

Polish Journal  
of Political  
Science

Volume 10 Issue 1 (2024)

**Polish Journal of Political Science**  
Volume 10 Issue 1

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The journal is published by the Interdisciplinary Research Center  
of the University of Warsaw “Identity – Dialogue – Security”  
(Interdyscyplinarne Centrum Badawcze Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego  
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Warsaw 2024

eISSN 2391-3991

Original version: e-book

Submit your paper: [pjps@uw.edu.pl](mailto:pjps@uw.edu.pl)



Polish Journal of Political Science is included in:



## Table of Contents

### Articles

- 4 Lech Drab**  
Modern Defense Diplomacy of India, Indonesia,  
Malaysia – Challenges and Priorities
- 23 Jadwiga Korszniak**  
Community Security and Its Threats  
on the Example of a Selected Rural Municipality:  
A Pilot Study
- 38 Walter E. Block**  
The Right to Roam?
- 65 Sylwia Badaczewska**  
Police Actions during Securing Mass Events on  
the Example of Football Matches Held in Warsaw

### Book review

- 82 Cezary Smuniewski**  
Listy, orędzia i odezwy biskupów tarnowskich  
w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym  
[Letters, Messages and Proclamations of  
the Bishops of Tarnów in the Interwar Period]

**Lech Drab\***

## **Modern Defense Diplomacy of India, Indonesia, Malaysia – Challenges and Priorities**

DOI: [10.58183/pjps.01012024](https://doi.org/10.58183/pjps.01012024)

### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to present different approaches to activities in the field of defense diplomacy among selected countries in South and Southeast Asia. In light of this, the study seeks to expand the understanding of the role of defense diplomacy within a nation's foreign policy framework. It delves into multiple facets, including the various domains where defense diplomacy operates, the instruments it employs, and its utilization by India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This research includes a literature review, using data collected from various sources. These sources include official state documents, journals, articles, online news networks, and articles from the governments' official websites. The article attempts to define the concept of modern defense diplomacy and present the most important contemporary areas of cooperation within its framework, in order to implement the foreign policy priorities of India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Moreover, the aim of the research is to show the role of modern defense diplomacy in enhancing international security.

Defense diplomacy has not yet achieved a universally recognized definition. The lack of an agreed definition seems to be due to the constantly

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changing activities of states and international organizations in this area. Individual states and international organizations, in an effort to counter new threats, propose new areas of cooperation within what is termed modern defense diplomacy. Changes in the security environment and hybrid threats require a broader view of the role and importance of defense diplomacy in the modern world.

**Keywords**

defense, diplomacy, Asian countries

## Introduction

One of the most important instruments for conducting a state's foreign and security policy is modern defense diplomacy. It is a specialized tool of state foreign policy that concerns international military relations and has become a permanent part of the national and international security system. "Its main tasks are to build trust between countries and strengthen the transparency of mutual actions."<sup>1</sup> The current threats to security, particularly their intensification, diversification, and complexity, including hybrid threats, allow us to conclude that the importance of defense diplomacy in contemporary international relations is increasing. Despite covering many areas of involvement, it should be clearly stated that defense diplomacy does not independently create external foreign policy but is an important tool for it.

Modern diplomacy has many instruments at its disposal when carrying out tasks resulting from the priorities of foreign and security policy.<sup>2</sup> It seems that a wide range of political, economic, social, and military tools allows for the implementation of tasks related to increasing regional and global security. However, the effects of diplomatic actions do not always resolve problems or crises.

The objective of this article is to investigate the role of modern defense diplomacy in the context of India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, with a specific emphasis on exploring the scope of its cooperative efforts and challenges, as well as identifying the specific areas within defense diplomacy that have a significant impact on the security situation in the region. It can be pointed out that there is a lack of comprehensive studies providing comparative analysis that highlights the challenges of defense

1. D. Ćutić, *Defence diplomacy and international relations*, "Strategos", 2022, 6 (2), p. 62.

2. R.P. Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*, Fifth Edition, Routledge 2019, p. 18.

diplomacy in these countries. This research also shows how these three countries use defense diplomacy tools to counter contemporary threats. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the question: What kinds of defense diplomacy instruments should be used in the challenging security situation to enhance state and regional security and achieve the nation's aims?

To achieve this aim, the author of the article examines several critical dimensions. Firstly, the role of modern defense diplomacy as one of the most important instruments of a state's foreign policy. Secondly, a thorough analysis of the various domains where defense diplomacy operates in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and the instruments employed within these domains. Finally, the study scrutinizes the specific areas of support and cooperation among the modern defense diplomacy efforts of India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and their interactions with other nations in the region within the framework of modern defense diplomacy.

Official state documents, articles, and available analyses provided by the author both from the region and other parts of the world will be taken into account to conduct adequate analyses and attempt to answer the research question. The official websites of the countries' governments will also be examined.

