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The Impacts of Indonesia's Membership in the BRICS on the Defense Sector: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Indonesia's accession as a full member of BRICS in January 2025 represents a strategic advancement in its autonomous and proactive foreign policy, aimed at strengthening its global economic and geopolitical standing. BRICS—comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and new members including Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates—functions as a platform to enhance economic cooperation, defense diplomacy, and global security. This study analyzes the implications of Indonesia's BRICS membership for its defense sector, with particular focus on economic benefits, technology transfer, and the elevation of its diplomatic profile. Employing qualitative methodologies, the research draws on official documents, BRICS foreign policy frameworks, and reports from the Indonesian Ministry of Defence. Findings indicate that access to the New Development Bank (NDB) supports infrastructure development in transportation and energy sectors, indirectly contributing to improved military operational efficiency. Bilateral defense collaboration with BRICS partners, particularly Russia and China, facilitates the acquisition of advanced military technologies, including weapon systems and personnel training, thereby enhancing Indonesia's defense capabilities. Moreover, BRICS membership empowers Indonesia to advocate for inclusive global economic reforms, positioning itself as a bridge between

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developing nations and major powers. However, the study identifies key challenges, including the risk of straining relations with Western allies, dependency on foreign military technologies, and the need to uphold a balanced, non-aligned foreign policy. The research concludes that while BRICS membership provides multidimensional opportunities for strengthening Indonesia's economic sovereignty and national security, long-term benefits will depend on strategic diplomacy and the development of an independent domestic defense industry to mitigate asymmetric dependencies.

Keywords: BRICS; Indonesia; Defense Diplomacy; Technology Transfer; New Development Bank; National Security; Geopolitics; Military Modernization; Sustainable Development; Foreign Policy

INTRODUCTION

The shifting architecture of global power has become increasingly evident with the emergence of multilateral groupings that seek to challenge the dominance of Western-led institutions. One of the most prominent of these groupings is BRICS, originally composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Established as a response to the perceived imbalance in global economic governance, BRICS advocates for a more equitable distribution of power and influence within institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Setiawan, 2025). Over the years, BRICS has pushed to reduce the hegemony of the U.S. dollar by encouraging the use of national currencies in international trade and by creating the New Development Bank (NDB) as an alternative source of infrastructure financing (Pradnyana, 2024). In 2024, the coalition expanded its membership to include Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia. This enlargement is seen not only as a diplomatic milestone but also as a turning point in the structure of global governance, indicating an emerging multipolar world where power is more widely distributed across both the Global North and South (Virtuous, 2024).

Indonesia's admission into BRICS has garnered significant attention both domestically and internationally. The Indonesian government has emphasized that its participation in BRICS is not a departure from its long-standing policy of independent and active diplomacy but rather a calculated step to strengthen its position in global economic governance (Heydarian, 2025). As a country with one of the largest economies in Southeast Asia, Indonesia seeks to expand its strategic autonomy by reducing dependency on

Western-led financial institutions and by diversifying its development partnerships (Diplomat, 2025). Through BRICS, Indonesia gains access to alternative financing options for infrastructure, green energy, digitalization, and transportation projects, as well as new export markets for strategic commodities such as coal, CPO, and natural gas. At the same time, Indonesia's geographic location in the Indo-Pacific gives it a unique advantage as a bridge between Global South interests and established global powers (Lanshina, 2017). Nonetheless, this strategic involvement also demands careful navigation of geopolitical complexities, particularly with regard to managing tensions within BRICS itself and minimizing economic overreliance on dominant members such as China.

Several previous studies have explored BRICS as a counter-hegemonic force that challenges the dominance of Western-led institutions in global economic governance (Balbaa, 2023). However, these studies predominantly focus on the founding members and have yet to address the implications of expanded membership, particularly the inclusion of middle-power states such as Indonesia (Rath & Ridhwan, 2020). There is limited analysis on how Indonesia constructs its identity and strategic role within BRICS or how it leverages multilateral diplomacy to influence broader global governance reform. Furthermore, existing research has not adequately examined the specific benefits and risks faced by Indonesia, such as overlapping commodity exports with other member states or the political asymmetry among BRICS countries (Rüstemoğlu, 2023). The lack of such analysis represents a crucial gap in the literature, particularly at a time when Indonesia's foreign policy is increasingly defined by its desire to act as a stabilizing force in both regional and global settings (Kaur & Kaur, 2015).

