



Indonesia-Japan Advancing Defense and Security Cooperation: Promoting Democracy in Indo-Pacific Waters

By

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Introduction

The article visualizes the use of defense and security cooperation as the means to promote democratic values. In a more specific context, this article narrates the advancement of the security bond between two democracies in Asia with synchronized geostrategic ambition at sea: Japan and Indonesia. Japan, as one of the closest United States allies in Asia, is in the front row of protecting liberal order in the region while Indonesia is the biggest democratic country in Southeast Asia and the proponent of Bali Democracy Forum. Taking off from this setting, this article explores the possibilities for these two democracies to expand and intensify security defense cooperation.

During the Joko Widodo administration, Indonesia and Japan have made a number of breakthroughs in their defense and security cooperation. Lately in March 2021, Japan and Indonesia had concluded another 2+2 meeting after the last meeting concluded in 2015, resulting in a collaboration on transfer of technology in military equipment.¹ In the non-traditional security sector, Indonesia and Japan are having a common concern on maritime security. This has stimulated the initiation of Indonesia-Japan Maritime Forum in 2016 Indonesia, leading to a more intensified and institutionalized cooperation between Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (BAKAMLA) and Japan's Coast Guard a year later.² Since Shinzo Abe administration, Japan's security posture has significantly expanded to be more engaged in traditional security sector which involves more of military sector. Japan's Ministry of Defense along with Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) has had the capacity building, joint training and defense equipment and technology transfer activities with Indonesia's Ministry of Defense as well as Indonesian Army (TNI). In short, the bond has advanced more than ever.



The author argues that these fortified defense and security bonds are mainly driven by common democratic values promoted by Japan and Indonesia. Despite the established understanding of Japan's mounting security posture in Southeast Asia as the counterbalancing measure against China, the 'free and active' Indonesia, in specific context, is less likely to flock into a certain block. Thus, the analysis of a cooperation which revolves around value-based benefit suits more neatly in narrating Japan-Indonesia defense and security cooperation. To that end, this article will first portray the synchronized values and visions of the two countries before it departs to expose the manifestation of these common values into security and defense initiatives.

Analysis

Japan and Indonesia have plenty of similarities in going through their path to democracy. Japan, after the devastating end of World War II, had to endure 7 years of occupation by the Allies in order to establish democracy after the long-rooted feudalism and fascism. Despite the various so-called 'democratic leaderships' brought by its leaders since independence, Indonesia, on the other hand, had to go through the hard way before establishing a more functioning democracy through *reformasi* in 1998.

Aside from the development of democracy in both countries, Japan and Indonesia also have similar geographical, geopolitical and geostrategic contexts. Both nations are geographically archipelagic nations, geopolitically maritime power throughout history, and aiming for maritime regional prosperity through its geostrategy. Shinzo Abe introduced the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) as a vision among African audiences during the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Nairobi during his leadership in 2016.³ This geostrategic vision aimed to connect two developmental hotspots surrounding the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. His successors, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide, also endorsed this vision in his first overseas visit to Indonesia and Vietnam, known to be two of the key players in Southeast Asia.⁴ President Joko Widodo, since the early days of his office has introduced Global Maritime Fulcrum (*Poros Maritim Dunia*), which reflected his maritime ambition. As an extension of this strategy and the reflection of its natural leadership in the region, Indonesia has led ASEAN to formulate the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' (AOIP).⁵ All in all, to achieve all of those visions, all players must commit to the common value of freedom of navigation. To achieve these maritime ambitions, Japan and Indonesia, alongside with other like-minded countries, need to maintain the vital sea lanes of communications and trade shipping routes free and open. Putting into perspective, the freedom of navigation is contingent upon democratic values.





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It is governed by rules instead of might, equal rights and access to the maritime domain, and have no hierarchy or domination over each other. Underpinned by democracy and the common goal to preserve these values, Japan and Indonesia thus translated these urges into security initiatives.

Japan-Indonesia defense and security cooperation is protecting democracy at sea through sharpening each other's awareness and capability in dealing with maritime challenges aiming to intercept the *status quo*. First, the workshops given by JSDF and Japan's Defense Ministry to Indonesian security and defense agencies could enhance the maritime domain awareness and the understanding towards international law. Also, military and security personnel exchanges between the two countries could be an asset for the security network between the democracies. Second, in practical execution, Japan and Indonesia are kicking off sets of defense technology development cooperation, joint exercises, and other practical capacity building programs to leverage each other's ability in dealing with immediate security threats, especially in maritime areas.

These progresses were robust in Indonesia-Japan relations under Shinzo Abe administration and will likely remain the same under the leadership of Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide. While many discussions were initiated during the Joko Widodo and Shinzo Abe era, such as the first 2+2 meeting in 2015, many of these talks came into concrete realization under Joko Widodo and Suga Yoshihide. Aside from the defense transfer and technology deal in March 2021, Japan and Indonesia also exchanged notes on the provision of patrol vessels in May 2021.⁶ In the same month, it was also reported that Japan also offered Indonesia to jointly build maritime warship.⁷

Conclusion

It is evident that Indonesia-Japan security and defense cooperation has been expanding and intensifying in recent years, especially since Joko Widodo-Shinzo Abe leaderships. Japan and Indonesia did have security cooperation prior to the two leaders coming to power, yet it was mostly dealing with non-traditional issues. Now as it evolves and involves traditional issues, including more military and defense equipment transfer elements in the mold. However, this does not necessarily imply that Japan is teaming up with Indonesia and other Southeast Asians to balance Chinese power, considering that Indonesia is strategically independent. The highlight of these security advancements is that the security and defense cooperation is driven by common values, such as democracy, aside from a similar interest of balancing a certain power. Thus, this paper reflects that the security and defense network driven by common-values, such as democracy, will be more popular.





Endnotes

- 1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2021, March 30). "Second Japan-Indonesia Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ("2+2")." Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press6e_000279.html.
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- 6 Embassy of Japan in Indonesia. (2021, May 24). "Pertukaran Nota (E/N) tentang Penyerahan Kapal Pengawas Perikanan kepada Indonesia." Retrieved from https://www.id.emb-japan.go.jp/news21_16.html.
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