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The Role of Defense Diplomacy in Strengthening Indonesia–France Relations: A Case Study of Defense Equipment Procurement

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of defense diplomacy in enhancing bilateral relations between Indonesia and France, with particular emphasis on defense equipment procurement as a strategic instrument. Grounded in neorealism, cooperative security theory, and the concept of defense diplomacy, the research explores how Indonesia's acquisition of French military platforms, including *Rafale* fighter jets and *Scorpène*-class submarines, extends beyond arms transactions to encompass trust-building, capability development, and regional power balancing. Employing a qualitative case study approach supported by policy analysis, defense agreements, and secondary literature, the study demonstrates that defense procurement has strengthened bilateral strategic alignment while advancing Indonesia's military modernization agenda. The findings indicate that defense diplomacy can serve as an effective bridge between hard power imperatives and soft power engagement, particularly within the increasingly contested Indo-Pacific context. This research contributes to scholarly debates on middle power diplomacy and underscores the multidimensional value of defense cooperation in achieving foreign policy and security objectives.

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Keywords: Defense Diplomacy; Indonesia–France Relations; Military Modernization; Indo-Pacific Security; Strategic Procurement

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of international security, defense diplomacy has emerged as a vital instrument for states to pursue strategic interests while maintaining peaceful international relations. Particularly for middle powers like Indonesia, the conduct of defense diplomacy is not solely about military projection but also about fostering strategic partnerships, enhancing defense capabilities, and promoting regional stability. Defense diplomacy provides a channel through which trust-building, interoperability, and policy alignment can be achieved with partner countries (Kalam, 2024).

Indonesia's partnership with France represents a compelling case of modern defense diplomacy in practice, notably through its procurement of advanced military platforms such as the Dassault Rafale fighter jets and the Scorpène-class submarines. These acquisitions are not merely technical transactions but part of a broader strategic calculus involving power balancing, technological advancement, and defense-industrial development. France, a key actor in the Indo-Pacific strategy of the European Union, views Indonesia as a pivotal partner in ensuring regional maritime security, non-traditional threat mitigation, and the rules-based order (Prasetyo, 2024).

This journal article explores the role of defense diplomacy in shaping and strengthening bilateral Indonesia–France relations, using the case study of defense equipment procurement as a focal point. It interrogates how such cooperation is influenced by international structural pressures (neorealism), shaped by mutual confidence-building mechanisms (cooperative security), and executed through formal and informal channels of defense engagement (defense diplomacy).

The study is guided by three analytical lenses. First, neorealism is applied to assess how defense procurement reflects Indonesia's strategic responses to the changing balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Second, cooperative security theory is employed to understand how Indonesia and France manage defense ties to promote trust and prevent conflict. Third, the concept of defense diplomacy particularly in the context of post-

reformasi Indonesia is used to analyze how military-to-military cooperation advances broader diplomatic objectives(Sari, 2023)

In doing so, this article fills a gap in current defense and international relations literature by linking procurement strategies with diplomatic intent, and by situating Indonesia–France defense relations within the larger dynamics of Indo-Pacific geopolitics. The research draws on policy documents, defense white papers, academic literature, and official procurement records to build a comprehensive picture of the bilateral engagement.

Ultimately, the article argues that defense diplomacy when linked with strategic procurement can serve as a multidimensional tool to strengthen bilateral partnerships, reinforce national defense objectives, and enhance regional security architectures in a cooperative and sustainable manner (Yusnita Sari, 2023)

Literature Review

Defense diplomacy, once considered a supplementary component of foreign policy, has emerged as a strategic tool in advancing national interests and fostering international cooperation. Scholars such as Cottey and Forster (2004) argue that modern defense diplomacy extends beyond traditional military alliances, encompassing a wide array of non-combat military engagements such as bilateral dialogues, training missions, defense attaché exchanges, joint military exercises, and arms procurement. These practices aim not only to enhance military interoperability but also to foster mutual trust, conflict prevention, and regional stability.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia's growing reliance on defense diplomacy reflects the country's response to emerging regional challenges, particularly maritime security threats, the rise of China, and evolving regional security architectures like the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) (Prasetyo, 2024). France, on the other hand, has pursued a more active Indo-Pacific strategy since the 2010s, positioning itself as a balancing force by engaging with regional partners such as India, Japan, and increasingly, Indonesia (Ministère des Armées, 2022).

