

## South Korea's Defense Diplomacy for Long Term Capacity Building through International Military Education in the United States

Deja Akmal Nugraha<sup>1\*</sup>, Anak Agung Banyu Perwita<sup>2</sup>, Frega Wenas Inkiriwang<sup>3</sup>, Kim Joodael<sup>4</sup>

Defense Diplomacy Study Program, Faculty of Defense Strategy, Republic of Indonesia Defense University

**Corresponding Author\***: Deja Akmal Nugraha [deja.akmal.nugr@gmail.com](mailto:deja.akmal.nugr@gmail.com)

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords*: Defense Diplomacy, Capacity Building, Educational Exchange, Military Education.

*Received* : 14, July

*Revised* : 28, July

*Accepted*: 29, August

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the long-term impact of South Korean military education in the United States on South Korea's defense capacity building. Through qualitative case studies, the research examines the evolution of South Korea's participation in US military education programs and the subsequent utilization of US-trained officers within the South Korean military. The findings reveal significant benefits such as enhanced interoperability, modernization of military tactics, and the development of a highly skilled officer corps. However, the study also addresses challenges including cultural barriers, costs, and political polarization. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this research underscores the critical role of international military education in strengthening South Korea's defense capabilities and fostering enduring defense partnerships between South Korea and the United States.

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**INTRODUCTION**

International Military Training and Education serves as a vital aspect of Defense Diplomacy, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, tactics, and technologies between partner nations, and strengthening interoperability and mutual understanding (Savero et al., 2024). These training programs create a shared language of military expertise, ensuring smoother and more effective future joint operations. Educational exchanges in particular take this concept further by sending military personnel to train or study in partner countries, promoting cultural exchange and building lasting professional networks (Cope, 1995). By enrolling officers in war colleges or military academies in allied nations, countries invest in the long-term development of their military leadership.

Table 1: Military Training Classification

Aspect	Training	Education	Exercise
Definition	Practical activities to develop specific skills and abilities	Academic instruction focused on theoretical knowledge and strategic thinking	Large-scale simulations or maneuvers to test readiness and operational capability
Purpose	To enhance specific technical, tactical, and physical skills	To develop strategic thinking, leadership, and theoretical knowledge	To evaluate and improve unit readiness, coordination, and execution of plans
Content	Hands-on practice, drills, simulations	Lectures, discussions, research, theoretical studies	Simulated combat scenarios, joint operations, field exercises
Format	Repetitive, skill-focused sessions often in training grounds or simulators	Classroom-based, involving reading, writing, and critical analysis	Comprehensive, scenario-based drills often involving multiple units or countries
Examples	Rifle marksmanship, physical conditioning, tactical maneuvers	Military history courses, strategic studies, leadership programs	Combined military exercises like RIMPAC, Freedom Shield, large-scale field maneuvers
Effect	Short-term	Long-term	Short to Long-term

U.S Field Manual (FM) 7-0, Training

Source: (U.S. Field Manual No. 7-0 (FM 25-100))

Long-term capacity building through international military education offers significant benefits, including institutional development, capability enhancement, and human capital investment (Cope, 1995). Advising on defense institution building, doctrine, and organizational structures helps create capable and accountable armed forces. Unlike reactive short-term assistance provided in times of crisis, these programs often span decades, creating generations of military professionals with a deep understanding of modern military practices, a commitment to ethical conduct, and a global perspective.

In the context of South Korea, the significance of International Military Training and Education is particularly evident (Ko, 1983). Following the Korean War, South Korea’s dependency on the United States for its defense became apparent, necessitating extensive collaboration to build a capable and modern military force. The relationship itself began in the aftermath of World War II and the onset of the Cold War, formalized with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, where the U.S. led a coalition to defend South Korea, marking the beginning of a long-standing military alliance (Cha, 2017).

