

Norms in the Field: Super Garuda Shield, Discursive Socialization, and the Construction of Indo-Pacific Security Identity (2007–2025)

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Abstract

The annual Super Garuda Shield exercises have developed from a U.S.–Indonesia bilateral engagement into a recurrent multinational event that, by the mid-2020s, convened thousands of personnel and a widening circle of participating and observing states across multiple domains of training. Official communications surrounding the exercises repeatedly frame cooperation in terms of sovereignty, interoperability, partnership, and a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” positioning Super Garuda Shield as a productive site for examining how security cooperation is narrated as a norm-governed community rather than merely an instrument of capability building. It employs a longitudinal qualitative discourse analysis grounded in social constructivism, supplemented by the norm life cycle model and security community theory. The analysis identifies three empirical trajectories: a shift from bilateral to group-referential identity language across exercise iterations; the stabilization of interoperability as an uncontested procedural norm; and the progressive routinization of ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ framing from advocacy toward taken-for-granted vocabulary, consistent with (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)’s cascade and internalization stages. The study’s central finding is a discursive transformation from bilateral, sovereignty-focused framing toward interoperability-based multilateral cooperation, charting three analytically distinct temporal phases; repeated exercise participation functions as a socialization mechanism generating “thin” but politically consequential expectations of cooperative security expectations that account for participation patterns and rhetorical convergence that neorealist and institutionalist frameworks leave underdetermined (USINDOPACOM 2025; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). The article analyzed comprises approximately 47 official public documents including press releases, opening ceremony speeches, defense cooperation statements, and partner-nation defense ministry releases issued across the 2007–2025 exercise series by USINDOPACOM, the U.S. Army, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and partner defense establishments including Singapore, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

Keywords: Social Constructivism, Security Norms, Norm Lifecycle, Discourse Analysis, Security Community, Military Exercises, Indo-Pacific, Indonesia, FOIP

1. INTRODUCTION

In late August 2025, Super Garuda Shield opened in Jakarta (USINDOPACOM 2025) with official remarks that were explicit about both scale and meaning: the exercise brought “over 6,500 participants” and “13 nations,” and was publicly framed as a commitment to partnership and the “sovereignty of each country” expressed through “mutual respect,” “friendships,” and “deep trust.” Samuel Paparo Jr. (Canada DND 2025) delivered these lines not as an aside to technical training, but as the exercise’s core rationale; the rhetoric sat

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alongside descriptions of multi-domain training that now regularly extends beyond conventional field maneuvers. (U.S. Army 2025a) For constructivist IR scholarship, the puzzle is what such rituals do in the social world of security: they are the occasions through which participants produce and reproduce standards of appropriate cooperation, and through which a particular sense of 'who we are as partners' is assembled, confirmed, and contested.

Existing scholarship on joint and multilateral exercises in the Indo-Pacific has typically been organized around materialist and institutionalist expectations. Neorealist and offensive realist traditions, associated with Kenneth Waltz (Waltz 1979) and John J. Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 2001), orient analysis toward threat perception, balancing behavior, and the constraining effects of anarchy on state strategy, making exercises analytically salient primarily as signals or preparations for deterrence. That framing aligns with the broader strategic environment in which the exercise occurs one visibly shaped by major-power competition and South China Sea disputes even as officials carefully avoid naming adversaries in public communications. (Reuters 2024) Liberal institutionalist approaches, commonly associated with G. John Ikenberry (Ikenberry 2011), prioritize repeated interaction, interoperability gains, transparency, and the stabilizing effects of rules and institutions; in that domain, Super Garuda Shield is a mechanism for building habits of cooperation and coordination across services and partners. Official communications repeatedly foreground precisely these institutional payoffs, emphasizing secure information exchange, command-and-control integration, and staff planning processes. (USINDOPACOM 2024a)

Yet the public record around Super Garuda Shield contains a persistent surplus of normative language that cannot be reduced to logistical or tactical description without remainder. The exercise is regularly narrated through principles, not only through capabilities. In 2022, for example, Charles Flynn (Flynn 2022 via U.S. Army Pacific 2022) framed the multinationalization of Garuda Shield as an expression of “unity as a group of nations” seeking a “free and open Indo-Pacific” and a “rules-based order.” (USINDOPACOM 2022) In 2024, statements tied the exercise to a Defense Cooperation Arrangement and highlighted “mutual trust” and long-lived relationships; in 2025, partner-nation releases continued to stress professional ties, mutual understanding, and interoperability as an expression of shared commitments rather than mere efficiency. (USINDOPACOM 2024a) This study identifies a more specific gap: no existing analysis has systematically treated Super Garuda Shield’s official discourse as a site where collective identities and security norms are produced, stabilized, and contested over time, with consequences for how cooperation becomes politically intelligible to participants and audiences. The gap matters for theory because, as Wendt (1999) argues, identities and interests are not pre-given inputs to interaction — they are outcomes of it; to leave SGS discourse unanalyzed is to leave the constitutive mechanism unobserved. The gap also matters empirically because Super Garuda Shield’s expansion is accompanied by a visible intensification of norm talk that tracks the exercise’s growing multinational character. (U.S. Army 2025b)

Existing scholarship on SGS has addressed the exercise through operational and strategic lenses. Montolalu, Perwita, and Sudibyo (2023) map the operational impacts of the U.S.–Indonesia strategic partnership on Garuda Shield, foregrounding U.S.–China rivalry as a structural driver of the bilateral exercise logic. This work is valuable for establishing the

partnership's institutional contours but treats official discourse as an effect of material interests rather than a producer of them. No published study has applied systematic discourse analysis to the SGS corpus, nor has any study traced how shared normative language evolves as the exercise expands from bilateral to multinational format. This paper addresses that absence.