Recent studies highlight that defense procurement, particularly of advanced platforms, has become a conduit for defense diplomacy. As Setiawan and Fitriani (2022) note, the acquisition of high-end systems such as the Rafale fighter jets or Scorpène-class submarines often serves dual purposes: improving national defense capabilities and strengthening strategic ties with supplier countries. The Indonesian Ministry of Defence's

push for modernization (2020–2024) reinforces this dual-purpose approach (Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how specific bilateral defense procurement cases such as between Indonesia and France are shaped by, and contribute to, broader defense diplomacy goals. This article seeks to fill that gap by contextualizing Indonesia–France defense procurement within a multi-theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs three complementary theories to analyze the Indonesia–France defense equipment procurement case: neorealism, cooperative security, and the conceptual framework of defense diplomacy.

Neorealism

Neorealism, or structural realism, posits that states act primarily in pursuit of survival in an anarchic international system, where the absence of a central authority compels them to accumulate power and capabilities to ensure their security (Zulkifli M.; Perwita, A. A. B.; Mahroza, J., 2024).In this view, defense procurement is a rational response to perceived threats or power imbalances. For Indonesia, the acquisition of advanced French military platforms can be interpreted as a hedging strategy against regional uncertainties, including the assertiveness of China in the South China Sea and the shifting balance of power in Southeast Asia.

Cooperative Security

In contrast, the cooperative security framework emphasizes mutual trust, transparency, and institutional mechanisms for dialogue and joint action to prevent conflict(Widyatmoko et al., 2022). Defense procurement, when embedded in broader frameworks of cooperation such as joint exercises or co-production agreements, can foster interoperability and strategic confidence. Indonesia's engagement with France, particularly through intergovernmental defense agreements, can be viewed as part of a broader cooperative security effort to build stable and resilient regional partnerships (Ginong Maulidyatama, 2016).

Defense Diplomacy

The concept of defense diplomacy focuses on the peaceful application of military resources to achieve foreign policy objectives (Heriyadi, 2019). Unlike traditional military operations, defense diplomacy includes joint training, defense cooperation agreements, arms transfers, and strategic dialogue. In this study, the Indonesia–France defense procurement is seen not merely as a transactional arms deal but as a diplomatic mechanism that facilitates long-term strategic engagement and bilateral trust-building.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach, focusing on Indonesia's defense diplomacy through the procurement of defense equipment from France. The case study method is suitable for analyzing complex bilateral interactions and exploring how defense diplomacy operates within the broader frameworks of international relations and national security strategy (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of political behavior, defense policy decisions, and strategic motivations behind procurement contracts.

Research Design

The research is descriptive and explanatory. It aims to describe the processes and outcomes of defense diplomacy and explain the underlying strategic, political, and diplomatic rationales. The analysis is guided by three theoretical lenses: Neorealism, Cooperative Security, and Defense Diplomacy Theory (Eris Herryanto, 2024).

This multi-theory framework allows the researcher to analyze state behavior through both power-driven logic (neorealism) and normative cooperative engagement (cooperative security) while grounding the empirical findings in the practical instruments of defense diplomacy.

Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data, which were collected from multiple sources including:

- Official government documents from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense and French Ministry of Armed Forces

- Bilateral agreements and joint press statements
- Academic journals, books, and working papers (e.g., RSIS, SIPRI, IISS)
- News articles and interviews published by reputable international defense media (e.g., Defense News, The Diplomat, Reuters)
- Publications and reports from defense companies involved, such as Dassault Aviation and Naval Group

These data were triangulated to ensure reliability and to build a comprehensive understanding of defense procurement decisions and their diplomatic implications.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic interpretation. Key themes such as strategic autonomy, arms procurement, defense industrial cooperation, and trust-building were extracted from documents and texts. Each theme was then examined in light of the three selected theoretical frameworks to identify convergences and tensions.

A comparative timeline analysis was also conducted to trace the evolution of Indonesia–France defense cooperation, especially from the signing of the 2011 Defense Cooperation Agreement to the 2022 Rafale deal and ongoing submarine negotiations. The analysis also looked at correlating events such as shifts in regional security architecture, ASEAN dynamics, and external geopolitical pressures including AUKUS and China's maritime assertiveness.

