

## Moving Forward with the New Southern Policy Plus in National Defense in the Post-COVID Era

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The Moon Jae-in government is pushing ahead with the New Southern Policy as the Korea's new diplomatic policy paradigm. This policy mainly aims to strengthen relations and cooperation with India and ten ASEAN countries in all areas, including politics, economy, society, and culture, to similar levels of ties Korea has had with its four surrounding countries, i.e. the United States, China, Japan, and Russia. In August 2018, the Special Committee on the New Southern Policy (hereinafter referred to as the Special Committee), set up under the Presidential Policy Planning Committee, presented nineteen implementation tasks focusing on three pillars: People, Prosperity, and Peace (3P). For the pillar of peace, the MND has implemented the following four tasks: (i) promoting the signing of defense cooperation agreements and MOUs with ten ASEAN countries; (ii) hosting of annual Korea–ASEAN vice defense ministerial meetings; (iii) expansion of combined exercises, including anti-piracy and maritime counter-terrorism drills; and (iv) transfer of retired naval ships to ASEAN member states.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, it has become difficult to implement these tasks under normal conditions. Hence, in November 2020, the Special Committee announced the “New Southern Policy Plus” with action plans in seven categories by

reflecting changes in the policy paradigm during the pandemic and the goals of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025. Of these, the MND developed four tasks in nontraditional security cooperation: (i) cultivating human resources capabilities through exchanges in education and training; (ii) completing a framework for Korea–ASEAN defense cooperation; (iii) creating a synergy effect by closely connecting cooperation in defense industry and logistics; and (iv) promoting multilateral security cooperation. Not to mention contagious disease, nontraditional security threats such as climate change, natural disasters, and marine pollution are transnational risks that require joint response from related countries. The ROK seeks to contribute to making the Asian region more peaceful and safer by cementing cooperation with countries under its New Southern Policy in combating nontraditional security threats.

#### *Cultivating human resources competencies through education and training exchanges*

To strengthen cooperation in peacekeeping operations (PKO), the MND will expand its signing of MOUs and commissioned education. By identifying the needs of each country in Southeast Asia, the MND will offer a custom-tailored education and additionally provide PKO training opportunities to military officers of ASEAN countries. Moreover, it also plans to actively participate in combined military exercises in which ASEAN states act as hosts or participants. The MND will strengthen its maritime security cooperation with ASEAN states and contribute to heightening maritime security capabilities of Southeast Asian countries in rescue, maritime counter-terrorism, and anti-piracy activities.

#### *Completing a framework for Korea–ASEAN defense cooperation*

The ROK will sign memorandums of understanding (MOUs) on defense cooperation with all ten ASEAN member states and form a regular defense consultative body with each ASEAN state. When the government unveiled the New Southern Policy in November 2017, the MND signed MOUs on defense cooperation with six countries (Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Myanmar), but reaching no agreement with four other states (Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei). In 2018, the MND signed MOUs with Cambodia and Brunei, and in June 2021, it signed an MOU with Laos on the occasion of the 8th ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). Furthermore, to increase communication and build trust with ASEAN

states, the MND is planning to actively host regular defense consultative bodies. In principle, meetings will be held in person, but due to the circumstances of COVID-19, a virtual conference is also being considered.

#### *Fostering cooperation through linkage of defense industry and logistics*

The ROK's cooperation in defense industry will be implemented according to the needs of each nation. While continuously maintaining and updating relations with countries that are involved in existing large-scale defense cooperation, the MND will explore the possibilities of enlisting other countries with potential for defense cooperation. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian countries possess an army size on par with their navies in proportion and are keen on logistics cooperation with Korea. Considering this, holding a logistics cooperation forum at the army level may provide a foothold for pioneering logistics cooperation with these Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, by prioritizing Southeast Asian countries in transferring decommissioned naval ships, Korea can contribute to enhancing maritime security of these countries and thus strengthening defense cooperation. Between 2017 and 2019, Korea delivered three patrol corvettes, twenty patrol killers, and one combat support ship to certain countries. These donated decommissioned ships are expected to be employed in cracking down on illegal drug trafficking and reinforcing coastal patrol operations of Southeast Asian countries. Besides such delivery of decommissioned ships, the Naval International Logistics Information and Support System (NILISS), an Internet-based information system, can be promoted to broaden the scope of logistics cooperation with these states to a post-logistics support level. The NILISS is a service developed by the ROK Navy to provide information on the operation, maintenance, education, and training of Korean military ships and equipment exported or transferred to foreign countries. The service is now in operational testing. Based on these efforts, Korea may discuss hosting a forum on developing a force support system with these Southeast Asian countries.

#### *Promoting multilateral security cooperation*

To promote regional security and peace, it is necessary to prevent the rise of challenges such as escalating tensions in the South China Sea, furthering divisions in regional states, and growing economic uncertainty. To address these concerns, the ROK has striven to promote

international cooperation and solidarity with ASEAN states, just as it launched the ASEAN+3 platform in the wake of the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis. Firstly, the country is actively participating in ASEAN-hosted multilateral meetings. Moreover, it plans on hosting small-scale multilateral meetings and establishing a 1.5-track multilateral security consultative body. To this end, the MND attends ADMM-Plus, at which it expresses the country's views on regional issues, including those regarding the Korean peninsula, and listens to the positions of other member states. In addition, the MND is promoting senior-level strategic cooperation by hosting vice defense ministerial meetings and defense ministerial meetings with ASEAN countries.

Meanwhile, at the ADMM-Plus meeting held in June 2021 by videoconference, Korea, along with Malaysia, presented major activities as the co-chair of the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity. Prior to this meeting, Korea had presented a clear vision for “strengthening policy and technology capabilities” during the plenary meeting of the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity held in March 2021 and led the discussion on securing a drive for sustainable multilateral cooperation. In today's world, cybersecurity is critical to protecting core national infrastructure industry and fortifying national defense. Achieving tangible advancements in cybersecurity cooperation with Southeast Asian countries will serve as another catalyst for strengthening multilateral security cooperation.

Amid the protracted COVID-19 pandemic, the policy environment for the second half of 2021 are equally not favorable. Nevertheless, during the first half of 2021, the MND has steadily pursued the New Southern Policy in national defense, starting with the Defense Minister's visit to India (March); the Indonesian Defense Minister's visit to Korea (April); and Korea's participation in various multilateral security meetings organized by ASEAN (April through June). Building on these efforts, the MND will implement the tasks for the second half of 2021 without any setbacks. First, preparation of an MOU draft on defense cooperation with Malaysia will be promptly concluded for the MOU signing within the year. This completes signing of MOUs for defense cooperation with all ASEAN states, laying a systemic foundation for defense cooperation. Second, through online videoconferences, the MND will host a regular consultative body with ASEAN countries including the Philippines, Cambodia, and Brunei to provide momentum for further defense cooperation.

Third, by participating in the Cobra Gold exercise in Thailand (August) and observing exercise KAMANDAG 3 in the Philippines (October), the ROK will contribute to strengthening regional maritime security capabilities. The country will also prepare for its participation in combined exercises in 2022 without major delay. Lastly, the ROK–ASEAN vice defense ministerial meeting that was not held in 2020 due to COVID-19 will be organized through videoconference, in line with the Seoul Defense Dialogue. Through the meeting, the MND intends to exchange views on and seek ways to further cooperate in matters of mutual concern in defense including cybersecurity, maritime security, and logistics cooperation. Building on discussions at the ROK–ASEAN vice defense ministerial meeting, the ROK–ASEAN defense ministerial meeting will be held in November 2021.