The central puzzle this study addresses is the following: how do repeated exercises, narrated publicly as sovereignty-respecting partnership in a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” produce and reinforce a shared sense of appropriate security cooperation among a diverse set of states? This study therefore asks how collective identities and security norms are constructed and reinforced through the discursive practices of the Super Garuda Shield exercises (2007–2025). (U.S. Army 2025b)

The theoretical framework draws primarily on social constructivism associated with (Wendt 1999), supplemented by the norm lifecycle model of (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), and extended through the security community framework of (Adler and Barnett 1998). Constructivism is suited to this inquiry because Super Garuda Shield’s publicly repeated framing implies that cooperation is justified not only instrumentally, but also through standards of appropriateness, collective purpose, and shared principles. Wendt’s argument that “self-help” is a product of social process rather than an automatic feature of anarchy provides a direct bridge from exercise interaction to changing interpretations of security cooperation. (Wendt 1999) (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)’s theorization of emergence, cascade, and internalization provides a vocabulary for tracing how terms like “free and open Indo-Pacific” and “sovereignty” move from advocacy to routinization across yearly iterations. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) (Adler and Barnett 1998)’s account of trust and collective identity formation supplies a meso-level bridge between repeated cooperation and the formation of expectations that make certain forms of conflict among participants less thinkable, even when formal alliance commitments are absent. (Adler and Barnett 1998)

The contribution is threefold. Theoretically, we extend security community reasoning to a practice-based setting: a recurring multinational exercise that is neither a treaty alliance nor a formal organization. Empirically, we assemble and interpret a longitudinal record of public communications surrounding Garuda Shield and its “Super” iterations, highlighting how the language of sovereignty, partnership, and “free and open Indo-Pacific” is performed and stabilized. For policy, the argument implies that planners should treat official framing as part of the exercise’s strategic effect, because shared norms and collective self-understandings can increase coalition durability and lower coordination costs in crises. (USINDOPACOM 2024a)

The scope of the study is delimited in three ways. Temporally, it spans Garuda Shield’s inception in 2007 through the 2025 iteration, acknowledging that the public record becomes denser in the 2020s (U.S. Army 2025b) as the exercise expands and communication channels professionalize. Spatially, it focuses on exercises conducted on Indonesia’s territory and adjacent operating areas (U.S. Army 2021) referenced in official releases. Conceptually, the analysis is limited to public discourse in official and reputable media texts; classified planning, private diplomatic bargaining, and internal deliberations are excluded because the research question concerns public norm articulation and identity performance (USINDOPACOM 2024a) rather than private belief.

2. METHOD

The research design is a longitudinal qualitative discourse analysis of public texts surrounding Garuda Shield and Super Garuda Shield, chosen because the research question is about intersubjective meaning: how states narrate cooperation, attribute purpose to joint activities, and establish standards of appropriate behavior through repeated public speech acts. (Wendt 1999) The design is explanatory rather than descriptive: the objective is to identify the constitutive and socializing mechanisms through which exercise discourse produces identity and norm outcomes, not merely to document that such outcomes exist. (Wendt 1999) It is also a single-case, within-case temporal comparison (U.S. Army 2025b) : the core logic is that the same exercise platform can be observed evolving across phases, allowing a more controlled assessment of how discursive patterns shift as the exercise becomes multinational.

The theoretical foundations rest on three linked propositions. Wendt's constructivism centers the claim that the meaning of anarchy and the distribution of power for action depend on social interaction and shared ideas, not only on material capabilities; the proposition matters here because exercises are repeated sites of interaction where states actively perform understandings of partnership and security. (Wendt 1999) (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)'s norm theory treats norms as standards of appropriate behavior, with a life cycle of emergence, cascade, and internalization, enabling temporal tracing of how particular principles become taken for granted. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)(Adler and Barnett 1998)'s security community framework emphasizes the development of trust and collective identity formation through transactions, social learning, and institutionalized practices, offering a way to interpret recurring exercises as more than episodic coordination. (Adler and Barnett 1998)

Core concepts are defined. Collective identity is treated as (Wendt 1999) a shared self-conception expressed in in-group language, recurring group labels, and articulated common purpose. Security norms are treated as (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) publicly invoked standards that regulate the meaning of cooperation, recognizable through prescriptive language and repeated principle-claims, such as "sovereignty," "rules-based order," and "free and open Indo-Pacific." Socialization is treated as a process whereby repeated interaction and public framing produce convergence in how actors describe appropriate behavior and the relationship among participants; it is conceptually aligned with mechanisms identified in work on institutional socialization (Checkel 2005), even when the setting is not a formal organization.

Operationalization translates these concepts into observable textual indicators. Collective identity is tracked through shifts in first-person grammatical construction from bilateral 'partnership between' to collective 'we' and 'group of nations' and through the adoption and diffusion of group-membership labels such as 'partners,' 'like-minded,' and 'partner nations' across successive exercise iterations and across different national communicators. Security norms are identified through prescriptive and constitutive language: explicit invocations of principles ('sovereignty,' 'mutual respect,' 'rules-based order,' 'free and open Indo-Pacific'), and modal commitments ('committed to,' 'uphold,' 'ensure') that signal normative expectation rather than mere description. Norm lifecycle stage is operationalized by examining whether a norm requires explicit justification at a given iteration (emergence), appears alongside

increasing adoption by new actors without justification (cascade), or is invoked as routine background vocabulary across multiple institutional voices (internalization). Socialization is tracked through attribution language commanders and officials describing behavioral or relational outcomes as products of exercise participation and through vocabulary convergence across U.S., Indonesian, and third-party national sources in the same exercise cycle.