Building trust, implementing state tasks to prevent conflicts, and executing international military cooperation projects are key responsibilities of modern defense diplomacy. It serves to minimize hostility and achieve the national foreign policy goals of the state. According to the analyses, modern defense diplomacy, when effective in a systemic sense and functionally efficient, serves to strengthen a state's international position. It "is an instrument of its foreign and security policy and an element of the defense system, stabilizes international relations, increases their transparency and reduces the risk of an armed conflict."<sup>3</sup>

The current areas of cooperation within defense diplomacy<sup>4</sup> are not limited to a fixed set of activities. New opportunities and methods for expanding cooperation using new instruments are constantly emerging. Advising, informing, and conducting analyses about the armed forces, the military-political situation, and other events related to the security of a given country are the ongoing tasks of defense diplomacy in democratic countries. This is known as the executive role of defense diplomacy, which involves implementing the objectives of foreign and state security policy and is carried out in

3. L. Drab, *Defence Diplomacy of Selected States: Searching for a Universal Model of Defence Diplomacy*, "Polish Political Science Yearbook", 2023, Vol. 52 (3), pp. 95–96, DOI: [10.15804/ppsy202262](https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202262).

4. Cf. L. Drab, *Dyplomacja obronna w procesie kształtowania bezpieczeństwa RP*, Difin 2018, pp. 39–49.

## The role and importance of modern defense diplomacy

cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nowadays, the creative role of defense diplomacy appears to be increasingly important.

Creative defense diplomacy is closely related to its contemporary tasks and expectations, which involve the ability to warn military and political authorities about signs of potential crises or other factors affecting state security. It is evident that this process requires the capability to analyze and assess causes that may signal unfavorable developments in regions of interest to the state. Another challenge for modern defense diplomacy is having the appropriate structure and capabilities to respond quickly to crisis situations, efficiently transmit political and military decisions, and communicate effectively with partners or opponents. Possessing these capabilities facilitates the creation of the right atmosphere for discussions, negotiations, and parleys.

The task of modern defense diplomacy is also to seek international solutions to ensure state security. Another task and challenge is to ensure that political obligations are met in such a way that the adopted solutions satisfy all states in a given organization while also guaranteeing security. Modern defense diplomacy also involves searching for forms of cooperation with partners that will enhance security<sup>5</sup> and simultaneously build trust and friendly relations between states.

The implementation of tasks within modern defense diplomacy by the armed forces must be adapted to the current security situation. In their activities, the armed forces should also strive to use confidence-building measures, promote cooperation, prevent conflicts, and consolidate peace and stability. Bilateral and multilateral agreements, including those among international organizations, on the free flow of information, supervision of regional arms control agreements, peacekeeping missions, and the creation of regional centers for reducing the risk of crisis situations, are contemporary challenges facing the armed forces. These responsibilities are in addition to the standard tasks, which should be implemented within the framework of defense diplomacy.

Modern defense diplomacy is defined as the practice of maintaining international relations, requiring the use of means, methods, and instruments that do not escalate hostility and are, at the same time, implemented within the framework of international law. Defense diplomacy is an art and a complex craft shaped by tradition. Its main task is to build good military relations between countries and to create and implement the state's foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the effective and appropriate use of suitable instruments at all levels of cooperation available to modern defense diplomacy can

5. R.A. Bitzinger, *U.S. Defence Diplomacy Towards Southeast Asia*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 2011, p. 10.

6. L. Drab, *Defence Diplomacy of...*, op. cit., p. 107.



## Role and importance of modern defense diplomacy for India, Indonesia and Malaysia

lead to closer cooperation and relations between states, create favorable conditions for their development, and may directly contribute to the resolution of conflicts and provide security guarantees.

The Indo-Pacific region is developing rapidly and becoming a crucial geostrategic area, partly because over 50% of the world's population lives in this region. Two thirds world container shipping is carried out through the Indo-Pacific and sea routes that are the main trade and energy supply routes.<sup>7</sup>

The geostrategic future of South Asia is largely influenced by India's actions in the region. According to Paweł Łysiak, "As the largest country in the region, its decisions and actions will determine the policies of neighboring countries and countries from outside the region, which in turn will influence the processes taking place on the subcontinent."<sup>8</sup> Since 1991, global interest in South Asia has been continually rising due to economic and security reasons. Concurrently, India's ambitions and its commitment to international affairs, influencing both foreign and economic policy, have been increasing. This trend is also evident in the intensification of regional cooperation in South Asia such as through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus.