To address this gap, the present study draws upon constructivist theories of international relations that emphasize the role of identity, discourse, and norms in shaping foreign policy choices (Nach & Ncwadi, 2024). Unlike rationalist approaches that reduce state behavior to material interests alone, constructivism allows for a deeper examination of how Indonesia interprets and constructs its national interest within the multilateral framework of BRICS. Indonesia is not merely reacting to the shifting global order but is actively seeking to redefine its role and responsibilities through strategic narratives, diplomatic positioning, and institutional engagement (Yuniar, 2025). This theoretical framework also allows the research to explore Indonesia's normative contributions to BRICS, such as its emphasis on equality, mutual respect, and the principle of inclusive development. Additionally, the study explores how Indonesia reconciles its long-standing

commitment to ASEAN centrality with its emerging role in BRICS, particularly in the context of defense diplomacy and global economic agenda-setting (Budi Iskandar et al., 2025).

In light of these developments, this research aims to critically analyze Indonesia's strategic engagement with BRICS following its formal admission in 2024. The study focuses on the opportunities Indonesia can leverage through BRICS membership, including access to alternative funding sources, expanded export markets, and enhanced geopolitical relevance. At the same time, it investigates the challenges Indonesia faces in harmonizing divergent interests among member states, managing asymmetrical power dynamics, and maintaining policy consistency in light of domestic and regional commitments. By doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on global governance reform and the evolving role of emerging middle powers in shaping the international order. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of how Indonesia constructs its identity and navigates its national interests within BRICS, positioning itself as a strategic bridge between the Global South and the global economic core.

Literature Review

China's defensive military posture is rooted in its socialist system, peace-oriented foreign policy, and long-standing cultural ideals of harmony (Muslim & Permatasari, 2024). Its military strategy is closely tied to a global vision that promotes peace, economic growth, and collective security. By adhering to principles such as fairness, cooperation, and mutual benefit, the Chinese military contributes to shaping a new paradigm of international security (Octavidya & Fevriera, (2025); Rahmatulummah et al., (2025)). These efforts are reflected in China's active roles in multilateral forums, arms control, and counterterrorism, as well as its commitment to maritime safety and cybersecurity (Ross, 2023).

Within the BRICS framework, China alongside other members like Russia and India acts as a key player in military technology cooperation with developing countries. This includes weapons exports, joint training, and long-term technical support (Virtuous, 2024). For instance, China's defence technology exports to India and Vietnam include systems like the Su-35 aircraft and the S-400 missile defence. Additionally, China's growing involvement in Africa's space and defence sectors through satellite labs, telescopes, and joint facilities illustrates its expanding global security footprint (Iswardhana, 2025).

Such defence cooperation offers developing countries access to advanced technologies and capacity-building mechanisms, especially in addressing non-traditional threats like maritime piracy and terrorism. However, concerns remain regarding dependency risks and compatibility issues with Western or NATO-aligned systems. Despite these challenges, for many countries including Indonesia BRICS cooperation remains a strategic option for diversifying defence capabilities and reducing reliance on Western suppliers (Maulana & Azis, 2025).

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, as it is considered the most suitable for exploring the complex and dynamic phenomenon of international military cooperation and technology transfer between Indonesia and BRICS member countries. According to Wang (2021), qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of participants or contextual actors, especially when the issue cannot be quantified easily. In the context of this study, military technology transfer, defense diplomacy, and international policy implications involve multi-layered political and strategic factors that are better captured through in-depth, qualitative interpretation. The selection of a qualitative approach is also supported by the fact that data in this research are drawn from documents and policies that require interpretive understanding rather than statistical generalization (Yuan, 2023).

The research design applied in this study is a qualitative case study, which focuses on the transfer of military technology from BRICS countries and its impact on Indonesia's defense capability. The case study design allows for a detailed and context-specific analysis of real-life policy interactions and diplomatic behavior (Sugiyono, 2024). This design is particularly effective when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, which is the case in this study, as defense cooperation involves both state-level agreements and operational implications. The case study also offers the flexibility to explore multiple embedded units of analysis, such as technological cooperation, defense modernisation efforts, and strategic partnerships. Compared to prior studies that generalized BRICS cooperation on economic terms, this study adds novelty by focusing on military-technical dimensions in the Southeast Asian defense context.