The causal mechanism theorized is that repeated participation in a recurring joint exercise produces discursive socialization through ritualized public framing, which, over time, supports the internalization of a collective security identity and cooperative dispositions that persist beyond a single iteration. (Wendt 1999) The scope conditions are that participants share minimal normative overlap on sovereignty and non-aggression, and that exercise recurrence is sufficient to maintain interpersonal and institutional continuity. (U.S. Army 2025a)

The primary sources are public statements and releases from defense and military communication channels, including USINDOPACOM news items, U.S. Army and U.S. Army Pacific reporting, and official partner defense ministry releases when available; The full article comprises approximately 47 documents distributed across the three analytical phases: five core documents represent the bilateral period (2007–2021); one the inaugural multinational iteration (2022); and the remainder the institutionalized multinational period (2023–2025), reflecting the progressive densification of official communications as the exercise expanded in scale and diplomatic significance. The analysis relies on existing, publicly accessible documentary and statistical evidence rather than fieldwork, interviews, or focus groups, a choice that matches the study's focus on public norm articulation and enables longitudinal comparison across exercise iterations.

2.1 Inclusion Criteria and Article Boundaries

Documents were included in the analytical article if they satisfied three criteria. First, the text was officially released or authorized by a defense ministry, military command, diplomatic mission, or publicly named senior officer directly involved in Garuda Shield or Super Garuda Shield. Second, the text contained explicit reference to the exercise by name, to the bilateral or multinational partnership it instantiates, or to normative principles publicly framed as the exercise's rationale. Third, the document was publicly accessible and verifiably attributable to an institutional author. Texts failing any of these three criteria were excluded, as were classified or non-public materials, internal planning documents, and commentary attributed to unnamed officials. Press coverage from Reuters and the Associated Press was included solely as a secondary cross-checking source for factual verification and for capturing verbatim quoted speech from exercise ceremonies, not as a primary analytical source.

2.2 Technical Procedure: Analytical Steps

The technical procedure of discourse analysis followed four sequential steps. In the first step, all article documents were read in full and annotated for the presence or absence of four deductive code categories derived from the operationalization framework: identity markers, norm invocations, lifecycle signals, and socialization attributions. In the second step, coded

excerpts were organized into a thematic matrix structured around the three theoretical lenses constructivist identity formation, the norm lifecycle model, and security community theory to enable systematic cross-iteration comparison. In the third step, inductive memoing captured emergent patterns exceeding the deductive framework, notably the divergence between U.S. deterrence-forward language and Indonesian trust-forward language across the same exercise cycles. In the fourth step, documents were compared across the three temporal phases bilateral (2007–2021), inaugural multinational (2022), and institutionalized multinational (2023–2025) to enable longitudinal tracking of discursive change. All coding was performed through manual systematic annotation.

The analysis proceeds through three coding passes. The first applies a deductive codebook drawn from the operationalized indicators identity markers, norm invocations, lifecycle signals, and socialization attributions to the full corpus. The second pass applies inductive memoing to capture emergent patterns not anticipated by the deductive framework, including variations between U.S. and Indonesian rhetorical priorities and shifts in the relative salience of sovereignty versus deterrence language. The third pass organizes coded material across three temporal phases the bilateral period (2007–2021), the inaugural multinational iteration (2022), and the institutionalized multinational period (2023–2025) to enable longitudinal comparison (U.S. Army 2021; USINDOPACOM 2022; USINDOPACOM 2024a; U.S. Army 2025a). Source triangulation across U.S., Indonesian, Japanese, Singaporean, Canadian, and Australian official communications, supplemented by Reuters and AP journalism, controls for single-actor bias and enables cross-national pattern detection.

3. RESULTS

The empirical record shows a clear expansion in the exercise’s scale and the breadth of its diplomatic audience, with corresponding shifts in how participants publicly narrate cooperation. U.S. Army public affairs dating places the exercise's inception at 2007 and officially marks 2022 as the year of multinational expansion a periodization (U.S. Army 2025b) that names the transformation rather than treating it as gradual drift, and that anchors the three-phase analytical structure employed in this study.

3.1 Narrative Evolution Across Exercise Phases (2007–2025)

The longitudinal record of Super Garuda Shield discourse reveals a coherent directional shift across three analytically distinct temporal phases, summarized in Table 1 below. Each phase is characterized by a dominant rhetorical frame, a particular mode of identity construction, and a specific status for 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) vocabulary in the exercise's official communications.