In the Southeast Asia region, Indonesia and Malaysia, due to their geographical location, are poised to play significant roles in the dispute between India and China, as key transport routes run through or near their maritime territories. In this context, both countries will have a substantial role in the potential conflict between these Asian giants, but certainly not as equal partners. Their economic and military potential (see: Table 1) does not position them on an equal level with India and China.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that the role and importance of modern defense diplomacy in the region are constantly increasing. The importance of modern defense diplomacy has some similarities but is interpreted differently by individual countries in the region. This variation depends on many factors – in particular – the security situation in the region and relations with neighboring countries. Participation in alliances that guarantee state security also plays a very important role. An example of this is cooperation within the ADMM-Plus, which provides an effective platform for practical cooperation among the participating countries' defense establishments. The ADMM-Plus currently focuses on maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster management, peacekeeping operations, military medicine, humanitarian mine action, and cyberse-

7. J. Soutullo, C. Stanculescu, W. Masur, *Azja Południowa*, European Union Information Papers 2024, pp. 165-180.

8. P. Łysiak, *Indie jako azjatyckie mocarstwo regionalne*, "Forum Politologiczne", 2008, Vol. 8, p. 429.

9. See more on the military strength of the countries at: *2024 Global Firepower Military Strength Ranking*, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>, (access 12.03.2024).

curity. Additionally, experts' working groups have been established to facilitate cooperation in these areas.<sup>10</sup> However, the political, economic, social, or military instruments available to states or security organizations in different parts of the world are generally similar.

**Table 1. 2024 Military Strength Ranking of India, Indonesia and Malaysia**

Country	Total Military Personnel (est.)	Active personnel	Reserve personnel	Paramilitary	Air Force personnel	Army personnel	Navy personnel
India	5 137 550	1 455 550	115 5000	2 527 000	310 575	2 197 117	142 252
Indonesia	1 050 000	400 000	400 000	250 000	30 100	300 400	66 034
Malaysia	264 600	113 000	51 600	100 000	15 000	130 000	18 000

Source: Author elaboration based on *2024 Global Firepower Military Strength Ranking*, op. cit.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the ability to use various instruments as part of defense diplomacy by each of the analyzed countries depends on their potential. The size of the armed forces, as presented in Table 1, highlights a significant disparity in the military capabilities of these countries and their potential to use military instruments in the region.

## The Indian defense diplomacy

According to the analyses, the Indian Ocean Region has been central to global economic and geopolitical affairs. Therefore, the need for peace and stability in its neighborhood is essential for India's growth and development. A regional environment conducive to nationbuilding and economic consolidation necessitates active engagement with regional nations not only to shape perceptions and enhance trust but also to protect and promote India's core national interests in the region. The economic prosperity and overall development of the region will depend on factors including managing a peaceful security environment and ensure the free flow of trade and commerce between countries.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Ministry of Defense, Government of India, in its Annual Report for the year 2014–15, states that "Defense cooperation is an important part of diplomacy

10. See more at: *About the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus*, <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/about-admm/about-admm-plus.html>, (access 12.03.2024).

11. J. Soutullo, C. Stanculescu, W. Masur, *Azja Południowa*, op. cit., 165–180.

to strengthen our bilateral cooperation with friendly foreign countries and to advance our foreign policy objectives.”<sup>12</sup> According to the Annual Report, activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces should aim to prevent hostilities, build and maintain trust, and make a significant contribution towards conflict prevention and resolution.

From India’s point of view, defense diplomacy is broadly understood as military-to-military interactions, activities, and policies aimed at building and maintaining national security. This diplomacy includes more advanced naval engagement, greater military exercises, and enhanced efforts for defense exports.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth mentioning that India currently has one of the largest standing armies in the world, the most powerful navy in the Indian Ocean Region, and the fifth largest air force. India also has credible nuclear deterrence with proven sea-launched nuclear capability.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, “India armed forces have been seen and accepted as the first responder for the numerous natural and manmade disasters that have afflicted the region the last few decades.”<sup>15</sup> India has shown military firmness to support the larger diplomatic effort in avoiding a larger conflict. Consequently, the Indian armed forces are well-positioned to become a very suitable coordinator in several capacity building projects in the region, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) or India’s Act East Policy.<sup>16</sup>

Among the entire spectrum of instruments available in defense diplomacy for the Indian Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces, New Delhi pays particular attention to the following:

- **addressing maritime capability deficit** – the political instability in some countries in the region has led to the emergence and proliferation of non-traditional threats. The area around India is highly diverse in its political, geographical, cultural, economic, military, and environmental nature. Furthermore, some nations in the region are developing economies with limited access to modern technology and maritime infrastructure. This situation requires addressing the full spectrum of threats and challenges that impinge upon regional maritime security. Kendra L. Roddis and Alexander C. Tan indicate that “Some of these extra-regional powers, which have enduring geopolitical and economic interests in the region, have undertaken capacity building initiative with regional partners. Prominent among these is China.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, recent Indian policy and project initiatives in the region clearly reflect the national vision and emphasize an approach to strengthen relations and developments with the states in the region in a mutually supportive and cooperative manner.

