



Active Actions by the New Minister of Defense

By

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Introduction

On October 24, 2019, Prabowo Subianto was officially appointed as Minister of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia. In the few months since taking office, it can be said that the new Minister of Defense has been active in conducting bilateral meetings with other countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe region. As of the end of November 2019, the Defense Minister has held bilateral meetings with eight countries. In addition, he also attended a multilateral forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) in Bangkok. What kinds of defense cooperation that have been discussed at the bilateral meetings between Indonesia and those countries? What was discussed by the Indonesian Defense Minister in the multilateral forum, the ADMM Plus?

Bilateral Meeting Indonesia with Partner Countries

The Indonesian Defense Minister conducted bilateral meetings with several countries from the Asian, African, and European regions such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Turkey, Ghana, France, the United States, and Russia. First, Malaysia. The Indonesian Defense Minister went to Malaysia for an honorary visit to meet the defense minister of Malaysia, YB Tuan Haji Mohamad bin Sabu. The issues discussed at the meeting were about the improvement of defense cooperation, especially in the field of education and training through the exchange of military personnel and students between Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as defense industry cooperation.¹

Second, the Philippines. The Indonesian Defense Minister would like to increase the cooperation in defense industry sector with the Philippines, by offering military equipment products from Indonesia.²



In addition, other cooperation discussed were about the exchange of intelligence information to counter radicalism and terrorism, and cooperation through joint patrols (sea, land, and air patrols) to face the common threats in the region. Third, Thailand. In the bilateral meeting, the Indonesian and Thai defense ministers talked about cooperation in the field of education and training to improve the capabilities of the military personnel of both countries and the cooperation to counter terrorism as well.³

Fourth, India. The bilateral meeting with India was held when Prabowo Subianto received an honorary visit at the Ministry of Defense office, Jakarta. Both countries discussed cooperation in education and training through military personnel exchanges. Until 2019, 368 personnel from the Indonesia Armed Forces have attended education in India and 50 personnel from the Indian Armed Forces also took education courses in Indonesia. Moreover, maritime cooperation is also a concern for both Indonesia and India because it has great opportunities in supporting the roles of both countries to maintain the security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴

Fifth, Turkey. The Indonesian Defense Minister met with Turkish Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar to discuss security issues and cooperation in the defense industry.⁵ The two countries have established cooperation in enhancing the defense industry. In 2015, Indonesia and Turkey previously signed a cooperation agreement to produce prototype medium tanks through PT. Pindad and Turkish armored vehicle manufacturer FNSS.⁶ Sixth, Ghana. Prabowo Subianto received a visit from the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Ghana to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries and explore the potential cooperation which can be started from education and training cooperation through exchanges of military personnel and cooperation among military academy institutions, as well as cooperation in defense industry products.⁷

Seventh, France. Prabowo Subianto held a meeting with representatives of France, namely the French Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Oliver Chambard. On this occasion, Indonesia and France discussed joint efforts to strengthen cooperation that beneficial for both countries.⁸ Eighth, the United States. The Indonesian Defense Minister met the US Secretary of Defense bilaterally on the event of ADMM Retreat and 6th ADMM Plus in Bangkok, Thailand. Prabowo Subianto and Mark Esper discussed increasing defense cooperation, including a joint training program with the special force and the United Nations peacekeeper. In addition, Prabowo Subianto also expressed his desire to increase cooperation in the field of education and training through sending Indonesian military personnel to get education in the US. It received a positive response from the US Defense Minister.⁹





Multilateral Forum through ADMM Plus

Prabowo Subianto also attended a multilateral forum, namely ADMM Plus in Bangkok on November 18, 2019. During the meeting, Prabowo Subianto expressed his views on several issues related to threats and challenges developing in the region such as the South China Sea dispute and dynamics in the Korean Peninsula. Regarding the South China Sea issue, he said that Indonesia appreciated the positive progress of the agreement to finalize the Code of Conduct (CoC). This is intended so that the maritime can remain stable and secure the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and Sea Lines of Trade (SLOT).¹⁰

Furthermore, he expressed his views in relation to non-traditional security threats that are still worrying, especially about terrorism, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, disease, and cyber warfare. Therefore, to achieve stability and security in the region, the role of the dialogue partner countries is needed through strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region while continuing to prioritize ASEAN centrality. ADMM Plus has become a forum for cooperation that provides great benefits to the countries involved, especially in increasing interoperability by sharing knowledge and experiences through joint exercises.¹¹

Analysis/The Verdict

Indonesia through the new Minister of Defense immediately acts actively in conducting bilateral and multilateral meetings to enhance and develop the potential defense cooperation with other countries. Those meetings carried out are as a form of defense diplomacy activity namely bilateral and multilateral cooperation between defense diplomacy actors, in this case among defense ministers and with ambassadors. There are several defense cooperation as focus of Indonesia such as in education and training, defense industry, and counter-terrorism cooperation through joint patrol and exercise. Through the defense cooperation discussed above, it aims to build confidence building measures (CBM) with other countries, to increase defense capability especially for military personnel, and to develop the defense industry.



Endnotes

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