Table 1. Evolution of Dominant Narratives in Super Garuda Shield Official Discourse (2007–2025)

Phase	Period	Key Source Documents	Dominant Narrative Frame	Identity Construction	FOIP Language Status
Bilateral Phase	2007–2021	Garuda Shield 2007–2021	Bilateral partnership;	Dyadic: cooperation	Regional aspiration;

		series (U.S. Army 2021)	tactical competence; peacekeeping readiness	framed 'between' U.S. and Indonesian forces	appended to bilateral rationale; not a group-identity marker
Inaugural Multinational Iteration	2022	USINDOPACOM 2022; U.S. Army Pacific 2022	'Unity as a group of nations'; multinational force identity; rules-based order	Collective: 'together as a multinational force'; grammatical shift from dyad to group	Core group-identity marker; explicitly paired with rules-based order language
Institutionalized Multinational Period	2023–2025	USINDOPACOM 2023, 2024a, 2024b; U.S. Army 2025a; Singapore MINDEF 2025; Canada DND 2025a, 2025b; Australia DOD 2025	Interoperability, deep trust, deterrence (U.S. only); mutual respect; bridge of friendship (Indonesia)	Diffuse multi-actor: partner nations adopt normative vocabulary independently without justification	Routinized background vocabulary; invoked across multiple institutional voices without explicit advocacy

As Table 1 illustrates, the bilateral phase (2007–2021) is characterized by dyadic framing language centered on the partnership 'between' U.S. and Indonesian forces and by FOIP language functioning as a regional aspiration appended to bilateral rationale rather than as a constitutive group-identity marker. The inaugural multinational iteration (2022) represents a discursive tipping point: the rhetorical subject shifts from a dyad to a collective ('together as a multinational force'), and FOIP language becomes embedded in explicit group-identity claims for the first time. The institutionalized multinational period (2023–2025) shows the consolidation of these gains multiple partner nations independently adopt the same normative vocabulary without explicit justification consistent with Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) internalization stage.

A 2021 Garuda Shield report (U.S. Army 2021) still describes a two-week bilateral exercise designed to strengthen interoperability and enrichment of specific tactical capabilities, even as it already frames the activity “in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific region,” suggesting that FOIP language entered the exercise’s public narration before the “Super” rebranding. By 2022, USINDOPACOM communications explicitly describe a “joint, multinational” exercise of roughly 4,000 combined personnel and list multiple participating and observing countries; the opening remarks foreground “teamwork,” “interoperability,” and “unity as a group of nations” committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific and a rules-based order. By 2024, official U.S. communications describe approximately 5,500 combined forces

and emphasize that the exercise is conducted “according to the Defense Cooperation Arrangement” (USINDOPACOM 2024a) in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific, signaling a formalization of the partnership narrative through an explicit bilateral framework. By 2025, U.S. Army reporting presents 6,500 participants and 13 nations, explicitly naming sovereignty (U.S. Army 2025a) as a principle upheld “through the prism of mutual respect,” while a Singapore defense release describes the exercise as co-hosted by the Indonesian armed forces and USINDOPACOM and notes that Singapore has participated since 2022.

Identity markers in the discourse shift in ways consistent with the construction of a more collective self-understanding. In bilateral-era reporting and retrospective references, Garuda Shield is repeatedly described as an annual exercise “between” the Indonesian National Armed Forces and U.S. forces, with emphasis on partnership and tactical learning; even where broader regional frames appear, the grammatical subject remains dyadic. (U.S. Army 2021) In 2022 opening remarks, the formulations 'Together as a multinational force' and 'unity as a group of nations' (USINDOPACOM 2022) are prominent signaling a shift in the grammatical subject of cooperation from a dyadic pair to a collective entity. By 2024 and 2025, official texts and partner releases regularly use terms such as “partners,” “multinational,” and “like-minded,” while also describing the exercise as a platform for relationships that “last a lifetime,” (USINDOPACOM 2024a) language that performs interpersonal continuity as part of collective identity. The presence of partner-nation statements (Singapore MINDEF 2025) that narrate participation as deepening professional ties, rather than as a one-off visit, provides additional evidence that collective identity claims are not limited to U.S. communications alone.

Norm invocation patterns show a relatively stable hierarchy across the 2021–2025 public record, with sovereignty and interoperability functioning as anchoring principles while FOIP language becomes increasingly routinized. The 2024 USINDOPACOM kickoff story frames the exercise as strengthening the defense partnership “according to the Defense Cooperation Arrangement” and repeatedly emphasizes interoperability, including the technical ability to exchange data across boundaries, deploying institutional language (USINDOPACOM 2024a) to stabilize cooperation as appropriate practice. An Indonesian senior officer's 2024 statement frames the exercise explicitly as a mechanism for “create and build mutual trust” (USINDOPACOM 2024a) and to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, making trust a publicly articulated expectation of the partnership, expressed in official discourse rather than confined to private diplomatic register. The 2025 opening ceremony places sovereignty at the center: the exercise is explicitly framed as a commitment to the sovereignty (U.S. Army 2025a) “of each country” and a collective determination to uphold that principle. Partner-nation releases reinforce this normative set: Singapore's defense ministry stresses professional ties, interoperability, and “mutual understanding,” while Canada's defense communications (Canada DND 2025a; Canada DND 2025b) link a newly signed memorandum of understanding to participation in Super Garuda Shield and state commitments to international law and sovereignty.

Variations in norm salience across national sources warrant documentation. U.S. communications in 2025 foreground deterrence alongside partnership Admiral Paparo's opening remarks include explicit deterrence framing ('detering anyone that would hope to change the facts on the ground using violence') alongside sovereignty and trust language.