12. Ministry of Defense, Government of India, *Annual Report 2014–15*, p. 159, [https://www.ddpmod.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annual%20report%202014-2015\\_0.pdf](https://www.ddpmod.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annual%20report%202014-2015_0.pdf), (access 20.12.2023).

13. See more on: *Defence Diplomacy*, <https://www.drishtiias.com/loksabharajyasabha-discussions/defence-diplomacy>, (access 12.03.2024).

14. See more on: *2024 India Military Strength*, [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=india](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=india), (access 12.03.2024).

15. T. Roby, *Indian defence diplomacy. A handbook*, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses 2021, p. 55.

16. See more: A. Palit, *India’s act east policy and implications for Southeast Asia*, in: *Southeast Asian affairs 2016*, eds. D. Singh, M. Cook, ISEAS Publishing 2016, pp. 81–92.

17. K.L. Roddis, A.C. Tan, *Defence diplomacy: Battling for the heart of the Pacific*, “Journal Outre-Terre”, 2020, No. 58–59, pp. 339–340.

These initiatives demonstrate the government's resolve to shape a favorable regional environment for national growth and prosperity;

- **implementation of the India government's military initiatives** – according to Indian analyses, the limited capacity and capability of neighboring partner countries necessitate a cooperative and collaborative approach to ensure economic progress and security in the region. Hence, a regional cooperative mechanism with capability and capacity building support structures has been established to ensure lasting peace and stability. This mechanism includes enhancing the maritime capability and capacity of many countries in India's neighborhood to create a favorable balance in the region. Moreover, the Indian armed forces have emerged as a first port of call and dependable partner for regional armed forces to address their security requirements. This approach reinforces India's regional obligations as a responsible, credible, and strong security partner. "The India's scope of cooperative defense diplomacy includes capacity building, capability enhancement, cooperative engagements and collaborative effort also for West Asia region."<sup>18</sup>;
- **capacity building** – efforts in defense cooperation include providing military hardware, military infrastructure, and Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems. Among the military hardware, the supply includes "military platform such as land warfare systems, military aircraft and warships or military equipment need to be provided with lifetime maintenance support that includes technical assistance."<sup>19</sup>;
- **military infrastructure** – India remains involved in developing military infrastructure in partner countries. This support includes marine infrastructure building in littoral island states. Military infrastructure is vital for developing the capabilities of any armed forces to carry out their duties in their area of responsibility. Countries in India's neighborhood, like Bangladesh, the Maldives, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka,<sup>20</sup> have been involved in various infrastructure projects. The Indian government has identified and pursued specific military infrastructure projects in other countries in the region;
- **military capability enhancement** – from India's perspective, military capability enhancement is one of the primary forms of cooperative defense diplomacy. This activity includes "military training at all levels – both education at the military schools and in the different units, technical assistance, maintenance of military assets, hydrographic surveillance, assistance in improving land, air and maritime domain awareness."<sup>21</sup>;

18. A. Ningthoujam, *India's Defense Diplomacy in the Gulf is Growing*, The Diplomat 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/indias-defense-diplomacy-in-the-gulf-is-growing/>, (access 10.12.2023).

19. T. Roby, *Indian defence diplomacy...*, op. cit., p. 36.

20. Ibidem, p. 39.

21. Ibidem, p. 37.

- **humanitarian assistance** – this involves the use of military resources in a series of operations to help with various natural disasters in the region, such as the “Nepal earthquake, India Ocean Tsunami, relief to Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Mozambique and Madagascar.”<sup>22</sup>;

- **hydrographic cooperation** – this is a significant component of India’s defense diplomacy. This cooperation began in 2001 with Indonesia, and over the years, more nations from the region, such as the Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, have been involved.<sup>23</sup> To strengthen mutual cooperation in hydrography, India has signed MoUs with some of these states.

**M**oreover, the activities of India’s defense diplomacy include initial engagements like staff-to-staff discussions and constructive activities between militaries, leading to more regular and complex levels of engagement. India’s defense diplomacy actions in the region encompass “structured delegation level talks, military exercises between the forces, dialogue between ministerial delegations, ships visits or platoon level exercises, highest level of dialogue at a military strategic level, defense ministers meetings, defense-related delegation talks, service level staff talks, bilateral/multilateral exercises, participation in regional international security organizations, participation in UN missions and operations, contribution to anti-piracy activities, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, participation in search-and-rescue actions.”<sup>24</sup>

**A**dditional agreements have been established in the region concerning China. The Agreement on Maintaining Peace and Stability in the Region includes the following provisions: the establishment of a Joint Working Group, composed of diplomats and military experts who meet annually; a commitment not to use force or threaten to use force; strict respect for and adherence to the actual control line; maintaining military strength at a minimum level; and reducing the strength of armed forces to a mutually agreed limit in areas along the actual control line.

