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Japan's Defense Strategy Transformation in the Indo-Pacific: Relevance, Opportunities, and Challenges for Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy

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Abstract

Japan's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific has received increasing scholarly attention, particularly in relation to the evolution of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy and regional security dynamics. However, studies specifically examining the transformation of Japan's defense diplomacy from FOIP 1.0 to FOIP 3.0 and its strategic implications for Indonesia remain limited. This study aims to analyze the transformation of Japan's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific and assess its strategic implications for Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research examines Japan's evolving defense diplomacy architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. Data were collected through document analysis of official government documents, defense white papers, policy reports, and relevant academic literature, and were analyzed using thematic and content analysis techniques. The findings indicate that Japan's defense diplomacy has shifted from a traditionally reactive security posture toward a more proactive, multidomain, and technology-oriented strategy encompassing maritime security, cybersecurity, space cooperation, alliance interoperability, and Official Security

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Assistance (OSA). The findings further show that Japan increasingly functions as a proactive security provider through multidomain cooperation and institutionalized defense diplomacy mechanisms. This study contributes to the development of Neoclassical Realism and defense diplomacy literature by demonstrating how states adapt to systemic pressures through non-coercive security instruments and multidomain engagement. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of balanced and adaptive defense diplomacy for Indonesia in strengthening maritime security, cybersecurity, and strategic autonomy amid intensifying Indo-Pacific geopolitical competition. The study offers practical implications for policymakers in designing adaptive and balanced defense cooperation strategies and provides opportunities for further comparative research on defense diplomacy among Indo-Pacific middle powers.

Keywords: Defense Diplomacy; Free and Open Indo-Pacific; Indo-Pacific Security; Indonesia; Neoclassical Realism

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the most dynamic and competitive strategic region in the contemporary international system. According to Baker (2023), the rivalry between the United States and China, increasingly intensive military modernization, and tensions in critical flashpoints such as the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the East China Sea are creating a growing level of security uncertainty. In addition to traditional threats, the region also faces new security challenges, including cyberattacks, satellite jamming, information warfare, and the use of dual-use technology, which further complicate regional security dynamics. These conditions require countries in the region to adopt more adaptive, comprehensive, and integrated defense policies.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022), Japan is in a particularly sensitive position within this security landscape due to its economic dependence on maritime trade routes, its geographical proximity to China and North Korea, and shifts in external threat patterns. Over the past decade, Japan has shifted from a passive defense posture toward a more proactive and multi-domain defense approach. This significant shift was formalized through three strategic documents in 2022, the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program, which together mark the most significant transformation in Japan's defense policy since the end of World War II.

The transformation of Japan's defense policy cannot be adequately explained solely through the structural pressures of the international system, as assumed in neorealism. According to Rose (1998), Neoclassical Realism emphasizes that a state's response to international dynamics is always influenced by domestic variables, such as the perceptions of the political elite, bureaucratic capacity, domestic political stability, and public support. Ripsman et al. (2016) also state that a country's policy changes result from the interaction between external pressures and domestic dynamics. In Japan's case, external pressures such as the rise of China's military power, North Korea's aggression, and global uncertainty following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have been key factors. However, domestic dynamics, including the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party, the defense bureaucracy's consistent push for modernization, and the growing public perception of threat in Japan, have also accelerated changes in defense strategy (Scheffran, 2023).

Japan is also playing an increasingly active role in Southeast Asia's security architecture. According to the State of Southeast Asia Survey report published by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2024), Japan is rated as the most trusted major power in Southeast Asia, surpassing the United States and China. ISEAS (2024) states that this level of trust stems from Japan's consistency in providing development assistance, maintaining regional stability, and conducting rules-based, non-coercive defense diplomacy.