Indonesian official statements, by contrast, systematically foreground trust, mutual benefit, and 'bridge of friendship' metaphors while omitting deterrence vocabulary. Japanese communications emphasize 'like-minded countries' and 'free and open Indo-Pacific' but also introduce island-defense specificity absent from Indonesian statements ('recapturing islands'). Canadian releases foreground legality and international law as the normative anchor for participation. These variations reveal that while the core vocabulary of sovereignty, interoperability, and FOIP is shared, the relative weighting and associated frames differ systematically by actor a pattern with implications for assessing the depth of normative convergence.

Evidence consistent with norm life cycle dynamics is visible in the timing and treatment of "free and open Indo-Pacific" language. In 2021, the phrase appears as part of a broader regional framing of a still-bilateral exercise, functioning less as a shared group identity marker and more as a regional aspiration attached to partnership. In 2022, the phrase becomes embedded in explicit multinational identity claims, with the exercise described as a demonstration of unity among a "group of nations," paired with "rules-based order" language. (USINDOPACOM 2022) In 2024 and 2025, FOIP wording and its associated vocabulary appear as routine descriptors across multiple channels (USINDOPACOM 2024a), including USINDOPACOM communications and partner defense ministries, suggesting that the phrase functions as a shared script rather than a contested policy slogan within Super Garuda Shield discourse. The diffusion is also visible at the ministerial level in allied bilateral diplomacy: an Australia–Indonesia joint statement (Australia DOD 2025) welcomes Australian participation and links it to enhanced contributions and maritime cooperation, embedding Super Garuda Shield within a broader repertoire of regional security practice framed in terms of stability and cooperation.

Socialization indicators are particularly explicit in the 2024–2025 record. U.S. and Indonesian statements repeatedly attribute outcomes to repeated interaction: relationships are described as producing a basis of "deep trust" (U.S. Army 2025a) that would matter in an "unforgiving hour," while Indonesian statements characterize the exercise as standing together to respond quickly and precisely to challenges. Organizational practices mirror this socialization language. The 2023 operational staff exercise description emphasizes joint planning processes (USINDOPACOM 2023), command-and-control integration, and exploration of command relationships; these are precisely the kinds of interactions that security community theory treats as process variables mediating identity and trust formation. In 2024, USINDOPACOM reporting describes a Joint Operations Center as a hub for multinational coordination and rapid information sharing, while also quoting a Japanese officer emphasizing (USINDOPACOM 2024b) cooperation with "partners and like-minded countries" and the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific; the point here is descriptive: a participant beyond the U.S.–Indonesia dyad publicly adopts the same normative vocabulary. By 2025, logistics and tactical reporting (U.S. Army Pacific 2025) similarly embeds identity claims, linking port operations, airborne jumps, and first-ever live fires to a narrative of interoperability and collective commitment.

Anomalies and variations nonetheless appear in the public narrative, especially around Indonesia's sensitivity to alignment politics. Reuters coverage of the 2024 iteration (Reuters 2024) reports Indonesian officials emphasizing that the exercise is not targeted at any

country, even as the program includes cyber defense and complex joint scenarios; the emphasis on “trust” and cooperation is paired with careful avoidance of explicit bloc signaling. A similar tension is visible in broader Indonesian foreign policy discourse that distinguishes “free and active” policy (Wicaksana and Yakti 2025) from formal neutrality, highlighting independence in policy choice rather than legal neutrality during war, a framing that can coexist with regular exercise participation while resisting alliance identity. These variations supply the empirical material for evaluating whether constructivist claims about identity multiplicity and norm compatibility better account for Super Garuda Shield discourse than accounts that treat norms as mere cover.

4. DISCUSSION

The preceding evidence warrants interpretation through the three theoretical lenses that structure this study. Wendt's (1999) constitutive logic asks how repeated interaction changes what cooperation means to participants; (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)'s lifecycle model asks how a norm moves from advocacy to routine; (Adler and Barnett 1998) security community framework asks what conditions generate dependable expectations of cooperative restraint. Each lens illuminates a different dimension of the SGS record, and the argument that follows integrates them into a coherent account of how exercise discourse functions as a socialization mechanism.

Our central argument (U.S. Army 2025a) is that Super Garuda Shield's public discourse constitutes a socialization mechanism through which participating states construct a collective security identity grounded in sovereignty, interoperability, and the FOIP/rules-based order frame, thereby generating cooperative dispositions that exceed what material threat balancing alone would predict. The argument is contestable precisely because security is the domain where material interests appear most determinative; the constructivist claim requires showing not that material factors are irrelevant, but that they underdetermine the specific cooperative form that emerges which the evidence supports.

The first supporting claim concerns identity constitution through repeated discursive practice. The 2021 Garuda Shield narrative still centers the bilateral dyad, even while borrowing regional FOIP language; by 2022, official remarks explicitly reorganize the grammar of cooperation around a “multinational force” and a “group of nations.” (U.S. Army 2021; USINDOPACOM 2022) By 2024 and 2025, third parties (USINDOPACOM 2024a) publicly speak the same language of partnership and like-mindedness, while ceremonies are narrated as occasions to build relationships meant to persist. In Wendtian terms (Wendt 1999), the point is not that identities become harmonious or uniform, but that the exercise platform becomes a structured site where participants repeatedly enact an in-group category that did not exist in the same form when the exercise remained bilateral. That enactment matters because it creates a publicly available script of “who we are” that can be used to justify future cooperation and to lower the rhetorical costs of coordinating across partners.

