Korea/Indonesia Fighter eXperimental* (KF-X/IF-X), which was followed-up by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on July 2010 that formally outlined the joint development and production programme. The project would consist of three phases: technology development, engineering and manufacturing development, and prototyping, before production and marketing could be executed.

The project would cost 6,7 billion USD, of which 80% would be covered by South Korea and the remaining 20% by Indonesia, in return for knowledge transfers and purchasing rights for Indonesia after the project's completion (Seung-woo, 2022). The cost-sharing agreement was signed by the Indonesian government and KAI in 2016, alongside a work assignment agreement that delineated PTDI's involvement in prototype development, component manufacture, testing, and certification (Ali, 2021). In total, 120 units would be produced for South Korea's air force and 48 units for Indonesia, targeted to enter active service by 2026. The respective aircraft manufacturing companies, Korean Aerospace, and PTDI, would jointly become "system integrators" by combining components like engines and avionics made by other parties (Antara, 2018).

However, two problems plague the KF-X project, namely difficulties in technology

transfers and financing. Initial disagreements over access to critical technology arose because some core systems and components could not be produced by either country and had to be sourced from the United States (Broad & Laksmana, 2023). Even though South Korea is a close ally, the United States refused to transfer several key technologies for the KF-X project due to complications related to its national security policy, including advanced radar, jammer, tracking and targeting systems (Kusumadewi, et al, 2016). Moreover, because Indonesia lacks special agreements with the United States for the procurement of sensitive technologies, South Korean authorities could not legally grant access to Indonesian engineers (Ali, 2021). While trilateral negotiations have commenced to resolve this issue, the Indonesian government and industry officials have stated that it is “reasonable” for the United States to gatekeep key technologies (Kusumadewi, et al, 2016). Nonetheless, Indonesia would not achieve mastery of the advanced aerospace technology that it seeks to acquire from this project.

The second issue holding back the KF-X/IF-X program is Indonesia’s commitment and financing. Korean media repeatedly reported Indonesia could quit the program because of its inability to make due payments since 2017 which amounts to approximately 700 million USD (Seok-min, 2021; Seung-woo, 2022). Although Indonesian officials have stated its “serious consideration” regarding the program’s high stakes for bilateral political relations, the Indonesian government’s lack of political will to commit the required amount of funds remained a major roadblock. In 2018, Indonesia sought to renegotiate its share of the development cost from 20% to 15%, which may partly be rationalized by the aforementioned setback in technology transfers (Oktaviani, 2021).

The issue worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic as Indonesia was forced to divert its budget to contain and combat the disaster. When President Joko Widodo visited Seoul in July 2022, there had been much expectation that both countries’ governments could find a solution to this problem. However, the high-level meeting only produced a statement that both countries “reaffirm their commitment to work together” on the program, and there were suggestions from Indonesia to hold “further consultations” to resolve the payment issue (Seung-woo, 2022). Payments were finally resumed by Indonesia in November 2022, promising to notify South Korea regarding its payment plan for the remaining amount by June 2023 (Yun-hwan, 2023).

In the maritime domain, defense industry cooperation was also pursued by

Indonesia and South Korea in the acquisition of *Chang Bogo*-class diesel-electric submarines produced by Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME) for the Indonesian Navy. The case for Indonesia's submarine modernization had been made clear by the KRI *Nanggala* sinking in 2021. However, though Indonesia's principal ship manufacturing company PT PAL has experience and capacity in constructing surface vessels, it lacks know-how in developing and building submarines. Indonesia chose South Korea as a partner again mostly due to financial considerations and perception of reliability, South Korea offered three units at 1 billion USD, considerably cheaper compared to European providers which demanded 450–500 million USD per unit (Al-Fadhat & Effendi, 2019). The contract was signed in 2012, which included clauses on technology and knowledge transfer.