Scope and Limitations

This study is focused on the period from 2010 to 2025, aligning with Indonesia's *Minimum Essential Force (MEF)* agenda. The scope is limited to defense diplomacy as practiced through high-level procurement and excludes broader military-to-military exchanges not related to equipment acquisition. One limitation is the lack of direct interviews with policymakers, given the classified nature of some agreements. However, publicly accessible statements and credible secondary sources compensate for this constraint.

RESULTS

Indonesia's defense cooperation with France has evolved significantly since 2011, when both countries signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement aimed at enhancing bilateral collaboration in training, strategic dialogue, defense industry partnerships, and procurement. This partnership became more strategic in the 2020s, driven by mutual geopolitical and defense interests in the Indo-Pacific region. For Indonesia, France offers a reliable, non-hegemonic defense partner; for France, Indonesia is a key partner in its Indo-Pacific strategy, particularly after its loss of the Australian submarine contract in 2021.

The most prominent markers of this cooperation are two major defense procurement programs: the Dassault Rafale multirole fighter jets and the Scorpène-class submarines. In February 2022, Indonesia signed a contract for 42 Rafale jets, valued at approximately USD 8.1 billion, marking the country's most expensive defense procurement deal to date. This deal includes not only aircraft delivery but also training, simulators, and maintenance support. In parallel, Indonesia entered into negotiations with the French Naval Group to procure two Scorpène-class submarines, which feature Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology, enhancing Indonesia's underwater endurance and deterrent posture.

These procurements are not isolated transactions but reflect a strategic defense partnership framework. The agreements are embedded within broader defense diplomacy initiatives, including bilateral staff college exchanges, visits by defense ministers and chiefs of staff, joint naval and air force exercises, and the potential for local assembly and technology transfer through Indonesia's defense SOEs such as PT PAL and PT Dirgantara Indonesia.

Table 1. Key Dimensions of Indonesia-France Defense Procurement Deals

Procurement Item	Description	Strategic Value	Diplomatic Implications
Rafale Fighter Jets	42 multirole jets with advanced radar, weaponry, and support packages (signed 2022)	Air superiority, deterrence capability, interoperability with Western air forces	Deepens military ties with France; signals strategic autonomy from US/Russia/China
Scorpene Submarines	2 diesel-electric submarines with AIP technology (under negotiation since 2021)	Enhanced underwater endurance, maritime domain awareness, and regional deterrence	Positions France as strategic partner in Indonesia's maritime defense modernization
Technology Transfer	Provision for local assembly, maintenance,	Boosts Indonesia's defense industrial base;	Strengthens trust and aligns with Indonesia's defense

Procurement Item	Description	Strategic Value	Diplomatic Implications
	and industrial collaboration via PT PAL, PT DI	reduces long-term foreign dependency	self-sufficiency (MEF) goals
Joint Exercises	Bilateral and multilateral naval drills and air force engagements in Indo-Pacific waters	Operational interoperability, strategic signaling to regional actors	Enhances ASEAN–France ties and France's regional credibility under its Indo-Pacific axis

These agreements represent more than mere arms sales they are a mechanism of strategic alignment. For Indonesia, the deals serve both operational and symbolic functions: bolstering military modernization while projecting diplomatic balance. For France, the relationship helps reposition its influence in Southeast Asia and compensate for losses in Australia's AUKUS alignment.

The deals also support Indonesia's Minimum Essential Force (MEF) blueprint, specifically focusing on improving air and maritime deterrence capabilities in alignment with regional security imperatives. France's willingness to engage in technology transfer and joint production underscores the long-term nature of this strategic cooperation and reflects the goals of both nations to promote defense self-reliance and multipolar balance in the Indo-Pacific.

Analysis Using The Three Theoretical Perspectives

This section analyzes the Indonesia–France defense equipment procurement particularly the Rafale deal through three theoretical lenses: neorealism, cooperative security, and defense diplomacy. By applying these perspectives, we gain a multidimensional understanding of the motives, dynamics, and implications of bilateral defense cooperation between the two countries.