The second supporting claim concerns norm cascade dynamics, especially around FOIP framing. The evidence suggests that FOIP language moved from a regional aspiration appended to bilateral partnership (visible in 2021) toward a core group-identity marker in 2022, and then toward routinized vocabulary across multiple institutional voices by 2024–2025. (U.S. Army 2021; USINDOPACOM 2022; USINDOPACOM 2024a; U.S. Army

2025a) (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) model predicts that, once a critical mass of adoption is reached, the need for extensive justification decreases and conformity becomes a standard. Super Garuda Shield functions as the institutional stage on which cascade dynamics unfold: each annual iteration reproduces the vocabulary across high-visibility official channels, and observer states' adoption of FOIP language in their own releases without explicit justification suggests the threshold of taken-for-grantedness is being approached among the exercise's widening audience. The 2023 joint press statement by the U.S. and Indonesian defense ministries in 2023: (U.S. DOD 2023) is revealing in this respect, because it explicitly links ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy through shared principles of an open and rules-based order guided by ASEAN centrality, institutionalizing compatibility between FOIP language and Indonesia's preferred regionalism. This compatibility explains why FOIP language can become routinized in Super Garuda Shield discourse without requiring Indonesia to abandon its self-presentation as independent and active.

The third supporting claim is that socialization through practice helps explain participation and rhetorical convergence in ways that purely material accounts leave underdetermined. The exercise has measurable material content, and some official language explicitly gestures toward deterrence; the 2025 opening remarks include deterrence-oriented phrasing (Jakarta Post 2025) about preventing violent changes to facts on the ground. Yet Super Garuda Shield's public narrative simultaneously invests heavily in relational terms, emphasizing trust, mutual respect, and friendships that enable rapid coordination in crises, and those claims recur across U.S., Indonesian, and partner sources. (U.S. Army 2025a) The importance of organizational routines is visible in staff exercise descriptions (USINDOPACOM 2023) that emphasize joint planning processes, command relationships, and the integration of service capabilities, which are precisely the kinds of interactions that institutional socialization research treats as mechanisms through which roles and interests can shift. Even where preference change is difficult to infer from public language alone, the convergence of vocabulary across multiple actors provides evidence of shared standards of appropriateness that stabilize cooperative expectations.

Realist counter-arguments deserve serious engagement. A realist could argue that the exercises' normative language is simply rhetorical cover for balancing behavior in response to China's growing power and regional assertiveness; on this reading, FOIP and sovereignty talk are instrumental to coalition-building and domestic audience costs, not constitutive. Reuters and AP reporting (Reuters 2024) provides partial support for the idea that broader U.S.–China rivalry is a background condition that shapes how the exercise is interpreted by observers and critics, including Chinese accusations of bloc formation. The realist account, however, the realist account leaves open why the exercise is repeatedly framed around sovereignty and mutual respect rather than around explicit alliance deterrence, especially given Indonesia's public insistence on avoiding alignment signaling. (Reuters 2024) Constructivism does not deny material incentives; it argues that material structures do not uniquely determine which cooperative form will be chosen. In a context where multiple forms of coordination are possible, the repeated performance of sovereignty-respecting partnership offers a politically viable template for cooperation that accommodates Indonesia's identity claims while still enabling coalition readiness.

A liberal institutionalist alternative would emphasize interoperability, information sharing, and repeated interaction as rational incentives for cooperation. The empirical record strongly supports the importance of these institutionalized payoffs, including explicit language about secure and automatic data exchange (USINDOPACOM 2024a) and operational coordination through joint operations centers. The institutionalist account, however, does not fully explain why these payoffs are consistently narrated through normative vocabularies that invoke sovereignty, trust, and shared regional principles as standards of legitimacy. Put differently, interoperability could be described as efficiency; in Super Garuda Shield discourse it is repeatedly described as partnership and mutual respect, which pushes explanation toward constitutive meaning (U.S. Army 2025a) rather than utility maximization alone.

The variations in norm emphasis documented in Results deterrence-first language in U.S. statements, trust-first language in Indonesian ones, island-defense specificity in Japanese ones do not undermine the socialization argument; they refine it. What socialization produces in this setting is not uniform preference convergence but a shared surface grammar of appropriate cooperation: all actors invoke sovereignty, interoperability, and FOIP, even as the underlying strategic objectives that motivate participation differ. Checkel's (2005) account of socialization anticipates precisely this outcome. Norm internalization at the elite level need not produce identical preferences; it produces common standards of appropriate public justification a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 1998) that constrains how states must frame cooperation to maintain participation in the community. SGS discourse exhibits that constraint: deterrence-oriented states cannot frame the exercise purely as a balancing coalition without undermining Indonesian participation; Indonesia cannot frame it purely as a capability-building exercise without losing the normative legitimacy that makes the multinational format valuable.

The main anomaly in the evidence, and the one that makes the case theoretically productive, is Indonesia's simultaneous participation in a visibly U.S.-connected multinational exercise and its persistent articulation of independent foreign policy. The "free and active" doctrine (Wicaksana and Yakti 2025) is not a claim of legal neutrality, according to Indonesian foreign ministry statements, but it is a claim of independent policy choice and active engagement. The 'free and active' doctrine can coexist with SGS participation precisely because the exercise is framed as sovereignty-respecting and inclusive, and because Indonesia has invested diplomatically in ASEAN-centered Indo-Pacific concepts that seek dialogue and cooperation rather than bloc rivalry, as scholarship on the ASEAN Outlook (ASEAN 2019) on the Indo-Pacific emphasizes. The tension therefore does not refute constructivism; it illustrates an identity structure where multiple roles are maintained: Indonesia as a convening and sovereign actor within ASEAN-centered regionalism, and Indonesia as a partner in a recurring multinational security practice.

