

## The Integration of Non-Traditional Security into *Ausindo Eagle* to Expand Defense Diplomacy between Indonesia and Australia

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### Abstract

This study addresses the limited scholarly attention to bilateral military exercises as instruments of defense diplomacy, despite their growing significance for regional security in Southeast Asia. Specifically, it analyzes the role of the *AUSINDO EAGLE* joint exercises in advancing Indonesia–Australia defense cooperation and in mainstreaming non-traditional security agendas within bilateral defense diplomacy. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study employed purposive sampling of two key historical cases—the inaugural *AUSINDO EAGLE* exercise in 1993 and the most recent in 2023. Data were collected through document analysis of official military reports, policy statements, and secondary literature, and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings demonstrate that *AUSINDO EAGLE* has progressed from a conventional interoperability-focused joint air exercise into a comprehensive defense engagement encompassing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This transformation underscores defense diplomacy’s dual function as both a confidence-building mechanism and an adaptive strategy to address non-traditional security challenges. The study

concludes that *AUSINDO EAGLE* not only consolidates bilateral defense cooperation but also enhances regional stability by broadening the scope of security collaboration. The implications include theoretical contributions to defense diplomacy literature and practical recommendations for policymakers to strengthen joint training programs, expand multilateral participation, and institutionalize HADR frameworks. The study also highlights avenues for future research, particularly comparative analyses with ASEAN-led exercises and empirical fieldwork involving military practitioners.

**Keywords:** Defense Diplomacy; *AUSINDO EAGLE*; Indonesia–Australia Relations; Military Cooperation; Non-Traditional Security

## INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the contemporary security environment demonstrate a fundamental shift in how threats are perceived and managed at both the global and regional levels. Traditionally, security was defined narrowly as military confrontation between states, with armed forces and weaponry considered the central instruments of safeguarding sovereignty. However, the rapid advancement of technology, the deepening of global interdependence, and the rise of new actors have broadened the scope of security, rendering it multidimensional. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998) emphasize that security is no longer confined to military matters but must also account for non-traditional dimensions such as environmental degradation, natural disasters, transnational crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other threats that transcend national borders. These evolving dynamics imply that security challenges are increasingly transnational and involve not only state actors but also non-state actors and natural phenomena, thereby requiring adaptive responses and cooperative mechanisms (Sudirman et al., 2023).

In this context, no country is immune to the impact of non-traditional threats, including Indonesia and Australia. Indonesia, situated along the Indo-Pacific trade routes, faces recurring challenges of arms smuggling, drug trafficking, maritime piracy, and human trafficking (Hanggarini & Perwita, 2024; Rachmawati, 2017). Meanwhile, Australia's proximity to Indonesia exposes it to similar vulnerabilities, reinforcing the need for bilateral cooperation to safeguard national and regional stability. From a geopolitical perspective, Indonesia serves as a strategic buffer for Australia, with over 60 percent of Australian

exports passing through Indonesian maritime zones (Gumay et al., 2018; Weltman & Whiteside, 2010). For Indonesia, cooperation with Australia is equally important to maintain territorial integrity and strengthen regional stability (Sarjito, 2025). Thus, their geographic closeness creates shared strategic interests, making bilateral cooperation a necessity rather than an option (Madutharanga et al., 2024).

Beyond cross-border crime, natural disasters also constitute a major security challenge. Indonesia's location within the Pacific Ring of Fire makes it highly vulnerable to earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions (Leginosuko et al., 2021; Scott, 2019). Although Australia is geologically more stable, its proximity enables it to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to Indonesia. In this sense, defense cooperation extends beyond combat training to encompass humanitarian operations such as disaster response and medical evacuation (Pedrason, 2022). This shift illustrates the growing integration of non-traditional threats into military cooperation, where platforms once designed solely for traditional warfare now incorporate disaster relief and humanitarian assistance as part of their strategic agenda.