For Indonesia, Japan is a strategic partner in the areas of maritime stability, defense modernization, strategic industrial development, and strengthening non-traditional security capabilities. Agastia and Perwita (2016) state that Indonesia, as the largest archipelagic nation, has vital interests in the security of maritime communication routes and the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, understanding the direction of changes in Japan's defense strategy is crucial for assessing its impact on the regional security environment and the position of Indonesia's defense diplomacy (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

To provide a more comprehensive understanding, this study employs two theoretical frameworks: Neoclassical Realism and Defense Diplomacy. According to Rose (1998), Neoclassical Realism explains why and under what conditions states adjust their defense policies based on the interaction of external pressures and domestic dynamics. Meanwhile, Cottey and Foster (2004) state that Defense Diplomacy is an approach that utilizes non-coercive military instruments such as joint exercises, capacity building, personnel exchanges, defense dialogues, and security assistance to achieve foreign policy

objectives. Winger (2014) also asserts that defense diplomacy is an important instrument for states seeking to expand their strategic influence without directly employing military force.

The integration of these two theories provides a stronger analytical framework. Neoclassical Realism explains the background of Japan's defense strategy transformation, while Defense Diplomacy explains how Japan practically projects its influence through non-coercive military cooperation, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia. Thus, this study can identify the direct and indirect implications of changes in Japan's defense strategy for Indonesia's defense diplomacy as a key actor in ASEAN and a maritime pivot state in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, through this study, the author will attempt to answer two research questions: *How have Japan's defense strategy and defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific evolved across different administrations, and how does this transformation affect the strategic implications, opportunities, and challenges for Indonesia.* This study is expected to identify opportunities and challenges for Indonesia as a consequence of Japan's policy transformation and, ultimately, provide strategic policy recommendations as an output.

METHODS

This research method was designed to provide a systematic analytical framework for examining changes in Japan's defense strategy and their implications for Indonesia's defense diplomacy. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, as this approach allows the researcher to understand phenomena in a holistic, in-depth, and context-specific manner. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for research focused on the dynamics of policy, processes, and the interpretations of state actors. Consequently, this approach is employed to examine the evolution of Japan's defense strategy and how Japan implements its defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region. Data collection was conducted through a literature review, which included a search of official Japanese documents such as: This study uses secondary data from various reliable sources, including (figure 1):

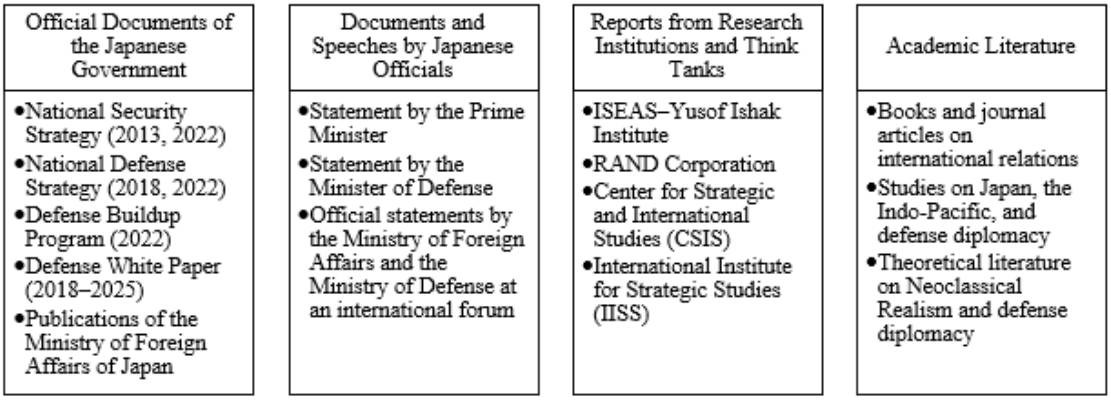


Figure 1. Research data sources
Source: compiled by the author

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), a literature review is an effective method for identifying conceptual trends and empirical findings in international policy research.