Neorealism: Procurement as Strategic Balancing

From a neorealist perspective, the primary driver of Indonesia's arms procurement is the imperative to ensure national survival and strategic autonomy in an anarchic international system. Neorealism posits that states act rationally to balance against perceived threats and to maintain their relative power position. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia faces increasing maritime tension in the South China Sea, regional power

competition, and uncertainties arising from defense alignments like the AUKUS and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA).

The acquisition of 42 Rafale multirole fighters from France can be interpreted as part of Indonesia's hedging strategy a way to avoid dependence on a single great power while enhancing its air power deterrent capability. By selecting France as a supplier, Indonesia avoids entanglement in U.S.–China rivalry while simultaneously improving its ability to assert control over its airspace and maritime boundaries. France, meanwhile, enhances its influence in the Indo-Pacific by supporting a regional middle power-seeking strategic autonomy.

This procurement is also reflective of Indonesia's intention to close capability gaps vis-à-vis neighboring states, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, which have also upgraded their fighter jet fleets. Hence, through the neorealist lens, the Rafale procurement is not merely about defense modernization it is a balancing act in a complex and competitive regional environment.

Cooperative Security: Procurement as a Platform for Trust-Building and Interoperability

Cooperative security theory emphasizes the importance of transparency, mutual trust, and multilateral collaboration to prevent conflict and promote shared stability. In this context, defense procurement is not solely a transaction but an entry point for long-term defense cooperation, including joint exercises, strategic dialogues, and knowledge-sharing.

The Rafale procurement agreement between Indonesia and France goes beyond the simple sale of aircraft. It includes provisions for pilot training, logistics support, armament systems integration, and the establishment of Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities in Indonesia. These components are intended to foster interoperability between the two armed forces and encourage institutional linkages that contribute to mutual confidence-building.

Moreover, France's willingness to offer offsets and technology transfers aligns with Indonesia's strategic goal of enhancing its indigenous defense industry. This cooperative framework not only strengthens bilateral ties but also contributes to ASEAN's broader objectives of building a peaceful, rules-based regional security architecture. Thus, cooperative security theory highlights the inclusive and constructive nature of the Indonesia–France defense relationship.

Defense Diplomacy: Procurement as a Strategic Engagement Tool

The defense diplomacy framework considers the peaceful application of defense-related tools such as training, dialogue, procurement, and personnel exchange to achieve foreign policy objectives and build strategic partnerships. Viewed through this lens, Indonesia's procurement of Rafale jets is not just a military upgrade but a diplomatic maneuver to strengthen political ties with France and elevate Indonesia's standing as a responsible and modern military actor in the Indo-Pacific.

The defense procurement has facilitated high-level defense dialogues and the signing of defense cooperation agreements, such as the 2021 Letter of Intent on strengthening strategic partnership and joint defense research. The inclusion of strategic cooperation elements such as co-development, defense-industrial collaboration, and defense education exchanges signifies that procurement is being used as a vehicle for broader diplomatic engagement.

Additionally, the role of defense attachés and defense industry delegations has grown in importance, enhancing the soft-power dimension of defense diplomacy. France gains access to Southeast Asia's largest archipelagic state, while Indonesia garners diplomatic leverage through diversification and modernization. Thus, the case demonstrates how procurement operates as a dual-purpose tool achieving both defense and diplomatic objectives.

Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

Taken together, these three theoretical lenses provide a comprehensive picture of the Indonesia–France defense procurement dynamic. Neorealism underscores the strategic calculus of survival and deterrence; cooperative security reveals the trust-building and multilateral dimensions of the partnership; and defense diplomacy explains how procurement serves as a tool of soft power and long-term strategic engagement. Understanding the convergence of these perspectives is essential for grasping the full significance of defense equipment procurement as both a tactical and diplomatic endeavor.

The strategic partnership between Indonesia and France, particularly in the domain of defense equipment procurement, reflects a dynamic interplay of structural imperatives, cooperative aspirations, and diplomatic signaling. This section explores the significance of Indonesia's procurement of Rafale fighter jets and Scorpène-class submarines by applying three theoretical frameworks: neorealism, cooperative security, and defense diplomacy.

Neorealism: Strategic Balancing Through Procurement

Neorealism posits that states operate within an anarchic international system and prioritize survival by maximizing power relative to others. In this context, Indonesia's engagement with France in acquiring high-tech military equipment is a manifestation of strategic balancing behavior.

