

# MP-IDSA *Commentary*

## India-Indonesia Defence Ties: Potential Areas of Cooperation

*Niranjan Chandrashekar Oak*

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### **S***ummary*

India and Indonesia can collaborate more closely to rapidly advance their defence relationship.

Defence and security cooperation between India and Indonesia made steady progress during the State Visit of Prabowo Subianto, President of the Republic of Indonesia, from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Subianto was the Chief Guest at India’s 76<sup>th</sup> Republic Day parade. The high-level Presidential delegation included Indonesian Navy Chief Admiral (Adm.) Muhammad Ali, who held bilateral discussions with the Chief of the Naval Staff Adm. Dinesh K. Tripathi to strengthen maritime ties between the two countries. Just a month earlier, during 15–18 December 2024, Adm. Tripathi was on a four-day official visit to Indonesia to consolidate bilateral defence relations between the two countries. Back-to-back important visits and engagements conveyed political intent in New Delhi and Jakarta to take forward the defence relationship, which is yet to realise its full potential despite having a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2018. However, there are several potential areas within the defence sector where both countries can collaborate closely to rapidly advance their defence relationship.

## **Defence-related Developments**

At the institutional level, the two countries welcomed the ratification of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA),<sup>1</sup> which was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Jakarta in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The leaders highlighted the importance of regular meetings between Defence Ministers and decided to convene one at the earliest to implement the DCA effectively. The last time the two defence ministers met was when Rajnath Singh met his Indonesian counterpart in 2023, who is now the President of that country.<sup>3</sup> President Subianto declared that he would send a high-level delegation in the field of defence to India to follow up on the DCA in the coming months.<sup>4</sup>

Along with DCA, the two countries also committed to utilising the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC), which was set up in 2001<sup>5</sup> to enhance collaboration between the defence industries of the two countries. The seventh meeting of the JDCC was held in New Delhi on 3 May 2024, during which

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<sup>1</sup> [“India-Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Prabowo Subianto, President of Republic of Indonesia \(23-26 January 2025\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 January 2025.

<sup>2</sup> [“India - Indonesia Relations”](#), Consulate General of India, Medan, Indonesia, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

<sup>3</sup> [“Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh holds bilateral meetings with his Indonesian & Vietnamese counterparts on the sidelines of 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting - Plus in Jakarta”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 16 November 2023.

<sup>4</sup> [“Prabowo to Send Delegation to India to Discuss Defense Pact”](#), *Antara*, 25 January 2025.

<sup>5</sup> [“Defence Secretary & Secretary General of MoD, Indonesia to co-chair 7th Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting in New Delhi”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2 May 2024.

secretaries of the respective defence ministries took stock of the progress made in the defence industrial domain. Secretary General of the Indonesian Ministry of Defence Air Marshal Donny Ermawan Taufanto visited the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) headquarters in New Delhi and held deliberations with private Indian defence industry partners.<sup>6</sup>

In the maritime domain, New Delhi and Jakarta renewed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation between the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and BAKAMLA, Indonesia, which was signed on 6 July 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, through telepresence.<sup>7</sup> The MoU enables the two agencies to augment information sharing, facilitating quick and effective responses to maritime crimes such as piracy, smuggling, trafficking and illegal fishing, among others. The MoU is also useful for improving inter-operability between respective maritime enforcement agencies, which would help coordinate search and rescue operations when needed. Additionally, the Indonesian side agreed to post an International Liaison Officer at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Gurugram, India.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction over the closer interaction between the defence forces of the two sides, including biannual India–Indonesia Coordinated Patrol and joint army and naval exercises—Ex Garuda Shakti and Ex Samudra Shakti, respectively. The two leaders agreed to enhance cooperation in hydrography and submarine search and rescue operations during the bilateral naval exercises. They also expressed interest in cadet exchange between the national defence academies and universities of the two countries. India and Indonesia participate in each other’s multilateral exercises such as Ex Milan, Ex Komodo, Ex Tarang Shakti and Ex Super Garuda Shield.