The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis allows researchers to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between variables based on the mapping of concepts and content. In this study, thematic analysis was used to group data into main themes, such as external and internal factors influencing changes in Japan's strategy (based on Neoclassical Realism), as well as the instruments of defense diplomacy employed by Japan in its relations with Southeast Asian nations and Indonesia. The analysis process was conducted in three stages: data reduction (selection of relevant information), categorization (thematic grouping), and interpretation (constructing meaning based on the theoretical framework). These stages ensure that the analysis remains systematic and theory-based.

The validity of the research is maintained through source triangulation (figure 2), which involves comparing and verifying information from official documents, research institution reports, and scholarly works to ensure data consistency. Yin (2014) states that triangulation is a crucial element in enhancing the credibility of qualitative research, particularly when the study focuses on the complex dynamics of policy and international relations.

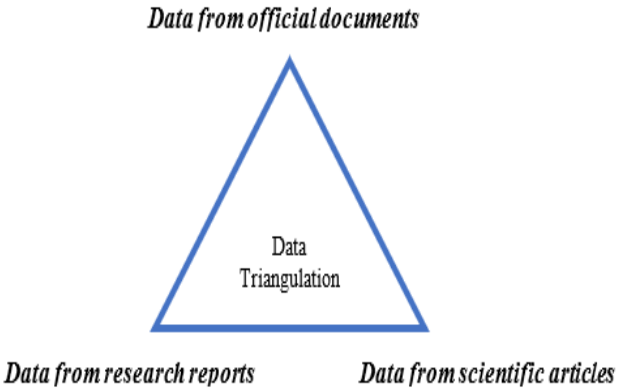


Figure 2. Data Triangulation Method
Source: compiled by the author

The limitations of this study lie in the scope of the analysis, which is confined to the period from 2012 to the post-publication of the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the 2025 Defense White Paper, as well as in the use of secondary data as the primary source without incorporating primary data such as interviews or direct observation. This study also examines only internal aspects of Japan to the extent relevant to the theory of Neoclassical Realism, and thus does not discuss the entirety of Japan's domestic political dynamics in detail. The research focus is directed toward the relationship between the transformation of Japan's defense strategy, the instruments of defense diplomacy employed, and their implications for Indonesia's defense diplomacy.

The following is a flowchart of the methodology used in this study at figure 3:

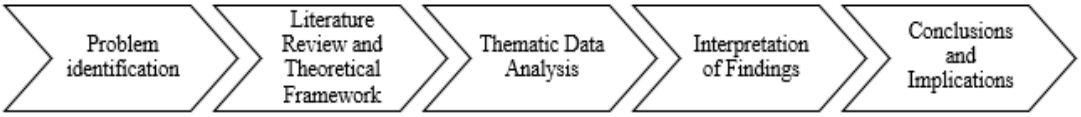


Figure 3. Research Flowchart
Source: compiled by the author

This study employs a qualitative approach using Neoclassical Realism as the primary analytical framework and Defense Diplomacy as a complementary analytical concept to examine Japan's defense transformation in responding to contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. In this study, both frameworks are not merely positioned as theoretical perspectives, but also function as analytical instruments for interpreting empirical findings. Accordingly, this study operationalizes these concepts into observable analytical dimensions to systematically analyze Japan's defense reform and strategic engagement.

According to Rose (1998), Neoclassical Realism is an extension of realist thought in international relations that seeks to integrate international structural pressures with domestic political dynamics in explaining state behavior. Although the international system exerts structural pressures on states, policy responses are not automatic but rather filtered through domestic intervening variables such as elite perception, state capacity, bureaucratic institutions, and internal political interests. Therefore, this study adopts the Neoclassical Realism framework proposed by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016) as the primary analytical lens for understanding Japan's defense policy transformation.