In the 21st century, the U.S.-South Korea defense relationship continues to evolve, adapting to new security challenges and regional dynamics. Enhanced cooperation on missile defense, continued focus on deterring North Korean aggression, and efforts to update and strengthen the alliance are key aspects of this modern relationship (Bae & Denmark, 2009). South Korea's approach to long-term capacity building through international military education in the United States has been an integral part of this relationship. By sending officers to U.S. military academies and war colleges, South Korea not only benefits from advanced military training and education but also from strengthening the interpersonal relationships between U.S. and South Korean military personnel, which are crucial for operational coordination and mutual trust (M. Kim, 2016).

This research aims to examine the impact and importance of South Korean military education in the United States on South Korea's long-term defense capacity building, highlighting the strategic benefits and challenges of these educational exchanges. By analyzing historical and contemporary contexts, this research will highlight how these educational exchanges have contributed to the modernization and professionalization of the South Korean military. Understanding the strategic benefits and challenges of this collaboration provides valuable insights into the role of international military education in defense diplomacy for long-term capacity building.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### ***Defense Diplomacy for Capacity Building***

Defense diplomacy refers to the use of military and defense-related activities as tools for achieving foreign policy objectives, enhancing bilateral and multilateral relations, and promoting international stability and security (United Kingdom, 1998). It encompasses a range of activities including military-to-military contacts, training and education exchanges, joint exercises, and defense cooperation agreements (Drab, 2018). For capacity building, defense diplomacy is instrumental as it allows countries to develop their defense capabilities through knowledge transfer, technical assistance, and collaboration (Savero et al., 2024).

### ***International Military Education***

International military education involves the training and education of military personnel in institutions outside their home country. This form of education is pivotal for several reasons: it facilitates the exchange of military knowledge and practices, promotes interoperability among allied forces, and strengthens bilateral and multilateral defense relations (Savero et al., 2024). Military education programs typically include attendance at military academies, staff colleges, and specialized training institutions where officers learn advanced military tactics, leadership skills, and strategic planning (Cope, 1995).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research method employed in this study is qualitative case study. The approach used in this study is a historical and comparative analysis, involving an examination of the historical context of the U.S.-South Korea defense relationship, particularly focusing on the period after the Korean War, and comparing it with the contemporary context to understand the evolution and impact of military education programs. The focus of this study is on the strategic and operational impact of South Korea's international military education in the U.S.

The data collection methods used in this study include archival research, and consultation of secondary sources. Historical documents, official reports, and military records were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the U.S.-South Korea defense relationship and the role of military education programs in this context. Relevant secondary sources, such as academic articles and books, were consulted to provide a broader understanding of the historical and contemporary context of the U.S.-South Korea defense relationship.

The data analysis involved a thematic analysis of the collected data, identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, themes, and relationships within the data (Jnanathapaswi, 2021). The analysis focused on the strategic and operational impact of military education programs in the U.S. on the development of South Korean military capabilities. The aim of this study is to examine the role of international military education in South Korea's defense diplomacy and to understand how these programs have contributed to the modernization and capacity building of the South Korean military

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Reasons for South Korea International Military Education in The U.S.***

After the Korean War (1950-1953), the South Korean military faced significant challenges. The war had left the country's military infrastructure in ruins, with inadequate training, outdated equipment, and a lack of experienced leadership. The South Korean military's ability to defend the nation was severely compromised, necessitating urgent modernization and capacity building efforts. This period was marked by political instability and economic hardship, further complicating the military's recovery efforts. The immediate need was to rebuild a robust, well-trained military capable of defending the nation independently while aligning with international standards (Seth, 2013).

Given the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War, South Korea's strategic importance as a frontline state against communist expansion heightened the urgency for military reform and development. Thus, seeking external assistance, particularly from the United States, became a pivotal strategy (Seth, 2013). The U.S., recognizing the importance of a stable and capable South Korean military in containing communism in Asia, offered substantial support through military education and training programs. These programs were aimed at transferring advanced military tactics, technologies, and leadership skills to South Korean officers, laying the foundation for a modern and effective military force (M. Kim, 2016).