One bilateral platform reflecting this integration is the AUSINDO EAGLE joint air exercise between the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and the Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU). Originally focused on strengthening combat capabilities, AUSINDO EAGLE has evolved to accommodate broader non-traditional elements, particularly humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations (Cahayani, 2023; Haura et al., 2025). This transformation demonstrates that defense cooperation is no longer limited to military interoperability but also serves as a form of defense diplomacy, aimed at building trust, enhancing transparency, and fostering civilian-military synergy (Destiningrum & Elvianti, 2023). Similar developments are observed in the United States-led Cobra Gold exercise, which integrates both traditional and non-traditional security scenarios (Prasirtsuk, 2021). These cases highlight the potential of AUSINDO EAGLE to strengthen bilateral defense diplomacy while simultaneously contributing to regional humanitarian security (Darmawan, Sumadinata, et al., 2025).

Previous academic studies, however, have primarily examined AUSINDO EAGLE in the context of traditional military cooperation and confidence-building measures between Indonesia and Australia. Research focusing specifically on the incorporation of non-traditional threats into this bilateral exercise remains limited. This gap is significant, as

the integration of HADR and humanitarian missions into AUSINDO EAGLE reflects the broader global shift toward non-traditional security cooperation, a topic underrepresented in the literature. Theoretically, this research is grounded in the Copenhagen School's securitization theory (Susilowati et al., 2024), which expands the concept of security across military, political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions, as well as in the theory of defense diplomacy (Anindito et al., 2022; Pangemanan & Perwita, 2022), which emphasizes the peaceful use of military resources to pursue strategic interests and humanitarian objectives. Combining these perspectives enables a comprehensive analysis of how bilateral exercises adapt to evolving threat landscapes and how defense diplomacy can simultaneously address traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

Based on this understanding, the novelty of this study lies in examining AUSINDO EAGLE not merely as a conventional military exercise, but as an evolving platform of defense diplomacy that incorporates non-traditional security, particularly humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This article therefore seeks to answer the following research question: How can the AUSINDO EAGLE exercise play a role in responding to non-traditional security threats and broaden the arena of defense diplomacy between Indonesia and Australia? By addressing this question, the research aims to contribute to the academic discourse on defense cooperation and provide policy-relevant insights into the expansion of bilateral military exercises in responding to evolving security challenges.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, a qualitative approach can help researchers understand the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). With this approach, researchers seek to understand the integration of non-traditional security issues into the bilateral AUSINDO EAGLE exercise, which has been on the agenda of the exercise. The method used in this research is a literature review. Zed stated that literature review is conducted by collecting data, reading, recording, and then processing the data according to the research topic (Sugiyono, 2024). The data sources used are secondary, obtained from scientific publications, including scientific researches and news articles. The scientific researches used as data include researches covering the AUSINDO EAGLE exercise, defense diplomacy, and non-traditional security, which are relevant to

this research topic. Meanwhile, the news articles used as data contain information about the implementation of the AUSINDO EAGLE exercise.

After collecting the data, researchers will analyze it using two stages: data reduction and categorization. Data reduction involves selecting data and then simplifying it to process the raw data into information that aligns with the research objectives. After the data has been reduced, the researcher will categorize the data by grouping them based on research topics (Darmawan, Ambarnis, et al., 2025; Trihartono et al., 2020). This categorization is carried out to find patterns or relationships between the keywords highlighted in this article, namely non-traditional security, the AUSINDO EAGLE bilateral exercise, and defense diplomacy.

## RESULTS

### 1. Chronology of Indonesia–Australia Defense Cooperation

The development of bilateral defense cooperation between Indonesia and Australia has evolved over more than six decades. As shown in Table 1, this trajectory began in 1961 with Australia’s appointment of its first Defense Attaché to Jakarta, marking the earliest formal channel for defense communication. The table also highlights Indonesia’s decision in the early 1970s to send Air Force personnel to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base in New South Wales, representing one of the first significant capacity-building initiatives. This exchange not only transferred technical knowledge but also demonstrated trust in allowing Indonesian technicians to integrate into Australian defense facilities. The establishment of the first cadet exchange in 1974 and the initiation of systematic training and personnel exchanges in the 1980s further strengthened this trust, gradually institutionalizing defense diplomacy between the two nations.