Following this, the Defence Ministry and DSME agreed on a second contract in April 2019 to provide three more submarines by 2026, with funding arranged by the Export-Import Bank of Korea (Rahmat, 2020). Besides expanding the Indonesian Navy's submarine arsenal, the project contributes by providing much-needed technical skills and know-how. Over 200 naval engineers and designers of PT PAL were sent to DSME's facilities, where they observed and gradually participated in the submarine assembly process to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications for future projects (Al-Fadhat & Effendi, 2019).

Like the KF-X project, *Chang Bogo* also faced two critical issues, namely trust deficit between the primary stakeholders involved and financial commitments. PT PAL reportedly failed to meet quality control assessments set by DSME throughout the submarine production process, which caused DSME's reluctance to directly involve PT PAL engineers (Laksmana & Mantong, 2021). On the other hand, Indonesian analysts have suggested that the performance of submarines produced by DSME in the first contract did not live up to Indonesia's initial technical expectations (Gyeong-min & Young-Keun, 2022). Furthermore, Indonesian commentators have doubted South Korea's capabilities of submarine production following the sinking incident of KRI *Nanggala* in 2021, which had been previously refitted by DSME in 2012 (Broad & Laksmana, 2023).

Additionally, the Indonesian government had yet to deliver payments of 74 million USD or 10% of the total contract amount, which meant the second contract was never in effect three years after its signing (Lee, 2022). Meanwhile, in April 2019, DSME had already pre-ordered materials to build the submarines, which led

Korean media to suspect a possible financial loss for the company should Indonesia decide to cancel the contract (Gyeong-min & Young-Keun, 2022). After years of deliberation and review, the Indonesian government eventually decided to look for other partners to fulfill its future submarine fleet requirements.

These problems illustrate three lessons learned for both countries in their defense diplomacy as follows: first, should two countries pursue defense diplomacy agendas that involve a degree of dependency on third-party countries—directly or otherwise—a realignment of interests and objectives between the three parties is required before the agenda could be continued. Findings indicate that even when interests between two initial parties are aligned, the involvement or intervention of a third-party country with different sets of interests could delay or inhibit defense diplomacy agendas. Therefore, two options could be considered. Interruptions could be minimized by entirely avoiding agendas dependent on third parties with unclear alignments and tolerance for differing interests. Alternatively, should third-party involvement be unavoidable, it is important to consider partners with the least difference in interests and most similarity in underlying values, which may ease the realignment process.

Second, advancements in defense technology remain generally highly secretive, even between trusted partners. Therefore, technical details should be examined and agreed upon by all involved parties before making long-term financial commitments, with consideration of respective domestic capacities. Third, low levels of trust and commitment during the execution of agendas have led to delayed progress or entire cancellation of projects, which would undermine or damage relations instead of strengthening them. Pre-existing mutual trust between parties and their capacity to make commitments and follow through with agreements are the necessary foundations for defense diplomacy. As such, countries should look beyond similarities in values, outlooks, and objectives when seeking defense diplomacy partners.

Strategic Communications and Consultations

Indonesia and South Korea signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2013 that included regular bilateral dialogue on strategic issues of common interest, defense-related information exchanges, personnel exchanges for education and research, scientific and technical data exchanges, and several other fields of cooperation. Along with the upgrade in bilateral relations status to “special strategic partnership” in the 2017 *Joint Vision*

Statement, both countries agreed to explore new consultation mechanisms. Since then, their respective high-level military and civilian officials have maintained strategic communication as a crucial activity in defense diplomacy.

As a concrete follow-up to the statement, the Foreign and Defence Senior Officials' Meeting (2+2 SOM) was held to assess the regional and global security situation and possible actionable engagements, such as capacity-building for Indonesian defense personnel. The first annual 2+2 SOM was held virtually in 2021 and the second was hosted by Seoul in person in 2022. During the second SOM, cooperation in cybersecurity, maritime security, peacekeeping operations, counter-terrorism, and Indo-Pacific issues was extensively discussed, as well as an agreement to establish a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) in 2023 (Kemhan, 2022). Such talks reflect shared interests and visions for regional security and stability, strengthening mutual trust and understanding.