From South Korea's perspective, participation in US military education programs was essential for several reasons. One of the primary motivations was the need for modernization and standardization. By adopting advanced military tactics, technologies, and standards from a leading global military power, South Korea could significantly enhance its military capabilities. The US, known for its pioneering military innovations, provided South Korean officers with exposure to cutting-edge strategies and technologies, crucial for transforming their armed forces post-Korean War (Seth, 2013).

Another critical aspect was the transfer of skills and knowledge. South Korean officers gained access to superior training programs and leadership development courses in the US, equipping them with invaluable skills and knowledge. This transfer was essential in building a competent officer corps capable of effective command and strategic decision-making. The development of such a corps was vital for defending against potential threats from North Korea and ensuring national security.

Additionally, these military education exchanges played a significant role in strengthening alliances. The close military ties forged through educational exchanges ensured strategic and defense support against North Korean aggression. This alliance was mutually beneficial; the US gained a reliable partner in East Asia, while South Korea bolstered its defense posture with American assistance. These strengthened alliances not only enhanced South Korea's defense capabilities but also reinforced the country's position on the global stage (Lee, 2024).

From the US perspective, facilitating South Korean military education was part of a broader strategy. During the Cold War era, containing the spread of communism was a top priority (Cope, 1995). Strengthening South Korea's military capabilities through education and training was seen as a crucial component of this strategy. By equipping South Korean officers with US military doctrines and strategies, the US aimed to create a robust bulwark against communist expansionism in Asia, particularly from North Korea (Chung, 2023). This containment strategy was vital for maintaining global balance during a tense period in history.

Training South Korean officers also ensured the development of a reliable and interoperable ally in the region. The integration of South Korean forces with US military operations promoted cohesion and effectiveness in joint military exercises and operations (H. Kim, 2024). This interoperability was essential for maintaining regional security and stability, further aligning South Korea with US strategic objectives. By fostering reliable allies, the US could enhance its influence and operational capacity in the region.

Furthermore, promoting regional stability was another significant motivation for the US. A stronger South Korean military contributed to stability in the Asia-Pacific region, reducing the necessity for direct US military intervention. By enhancing South Korea's defense capabilities, the US aimed to create a secure environment conducive to economic development and political stability (Chung, 2023). This approach not only benefited South Korea but also

aligned with broader US geopolitical interests in maintaining a stable and prosperous region.

Overall, the collaboration between South Korea and the United States in military education was driven by complementary interests that aligned well for both nations. South Korea's need for modernization, standardization, and a skilled officer corps to strengthen its defense capabilities against North Korean aggression matched the US's goals of containing communism, building reliable allies, and promoting regional stability. This convergence of interests led to the initiation of large-scale military education programs, fulfilling South Korea's need for robust defense capacity building while advancing US strategic objectives in the Asia-Pacific region. The mutual benefits derived from this collaboration underscored its importance in shaping the defense strategies and international relations of both countries.

***Key Aspects of the U.S. Military Education Program for South Korea***

The United States operated special courses for allied nations, including South Korea, to support their military development. The selection process for South Korean officers to study in the US was rigorous, focusing on leadership potential, academic performance, physical fitness, and ideological alignment with democratic values. Initially, the military education programs were concentrated in the Infantry and Artillery schools. However, as the program expanded, it included diverse fields such as the Marine Corps, Engineering, Intelligence, and Command and General Staff Colleges.