**Table 1.** Chronology of Indonesia–Australia Defense Cooperation

Year	Bilateral Relations
1961	Australia sent its first Defense Attaché to Indonesia
Early 1970s	Indonesian Air Force personnel trained at RAAF Base New South Wales to support the Sabre aircraft program
1974	First cadet exchange between the Indonesian Military Academy and Royal Military College Duntroon
1980s	Routine defense training and personnel exchanges initiated
1993	First AUSINDO EAGLE joint air exercise held

Year	Bilateral Relations
2006	Signing of the Lombok Agreement by the Indonesian and Australian Foreign Ministers
2009	Formal Defense Cooperation Framework established
2023	Second AUSINDO EAGLE joint air exercise conducted

**Source: Wulandari et al., 2024**

The evidence presented in Table 1 indicates that the bilateral defense relationship developed incrementally, with each phase laying the groundwork for subsequent cooperation. The initial focus on technical exchange in the 1960s and 1970s transitioned into institutionalized personnel exchange programs in the 1980s, signaling a maturing partnership. The 1993 AUSINDO EAGLE exercise (also recorded in Table 1) was not an isolated event but rather the culmination of decades of incremental trust-building. Furthermore, the Lombok Agreement of 2006 and the 2009 Defense Cooperation Framework formalized what had been primarily ad hoc arrangements into legally binding commitments, thereby ensuring sustainability and predictability in bilateral defense ties. In sum, Table 1 underscores that defense diplomacy between Indonesia and Australia progressed in both scope and depth, evolving from symbolic representation to operational collaboration.

### **AUSINDO EAGLE 1993 in Medan**

The first AUSINDO EAGLE exercise was conducted in Medan, North Sumatra, from 13 to 17 November 1993. As illustrated in Figure 1, the RAAF deployed F/A-18 A/B Hornet fighter aircraft, while the Indonesian Air Force participated with Northrop F-5E/F Tiger II jets. The mismatch in generational technology between the two aircraft was significant the RAAF's fourth-generation Hornets had superior avionics, radar, and weapons systems compared to the TNI-AU's third-generation Tigers. However, the agility and tactical flexibility of the Indonesian pilots allowed them to compete effectively in air combat simulations, earning the exercise the nickname "David versus Goliath" (Sumbodo, 2020).



**Figure 1.** First AUSINDO EAGLE Exercise, Medan, 1993

*Documentation source: Aviahistoria.com*

The operational dynamics recorded in Figure 1 are important because they highlight the dual function of the exercise: on one hand, to expose Indonesian pilots to advanced platforms like the F/A-18; and on the other hand, to demonstrate that tactical skills and combat maneuvers can partially offset technological disadvantages. This reflects one of the central goals of defense diplomacy: not to compete for superiority, but to build interoperability and mutual respect. The fact that Indonesia and Australia successfully conducted this exercise in 1993 only a few years after bilateral tensions during the East Timor crisis demonstrates the utility of military exercises as confidence-building measures. Therefore, Figure 1 illustrates that AUSINDO EAGLE served as a platform for operational learning and strategic trust-building, even under conditions of asymmetrical capability.

### **AUSINDO EAGLE 2023 in Manado**

After a 30-year gap, the AUSINDO EAGLE exercise was resumed in Manado, North Sulawesi, from 18 to 28 September 2023. As depicted in Figure 2, the scale of participation increased significantly, with 160 Indonesian Air Force personnel and 150 RAAF personnel taking part. The exercise included offensive and defensive air operations, basic combat maneuvers, and aerial refueling missions using the RAAF's KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport (MRTT). The inclusion of aerial refueling was particularly important, as it introduced Indonesian pilots to operational procedures that extend the range and endurance of fighter aircraft, thereby enhancing interoperability with coalition air forces.