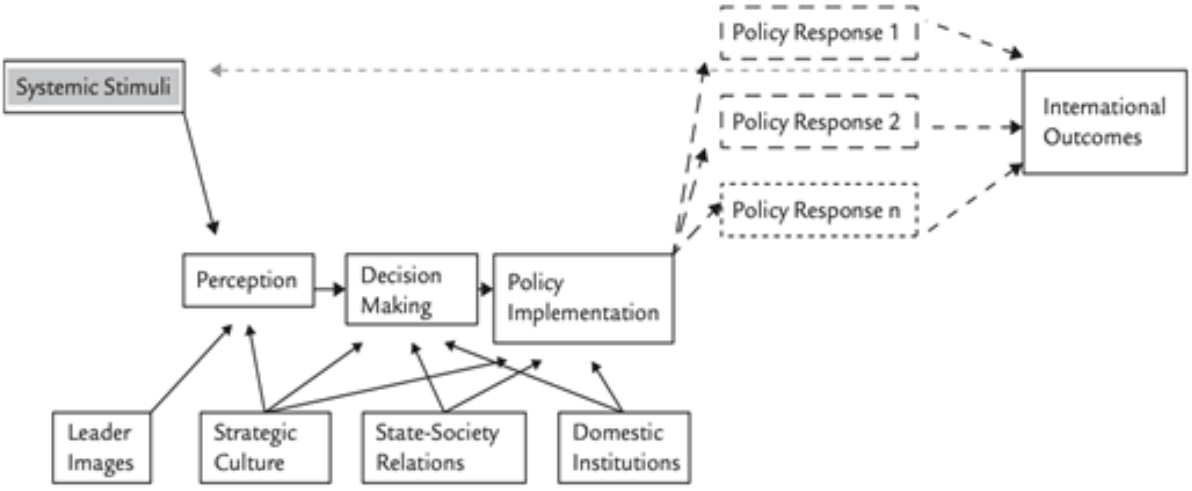


Figure 4. Analytical Framework of Neoclassical Realism Applied in This Study

(Adapted from Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016)

As shown in Figure 4, this study examines Japan's defense transformation through the interaction between external systemic pressures and domestic intervening variables. External pressures include China's military rise, North Korea's missile and nuclear development, and intensifying geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region. These pressures are analyzed through three categories of domestic variables proposed by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016), namely perceptual variables, institutional variables, and material variables. In the case of Japan, the transformation of its defense policy, which can be acknowledged as part of defense reform, reflects the interaction between external pressures, such as China's rise, North Korea's military threats, and intensifying geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, and domestic factors including bureaucratic consensus, leadership orientation, and evolving public perceptions regarding national security. Hence, this demonstrates a process of strategic adaptation in which the state seeks to convert its

economic, technological, and institutional capabilities into usable strategic power through defense modernization and defense diplomacy. Both of defense modernization and defense diplomacy are linked to country's defense reform which has been identified as an observable variable in the context of Neoclassical Realism (Dyson, 2010).

First, perceptual variables are employed to analyze how Japanese leaders and political elites interpret external threats. In this context, particular attention is given to leaders' strategic narratives, national security discourse, and official policy statements concerning regional security developments. Second, institutional variables are used to assess the role of political institutions, bureaucratic structures, constitutional debates, and domestic political dynamics in shaping defense policy transformation. This includes examining the political orientation of Japan's leadership under the Abe, Suga, and Kishida administrations, as well as bureaucratic consensus in the Ministry of Defense and broader domestic political arrangements. Third, material variables are utilized to examine Japan's military capabilities, technological development, defense spending, and broader institutional capacities that support defense modernization. Following Dyson (2010), defense reform is understood not merely as an automatic response to changes in the international system, but as a strategic adaptation process shaped by domestic institutions, elite perceptions, and national strategic culture. To operationalize the analytical process, the dimensions of Neoclassical Realism applied in this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization of Neoclassical Realism Framework

Analytical Dimension	Observable Indicators	Sources of Data
Perceptual Variables	Threat perception, leaders' speeches, national security narratives	Prime Minister speeches, National Security Strategy (NSS), official statements
Institutional Variables	Bureaucratic role, political dynamics, constitutional debates, leadership orientation	Government reports, Ministry of Defense documents, parliamentary discussions
Material Variables	Defense budget, military modernization, technological capacity	Defense White Paper, military expenditure reports

