



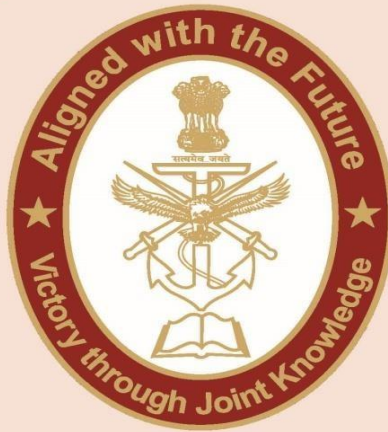
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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF INDIA INDONESIA DEFENCE AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

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Challenges and opportunities of India Indonesia defence and security partnership



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Introduction

Bay of Bengal is the natural separation between India and Indonesia. India's Andaman & Nicobar Islands is the closest Indian territory to Indonesia. From the times of Ramayana, India and Indonesia's bond spans over the period of 2000 years. Sovereignty and freedom have been the cornerstone of both the countries, since the time of their independence. In the present time, India and Indonesia collaborates successfully both in economic and strategic domains. Defence and security arrangements have become important as new geopolitical events are shaping the Indo-Pacific. Thus, in contemporary times, Indonesia and India are emerging crucial Indo-Pacific powers.

To quote Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto here, who said in the Jakarta post that- 'China's economic security is utterly dependent on Beijing's ability to secure markets and sea lanes that traverse the Indian and Pacific Oceans—the Indo-Pacific.'ⁱ This reflects the strong relationship existing between India and Indonesia. In the following section, various aspects of cooperation that exist between the two countries are discussed.

Historical Aspect

Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are widely popular in the Indonesian archipelago. Indonesian culture- especially the Hindu Balinese culture is closely related to Indian Hindu religion. Indonesia was under the rule of Dutch people, and India was colonized by the Britishers. Hence, both the countries went through the same situation. Later, President Sukarno was the Chief Guest at India's first Republic Day in the year 1950.ⁱⁱ

Counter- Terrorism and Intelligence Sharing

Terrorism, radicalization, and transnational crime are the major areas of concern between India and Indonesia. The Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism aims to promote intelligence sharing, capacity building, and coordination on security matters. Its first meeting was held in the year 2005, with the latest one- the 6th edition was held last year in August 2024.ⁱⁱⁱ The Defence Cooperation Agreement of the year 2001, made intelligence-sharing mechanisms between the security agencies quite strong.

To counter extremist activities information regarding regional terrorist networks like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and ISIS-affiliated groups is being regularly tracked and shared between both the nations.^{iv} Intelligence gathering and sharing is being done for the strategically important areas in the Indo-Pacific and the Malacca Strait like maritime threats, piracy, and terrorist movements. Counter-terrorism initiatives covering radicalization and terrorism financing are discussed extensively by both nations at platforms like ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and as well as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

Defence Technology Collaboration

During the tenure of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, an agreement on Defence Cooperation was signed in 2001, which led to the formalisation of defence technology exchange program, setting the base for future defence collaboration at the bilateral level.^v Key initiatives included joint military exercises, ship visits, officer

exchanges, and coordinated patrols in the Indo-Pacific region. It led to the formation of the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee to foster military-industrial cooperation. This was further taken to an advanced level with the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the year 2018.^{vi} It emphasise upon joint production and research. Indonesia is looking forward to investing in obtaining defence technology from Indian defence manufacturing companies like Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL) Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE).^{vii}

On the other hand, India has offered offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), corvettes, and submarines to Indonesia, in addition to maritime surveillance technology. Indonesia is interested in making purchases from India, especially the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. There have been rounds of talks going for Indonesia to buy BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles from India.^{viii}

There are various areas where both the countries can work together like- armoured vehicle production. India's defence systems can serve as an inspiration.^{ix} Discussions and military drills held during defence exercises, helps to develop an effective relation between the armies of both the nations. This comes handy, if any future conflict takes place and both the countries need to fight together. In November last year, 9th edition of joint military exercise Garuda Shakti was held involving armies of both the nations.^x Initiatives like regular bilateral dialogue is being held under Defence Agreement, signed in 2018. In this, important areas which are of mutual interest are discussed. Other areas were exchange of strategic information, military education, training and exercise, cooperation among the armed forces, humanitarian aid and disaster management.^{xi}

Challenges In India-Indonesia Defence Partnership

Even after various engagements, there is a lack of trust which in turn leads to half-hearted efforts from both the nations towards each other. As per ISEAS' State of Southeast Asia Surveys, almost all Indonesians think that India has almost no political and strategic influence in Southeast Asia.^{xii} It indicates that Indonesians don't see India in a positive light. The US and China have a hegemonic presence in the region; thus, India is not seen as a key player in the region.