Both countries' leaders and officials demonstrated high regard for the bilateral special strategic partnership. Defence Ministers Prabowo Subianto and Suh Wook held a bilateral meeting discussing strategic security matters and opportunities for future defense cooperation when the former visited South Korea in April 2021. Subianto also attended the rollout ceremony of the KF-X/IF-X jet representing the Indonesian government in person while President Joko Widodo gave a virtual speech, symbolically signaling the importance of the jet development program in wider Indonesia-South Korea relations and Indonesia's continued commitment to the program despite ongoing issues (Parameswaran, 2021).

One prominent problem with Indonesia-South Korea security dialogues under the NSP framework is that preoccupation with non-traditional security tends to take precedence over more "sensitive" traditional security and defense issues. Development of disaster response capabilities and law enforcement partnerships are among the prevalent areas of security cooperation. Wongi (2021) argued this was to minimize South Korea's risks of being drawn into the US-China rivalry. However, while issues like climate change and transnational crime are also important for Indonesia and the region, past surveys have illustrated how South Korea's distancing from traditional security affairs resulted in low trust among Southeast Asians toward South Korea as a strategic partner (Wongi, 2021).

South Korea generally judges the efficacy of any regional defense and security

cooperation based on its effectiveness in managing Korean Peninsula issues (Lee, 2016). China's posturing in the South China Sea ("SCS") dispute—a crucial issue for Indonesia and Southeast Asian countries alike—ranked lower on South Korea's security priorities compared to North Korea's nuclear weapons development. Nevertheless, Indonesia and South Korea are both parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and share an aligned view on North Korea's nuclear activities as a "serious challenge" to international peace and security. In the 2017 *Joint Vision Statement*, both countries reaffirmed their support for the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and urged North Korea to comply with obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions. During the first 2+2 SOM in 2021, Indonesia has vowed to always support South Korea's peace initiatives; in practice, Indonesia has called for North Korea to refrain from making provocative actions numerous times to prevent escalating tensions. In a symbolic show of support for upholding peace and security on the peninsula, an Indonesian delegation visited the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) in 2022 (Kemhan, 2022).

Indonesia is well-positioned to exert its influence to tackle this issue thanks to stable relations with North Korea since the 1960s enabling high-level dialogue. In the wider regional context, Korean Peninsula issues have been on the forefront ever since Indonesia and other ASEAN member states began more intense and frequent engagements with South Korea as an ASEAN dialogue partner. Considering discussions on traditional security issues have long been seen as "too sensitive" within ASEAN, this was a significant development.

Indonesia and South Korea also participated in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since 1994 and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus since 2010 alongside other major Indo-Pacific powers. These are the premier regional forums where members could engage in constructive dialogue to address shared regional security challenges. However, the South Korean government's defense policy priorities did not put ADMM-Plus as a high priority due to the perceived lack of effectiveness in resolving regional conflicts and disputes, partly because of ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making mechanism. Thus, South Korea places greater trust in other arrangements, mainly its bilateral security ties with the United States (Lee, 2016).

Nonetheless, closer defense relations between South Korea and Indonesia as well as other regional states could potentially discourage North Korea from conducting aggressive behavior or encourage it to pursue dialogue with ASEAN instead, which

would ultimately be desirable for South Korea's interests (Kim, 2019). Furthermore, the accommodation of North Korea in ARF enabled the improvement of relations with countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and even the United States which may indirectly ease the peace process with South Korea. ARF has yet to make significant contributions towards resolving tensions in the Korean Peninsula. Still, Indonesia and ASEAN should maintain engagement with both North and South Korea and avoid being directly drawn into the conflict to continue playing a considerable role in this issue (Wong, 2017).