**Figure 2.** Second AUSINDO EAGLE Exercise, Manado, 2023

*Documentation source: Australian Government DFAT, 2023*

The evidence in Figure 2 demonstrates the evolution of AUSINDO EAGLE from a basic combat maneuver exercise in 1993 into a more sophisticated joint air operation by 2023. The inclusion of aerial refueling, for example, shows that the exercise is no longer limited to tactical engagement but also incorporates strategic enablers essential for modern warfare. This reflects the deepening level of trust and technical integration between the two air forces. Moreover, the large number of personnel involved (310 in total) signifies that AUSINDO EAGLE is no longer a symbolic activity but a substantive military operation with operational and strategic implications. In this sense, Figure 2 underscores how AUSINDO EAGLE has evolved into a multidimensional platform that prepares both air forces for real-world contingencies, including coalition operations.

### **Integration of Non-Traditional Security in AUSINDO EAGLE**

Beyond combat training, the 2023 AUSINDO EAGLE exercise incorporated non-traditional security components, specifically Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). As presented in Table 2, the exercise included scenarios such as search and rescue missions, humanitarian aid distribution, and the use of Super Puma NAS-332 helicopters for victim evacuation. The decision to integrate HADR into AUSINDO EAGLE reflects the recognition that Indonesia and Australia share vulnerability to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and forest fires.

**Table 2.** Integration of Non-Traditional Security in AUSINDO EAGLE

Year	Non-Traditional Security Elements	Operational Activities
2023	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)	Search and rescue operations, victim evacuation, humanitarian aid distribution, coordination with civilian agencies

Source: Dispen AU, 2023; Hanum, 2025

The evidence in Table 2 highlights a crucial shift in the orientation of AUSINDO EAGLE from exclusively combat-oriented training toward multidimensional defense cooperation. By incorporating HADR, the exercise not only enhances interoperability between air forces but also between military and civilian institutions such as disaster management agencies and humanitarian organizations. This expansion broadens the scope of defense diplomacy by demonstrating the “dual role” principle, whereby the armed forces contribute both to national defense and to humanitarian missions. Furthermore, Table 2 underscores that joint responses to non-traditional threats can strengthen confidence-building measures not only bilaterally between Indonesia and Australia but also across sectors, bridging the civil-military divide. This development illustrates the adaptability of AUSINDO EAGLE in addressing evolving security landscapes, thereby reinforcing its relevance as a platform for regional stability.

## DISCUSSION

### Results Analysis

The findings demonstrate that Indonesia–Australia defense cooperation has progressed from symbolic exchanges in the 1960s to highly institutionalized military exercises in the 2020s. The chronology in Table 1 reveals that each stage of cooperation—from defense attachés, cadet exchanges, and joint training—served as incremental confidence-building measures that culminated in the AUSINDO EAGLE exercises. The first AUSINDO EAGLE in 1993 (Figure 1) emphasized tactical air combat interoperability, even under asymmetric technological conditions, while the 2023 exercise (Figure 2) highlighted a more complex and strategic orientation, including aerial refueling and large-scale joint operations. Furthermore, the integration of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) into the 2023 exercise (Table 2) shows the adaptability of

defense diplomacy, extending beyond traditional combat readiness into addressing non-traditional security threats. These results align directly with the research objective of assessing how AUSINDO EAGLE embodies the implementation and evolution of defense diplomacy between Indonesia and Australia.