**F**urthermore, both sides agreed to conduct mutual visits by personnel from military agencies and organize joint expeditions for the exploration of ventures, while forbidding hunting, firing guns, and explosions in the area near the actual control line. A similar agreement has been signed with Pakistan. The agreement with Bangladesh, in addition to the previously mentioned provisions, addresses issues such as illegal migration, smuggling, cattle trafficking, and transborder movements of insurgents.

22. A.A.B. Perwita, et al., *Indonesia’s defense diplomacy through humanitarian assistance to Fiji*, “Dinamika Global”, 2022, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 323, 326, DOI: [10.36859/jdg.v7i02.1093](https://doi.org/10.36859/jdg.v7i02.1093).

23. T. Roby, *Indian defence diplomacy...*, op. cit., pp. 88–90.

24. A. Sarin, *Military Diplomacy – A Tool for Foreign Policy*, in: *India’s Defence Diplomacy in 21st Century*, eds. S. Kumar, D. Dwivedi, M.S. Hussain, Advance Research Institute for Development of Social Science (ARIDSS) 2016, p. 12.



## Indonesian defense diplomacy

New Delhi places particular emphasis on the role of the defense attaché. The defense attaché is normally responsible for all aspects of bilateral defense relations. However, in India, “attachés are asked to handle larger security issues, such as migration and justice matters. To adapt to this increase in task load and broadening range of relationships, the demands on a defense attaché’s technical expertise and political skills have grown significantly.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, as the security environment becomes increasingly complex, the role of the defense attaché is expected to expand.

The larger objectives of India’s defense diplomacy cooperation efforts aim not only to “improve security and stability in India’s neighboring regions but also to shape a favorable and positive regional environment that is conducive for regional growth.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Indonesian scientists, defense diplomacy is a concept that describes the use of armed forces and related infrastructure, such as the civilian structure of the ministry of defense, in peacetime to help define policy tools supporting the peace and security of the state.

The priority of defense diplomacy, according to Iis Gindarsah, Anak A.B. Perwita, and other authors, is to build cooperative relations with other countries and support other states in re-establishing their armed forces. Defense diplomacy is cooperative, which differs from the primary function of these institutions, namely the use of force and threats.<sup>27</sup> Several aspects shape the current definition of defense diplomacy. At first, defense diplomacy is a cooperative activity carried out by the military and related institutions during peacetime. Secondly, defense diplomacy includes cooperation that includes the military’s traditional functions, namely, efforts to balance rival countries and new military tasks outside its traditional duties.<sup>28</sup> This activity also includes supporting other countries in re-establishing their armed forces through the exchange of experiences and joint exercises. Thirdly unlike the past, defense diplomacy involves now not only at military cooperation with friendly countries, but also with countries that have the potential to become enemies.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Indonesian Defense White Paper, defense diplomacy is “an instrument in realizing national interests in the defense sector, one of which is to increase soldiers’ professionalism through the field of education, training, and cooperation in the defense industry.”<sup>30</sup> The purpose of Indonesian defense cooperation is to build mutual trust between countries, respect each other’s sovereignty, build mutually beneficial relationships, and prevent conflicts between countries. Amany

25. A. Nainar, *India’s defence-diplomacy bet*, Lowy Institute 2023, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-s-defence-diplomacy-bet>, (access 10.12.2023).

26. T. Roby, *Indian defence diplomacy...*, op. cit., p. 54.

27. A.A.B. Perwita, et al., *Indonesia’s defense diplomacy...*, op. cit., p. 317; I. Gindarsah, *Strategic hedging in Indonesia’s defense diplomacy*, “Defense & Security Analysis”, 2016, Vol. 32, Issue 4, pp. 336–339, DOI: [10.1080/14751798.2016.1233695](https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2016.1233695).

28. A.A.B. Perwita, et al., *Indonesia’s defense diplomacy...*, op. cit., p. 317.

29. Ibidem.

30. Defence Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia, *Defence White Paper of the Republic of Indonesia*, <https://www.kemhan.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2015-INDONESIA-DEFENCE-WHITE-PAPER-ENGLISH-VERSION.pdf>, (access 20.11.2023).

Lubis notes another objective of Indonesia's defense diplomacy is to increase the capability and professionalism of soldiers through cooperation in the field of education, training, and cooperation in the defense industry.<sup>31</sup> This shows that the capacity-building function of defense diplomacy is intended to enhance national resilience against threats.

The objectives of defense diplomacy include presence or representation, deterrence, negotiation, and bargaining position, increasing capability and credibility, reducing the desire of countries with different interests to engage in undesirable actions, cooperation in intelligence, increasing contacts, building public opinion, promoting international law, building mutual trust, and regional expansion.