In addition to Neoclassical Realism, this study incorporates the concept of Defense Diplomacy to analyze Japan's non-coercive strategic engagement in regional security cooperation. According to Cottey and Forster (2004), defense diplomacy refers to the use of non-coercive military instruments to strengthen international relations, foster trust, and support strategic foreign policy objectives. Such activities include joint military exercises,

defense dialogues, military personnel exchange, capacity-building programs, and defense assistance initiatives. This framework is particularly relevant for analyzing Japan's increasing reliance on cooperative security mechanisms, including its implementation of Official Security Assistance (OSA) and defense cooperation in Southeast Asia and Indonesia. The operational categories of defense diplomacy analyzed in this study are presented in Figure 3.

Defense Diplomacy Activities:

- Bilateral and multilateral contacts between senior military and civilian defense officials.
- Appointment of defense attaches to foreign countries.
- Bilateral defense cooperation agreements.
- Training of foreign military and civilian defense personnel
- Provision of expertise and advice on democratic control of armed forces, defense management and military technical areas.
- Contacts and exchanges between military personnel and units, and ship visits.
- Placement of military or civilian personnel in partner countries' defense ministries and armed forces (exchanges).
- Deployment of training teams.
- Provision of military equipment and other material aid.
- Bilateral or multilateral military exercises for training purposes.

Source: Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, "Adelphi Paper 365: Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Figure 5. Operational Categories of Defense Diplomacy Activities Used in This Study

(Adapted from Cottey & Forster, 2004)

As illustrated in Figure 5, this study analyzes Japan's defense diplomacy through several observable activities, including joint military exercises, strategic defense dialogues, security assistance, military personnel exchange, and defense capacity-building initiatives. Following Winger (2014), defense diplomacy is understood as a mechanism through which states project strategic influence peacefully amidst geopolitical competition. Likewise, Drab (2018) emphasizes that non-coercive military engagement enables states to expand strategic influence without escalating tensions. Therefore, Japan's defense diplomacy is interpreted as part of its broader strategic adaptation in responding to Indo-Pacific security dynamics.

RESULTS

The Transformation of Japan's Defense Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific

Japan's defense diplomacy has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, particularly in response to increasing strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The transformation can be observed through changes in strategic orientation across successive administrations, from Shinzo Abe to Yoshihide Suga, Fumio Kishida, and the

projected policy direction under Takaichi Sanae. The findings indicate that Japan's defense policy has shifted from a reactive and largely constrained security posture toward a proactive, multidomain, and technologically driven approach.

A comparison of FOIP policies across different administrations can provide a clearer picture of the direction of Japan's transformation, as follows:

Tabel 2. The Evolution and Characteristics of FOIP 1.0 to FOIP 3.0

FOIP Phase	Main Characteristics	Strategic Intstruments	Defense Diplomacy Focus
FOIP 1.0 (Abe Era)	Rule-based order, maritime stability, response to China	Maritime exercises, capacity building, maritime law diplomacy	Maritime, exercises, surveillance, trilateral cooperation
FOIP 2.0 (Suga – Kishida Era)	Inclusive, economic and security development, connectivity	Infrastructure, cybersecurity, technology, economy	Integration of non-traditional security with capacity-building
FOIP 3.0 (Takaichi Era)	Multi-domain, deterrence, deeper alliances, emerging technologies	Counter-Strike, satellites, cyber, space, ISR	Expanded OSA, U.S.–Japan interoperability, Taiwan's preparedness

Source: Yoshimatsu, 2025; Hosoya, 2019; compiled by the author

From the perspective of neoclassical realism, according to Walt (1987), states will adjust their defense postures and alliances to counterbalance threats from major powers. Threats from China and North Korea, as well as broader uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific, have prompted Japan to strengthen its domestic military capabilities while deepening coordination with the United States. However, the theory of defense diplomacy provides an additional layer of understanding. Defense diplomacy explains that Japan's decisions are not merely about military buildup, but also about how Japan builds partnership networks, shares information, expands interoperability, and distributes security assistance to shape a strategic environment conducive to its national interests.

