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# How Military Marches can Help Indonesia's Soft Diplomacy

By Karl Gading Sayudha

[ANALYSIS](#)

Indonesia's historic military march in New Delhi during India's Republic Day expands its armed forces' role from traditional hard power to embrace soft military diplomacy. This move demonstrates Indonesia's evolving commitment to fostering international goodwill and strategic partnerships. As Indonesia seeks further opportunities on the global stage, its soldiers are redefining its contribution to peace and stability beyond conventional military operations.

On 26 January, a historic moment unfolded in New Delhi as Indonesian Army Cadets ([AKMIL](#)) and Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) personnel marched alongside their Indian counterparts to commemorate India's Republic Day. This special occasion marked TNI's debut participation in any major foreign military ceremony. The event appears to have successfully captured considerable attention from those who remain sceptical about President Prabowo's goal of reshaping Indonesia's diplomatic approach by utilising the military as an instrument of soft power.

While this initiative marks an excellent starting point for such a goal, Prabowo and Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin should indeed consider expanding this practice, sending more military personnel to similar events in partner countries as a strategic move to enhance Indonesia's soft military diplomacy.

Traditionally, Indonesia's soft power strategy has centred on its diverse and rich cultural heritage, exemplified by Batik Diplomacy. Batik, a traditional fabric, is widely used by diplomats and officials to promote Indonesia at formal and cultural events around the world. At the same time, The Indonesian government also engages in [gastrodiplomacy](#) by showcasing its unique and delicious cuisine overseas., effectively communicating the nation's distinct identity compared to other countries.

On the other hand, it is uncommon to see the Indonesian military used as a tool for soft power abroad. Since its establishment, the military's primary focus has been on hard power—ensuring national defence, security, and serving as a geopolitical deterrent against external threats. Consequently, its doctrine rarely emphasises “soft” military diplomacy, instead sticking to traditional approaches that highlight its operational expertise in warfare.

This can be seen in Indonesia's active role in peacekeeping operations, from Congo to Lebanon, under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN). This involvement is also reinforced through frequent military exercises with foreign partners domestically and overseas. For example, the Orruda Russia-Indonesia Navy exercise and Australia-Indonesia Keris Woomera joint exercise both occurred in November 2024, as well as the Garuda Shield in August 2024, are several recent examples in which joint military exercises were held on Indonesian soil. While at the same time, the Indonesian military also sent its delegations to partake in combined training abroad, such as in, the annual ASEAN Armies Rifle Meet (AARM), where ASEAN member states rotate the hosting responsibilities. In 2024, the 32nd AARM was held in the Philippines. Furthermore, the Indonesian Navy recently dispatched a single corvette, KRI Bung Tomo, to Pakistan for a joint multilateral navy exercise from 7 to 11 February 2025. These actions have demonstrated TNI's capacity to operate in multinational settings and have cemented its reputation as a collaborative and proactive regional partner.

However, TNI could expand their diplomatic role more than its routine military exercise or international drill, especially to build bridges and understanding across diverse global landscapes. In this context, the march in New Delhi serves as a clear demonstration of military soft diplomacy—a tool that Jakarta should harness to achieve its foreign policy objectives. There are several options for how Indonesia can optimise its military soft diplomacy. In this article, I focus on exclusive opportunities for each military branch, especially their respective cadets academy, to participate in special military tours or events hosted by partner nations. A prime example is the enduring five-decade tradition of Indonesian Navy Cadets (AAL) celestial navigation training, which is integrated with the diplomatic mission aboard KRI Dewaruci and its successor, KRI Bima Suci, as they visit various partner countries. Through activities like open ship visits and cocktail receptions at selected harbours, both KRI Dewa Ruci and KRI Bima Suci provide an excellent platform for Navy Cadets to promote Indonesian culture and history, while also helping foreign powers appreciate Jakarta's stance and commitment through a friendly gesture.

Although President Prabowo has already granted AKMIL Cadets and TNI personnel the rare opportunity to conduct a military march on foreign soil in India, there is still potential to do more. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) could seek out other international military ceremonies to further showcase Indonesia's position and dedication amid global uncertainty.

For instance, Indonesian military personnel, along with a select group of cadets from each branch, might one day have the opportunity to march on Red Square during Russia's Victory Day on May 9. This potential occasion is interesting since Indonesia-Russia partnership is a long-standing tie since the Cold War, primarily in defence and energy sector. Even Prabowo during his visit to Moscow in August 2024, consider Russia as a “great friend”. In a more Western-aligned manner, a similar military march on France's Bastille Day on 14 July could serve as a balanced option. This is mainly due to the increasing defence partnership between Indonesia and France following the procurement of Dassault Rafale jets and Scorpene submarines. Moreover, the two countries are expected to have more defence related collaborations in the coming years.

It is important to note that such events would be feasible only if Indonesia maintains a close, reputable, and respectful relationship in line with the standards of those nations. In this case, both Moscow and Paris are in favour of Jakarta as previously explained, potentially fostering even closer partnerships while also sending a mixed signal to potential rivals, an outcome that could benefit Indonesia if executed skilfully. Nevertheless, all these initiatives must be carefully balanced, as President Prabowo has demonstrated through his adept use of diplomatic ruse.

Overall, Indonesia's march in New Delhi is more than a ceremonial debut; it is a strategic signal that the TNI is evolving. Under Prabowo's leadership, the Indonesian military is progressively expanding its roles, including a focus on fostering international goodwill. As Indonesia continues to expand its involvement in global military exercises and diplomatic events, it is setting a new precedent for how TNI can contribute to peace and stability—not just through force, but through the art of soft diplomacy.

*[Karl Gading Sayudha](#) is an Analyst at Kiroyan Partners, an Indonesian public affairs firm. He holds a degree in international relations from President University and is highly passionate about security, Indonesian politics, defence, and geopolitics.*

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