Table 2: Number of South Korean Officers Sent to the US for Military Education

Course	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956
General Staff College	2	6	15	15	20
Command and General Staff School	0	9	6	6	18
Infantry School	300	336	360	368	320
Artillery School	201	248	289	274	164
Armored School	14	19	27	27	18
Airborne School	6	93	50	55	20
Aviation School	0	0	10	10	10
Naval School	0	0	10	10	6
Marine School	4	64	84	90	12
Engineer School	16	36	34	45	12
Ordnance School	4	2	6	10	6
Chemical School	0	0	0	12	8
Signal School	4	2	14	16	16
Intelligence School	4	8	12	12	10
Quartermaster School	0	2	10	15	12
Military Police School	0	2	2	5	4
Psychological Warfare School	0	0	0	2	2
Supply School	0	0	0	8	0

Other Schools	62	0	2	0	4
<b>Total</b>	621	827	886	1,070	1,041

Source: (Republic of Korea Army Headquarters, 1952-1956)

As the table indicates, early military education efforts were heavily focused on the Infantry and Artillery schools. However, over time, the program expanded to include a wider range of disciplines such as the Marine Corps, Engineering, Intelligence, and Command and General Staff Colleges. Considering that the total number of military students studying abroad in the 2020s is around 200, the figure of 1,041 in 1956 highlights the scale of the military exchange program during that era. This extensive participation underscores the significant level of military cooperation between South Korea and the United States at the time.

### *Utilization of US Military Education Post-Training by South Korea*

The utilization of South Korean officers who received military education in the United States was a pivotal element in the broader strategy to modernize and strengthen the South Korean military. Upon returning to South Korea, these officers were strategically assigned to key positions where their newly acquired skills and knowledge could be effectively implemented. This strategic deployment played a crucial role in the development and modernization of the South Korean military, ensuring that the benefits of their advanced training were maximized.

Many of these officers took on critical leadership roles within various divisions, training commands, and specialized units. Their advanced training in the United States enabled them to implement new strategies and improve operational effectiveness within their respective commands. By placing US-educated officers in such influential positions, the South Korean military was able to leverage their expertise to drive significant improvements in leadership, decision-making, and overall military performance. These officers brought back a wealth of knowledge on modern military tactics, organizational management, and strategic planning, which they applied to enhance the capabilities of their units.

In addition to leadership roles, these officers were instrumental in reshaping South Korean military doctrines and training programs. The insights and methodologies they acquired in the US were critical in aligning South Korean military practices more closely with US standards. This alignment was not merely a matter of adopting foreign practices but involved a thoughtful integration of advanced military concepts into the existing framework. The result was a more professional and capable military force, with doctrines and training programs that reflected the latest advancements in military science and technology. The officers' contributions were essential in fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within the South Korean military.

The operational enhancements brought about by these US-trained officers were also significant. The knowledge and skills they acquired were directly applied to improve tactical and operational planning, leading to enhanced

military readiness and effectiveness. For example, these officers introduced new techniques in areas such as logistics, intelligence, and combat operations, which were critical in ensuring that the South Korean military could respond more effectively to various threats. The improvements in operational planning and execution resulted in a military that was not only better prepared for immediate challenges but also more adaptable to future uncertainties. As shown in the data below, US-trained South Korean officers were placed in strategically important positions across various branches of the military.

Table 3: Positions Held by South Korean Officers After US Military Education

<b>Rank/Name(Censored)</b>	<b>Post-Education Assignment</b>
Colonel L	Division Operations Officer
Major P	Division Operations Chief
Major P	Training Command School Instructor
Major Y	Training Command Artillery Branch Head
Major C	Artillery School Information Instructor
Major J	Training and Education Commander
Major K	Division Operations Chief
Major K	Division Operations Chief
Major K	Division Operations Chief
Major K	Regiment Intelligence Chief
Major L	Regiment Operations Chief
Major P	Training Command Chemical Branch Instructor
Major P	Regiment Information Chief
Major P	Artillery School Chemistry Branch Instructor
Major K	Infantry School Chemistry Branch Instructor
Major L	Artillery School Chemistry Branch Head
Major K	Artillery School Chemical Branch Instructor
Major L	Ordinance School Instructor
Major K	Artillery School Instructor
Major P	Division Operations Chief
Major L	Division Operations Chief
Major K	Ordinance School Instructor
Major P	Training Command Instructor
Major L	Division Operations Chief
Major C	Division Operations Chief
Major K	Division Operations Chief

Source: (Republic of Korea Army Headquarters, 1952-1954)

The strategic assignment of South Korean officers who received military education in the United States was a key component in the broader effort to modernize and enhance the capabilities of the South Korean military post-Korean War. These officers were placed in critical operational roles, particularly within operations and intelligence divisions, underscoring their importance in strategic planning and execution. Their advanced training equipped them with the skills necessary to undertake complex tasks and make informed decisions,



which significantly bolstered the effectiveness of South Korea's military operations.