Indonesia carries out defense diplomacy activities through the military or the Ministry of Defense. According to Lubis, the most important instruments of Indonesia's defense diplomacy are bilateral and multilateral contacts between military and civilian officials, the appointment of defense attaches or advisors, defense cooperation agreements, training of defense and civilian personnel, deploying training teams and other experts, providing expertise and advice on matters related to defense, conducting ship visits and other military-related exchanges, conducting training, providing military equipment and technical expertise.<sup>32</sup>

All these activities are conducted in peacetime to resolve or avoid conflicts and increase the defense capability of a country. It is worth mentioning that according to Indonesian policy, the function of defense diplomacy, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels, is to prevent conflict.

One of the most important areas of Indonesia's international cooperation is defense cooperation. Defense cooperation is a form of assistance that emphasizes the national interest of a country. This cooperation is sensitive because it concerns state sovereignty, as well as security, stability, and the welfare of the people.

For Indonesia, defense diplomacy means establishing strategic partnerships with various countries to create opportunities to achieve optimal benefits in the defense sector. Moreover, this approach must be as effective as possible to avoid creating a counterproductive impression of negative dependence on foreign countries. Therefore, it is crucial for Indonesia to build an appropriate defense diplomacy mechanism that will be beneficial for national interests.<sup>33</sup> According to Frega W. Inkiriwang, the most important tasks for defense diplomacy should include:

31. A. Lubis, *The Strategy of Defence Diplomacy in Achieving National Interests and Maintaining the Sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia*, "The Asian Institute of Research Law and Humanities Quarterly Reviews", 2022, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 108, DOI: [10.31014/aior.1996.01.04.39](https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1996.01.04.39).

32. Ibidem, pp. 110–113.

33. B. Pramono, *Defense diplomacy and country existence*, Department of Defense Diplomacy, Faculty of Defense Strategy, Universitas Pertahanan 2020, p. 189.

- **strategic engagement** – defense diplomacy serves as a broader strategy to enhance military and foreign policy practices.<sup>34</sup> Multilateral joint exercises are crucial for strategic engagement. At the same time strong military ties can become the foundation for strengthening relations between countries and nations. These exercises are essential for Indonesia's strategic engagement not only with great powers but also with other international partners;
- **confident building measures** – in this area, defense diplomacy aims to create a conducive strategic environment for Indonesia. Cooperation with other countries should focus on building good relations, sharing perceptions, and creating a positive climate bilaterally and transparently. Those activities will reduce the tension of mutual suspicious, mutual threat so that development of a country's military capability is not misinterpreted as a threat to other states.<sup>35</sup> Various activities can be employed in this area, such as country visits, communication forums at bilateral and multilateral levels, information exchange, cooperation agreements, educational exchanges, training, and joint security patrols;
- **capacity-building** – in this area, defense diplomacy acts as a transformation tool to increase Indonesia's defense capability. Limited resources, threats, challenges, vulnerability and opportunities still is a crucial for defense development.<sup>36</sup> Cooperation under the umbrella of defense diplomacy can initiate an increase in defense capability through economic and arms trade approaches. Prioritizing domestic production of modern military equipment is a key program to meet the modernization goals of the Indonesian forces. Therefore, cooperation with other states can be regulated in more detail in areas such as countertrade, technology transfer, and others to produce the high-technology defense equipment required. From the Indonesian perspective, defense diplomacy should take the steps in order to build mutual benefits, through the mechanism of joint production, joint development, training and research and developments in an effort to increase the capacity of human resources<sup>37</sup>;
- **international reputation** – the primary objective in this area is to improve Indonesia's international reputation, which includes participating in joint exercises to promote military professionalism and traditions. International reputation has become an essential motive for enhancing Indonesia's defense diplomacy at the same time promoted Indonesian culture and tourism. Moreover, the increasing number of participants in multinational exercises demonstrates the recognition of these exercises as an essential defense diplomacy activity which has elevated Indonesia's reputation in the

34. F.W. Inkiriwang, *Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo: Enhancing Indonesia's Multilateral Defence Diplomacy?*, "Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs", 2021, Vol. 40, Issue 3, p. 426, DOI: [10.1177/18681034211008905](https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034211008905).

35. Ibidem.

36. Ibidem, p. 427.

37. Ibidem, pp. 428–430.

38. Ibidem, p. 427.



## Malaysian defense diplomacy

region.<sup>38</sup> For Indonesia, professionalism is a key component in creating a defense force capable of securing national interests. Thus, defense diplomacy can serve as the main gateway for the military to continue developing its capabilities. Joint training, education, exchange visits, and other activities within defense diplomacy with other countries have been established to improve the professionalism of Indonesian soldiers.