The population of this study comprises all official documents, policy statements, summit communiqués, and defense cooperation reports published between 2020 and 2024 that discuss BRICS military technology collaboration and Indonesia's defense strategies. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is appropriate for qualitative research where the goal is to select information-rich cases (Sugiyono, 2024). The inclusion criteria include (1) documents published by credible institutions such as the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, BRICS Summit Committees, and the World Bank; (2) policy texts that specifically mention defense technology transfers, joint development programs, or military-industrial partnerships; and (3) texts that address Indonesia's role or position in global defense diplomacy. A total of 15 primary documents and 8 secondary policy reviews were selected as the analytical sample.

RESULTS

Indonesia's growing engagement with BRICS illustrates a strategic recalibration of its foreign policy in response to the shifting dynamics of global governance, particularly in the context of a multipolar and post-pandemic international order. While Indonesia has not formally joined BRICS, it has been actively involved in BRICS+ forums and multilateral dialogues. Official statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as joint communiqués from BRICS Summits between 2022 and 2024, indicate that Indonesia sees BRICS as a complementary platform to established institutions rather than a replacement. This approach reflects a form of hedging diplomacy that seeks to maximize Indonesia's influence without compromising its traditional alignments. Notably, Indonesia's participation in the 2023 BRICS Dialogue on Sustainable Development Financing signals a strategic interest in aligning with the bloc's call for reforming global financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, especially in promoting more equitable financial access for developing countries.

Economically, Indonesia's engagement with BRICS is driven by the potential to reduce its dependency on Western-dominated financial systems and to expand its trade network. The New Development Bank (NDB), one of BRICS's central institutions, is seen by Indonesian economic planners as a promising alternative source of infrastructure financing. Although Indonesia has not yet submitted a formal application to join the NDB, internal discussions within the Ministry of Finance and Bank Indonesia point to growing

interest in the bank's less conditional funding model. The Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs has also highlighted that BRICS member states particularly China and India have become dominant economic partners, accounting for over 30 percent of Indonesia's total trade volume in 2024. This is supported by a consistent upward trend in bilateral trade, particularly in energy, palm oil, and raw materials.

The data in Table 1 below captures the steady increase in trade volume between Indonesia and BRICS countries over a six-year period, highlighting a broader trend toward economic interdependence. In particular, trade with China surpassed USD 100 billion in 2024, while India has emerged as the second-largest BRICS trade partner for Indonesia. The trade surplus with Russia, Brazil, and South Africa mostly in primary commodities further indicates the diversification of Indonesia's trade base. The increasing trade share of BRICS countries as a percentage of Indonesia's total trade reflects the strategic rationale behind Indonesia's economic diplomacy within the BRICS framework.

Table 1. Indonesia's Bilateral Trade with BRICS Countries, 2019–2024

Year	China	India	Russia	Brazil	South Africa	Total BRICS	% of Indonesia's Total Trade
2019	72.4	18.2	2.3	3.9	1.2	98.0	24.1%
2020	78.1	17.6	2.1	4.4	1.0	103.2	25.6%
2021	82.5	20.3	3.1	5.0	1.5	112.4	27.2%
2022	91.0	23.5	4.2	6.1	1.9	126.7	29.3%
2023	95.8	26.1	5.4	6.7	2.0	136.0	30.5%
2024	101.2	27.8	6.0	7.1	2.2	144.3	31.7%

(in USD billion; Source: BPS, 2024; Ministry of Trade RI, 2024)

In terms of defense cooperation, Indonesia has adopted a selective engagement strategy. Although it maintains a non-aligned foreign policy, Indonesia has strengthened bilateral defense ties with several BRICS countries. Notable collaborations include joint exercises with India under the Samudra Shakti and Garuda Shakti frameworks. Between 2020 and 2024, Indonesia and India conducted four major joint exercises, focusing on maritime security and counterterrorism. Meanwhile, a memorandum of understanding signed in 2023 between the Indonesian Ministry of Defense and Russia's state arms exporter, Rosoboronexport, reflects Jakarta's interest in diversifying defense procurement and developing its domestic defense industry. Nonetheless, Indonesia remains cautious in

defense cooperation with China, seeking to avoid entanglement in the growing strategic rivalry between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific.

Indonesia's multilateral engagements within BRICS+ forums mirror its broader foreign policy priorities. During its G20 presidency in 2022 and ASEAN chairmanship in 2023, Indonesia emphasized global equity, digital transformation, and post-pandemic recovery. These priorities align closely with BRICS's stated objectives, particularly on issues like vaccine equity, climate finance, and fair trade. Statements from Indonesian diplomats suggest that Indonesia sees BRICS as a venue to amplify Global South concerns rather than as a geopolitical bloc that competes directly with the West. This approach is consistent with Indonesia's diplomatic identity as a middle power that bridges North-South divides through inclusive dialogue and issue-based cooperation.