Indonesia's geographical position in the Indo-Pacific flanked by the South China Sea and critical sea lanes places it in a volatile security environment. The rise of China's assertive maritime posture and the strategic uncertainty stemming from U.S.–China rivalry have prompted Jakarta to recalibrate its defense strategy. The procurement of 42 Rafale fighter jets and a plan to acquire two Scorpène-class submarines from France not only enhances Indonesia's deterrence capabilities but also signals its intention to remain strategically autonomous without depending solely on U.S.-made platforms.

These procurements reflect the application of neorealism in two key ways:

- First, they serve to strengthen Indonesia's air-sea denial capability, a core component of its Minimum Essential Force (MEF) strategy.
- Second, they represent a hedging strategy, allowing Indonesia to diversify defense suppliers while maintaining diplomatic flexibility amid great-power competition.

Cooperative Security: Building Mutual Trust and Interoperability

While neorealism highlights power dynamics, cooperative security emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and institutionalized defense engagement to address common threats (Evans, 1994; Acharya, 2001). Indonesia and France have strengthened their cooperative frameworks through not only procurement but also training programs, joint naval exercises, strategic dialogues, and technical assistance.

The defense cooperation agreement signed in June 2021 laid the foundation for long-term interoperability and maintenance collaboration (Ministry of Defense Indonesia, 2022). France has also committed to assist Indonesia in technology transfer and the local production of defense components, including plans involving PT PAL and PT Dirgantara Indonesia.

These cooperative engagements fulfill key principles of cooperative security:

- Confidence-building through defense attaché exchanges and transparent procurement negotiations.

- Institutional cooperation through continued France–Indonesia defense working groups and high-level policy dialogues.
- Capacity building, particularly in maritime and air force capabilities, through embedded training and simulation systems.

Such cooperative measures not only modernize Indonesia's defense sector but also improve its readiness to contribute to multilateral initiatives under ADMM-Plus and other regional security forums.

Defense Diplomacy: Military Engagement as a Tool of Influence

Defense diplomacy provides a more nuanced lens to examine how military tools beyond coercion serve political and diplomatic purposes. As defined by Cottey and Forster (2004), defense diplomacy includes defense dialogues, military training exchanges, confidence-building activities, and arms sales as mechanisms of foreign policy.

Indonesia's procurement of major French defense systems has been accompanied by intense diplomatic engagement. Key developments include:

- The bilateral ministerial meetings between Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and his French counterparts in 2021–2022.
- Visits by the French Navy to Indonesian ports and French defense exhibitions involving Indonesian delegations.
- The symbolic inclusion of Indonesian pilots and engineers in French training facilities, signaling long-term military-to-military relations.

France, for its part, views this defense diplomacy as part of its broader Indo-Pacific Strategy launched in 2018, which aims to deepen engagement with like-minded regional powers. For Indonesia, defense diplomacy is a way to gain not only hardware but also diplomatic leverage and prestige as a rising middle power in Southeast Asia.

Strategic Synergi: Interplay of Theory and Practice

These three perspectives are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. Neorealism explains the underlying motivation strategic balancing; cooperative security elucidates the methods joint training and engagement; and defense diplomacy clarifies the broader goals political influence and institutional integration. The following table synthesizes these perspectives:

Table 2. Strategic Analysis of Indonesia-France Defense Diplomacy (2021-2024)

Theoretical Framework	Core Concepts	Indonesia-France Application
Neorealism	Power balancing, military modernization, security autonomy	Acquisition of Rafale jets and Scorpène submarines to deter threats and diversify strategic partners (China, US, Russia)
Cooperative Security	Trust-building, joint exercises, institutional transparency	Joint defense working groups, tech transfer programs, interoperability-building, training for air force and navy personnel
Defense Diplomacy	Military cooperation as diplomatic engagement, confidence-building	High-level visits, bilateral agreements, symbolic acts (pilot exchanges), and alignment with France's Indo-Pacific outreach strategy

In conclusion, the Indonesia–France defense partnership illustrates a multidimensional defense diplomacy approach that combines strategic intent with cooperative engagement. It reflects Indonesia's transition from a reactive security posture to a more proactive and globally engaged defense strategy, contributing to regional security while advancing its national defense goals.