South Korea's engagement strategy towards Indonesia and Southeast Asia was expanded in 2022 through KASI, building upon NSP through security-driven initiatives such as defense exchanges and joint responses to cyber and maritime security issues (Martinus, 2023). Closer attention towards maritime security issues could be seen from President Yoon Suk-yeol's eagerness to become more involved in the SCS dispute (Kembara, 2022: 50). Being the second-largest country that exports through the SCS, guaranteeing freedom of navigation in the disputed area is critical in securing South Korea's global trade (Darmawan, 2021). In his address during the East Asia Summit in 2023, President Yoon emphasized the need to establish a "rules-based maritime order" in SCS. Although a formal alignment has never been made on a bilateral level, Indonesia and South Korea share the same view that the SCS issue must be resolved peacefully with self-restraint and without the use of force in accordance with 1982 UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as often discussed during ASEAN-ROK Summits.

Joint Military Exercises and Security Exchanges

Indonesia has been hosting numerous multinational military exercises in which South Korea routinely participates as an ASEAN dialogue partner. Indonesia's motives for hosting joint exercises include pursuing strategic engagement, providing confidence-building measures, capacity-building, and improving its international reputation (Inkiriwang, 2021). Moreover, through active involvement, Indonesian and South Korean personnel showed openness to collaboration and developed greater trust, interoperability, and joint capability with each other and their counterparts.

TNI hosted a counter-terrorism exercise involving militaries of all ADMM-Plus member states in 2013, including South Korea. Under the shared acknowledgment that terrorism poses a threat to international security, participants shared best practices and demonstrated counter-terrorism

techniques and procedures (Kemhan, 2013). TNI-AL has hosted *Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo* four times since 2014 as a "non-war" exercise aiming to strengthen relationships between navies, to which the ROKN has always sent participating contingents. Indonesia invited North Korea as a participant as well, with the expectation that both Korean contingents could communicate and cooperate in practice. Another routine exercise, the multi-branch *Super Garuda Shield* 2023, hosted jointly by Indonesia and the United States, was viewed by some analysts as reflecting shared concern over North Korea's nuclear activities, among other regional security developments. South Korea sent their personnel as observers, partaking in the planning phase up to the exercises itself. However, it has yet to send troops as a full participant thus far, including in the upcoming SGS 2024.

As co-chair of ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security—together with Singapore—South Korea co-organized the Maritime Security Field Training Exercise in 2019, involving forces from Indonesia and 17 other ADMM-Plus members in several phases of joint operations drills to enhance practical field cooperation among participating navies. Furthermore, Indonesia and South Korea have also participated in military training drills hosted by other partners, sending their forces alongside regional states and extra-regional powers with interest in the region, such as the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) and Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) routinely held by the United States.

One notable shortcoming of these exercises is the lack of a common designated state adversary that the joint capacity-building activities are directed against. The specific designation may better strengthen mutual trust and understanding between participating forces, and determine what capabilities should be prioritized to counter that adversary together. This is understandably due to the differing core strategic interests between Indonesia, South Korea, and other countries that may be involved. South Korea focuses intensely on North Korea as its primary existential threat and has no problem publicly stating and condemning North Korea's actions that it deems aggressive or contrary to international law, while Indonesia under the "free and active" foreign policy principle remains reluctant and refrains from openly considering any particular country as a threat. Therefore, non-traditional security issues emanating from non-state actors including piracy and terrorism or other sources such as natural disasters continue to be the focus of such exercises, being easier

to navigate in a multilateral setting compared to traditional military threats.

Future joint exercises could consider hypothetical scenarios involving imaginary state adversaries—with fictional capabilities that may mirror actual challenges faced by regional states. Such scenarios could better simulate cooperation and interoperability in facing conventional defense threats whilst simultaneously avoiding misinterpretation of intentions and deepening mutual understanding of threat perceptions.