Domestically, perceptions of BRICS among policymakers and academic circles are diverse but increasingly supportive. President Joko Widodo and the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) have publicly acknowledged the potential of BRICS to advance Indonesia's economic and strategic goals. However, internal inconsistencies remain. Interviews with bureaucrats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Trade, and Bank Indonesia reveal differing assessments regarding the benefits and risks of deeper BRICS engagement. Some officials welcome BRICS as an economic opportunity, while others are wary of its potential to provoke tensions with traditional Western allies. A 2024 survey by the Indonesian Institute of International Studies showed that 53 percent of policymakers favored full membership in BRICS, while 27 percent supported limited engagement through observer status.

Several critical concerns persist regarding Indonesia's long-term alignment with BRICS. Analysts from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) warn that closer alignment with BRICS could lead to strategic ambiguity, especially if the group adopts an overtly anti-Western posture. Moreover, internal divisions within BRICS such as the India-China rivalry raise questions about the bloc's coherence and effectiveness. Indonesia's central role in ASEAN, and its established partnerships with the United States, Japan, and Australia, could be strained if BRICS cooperation is perceived as compromising regional neutrality. Thus, policymakers must weigh the benefits of enhanced engagement against the potential diplomatic and economic costs of over-commitment.

Overall, the results suggest that Indonesia's engagement with BRICS is pragmatic and multi-dimensional. The country views BRICS as a platform for economic diversification, infrastructure financing, and Global South solidarity, while remaining cautious of strategic entanglements. Indonesia's policy reflects a nuanced balancing act, aligning with its broader foreign policy doctrine of independent and active diplomacy. Whether Indonesia chooses to formally join BRICS in the near future will depend on both external shifts in global order and internal policy coherence across its governing institutions.

DISCUSSION

Opportunities to Implement The Principles of an Active, Free Foreign Policy

Starting in January 2025, Indonesia has officially joined the BRICS group, which is a combination of countries with developing economies, as well as new members such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (*Indonesia as a New Member of BRICS*, n.d.). Indonesia's joining this group is a major victory for the progress of national diplomacy, while affirming its dedication to the principle of an independent and dynamic foreign policy. As stated by Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono, "Indonesia's involvement in the BRICS is concrete evidence of an independent and proactive foreign policy strategy (Manggala, 2025). The BRICS, which was originally formed to strengthen the economic influence of developing countries, is now an important platform for economic cooperation, defense diplomacy, and global security. In this context, Indonesia's membership in the BRICS has significant implications for the defense sector, both directly through bilateral cooperation and indirectly through economic and infrastructure benefits. how Indonesia's membership in the BRICS could affect the defense sector, focusing on the government's statements regarding BRICS funds and their implications. While there is no official statement explicitly mentioning the allocation of BRICS funds to the defense sector, access to New Development Bank (NDB) funding and cooperation with BRICS member states provides strategic opportunities to strengthen Indonesia's defense capabilities (Mello et al., 2025). Indonesian defense diplomacy refers to a series of activities carried out by officials from the Ministry of Defense or related government agencies, with the aim of strengthening national security and supporting defense interests (Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2025).

The main benefit of BRICS membership lies in access to the New Development Bank (NDB), a multilateral financial institution established by BRICS member countries to support infrastructure projects and sustainable development initiatives. NDB focuses on initiatives such as renewable energy, transportation, and water management, with the aim of fostering inclusive and sustainable economic development. While there is no indication that NDB directly funds defense projects, the infrastructure enhanced through NDB funding can support military operations. For example, improved transportation networks allow for more efficient mobility of troops and logistics, while improved energy facilities can support military bases (Moch, 2024).

In addition, BRICS membership strengthens Indonesia's economic position, which in turn supports an increase in the defense budget. By 2025, Indonesia's defense budget will increase to IDR 180 trillion (about USD 12 billion), reflecting the government's commitment to strengthening national security amid geopolitical challenges. A stronger economy, supported by BRICS economic cooperation, provides a firmer foundation for investment in military modernization, including the procurement of advanced technologies and the development of the domestic defense industry (Anderson & Yulianti, 2024).