Many of these US-trained officers took on instructional roles at training commands and military schools. This move was particularly impactful as it allowed them to directly impart their knowledge to the next generation of military leaders. By teaching advanced tactics, modern military doctrines, and leadership principles, these officers played a crucial role in shaping the future of the South Korean military. Their contributions ensured that the lessons learned and skills acquired in the United States were disseminated widely within the military, creating a ripple effect that elevated the overall competence and professionalism of the forces (Park, 2011).

The enhanced capabilities resulting from the strategic placement of these officers were evident in both field operations and training environments. By occupying roles that influenced both practical military engagements and the educational framework, these officers were able to apply their US-acquired skills in ways that had a broad and lasting impact. Their presence in operational roles led to improved tactical planning and execution, while their involvement in training commands helped to institutionalize advanced military practices and standards across the entire military structure.

The significance of deploying US-trained officers into these roles cannot be overstated. This was not a random allocation but a meticulously planned strategy designed to maximize the benefits of their advanced education. These officers returned with a wealth of knowledge that included not only advanced tactical and operational insights but also a deep understanding of modern military doctrines and leadership principles. This comprehensive knowledge base was crucial in transforming the South Korean military into a more effective and professional force.

Moreover, the scale of this program and the significant number of officers involved highlight the extensive military exchange and cooperation between South Korea and the United States during this period. The deployment strategy ensured that the impact of US military education was felt across multiple levels of the South Korean military, from strategic planning and field operations to training and doctrine development. This widespread influence underscores the depth of the partnership between the two nations and the mutual commitment to enhancing South Korea's defense capabilities.

### ***Opportunity and Challenges***

One of the primary opportunities of sending military officers to study in the United States is the transfer of advanced military tactics, technologies, and leadership skills. The United States is a global leader in military innovation, and its military education programs offer South Korean officers exposure to cutting-edge strategies and technologies. This exposure is crucial for transforming the South Korean military into a more effective and professional force. For instance, the United States' Infantry and Artillery schools were initially the focus of the military education program, but over time, the program expanded to include a wider range of disciplines such as the Marine Corps, Engineering, Intelligence,

and Command and General Staff Colleges (M. Kim, 2016). Additionally, programs like the Korea Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) enable South Korean soldiers to serve with U.S. Army units, learning valuable American military practices and promoting flexibility and innovation in South Korean military operations (Weitz, 2013). This expansion has enabled South Korean officers to acquire a broader range of skills, making them more versatile and capable of adapting to various military scenarios.

Another significant opportunity is the development of a reliable and interoperable ally in the region. By integrating South Korean forces with US military operations, the two nations can promote cohesion and effectiveness in joint military exercises and operations. This interoperability is essential for maintaining regional security and stability, further aligning South Korea with US strategic objectives. Furthermore, the United States' containment strategy during the Cold War era, which aimed to prevent the spread of communism, was also a key driver of this collaboration. By strengthening South Korea's defense capabilities, the US aimed to create a secure environment conducive to economic development and political stability (Gaddis, 2007).

Despite the numerous opportunities, there are also several challenges associated with sending military officers to study in the United States. One of the primary challenges is the potential for cultural and linguistic barriers. South Korean officers may face difficulties in adapting to the cultural and linguistic norms of the United States, which could impact their ability to effectively communicate and work with their US counterparts. Additionally, the cost of sending officers to study in the United States such as tuition, travel, and living expenses can be substantial, which may strain the South Korean military's budget (M. Kim, 2016). Not only that, deploying personnel for extended periods for international military education can temporarily reduce the available manpower for domestic operations, creating opportunity costs.