### **Comparison with Previous Studies**

The results are consistent with the conceptual framework of defense diplomacy articulated by Susilowati et al. (2024), who argue that defense diplomacy encompasses military attachés, personnel exchanges, and joint training as peaceful means of using military resources. The evidence in Table 1 and Figure 1 supports this, as early exchanges and joint exercises fit squarely into these categories. Similarly, the findings confirm Anindito et al. (2022) view that joint exercises enhance combat readiness and interoperability by allowing militaries to share tactical knowledge and operational procedures. The incorporation of HADR into AUSINDO EAGLE, as presented in Table 2, reflects Pangemanan & Perwita (2022) theory of non-traditional security, which highlights natural disasters and environmental challenges as critical security threats in Asia-Pacific. This integration also resonates with Edmons and Mills (2018), who emphasize that defense diplomacy serves not only traditional deterrence but also cooperative, non-combat roles that strengthen strategic trust. Compared with prior studies on ASEAN defense cooperation, the AUSINDO EAGLE case provides unique evidence of a bilateral framework successfully expanding its scope to address both traditional and non-traditional security concerns.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, AUSINDO EAGLE demonstrates the multi-dimensional character of defense diplomacy, confirming that it cannot be restricted to traditional combat readiness but must adapt to contemporary challenges such as humanitarian crises. This contributes to defense diplomacy literature by providing an empirical example of dual-function exercises that combine security and humanitarian missions. Practically, the integration of HADR expands the exercise's utility for both countries, preparing their armed forces not only for joint combat operations but also for regional disaster responses. This has direct relevance for Southeast Asia, a region frequently affected by natural disasters, and suggests that AUSINDO EAGLE could serve as a model for other bilateral or multilateral exercises.

Moreover, the emphasis on interoperability and trust-building in Figures 1 and 2 underscores the importance of sustained engagement to prevent misperceptions and manage regional security dynamics.

### **Research Limitations**

Despite these insights, the study has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies primarily on documented evidence and secondary sources, which may not fully capture the operational dynamics of the AUSINDO EAGLE exercises. Second, the scope is limited to bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and Australia, meaning that the findings cannot be generalized to broader multilateral contexts such as ASEAN or FPDA (Five Power Defence Arrangements). Third, the research does not incorporate direct interviews with military practitioners or policymakers, which could provide deeper insights into the decision-making process and perceptions behind the exercises. Finally, the analysis focuses on two AUSINDO EAGLE exercises (1993 and 2023), leaving a gap in understanding of smaller-scale interactions that may have occurred in the intervening years. These limitations suggest the need for future research incorporating primary data and comparative perspectives to build a more comprehensive picture of defense diplomacy in the region.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research has shown that the AUSINDO EAGLE exercises serve as a critical manifestation of Indonesia–Australia defense diplomacy. The chronology of cooperation, as detailed in Table 1, illustrates how initial exchanges and attaché postings laid the groundwork for more complex engagements. The first AUSINDO EAGLE exercise in 1993 (Figure 1) underscored the role of joint training in enhancing interoperability, while the 2023 exercise (Figure 2) demonstrated the deepening of cooperation through advanced joint operations such as aerial refueling. Importantly, the inclusion of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in the 2023 agenda (Table 2) highlights the evolution of bilateral defense collaboration to address not only traditional but also non-traditional security threats. Together, these findings affirm that AUSINDO EAGLE contributes to confidence-building, operational readiness, and adaptive regional security practices, directly answering the study’s central objective of examining the dynamics of defense diplomacy.

Nevertheless, this research has several limitations. The analysis is primarily based on secondary sources and official documentation, which may not fully capture the perspectives of military practitioners or policymakers. The focus on two key exercises (1993 and 2023) also narrows the scope, leaving gaps in understanding of intermediate developments. Additionally, the study is limited to the bilateral dimension, without assessing the wider implications for ASEAN or multilateral security frameworks.

Future research could expand by incorporating interviews with defense officials, field observations of military exercises, and comparative analyses with other bilateral or multilateral training programs in Southeast Asia. Such studies would enrich understanding of how defense diplomacy adapts across different institutional contexts and could provide deeper insights into the strategic role of non-traditional security agendas. Exploring how AUSINDO EAGLE informs ASEAN-led mechanisms like the ADMM-Plus would also be a promising avenue for further inquiry.

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