DISCUSSION

The case of Indonesia–France defense procurement most notably the Rafale fighter jet deal offers critical insights into how defense diplomacy functions as a strategic mechanism for both capability enhancement and bilateral trust-building. Drawing from the previous theoretical analyses, this section outlines the key findings and contextualizes them within Indonesia's broader foreign and security policy objectives.

Procurement as a Multi-Dimensional Strategy

The findings indicate that Indonesia's procurement of advanced military platforms from France is not merely a transactional move aimed at increasing defense capabilities. Instead, it is part of a multi-dimensional strategy that combines elements of hard power (military capacity), soft power (diplomatic engagement), and smart power (institutional balancing and hedging).

Neorealism helps explain how this procurement responds to regional uncertainties and the need to hedge against dominant regional players like China. At the same time, cooperative security theory highlights the trust-building and interoperability benefits stemming from defense cooperation with France such as joint maintenance facilities, pilot

training, and logistical coordination(Sarjito & Perwita, 2024) . Defense diplomacy theory integrates these strands by framing procurement as a diplomatic instrument that supports Indonesia's broader goals of strategic autonomy and international prestige.

Strategic Autonomy and Supplier Diversification

Another key finding is that Indonesia uses defense procurement to promote strategic autonomy by diversifying its sources of military technology. By partnering with France an influential but non-aligned Western power in the Indo-Pacific Indonesia avoids overdependence on traditional suppliers such as the United States, Russia, or China (Fitriani, 2022). This approach enhances Indonesia's flexibility in foreign policy decision-making and aligns with the principle of bebas aktif (independent and active) that has historically guided its diplomacy.

Moreover, France's willingness to offer co-production, technology transfer, and offsets presents a more attractive and politically feasible package for Indonesia's domestic defense industry development goals that are explicitly stated in the *Minimum Essential Force (MEF)* policy framework (Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Institutionalization of Bilateral Strategic Dialogue

Defense procurement has facilitated the institutionalization of bilateral defense relations, with notable outcomes such as the Indonesia–France Joint Defense Cooperation Committee (JDCC), Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on defense industrial cooperation, and high-level visits between defense ministers. These platforms provide continuity and policy depth beyond the life span of specific arms deals, helping to embed trust and strategic alignment at the bureaucratic and political levels.

Such institutionalized engagement enhances predictability and transparency key components of cooperative security and allows for forward planning on joint exercises, maritime cooperation, and multilateral coordination within ASEAN or ADMM-Plus frameworks (Oktreza R.; Hadisancoko, R. E., 2024).

Implications for Regional Security and Defense Diplomacy

The Indonesia–France case also has implications beyond bilateral ties. First, it sets a precedent for middle-power diplomacy, where arms procurement is leveraged to assert agency in a contested regional order. Second, it demonstrates how defense diplomacy can

complement traditional alliance-building by fostering relationships based on mutual capability development and shared strategic interests rather than formal alliances.

Finally, it showcases a model of mutual benefit France expands its strategic influence and market access in Southeast Asia, while Indonesia gains advanced platforms, technical know-how, and a stronger international defense profile. In this way, defense procurement becomes a mutually reinforcing tool for enhancing both defense postures and diplomatic reach.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite these strategic gains, challenges remain. Procurement-based diplomacy is often constrained by financial limitations, bureaucratic inertia, and domestic political dynamics. Indonesia's fluctuating defense budgets and procurement delays risk undermining long-term planning and consistency. Additionally, concerns about technology dependency or unequal bargaining power may emerge if industrial cooperation is not adequately implemented (Setiawan & Fitriani, 2022).

Moreover, in the context of regional sensitivity, arms deals must be carefully managed to avoid triggering arms races or perceptions of aggressive posturing. As such, transparency and communication through regional platforms like the ADMM and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) remain essential.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the evolving defense relationship between Indonesia and France through the lens of defense diplomacy, using the Rafale fighter jet procurement as a central case. By applying neorealism, cooperative security, and defense diplomacy theories, the analysis has demonstrated that such defense equipment transactions serve not only functional military objectives but also play a pivotal role in shaping strategic partnerships and enhancing international political engagement.