Another challenge is the potential for political polarization within South Korea. The decision to send military officers to study in the United States may be met with resistance from certain political factions, which could undermine the initiative's success (Chung, 2023). For instance, some may argue that the initiative is too reliant on US military assistance and does not adequately address South Korea's own military capabilities. Moreover, this activity can sometimes be perceived as aligning with certain geopolitical blocs, potentially escalating tensions with neighboring countries such as North Korea and China. Over-reliance on international military education can also create vulnerabilities if geopolitical relations change, potentially affecting the continuity and reliability of such programs (Choi, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for the South Korean government to communicate the benefits of this initiative clearly and effectively to the public to build domestic support.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research reveals that the strategic collaboration between South Korea and the United States in military education has been instrumental in building a capable and modern South Korean military. The extensive participation of South

Korean officers in US military academies and war colleges has led to the transfer of advanced military tactics, technologies, and leadership skills. This collaboration has not only modernized the South Korean military but also strengthened the interpersonal relationships between U.S. and South Korean military personnel, which are crucial for operational coordination and mutual trust.

The utilization of US-trained South Korean officers in key positions within the South Korean military has been a pivotal element in the development and modernization of the South Korean military. These officers have brought back a wealth of knowledge on modern military tactics, organizational management, and strategic planning, which they have applied to enhance the capabilities of their units. The strategic deployment of these officers has led to significant improvements in leadership, decision-making, and overall military performance.

Given the substantial benefits of international military education in enhancing defense capabilities and fostering enduring defense partnerships, it is recommended that South Korea continue to prioritize and expand its participation in such programs. Specifically, the following measures should be considered:

#### ***Strategic Deployment of US-Trained Officers***

The strategic deployment of US-trained officers in key positions within the South Korean military should continue. These officers have brought back a wealth of knowledge on modern military tactics, organizational management, and strategic planning, which they have applied to enhance the capabilities of their units. By placing these officers in critical operational roles, particularly within operations and intelligence divisions, the South Korean military can ensure that their advanced training is effectively utilized to drive improvements in military performance.

#### ***Enhanced Interoperability and Joint Exercises***

The South Korean military should prioritize joint exercises and training with the U.S. military to further enhance interoperability and operational readiness. This will not only improve the coordination and effectiveness of joint operations but also strengthen the interpersonal relationships between U.S. and South Korean military personnel, which are crucial for operational coordination and mutual trust.

#### ***Institutionalization of Best Practices***

The South Korean military should institutionalize the best practices and lessons learned from the US military education programs. This involves integrating the advanced military concepts and methodologies into the existing military framework, ensuring that the benefits of these programs are sustained and disseminated widely within the military. This will help create a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within the South Korean military.

### ***Continuous Professional Development***

The South Korean military should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for its officers, including training and education in advanced military concepts and technologies. This will ensure that the military remains current with the latest advancements in military science and technology, maintaining its competitive edge and ability to adapt to evolving security challenges.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

### ***Evolution of Military Education Programs***

Future research should explore the contemporary evolution of military education programs, examining how they adapt to emerging security challenges and technological advancements. Investigating the current curriculum and training methods used in U.S. military education programs will provide insights into how these programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of South Korean officers. Understanding these adaptations can reveal how effectively these programs prepare officers for modern military challenges.

### ***Interoperability and Joint Operations***

Research could focus on the strategies and tactics employed to enhance interoperability in joint operations. Investigating how these strategies are applied in real-world scenarios will shed light on their effectiveness. Conducting field studies or simulations could help assess the success of interoperability measures and identify areas that need improvement.

### ***Regional and Global Security Dynamics***

To broaden the understanding of South Korea's defense diplomacy, future research should examine the global implications of its defense strategies and the role of international military education in global security frameworks. Analyzing how international military education impacts global security dynamics and influences strategic alliances and partnerships involving South Korea and the United States would provide valuable insights into its broader strategic significance.

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