The first Malaysia Defense White Paper was published in 2020. According to this document, the Malaysia Ministry of Defense (MoD) places greater emphasis on diplomacy in dealing with its traditional and non-traditional security threats with other countries.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the Malaysian MoD and its armed forces have actively engaged in defense diplomacy and other international activities with regional and global partners.

Malaysia prioritizes participating in various United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) worldwide and assisting civil authorities in addressing security challenges while supporting national building efforts.<sup>40</sup> The role of Malaysia's defense diplomacy, in cooperation with other countries in the region, is to share common aspirations and collaborate to combine collective strengths and resources to achieve national security, as well as regional and global stability. Malaysia has participated in numerous PKOs since 1960 until today, including a battalion at UNIFIL in Lebanon, as well as staff and observers in a few countries in Africa.<sup>41</sup> Malaysia also has own peacekeeping training center located at Port Dickson, that show the seriousness of Kuala Lumpur to be part of international community in maintaining global peace and stability.<sup>42</sup>

One of Kuala Lumpur's primary aims is to address the rise of major power competition in the region. Therefore, Malaysia is committed to pursuing a proactive, long-term national strategy through defense, development, and diplomacy. Kuala Lumpur provides numerous diplomatic programs and initiatives through bilateral and multilateral approaches. According to Malaysia's perspective, bilateral defense cooperation complements effective multilateral mechanisms and serves national interests. For Malaysia, ASEAN-led mechanisms provide an important platform for working closely with neighboring partners to "share security challenges while pursuing common goals."<sup>43</sup> The importance of defense diplomacy is even more pronounced given that Malaysia is not a party to any military alliance. Thus, participation in a multilateral setting is a crucial avenue for Kuala Lumpur to engage in regional discussions and manage security issues.

39. S.M. Tang, *Malaysia's Strategic Outlook and Developments in its Defence Policy*, p. 25, [https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/joint\\_research/series6/pdf/02.pdf](https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/joint_research/series6/pdf/02.pdf), (access 15.12.2023).

40. Defence Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia, *Defence White Paper...*, op. cit., p. 13.

41. *Malaysia's National Defence Policy*, p. 16, <https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/National-Defence-Policy.pdf>, (access 18.12.2023).

42. M.I.M. Huda, M.N.B.M. Nor, *Defence Diplomacy as Statecraft: Projecting Malaysia's Middle Power in the Post Cold War Era*, "Journal of Positive School Psychology", 2022, Vol. 6, No. 5, p. 572.

43. S.M. Tang, *Malaysia's Strategic Outlook...*, op. cit., p. 25.

Moreover, sub-regional cooperation continues to play a pivotal role in several cooperative agreements for Malaysia. According to Mohd I.M. Huda and Mohd N.B.M. Nor, those cooperation including such agreement as Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) or the Trilateral Cooperation Arrangement (TCA). MSP initiatives have started in 2004 by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. In 2006 Thailand joined to this project. The main aim in this cooperation is to counter sea robbery and piracy. This initiative addresses the common maritime security threats. Under the framework on TCA the three littoral countries, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have agreed to establish collaboration.<sup>44</sup> These countries established a transit corridor for ships and allowed the conduct of pursuit beyond maritime borders. Moreover, the participating countries have established the Maritime Command Centre, Trilateral Maritime Patrol, Trilateral Air Patrol, and Intelligence Working Group.

Bilateral cooperation plays a significant role within Malaysia's defense diplomacy. Malaysia's bilateral engagements cover a wide range of activities. The most important ones for Kuala Lumpur include: sharing and exchanging information, addressing defense and security issues, border cooperation, exercises and operations, joint high-level committees on defense cooperation, training and capacity-building programs, procurement and defense industry cooperation, transfer of military assets, and exchange of visits at all levels.

Bilateral defense cooperation has engaged with Brunei, Indonesia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Malaysia is also committed to enhance bilateral defense relations with countries in other parts of the Asian region, like China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Bangladesh and Pakistan.<sup>45</sup>

Malaysia's defense diplomacy activities are a source of soft power and enhance its capacity and capability. These activities include participation in multilateral defense dialogues, peacekeeping missions and operations worldwide, and military exercises with neighboring countries' armed forces. According to Amerul M. Mohammad and Afdal I. Hashim, defense diplomacy activities for Malaysia are vital in order to maintain its image as a principled country that seeks peace and stability within and without its borders, and a state that is not beholden to the interest and agenda of any particular great powers.<sup>46</sup> Whenever possible, Malaysia uses the instruments of defense diplomacy to present a broader international consensus and support on matters related to conflict and humanitarian crises in other parts of the world.

44. M.I.M. Huda, M.N.B.M. Nor, *Defence Diplomacy as...*, op. cit., p. 571.

45. Ibidem, pp. 568–571.

46. A.M. Mohammad, A.I. Hashim, *Malaysia's perspective on the Indo-Pacific*, Friedrich Naumann Foundation For Freedom 2023, pp. 10–11, [https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/2023-malaysias-perspective-on-the-indo-pacific\\_en\\_web-final.pdf](https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/2023-malaysias-perspective-on-the-indo-pacific_en_web-final.pdf), (access 04.01.2024).