From a neorealist perspective, Indonesia's arms procurement reflects a rational strategy to improve its deterrence capabilities amid regional uncertainties, particularly in light of maritime disputes and the shifting Indo-Pacific balance of power. The choice of France an influential yet non-aligned defense partner underscores Indonesia's intent to

pursue strategic autonomy and avoid overreliance on any single power bloc (Waltz, 1979; Fitriani, 2022).

Cooperative security theory enriches this understanding by highlighting how the Indonesia–France defense partnership extends beyond material transactions to include institutionalized military cooperation, joint training, and defense-industrial collaboration. These practices contribute to mutual trust and support broader ASEAN-led regional stability efforts (Evans & Grant, 1995; Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Moreover, defense diplomacy provides the most integrative framework for interpreting the multifaceted nature of this partnership. As the analysis has shown, arms procurement has functioned as a gateway for deeper strategic dialogue, defense policy alignment, and even soft-power projection. For France, the partnership with Indonesia reinforces its Indo-Pacific strategy, while for Indonesia, the relationship enhances its international defense profile and strengthens domestic military modernization.

In conclusion, the Indonesia–France case affirms that defense procurement, when embedded in broader diplomatic and strategic goals, serves as an essential component of modern defense diplomacy. It not only enhances military capacity but also promotes long-term bilateral trust, institutional cooperation, and regional stability. As such, this case exemplifies how middle powers like Indonesia can leverage defense diplomacy to navigate great power competition, foster balanced partnerships, and uphold national security interests in a dynamic and often contested regional environment.

Future research should investigate how such procurement-based diplomacy impacts multilateral security dynamics, particularly within ASEAN and its associated defense mechanisms. Additionally, comparative studies with other middle powers such as India or Vietnam may offer valuable insights into patterns and best practices in strategic arms diplomacy.

Policy Recommendations

To ensure that defense procurement serves not merely as a transactional activity but as a strategic instrument for long-term bilateral and regional security cooperation, this section outlines several policy recommendations for both Indonesia and France. These suggestions are derived from the empirical findings and theoretical reflections in the preceding sections.

Institutionalize Strategic Dialogue Mechanisms

Both countries should elevate existing bilateral forums into formalized and recurring strategic dialogues. These platforms must go beyond defense acquisition to cover interoperability, joint threat assessments, cybersecurity cooperation, and defense technology development. Establishing a Defense and Strategic Cooperation Council between Indonesia and France comprising civilian, military, and industry stakeholders can strengthen mutual trust and long-term engagement (Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Prioritize Technology Transfer and Industrial Cooperation

As part of defense procurement agreements, Indonesia must continue to negotiate robust **offset arrangements** that include technology transfer, joint production, and the development of local defense industries. France, for its part, should treat these measures not as concessions but as investment opportunities in strengthening its Indo-Pacific strategic presence. The partnership should move toward co-development models, similar to France's collaborations with India (Duchâtel & Li, 2020).

Integrate Defense Diplomacy into ASEAN Platforms

Indonesia should leverage its partnership with France to strengthen ASEAN defense diplomacy platforms, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). Through joint training, humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HADR) exercises, and maritime security collaboration, France can contribute constructively to regional public goods, reinforcing Indonesia's leadership in promoting cooperative security (Storey, 2021).

Strengthen Civil-Military Synergy in Procuremet Policy

To avoid inefficiencies, Indonesia should enhance coordination between the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the House of Representatives in planning procurement that aligns with long-term strategic and diplomatic objectives. Defense diplomacy should be treated not only as military engagement but also as a component of foreign policy, economic growth, and innovation (Erwan & Anindya, 2021).

Promoting Academic and People-to-People Exchanges

Defense diplomacy should also be humanized. Joint scholarship programs, officer exchange programs, and military education cooperation between institutions like Indonesia's Defense University and France's École de Guerre should be enhanced. These

efforts will cultivate mutual understanding and professional interoperability for the next generation of defense leaders (Nugraha F. W.; Perwita, A. A. B., 2024).

By adopting these recommendations, Indonesia and France can deepen their strategic partnership and harness defense procurement not only to meet immediate capability needs but also to serve as a long-term diplomatic asset in a rapidly shifting Indo-Pacific region.

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