The two countries collaborate closely in the field of space and satellites. Modi and Subianto expressed satisfaction over the bilateral cooperation in the space sector. The former also thanked the latter for Indonesia’s support for India’s Gaganyaan Mission. During Modi’s visit to Indonesia in 2018, the two countries concluded the Inter-Governmental Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Exploration and Uses of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes.<sup>8</sup>

On 19 March 2024, the two countries signed the Implementation Agreement for the Transfer of Title of Integrated Biak Telemetry, Tracking and Command (TTC)

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<sup>6</sup> [“7th India-Indonesia Joint Defence Cooperation Committee Meeting Held in New Delhi”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 3 May 2024.

<sup>7</sup> [“Signing of MoU Between ICG & BAKAMLA”](#), Embassy of India in Jakarta, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 6 July 2020.

<sup>8</sup> [“India-Indonesia Joint Statement During Visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 30 May 2018.

Facilities, and Implementing Arrangement on Operation, Maintenance and Utilisation of Integrated Biak Telemetry, Tracking and Command (TTC) Facilities for Satellites and Launch Vehicles between Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN).<sup>9</sup> India offers its expertise in operating and maintaining Indonesian space infrastructure in Biak. Moreover, India is launching a couple of Indonesian satellites in 2025 with a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.<sup>10</sup>

Parallel to the summit meeting, Adm. Ali had a fruitful discussion with Adm. Tripathi, during which both chiefs decided to strengthen operational collaboration between the two navies.<sup>11</sup> The Indonesian Naval Chief visited IFC-IOR, the Weapons and Electronics Systems and Engineering Establishment (WESEE) and BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL). Similarly, during his visit to Indonesia in December 2024, CNS met Indonesia's Defence Minister, Lt Gen Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin (Retd), Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, Gen Agus Subiyanto and Adm Ali to consolidate the bilateral defence relationship further.

## Prospective Areas of Cooperation

First, the BrahMos supersonic missile deal between India and Indonesia will bring the two countries closer in the defence domain. Jakarta wants to modernise its obsolete military hardware sooner, given the precarious security situation in the Indo-Pacific. According to reports, Indonesia was interested in the Chinese YJ-12E coastal anti-ship missile system<sup>12</sup> and the Ukraine-made Neptune anti-ship missile.<sup>13</sup> However, neither of these options augurs well for Indonesia in the current conditions. The Chinese claims over the Natuna Sea and its aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea raise serious questions about Beijing being the source of the coastal anti-ship missile system. Similarly, the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war makes the Ukrainian proposition unviable.

On the other hand, the BrahMos has several advantages over these options. The BrahMos missile system is a tested piece of military hardware, and the land, naval and air versions of the missile are currently in the service of the Indian military.

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<sup>9</sup> [“New Space Collaboration Agreements between ISRO and BRIN”](#), Embassy of India in Jakarta, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 19 March 2024.

<sup>10</sup> [“Transcript of Special Briefing by Secretary \(East\) on the State Visit of President of Indonesia to India”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 January 2025.

<sup>11</sup> [“Indian Navy Hosts Indonesian Navy Delegation to Strengthen Maritime Ties”](#), *Doordarshan News*, 27 January 2025.

<sup>12</sup> [“Indonesia Shows Interest to Acquire Chinese YJ-12E Coastal Defense Missile System”](#), *Asia Pacific Defense Journal*, 8 January 2024.

<sup>13</sup> [“Indonesia Negotiates Acquisition of Ukrainian RK-360MC Neptune Coastal Missile Defense System”](#), Army Recognition Group, 30 July 2021.