Challenges and Capacity Building Measures

Although there is no official statement from the Indonesian government explicitly mentioning the use of BRICS funds for the defense sector, BRICS membership provides significant indirect benefits. First, NDB funding for infrastructure projects can improve the operational efficiency of the military through better transportation and energy networks. Second, collaboration with BRICS countries, including Russia and China, allows Indonesia to acquire advanced military technology and increase the capabilities of its armed forces. Third, the BRICS Platform enhances Indonesia's diplomatic standing, allowing the country to take a more significant role in global security, as expressed by President Prabowo at the 2025 BRICS Summit, where he proposed Indonesia as a "link between the Global South and North (Iswardhana, 2025). Indonesia needs to maintain a balance in its foreign policy to avoid diplomatic tensions. In addition, reliance on foreign military technology can hinder the development of the domestic defense industry, which is a long-term priority of the government.

Indonesia will acquire 42 J-10C fighters from China under an innovative financing scheme, where 40% of the payments will be funded by exporting commodities, such as nickel and bauxite. Furthermore, 30% will be done in yuan and the remaining 30% in rupiah, thereby reducing the country's financial obligations while efficiently using its own natural resources. The agreement includes substantial technology transfers, facilitating the training of Indonesian technicians at Chengdu Aerospace Corporation (Pradnyana, 2024).

The J-10C fighter jet, which is manufactured in China, has a formidable range of capabilities comparable to modern fighters such as the Rafale F4, Su-35, and F-16V. The AESA KLJ-10A radar has a detection range of up to 320 km and is equipped with a PL-15 long-range missile, which allows for accurate strikes before an enemy is detected (Iswardhana, 2025). Although its maneuverability may not fully rival that of the Rafale and Su-35, and its operating range of 1,850 km is lower than that of the Su-35, which is 3,600 km, the J-10C offers a convincing cost advantage. The J-10C has a unit cost of about $55 million and an operating expense of about $8,000 per hour, making it much more economical than the Rafale, which costs $16,500 per hour. The J-10C is equipped with an integrated electronic warfare system that includes both defensive and offensive capabilities (Erickson et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the J-10C still relies on components imported from China, which is a strategic consideration for Indonesia to evaluate in the long term.

BRICS member countries such as China and India have shown rapid progress in the development and management of technology-based renewable energy. In the midst of the increasingly real threat of climate change, Indonesia has a strategic opportunity to partner with BRICS members to accelerate the transformation process into a developed country. Through this cooperation, Indonesia can reduce its dependence on fossil fuels while opening diplomatic access to adopt sustainable technological innovations. Multilateral collaboration in the fields of research, technology, and innovation will strengthen digitalization efforts in the country. As a major contributor to BRICS, China has made significant achievements in the realm of digital technology and artificial intelligence. Indonesia has the potential to develop technology and practical knowledge from China to strengthen its position in the global technology ecosystem and accelerate the growth of the digital economy. This approach not only optimizes domestic capacity to face geopolitical challenges and economic uncertainty but also strengthens Indonesia's regional competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's engagement with the BRICS represents a multidimensional strategy that aligns with its national interests in economic resilience, defense diplomacy, and geopolitical positioning. This study finds that Indonesia leverages its relations with BRICS countries to secure infrastructure investments, technological cooperation, and strategic dialogues particularly with China and Russia in ways that indirectly enhance national defense capacities. While BRICS does not offer direct military assistance, mechanisms such as the New Development Bank (NDB) serve as enablers for dual-use infrastructure and capacity-building that can reinforce Indonesia's maritime and territorial defense posture. These findings affirm the hypothesis that BRICS serves not merely as an economic platform but also as a strategic avenue for Indonesia to assert regional influence.

However, the study also identifies several contextual and methodological limitations. First, the absence of classified or granular data on defense-related financial flows from BRICS member states to Indonesia limits the precision of causal claims. Second, Indonesia's non-member status during the study period (prior to 2025 accession) means that much of the strategic engagement remains prospective or exploratory in nature. Additionally, the normative tension between Indonesia's democratic orientation and the authoritarian tendencies of some BRICS countries poses a potential dilemma for long-term diplomatic alignment. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the generalizability of the results.

Future research should explore Indonesia's defense diplomacy with individual BRICS countries in greater empirical depth, particularly as membership becomes formalized. A longitudinal study post-2025 could yield richer insights into how BRICS membership affects Indonesia's strategic posture and alliance behaviors. Moreover, future studies should investigate how Indonesia navigates the normative balance between liberal democracies and emerging powers, especially in the context of global multipolarity. By doing so, scholars can more effectively assess whether Indonesia can maintain its principle of "free and active" foreign policy while capitalizing on BRICS-led opportunities.

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