Besides joint exercises on the field, security institutions from both countries have also pursued closer cooperation in specific sectors to formalize alignments in common issues and increase capacity-building. Indonesian and South Korean militaries have recognized the need for increased capacity-building to better respond to current security challenges in their shared region and the world. Aiming to explore capacity-building efforts for peacekeeping forces deployed under UN missions, TNI and South Korea's Ministry of National Defense signed an MoU on peacekeeping operations in July 2023 that includes knowledge-sharing programs, joint courses and training, and troop exchanges (Antara, 2023).

Maritime security dialogue between the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) and the Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) has been conducted through routine Navy-to-Navy Talks (NNT), where both navies agreed to share information regarding the strategic environment in their respective regions. TNI-AL and ROKN also pursued counter-piracy cooperation, motivated by a common experience of both countries in conducting operations to rescue hijacked commercial vessels from pirates in the Gulf of Aden—South Korea's MV *Samho Jewelry* and Indonesia's MV *Sinar Kudus* in 2011 (Antara, 2011).

In 2018, Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) and the Korean Coast Guard (KCG) signed a bilateral MoU aiming to boost information-sharing, establish communication platforms, and plan joint exercises (Kembara, 2022: 52). Following a port visit to Jakarta by a KCG vessel in March 2019, the commanding officer of Bakamla visited South Korea in August 2019, where KCG committed to provide overseas development assistance (ODA) for the construction of Bakamla's training academy (TNI, 2019). Later in 2023, a second Bakamla-KCG bilateral meeting was held in Incheon, where commanders of both institutions reaffirmed the necessity of inter-coast guard collaboration to uphold regional maritime security (Bakamla, 2023). That same year, Bakamla personnel took part in a search and rescue capacity-building

program in South Korea, facilitated by Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

Future Possibilities

Indonesia and South Korea relations—bilaterally or regionally through ASEAN—would mutually benefit from increased cooperation in the defense and security sector, owing to their unique experiences and capabilities. Besides addressing traditional security threats, the 2006 *Joint Declaration* has provided grounds for developing future bilateral cooperation in tackling non-traditional security issues, including transnational organized crimes (TOCs) like smuggling, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and cybercrime. This deepened cooperation where previously in 2002, Indonesia and South Korea signed a mutual legal assistance treaty in criminal matters—especially those of transnational nature—which was eventually ratified by Indonesia in 2014. Furthermore, the 2017 NSP's "peace pillar" focused on contemporary non-traditional security, including emergency response capabilities, joint responses to terrorism, cybersecurity challenges, and maritime security threats.

As far back as 2011, maritime security issues and capacity-building have been discussed concerning capacity-building cooperation between Indonesia and South Korea. Dialogue on the promotion of maritime domain awareness, joint training and knowledge exchanges, and most importantly upholding a rules-based maritime order in the wider region based on UNCLOS should be pursued more extensively by Indonesia and South Korea. ROKN and KCG are recognized for their maritime patrol and surveillance capabilities, showing modern assets and operational frameworks. Closer cooperation with Indonesia's TNI-AL and Bakamla may help increase their technological capacity to tackle contemporary issues at sea. On the other hand, Indonesia's experiences in countering piracy, illegal fishing, and drug and people smuggling in the Malacca Strait and other maritime hotspots in the region may provide valuable insight for South Korea in better securing its maritime trade interests.

Since 2012, Indonesia and South Korea have identified cyber threats as a potential field of cooperation, conveyed during the visit of the Korean Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA) delegation to Indonesia's National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas RI, 2012). South Korea's advancements in digital technology, connectivity, and cybersecurity could be beneficial in providing technical assistance for Indonesia's cybersecurity institutions. Previously, South Korea has developed cooperation and conducted a consultation on cybersecurity with the United States, the

United Kingdom, and the Netherlands (ROK Government, 2023). Moving forward, Indonesia and South Korea could engage in the promotion and development of regional cyber norms and practices, joint research and development on cybersecurity technologies, and digitalization of law enforcement agencies and military forces.