Moreover, there exist strategic differences, as India believes in following a broader strategy by engaging with various multilateral platforms like QUAD, IORA, and ASEAN. Indonesia on the other hand is cautious of these alliances and maintains a careful

distance from them. Indonesia rather focuses on taking forward ASEAN'S objectives and priorities.^{xiii} The complex nature of the defence procurements process in India, and Indonesia's bureaucratic hurdles slows down signing of the defence deals. This is quite evident in Indonesia's purchase of BrahMos missile. Indonesia is focusing on amplifying its defence trade partnerships and prefers buying arms from other countries like the US, France, Australia etc. The 2024 defence cooperation agreement with Australia and the 2023 ANKA Drones deal with Turkey, are few examples.^{xiv}

Though both nations emphasise freedom of navigation, India's way of dealing with maritime conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region is altogether different from Indonesia's approach. Also, there is a difference in operational priorities which makes coordination in Joint military exercises a task.^{xv}

Budget is another concerning factor as Indonesia's defence budget is comparatively lower. India faces stiff competition from other key nations who are providing better technology at lower prices than what India is offering.^{xvi} There is also a lack of long-term commitment to institutionalized mechanisms like defence dialogues, which are important to understand each other's security concerns and arrive at a common path to deal with it.

Way Forward- Recommendations

There is a lot to be done to enhance cooperation at the bilateral level, and this can only be done by making best use of strengths of both the countries and finding out ways to resolve conflict areas.

- **A. On a Strategic level**

Indonesia is concerned about India's growing influence in the region, thus there is a need to address Indonesia's sovereignty concerns by having regular meetings at bilateral

level and formulating working groups. Annual meetings of foreign ministers, Finance ministers will help to chalk out further plans of cooperation. The Indian Ocean is an area of prime importance for both the countries, thus converging interests in the areas like infrastructure, fisheries, defence and security will be highly beneficial. India and Indonesia should aim for Multipolar Asia. They should focus on cooperation of civil society in areas like democracy. There should be close linkage between the activities of Indian Ocean Rim Association and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Recently, Indonesia became the first Southeast Asian nation to formally join BRICS. Thus, they got another platform for collaboration.^{xvii} Engagements should be made at Track 1.5 and Track 2 level diplomacy. It may involve groupings like India, Indonesia and Japan; India, Indonesia and US; India, Indonesia and Australia. Issues like regional security, economic cooperation could be discussed.

- **B. Defence area**

In the domain of Defence cooperation- expansion of combined patrols should take place. Real time information exchange mechanisms regarding maritime issues should be focused. To bolster the Indo-Indonesia Defence Innovation Partnership, start-ups and private defence companies from both countries should be encouraged to collaborate on new and advanced defence solutions.^{xviii} The armies of both the nations should work on bringing into picture regular company- based exercises. Think tanks of both the countries covering defence and security strategies should collaborate.

Joint production of military equipment should be enhanced. This can be done by forming Joint Working Group (JWG) especially for defence industries to address their concerns. Joint defence funds to be formulated for R&D and production.

● C. Technological Arena

There is immense potential for collaboration between India's public digital infrastructure and Indonesia's digital infrastructure to drive innovation, economic growth, and cultural exchange.^{xix} Entrepreneurs, start-ups, and creative professionals can be empowered to harness the prospects of digital technologies for innovation and growth. Power of AI can be leveraged to drive economic growth. Areas like Tourism, knowledge economy, sustainable agriculture can be covered.

Conclusion

Though tackling China is a common concern for both India and Indonesia, still one should not undermine the fact that Indonesia has a strong economic partnership with China, thus expecting it to go against China is something far from reality. After weighing all the concerns, there is a great possibility for both the nations to frame policies that will lead to a prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Collaboration in the field of defence calls for indigenisation and self-reliance in defence manufacturing. With mechanisms already in place for joint efforts in domains involving naval, aerospace, missile, and Cybersecurity, both India and Indonesia are striving for greater regional cooperation. For strengthening the future of security partnership, regular conduct of Defence Ministers' dialogues and joint exercises will pave the way for greater cooperation. As both nations share crucial economic and security concerns in the Indo-Pacific, they aim for freedom of navigation, sustainable development and maintaining ASEAN centrality.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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