Moreover, India has already exported BrahMos batteries to the Philippines. It is a cost-effective option with a short and reliable supply chain originating from India. Considering friendly relations between the two countries without territorial disputes, the BrahMos deal can harbingers a new dawn in the defence relations between the two countries. Moreover, India need not restrict itself to the export of BrahMos. The country can offer other indigenous military hardware including missiles systems, such as the Akash medium-range surface-to-air missile or Pralay surface-to-surface short-range ballistic missile (SRBM), according to Indonesia’s requirements.

Second, the commonality of defence platforms presents an opportunity for both countries to cooperate in the field of maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO). Recently, Dassault Aviation announced its plans to set up a new MRO facility in India and has already formed a new Indian company, Dassault Aviation Maintenance Repair and Overhaul India (DAMROI), to that effect.<sup>14</sup> Indonesia also has Dassault Rafale multirole combat aircraft in its inventory, which can use the DAMROI facility. Similarly, New Delhi and Jakarta can collaborate over other common defence platforms, such as Scorpene-class attack submarines that Indonesia ordered in 2024<sup>15</sup> and C-130J Super Hercules tactical airlifters, among others. Lockheed Martin, which makes the C-130J Super Hercules, is already in talks with Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL) to establish an MRO facility in India.<sup>16</sup> Jaideep Mazumdar, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India, mentioned during a special briefing on the State visit of the Indonesian President that both leaders discussed the repair and maintenance of common platforms.<sup>17</sup>

Third, collaboration in shipbuilding is another area where bilateral defence relations can thrive. Secretary (East), MEA, informed media that the top leaders deliberated upon the prospects of shipbuilding. As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia has a huge requirement for ships for its coast guard and navy.<sup>18</sup> India’s experience in building indigenous ships can be of great help to Jakarta in this endeavour.

Fourth, Sabang Port provides India with an opportunity to make its presence felt near the strategically important Malacca Strait, complementing its presence in the

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<sup>14</sup> [“Dassault Sets Up MRO for Rafale, Mirage Fighters in India; Indian National to Head Venture”](#), *The Economic Times*, 24 September 2024.

<sup>15</sup> [“Naval Group and PT PAL Have Signed a Contract with Indonesia for 2 Locally Built Scorpène Evolved Full LiB Submarines”](#), Naval Group, 2 April 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Bhaswar Kumar, [“India’s Defence MRO Sector Set to Take Off Over the Next Five Years”](#), *Business Standard*, 25 November 2024.

<sup>17</sup> [“Transcript of Special Briefing by Secretary \(East\) on the State Visit of President of Indonesia to India”](#), no. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI). President Subianto welcomed Indian investment in infrastructure development in Sabang, just like other ports of Indonesia.<sup>19</sup> According to media reports, the two countries have already completed a joint feasibility study on developing Sabang Port.<sup>20</sup> Indian presence in the Sabang has become more important in light of Chinese presence in the Coco Islands of Myanmar, which lie just 55 km north of ANI. If an unfriendly country establishes presence in Sabang which is just 194 km south of Indira Point on Nicobar Islands, then New Delhi will have unfriendly powers close to the north and south of ANI.

## Conclusion

Although the bilateral defence relationship has been institutionalised, there are few concrete outcomes to show on the ground. The BrahMos missile deal is a low hanging fruit that should be plucked sooner. Besides, India can offer other made-in-India military inventory including missile systems such as Akash and Pralay, as per Indonesia’s interest. Vast opportunities await both countries in the MRO field due to similarities between the defence platforms. Shipbuilding and infrastructure investment are other promising areas for the two to come together. Indonesia is seeking India’s investment in the archipelagic country’s ports. The case of Sabang port becomes special in the light of its close proximity to Malacca Strait and ANI. With President Subianto’s state visit and subsequent defence ministers’ meeting expected to occur soon, one can expect virility to be infused in the defence relations in the time to come.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Shashank Mattoo, [“India, Indonesia Complete Joint Report on Sabang Port Feasibility”](#), *Mint*, 29 May 2023.

## About the Author



**Mr. Niranjan Chandrashekhar Oak** is Research Analyst at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

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