The theoretical implications point toward a refinement rather than a rejection of the security community concept for the Indo-Pacific. (Adler and Barnett 1998)'s framework (Adler and Barnett 1998) treats trust and collective identity as emergent outcomes of repeated interaction and social learning; Super Garuda Shield provides evidence of those processes even in the absence of formal alliance commitments. The community that emerges is thin and practice-anchored rather than deeply value-convergent: its foundation is shared procedural norms sovereignty, mutual respect, interoperability, rules-based order

instantiated through institutionalized routines (USINDOPACOM 2024a) of joint staff planning, combined operations centers, and annual ceremonial affirmation. This is (Adler and Barnett 1998)'s (1998) 'nascent' community stage: reliable expectations of consultation and mutual accommodation without the deep trust that would enable automatic collective defense commitments. This suggests a scope condition for security community thinking in the Indo-Pacific's plural strategic environment: exercise-based communities may produce dependable expectations of cooperation and restraint among participants without requiring full alignment or a formal collective defense identity.

4.1 Indonesian Agency: Navigating *Bebas Aktif* within the FOIP Frame

Indonesia's simultaneous participation in a FOIP-framed multinational exercise and its persistent articulation of an independent foreign policy identity constitutes the analytically most productive tension in the Super Garuda Shield record. Engaging this tension requires treating *bebas aktif* not as a static principle of legal neutrality but as a dynamic strategic posture operationalized, across successive Indonesian presidencies, as what Wicaksana and Yakti (2025) term 'partial multialignment': the deliberate cultivation of security relationships with multiple major powers without formal alliance commitments to any. In this framework, participation in Super Garuda Shield is not an anomaly straining *bebas aktif* but an expression of its contemporary operational logic the exercise is constructed through careful framing as a venue where sovereign states deepen interoperability while retaining the right to choose partners independently and to decline bloc identity.

The compatibility of *bebas aktif* with FOIP vocabulary is not accidental; it has been institutionally negotiated. The 2023 U.S. Indonesia joint press statement (U.S. DOD 2023) explicitly aligned the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific through shared principles of an open, rules-based order guided by ASEAN centrality, providing a diplomatic bridge through which Indonesia can affirm FOIP language without endorsing the geopolitical architecture that originally produced it. Indonesian official statements in the exercise context consistently foreground trust, mutual benefit, and the bridge-of-friendship metaphor while omitting deterrence vocabulary a rhetorical selection that allows Indonesia to participate in Super Garuda Shield's normative community while simultaneously projecting a distinct strategic identity to domestic and regional audiences. As CSIS (2026) observes in its analysis of Indonesia's strategic culture, Indonesia has 'firmly refused to take sides in great power competition' even while deepening bilateral security ties with the United States a disposition that exercise framing centered on sovereignty and inclusivity accommodates rather than contradicts.

What Super Garuda Shield discourse reveals, through the lens of *bebas aktif*, is that thin community membership as theorized by Adler and Barnett (1998) does not require the resolution of identity multiplicity; it tolerates and institutionalizes it. Indonesia can simultaneously occupy the role of a sovereign non-aligning actor within ASEAN-centered Indo-Pacific regionalism and the role of an engaged partner in a multinational exercise that progressively routinizes FOIP vocabulary, because the exercise's framing foregrounds sovereignty-respecting partnership rather than collective defense commitments. The 'free and active' doctrine and the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' frame share sufficient normative overlap on sovereignty, non-aggression, and rules-based order that Indonesian policymakers can

draw on both registers without experiencing them as contradictory, provided the exercise context remains inclusive and avoids explicit adversary designation.

4.2 Regional Perspectives: Australia, Japan, and Singapore

The preceding reading gains analytical depth when situated alongside scholarly perspectives from participating states beyond the U.S.–Indonesia dyad. Japanese engagement with Super Garuda Shield is inseparable from Tokyo's broader normative entrepreneurship on the FOIP concept, which Japan officially formalized in 2016 and has continuously sought to embed across Indo-Pacific diplomatic platforms (Kishida 2023). Japanese government communications emphasize what Tokyo terms 'minimum basic principles' of international law — a deliberately inclusive formulation designed to attract states that might resist a more explicitly U.S.-aligned framing of Indo-Pacific security (Japan MOFA 2023). Japan's communications at Super Garuda Shield particularly the island-defense specificity and 'recapturing islands' language noted in Results reflect the domestic political context of Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy revision, which elevated island recapture capabilities to a central defense priority. That Japan simultaneously adopts FOIP vocabulary and introduces operationally specific framing absent from Indonesian communications illustrates Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) prediction: norm cascade dynamics generate shared vocabulary while leaving the strategic motivations underlying adoption nationally differentiated.

Australia's perspective on Super Garuda Shield is situated within a broader regional security architecture that includes the AUKUS arrangement and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The 2025 Australia–Indonesia joint 2+2 statement (Australia DOD 2025) welcomed Australia's enhanced contribution to the exercise and linked it explicitly to maritime cooperation and stability positioning exercise participation as an extension of rules-based-order commitments rather than as a bilateral service to Indonesia. This framing is consistent with Tan See Seng's (2019) observation, drawn from analysis of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus dynamics, that inclusive security platforms acquire institutional value precisely because they lower the threshold of entry for states with hedging postures, producing broader normative convergence than exclusive unilateral arrangements can achieve. For Australia, exercise-based engagement in ASEAN-hosted venues like Super Garuda Shield provides a mechanism for embedding like-minded security principles into forums that non-aligned states will join broadening the normative infrastructure of the regional order without triggering the alignment-signaling costs of formal alliance structures.