The stable domestic security situation and relatively low level of conflict relative to other parts of Asia caused the notion that South Korea is safe from terrorism to prevail. Although the country has yet to experience terrorist attacks where North Korea is not the primary actor responsible, threats and warnings from prominent foreign extremist groups like Al-Qaeda are still present. Furthermore, Shin (2022) states that "homegrown" terrorism may be putting South Korea in danger due to high levels of alienation among migrants, especially those who are unemployed and vulnerable to radicalization. This is taking place against the backdrop of an increasingly multicultural society in South Korea, a characteristic also found in Indonesian society. Already hardened after a series of extremist attacks in the early 2000s, Indonesian counter-terrorism institutions have since developed extensive preventive and deradicalization programs in addition to far-reaching intelligence networks to detect and preemptively take action against potential terrorist acts. Therefore, cooperation between South Korean and Indonesian counter-terrorism agencies may help prevent—or effectively mitigate—any potential for acts of terrorism going forward, especially those of a transnational nature.

While South Korea still prioritizes bilateral arrangements with the United States over regional mechanisms for security matters, Kim (2019) argues that forums like ADMM-Plus will eventually become more important for South Korea. ADMM-Plus offers the ability to move past political gridlock by focusing on practical cooperation, such as joint military exercises in maritime security and humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR); deepen relations with ASEAN members and demonstrate support for ASEAN centrality, through participation in information-sharing workshops, and technical training; and opportunity for officials to exchange views, push the dialogue forward, and maintain rapport (Kim, 2019). On the other hand, Indonesia could use ASEAN-centred mechanisms and uniquely good relations with both Koreas to push for more inclusive initiatives for the Korean Peninsula peace process. With the upcoming establishment of the ASEAN-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership proposed by South Korea, ASEAN-centred mechanisms could facilitate Indonesia and South Korea's more ambitious and inclusive

consultations, which overall strengthens bilateral defense diplomacy agendas.

CONCLUSION

Though relatively far from the mass media spotlight and general public attention, security cooperation between Indonesia and South Korea has shown significant progress and contributed towards the strengthening of overall bilateral relations under the special strategic partnership. It has proved the success of both countries' peaceful use of their armed forces and defense-related institutions to foster better relations and support their national security interests, especially in the backdrop of regional geopolitical tensions. By pursuing closer security ties with South Korea instead of siding with and over-relying on great powers, Indonesia could better navigate tense rivalries while achieving its desired defense development, and to an extent, increase its self-reliance in the process. Likewise, South Korea could increase and project its middle-power influence as a like-minded partner for countries in the wider Southeast Asian region.

On the other hand, the cases of the fighter jet and submarine procurement programs have shown that Indonesia urgently needs to evaluate and improve its financial capacity and political commitment before deciding to embark on more ambitious and diverse cooperation projects in the future. Resolving this issue would bring benefits for both countries involved: Indonesia could provide more clarity for its defense modernization plans, while South Korea could maintain its positive image as a reliable provider of advanced defense equipment and technologies (Hynd et al., 2023). Otherwise, Indonesia's current track record may have negative ramifications for its international reputation as a potential security cooperation partner. Furthermore, the sensitivities surrounding advanced technology usage and development that involve different stakeholders must be considered and anticipated by Indonesia to guarantee the implementation of technology transfers.

Tackling the North Korea nuclear issue as South Korea's existential threat will likely remain its primary motivation in engaging with Indonesia and regional states, bilaterally or through multilateral forums. Therefore, Indonesia could continue offering its steadfast support in seeking a lasting solution for peace on the Korean Peninsula to maintain its partnership with South Korea and as a foundation for developing future security cooperation initiatives. By ensuring that denuclearisation remains on the agenda of regional forums, especially ASEAN-centred mechanisms, Indonesia could help maintain South Korea's engagement with

itself and other regional states, which eventually would contribute to the wider regional peace and security efforts, benefitting both countries in the process.

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