## Conclusions

The research has yielded a broad understanding of modern defense diplomacy. This concept entails the strategic utilization of a nation's armed forces and military resources as means to conduct diplomatic endeavors and advance the country's foreign policy goals in the selected countries of South and Southeast Asia. In essence, it represents the harmonious interplay between a nation's military structure and its foreign affairs establishment, with the overarching objectives of nurturing international cooperation, forging collaborative partnerships, and effectively addressing security-related issues and threats.

The analysis shows that India's main activities within the framework of defense diplomacy are aimed at supporting countries in the region in rebuilding port infrastructure and maintaining naval potential. Equally important are issues related to supporting partner countries in the development of military infrastructure and broadly understood military education and training at various levels. In contrast, Indonesia focuses its defense diplomacy activities on confidence-building measures and defense capabilities. Traditional defense diplomacy instruments are also widely used, but these activities are mainly aimed at strengthening the defense capabilities of the Indonesian armed forces and developing its own defense industry. Malaysia, on the other hand, directs its activities to achieve strategic goals necessary to ensure security in three areas: defense, development, and diplomacy. Malaysia pursues these goals mainly through the participation of its armed forces in international peacekeeping operations. Sub-regional agreements and bilateral cooperation with the countries of the region are also very important elements in building trust and security in the region.

The Indian armed forces actively participate in humanitarian support for countries in the region. India's active participation in assisting its neighbors during natural disasters builds trust and is an important signal for maintaining good relations in defense matters as well. India's large military potential allows for the extensive use of universal instruments of defense diplomacy, which include visits of military and civilian representatives of the Ministry of Defense to neighboring countries, joint exercises, and ship visits. A special role is dedicated to defense attachés, who are tasked with handling larger security issues, such as migration and justice matters. Additionally, India's involvement in defense diplomacy, primarily due to its economic potential, is much greater than that of Indonesia and Malaysia. This involvement includes humanitarian support, the construction of sea-ports, and supporting the development of the coastal fleets of neighboring countries.

One of the most important aspects of Indonesia's defense diplomacy is to increase the professionalism of its soldiers. To achieve this, three elements are crucial: education, training, and enhanced cooperation in the defense industry with other countries. Additionally, Jakarta believes that defense cooperation in peacetime must be built on trust between countries. This cooperation should respect the independence of each country and provide mutual benefits, which should consequently help prevent conflicts in the region.

The tasks carried out as part of Malaysia's defense diplomacy aim at both regional cooperation and close bilateral relations. Activities within this cooperation are a source of soft power. All activities carried out as part of defense diplomacy are aimed at maintaining good relations with neighbors and reassuring them of Malaysia's peaceful intentions. Malaysia's diplomacy also seeks to emphasize to neighbors and other countries that the tasks undertaken within the framework of defense diplomacy are independent initiatives of Kuala Lumpur, not influenced by the interests of any great powers.

Answering the research question, it is challenging to identify adequate instruments that can be used by all the analyzed countries to increase security in the region. The priorities pursued by the selected states of South and Southeast Asia suggest the use of various instruments of defense diplomacy to implement their foreign and security policy objectives.<sup>47</sup> It also indicates that the instruments available in modern defense diplomacy include a wide range of possibilities at each state's disposal. The analysis suggests that the effectiveness of these instruments depends on many factors.<sup>48</sup> Economic potential, along with active participation in military or political-military alliances, significantly contributes to the effective use of defense diplomacy instruments during both peace and crisis times.

While the available instruments used by states or security organizations in different parts of the world are similar, new areas of cooperation within defense diplomacy are emerging due to the changing security environment and hybrid threats. A good example of strengthening regional security is the achievements made by countries in military-to-military cooperation under the auspices of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus framework.<sup>49</sup> This cooperation demonstrates the development of new areas within the framework of defense diplomacy. Consequently, the importance and role of defense diplomacy in ensuring security is continually increasing.

47. E. Pajtinka, *Military Diplomacy and Its Present Functions*, "Security Dimensions. International & National Studies", 2016, No. 20, pp. 179–194.

48. B. Taylor, et al., *Defence Diplomacy is the game worth the candle?*, The Australian National University 2014, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187796/COG%20%2317%20Web.pdf>, (access 21.12.2023).

49. See more at: *About the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus*, op. cit.

The conducted analysis does not encompass all areas of cooperation and task implementation by the selected countries within the framework of defense diplomacy. Further analysis is required on topics such as participation in military and political-military organizations, defense and military agreements with neighboring countries, or the role of technology in this cooperation. The presented study provides a foundation for continued research in this area.

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