Singapore's continuous participation since 2022, documented in Singapore Ministry of Defence communications (Singapore MINDEF 2025), adds a third perspective. As a city-state with acute sensitivity to great-power signaling and a long-established tradition of hedging across major-power relationships, Singapore's consistent affirmative engagement with Super Garuda Shield emphasizing professional ties, interoperability, and 'mutual understanding' while omitting deterrence or alliance language demonstrates that the sovereignty-respecting, interoperability-centered framing is sufficiently capacious to accommodate the most strategically cautious of the exercise's regular participants. As Carlyle Thayer of the University of New South Wales has noted, China is 'conspicuous by its absence' from Super Garuda Shield (Stars and Stripes 2024) a structural feature that Singapore navigates by foregrounding professional development and technical cooperation rather than

bloc solidarity, consistent with Singapore's longstanding preference for ASEAN-centric frameworks that formally include Beijing. That Singapore produces affirming communications about the exercise without triggering domestic or regional political costs suggests that the 'thin' community membership Adler and Barnett (1998) theorize is precisely what inclusively framed exercises like Super Garuda Shield produce and sustain.

Policy implications follow directly from the mechanism. If discourse is constitutive, then the framing of exercises is part of their strategic effect. Official language that foregrounds sovereignty (U.S. DOD 2023), mutual respect, and inclusivity provides a legitimating bridge for partners who wish to deepen cooperation without embracing binding alliances. That logic helps explain why partner governments embed Super Garuda Shield into wider diplomatic initiatives: Australia publicly welcomed an expanded contribution to Super Garuda Shield 2025, and Canada explicitly linked a new memorandum of understanding (Canada DND 2025a; Australia DOD 2025) to its participation, framing interoperability as readiness to uphold international law and sovereignty. For planners, the implication is modest but concrete: investments in interoperability and high-end training can be complemented by careful attention to inclusive, sovereignty-centered framing, which can broaden participation while reducing the costs of being seen as enforcing bloc politics.

5. CONCLUSION

The study finds that Super Garuda Shield functions as more than a venue for tactical interoperability. The longitudinal record from 2007 through 2025 (U.S. Army 2021) traces a discernible trajectory: a bilateral partnership framed around tactical competence and regional framing in the exercise's early iterations gives way, after 2022, to a multinational platform in which participants from multiple national contexts articulate group-membership claims, invoke shared normative standards, and attribute relational outcomes to repeated interaction the observable signature of socialization through practice.

The research question asked how collective identities and security norms are constructed and reinforced through the discursive practices of Super Garuda Shield. Our answer is that repeated exercise participation, combined with ritualized public framing in ceremonies, press releases, and partner statements, operates as a socialization mechanism: it stabilizes standards of appropriate cooperation and produces a thin but politically meaningful collective security identity (Wendt 1999) among participants.

The theoretical contribution is to extend constructivist and security community insights to a practice-centered site that sits between alliance and institution. The case demonstrates that security community formation need not proceed through formal institutional architecture recurring joint exercises that routinize shared vocabulary and procedure can generate community-building effects even where participants maintain competing identity commitments. Indonesia's simultaneous articulation of sovereign non-alignment and active participation in a FOIP-framed multilateral exercise illustrates how thin community membership accommodates identity multiplicity rather than requiring its resolution. Empirically, the analysis demonstrates how FOIP language becomes increasingly routinized within Super Garuda Shield discourse and how sovereignty and trust operate as anchoring

norms (U.S. Army 2021; U.S. Army 2025a) that allow multinational participation without explicit bloc formation.

The study's limitations are bounded by the public nature of the evidence: official speech acts are strategic performances and cannot be read as transparent windows into private belief, even though performative speech remains analytically consequential in constructivist theory. (Wendt 1999) Future research can deepen and test the mechanism in three ways. Comparative work across other Indo-Pacific exercises could evaluate whether similar discursive socialization patterns yield similar forms of thin security community. Additionally, future research comparing the Super Garuda Shield discourse article against closed-membership arrangements such as AUKUS or Quad-specific exercises would clarify whether the inclusive, sovereignty-centered framing documented here produces distinctive socialization dynamics precisely because it accommodates non-aligned participants like Indonesia, or whether broad norm convergence also occurs in more exclusive settings. Domestic-level analysis could assess whether elite-level norm talk diffuses into public opinion and media narratives in participating states. Finally, mixed-method approaches that combine discourse analysis with participation data and organizational network tracing (USINDOPACOM 2024a) could more precisely specify when discursive convergence predicts operational cooperation beyond the exercise itself.

The broader implication is that the cooperative infrastructure of the Indo-Pacific is partly semantic. The exercise as a military event is visible and measurable; the exercise as a norm-producing ritual is analytically invisible unless its discourse is treated as part of the phenomenon. Super Garuda Shield will continue to expand in force, domain, and geography but its strategic durability rests as much on the yearly reproduction of 'who we are as partners' as on the technical interoperability it generates. Understanding that durability requires attending to the language through which sovereignty-respecting partnership is assembled, confirmed, and kept politically viable across a diverse coalition whose members cannot formally commit to one another's defense.

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