Thus, Japan's evolution from FOIP 1.0 to FOIP 3.0, the development of counterstrike capabilities, and the expansion of defense diplomacy indicate that Japan is no longer a passive security consumer but is beginning to act as a security provider in the Indo-Pacific. This transformation has direct implications for countries in the region, particularly Indonesia, which must adjust its defense diplomacy strategy in response to Japan's growing role as a proactive, high-tech security actor.

During Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration, Japan introduced the first phase of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP 1.0), emphasizing maritime stability,

freedom of navigation, and the maintenance of a rules-based order. Japan began strengthening maritime security cooperation, military exercises, and trilateral partnerships in response to China's increasing maritime assertiveness.

Under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Japan maintained the strategic direction established during the Abe era while expanding FOIP into a broader framework (FOIP 2.0). This phase emphasized regional connectivity, infrastructure cooperation, and non-traditional security issues, including cybersecurity and technology cooperation.

The most substantial transformation occurred during Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration. In 2022, Japan introduced three major strategic documents: the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and Defense Buildup Program. These policies marked Japan's transition toward stronger deterrence capabilities, increased defense spending, multidomain defense operations, and the development of counterstrike capabilities.

Recent policy developments suggest that under Takaichi Sanae's leadership, Japan's defense diplomacy may deepen further through stronger alliance coordination, enhanced cybersecurity, Taiwan preparedness, and expanded multidomain interoperability. This phase reflects what can be categorized as FOIP 3.0 (table 2).

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Source: Yoshimatsu, 2025; Hosoya, 2019; compiled by the author

The Pillars of Japan's Defense Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific

In analyzing Japan's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific, there are four key pillars that are interrelated and form Japan's strategic architecture: (1) the evolution of the

Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision, (2) Official Security Assistance (OSA), (3) alliance-based diplomacy, particularly through the Japan–United States partnership, and (4) technology diplomacy and capacity building. These four pillars not only reflect Japan's response to an increasingly complex security environment but also offer important lessons for countries like Indonesia in designing adaptive defense diplomacy.

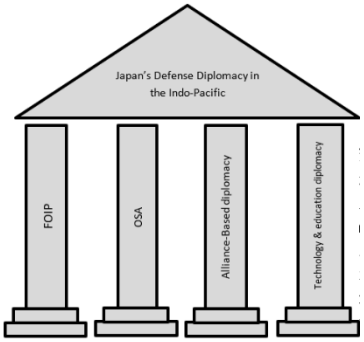


Figure 6. The Pillars of Japan's Defense Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific
Source: compiled by the author

Based on Figure 6, the first pillar is the evolution of FOIP as a multidomain strategic framework. FOIP serves as the primary foundation illustrating Japan's transition from a reactive defense approach to a proactive multidomain engagement strategy. According to analyses of Japan's strategic policy, FOIP was initially designed as a response to China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. In line with the thinking of Keohane and Nye (2012), the evolution of FOIP reflects a shift from a realist balancing approach toward complex interdependence, in which states integrate economic, political, and defense interests. The development of FOIP can be mapped as follows:

- FOIP 1.0 (Abe Era) → Focus on maritime security and freedom of navigation.
- FOIP 2.0 (Suga Era) → Expanding the agenda toward regional development and connectivity.
- FOIP 3.0 (Kishida Era until present) → Under the 2022 NSS framework, Japan emphasizes multidomain security cooperation: maritime, cyber, space, and electromagnetic.

This evolution also reflects Japan's efforts not merely to respond to threats, but to build a rules-based regional architecture, institutional resilience, and long-term capacity. For Indonesia, this underscores that modern defense diplomacy must encompass multidomain cooperation such as maritime domain awareness (MDA), cybersecurity, and dual-use technology.

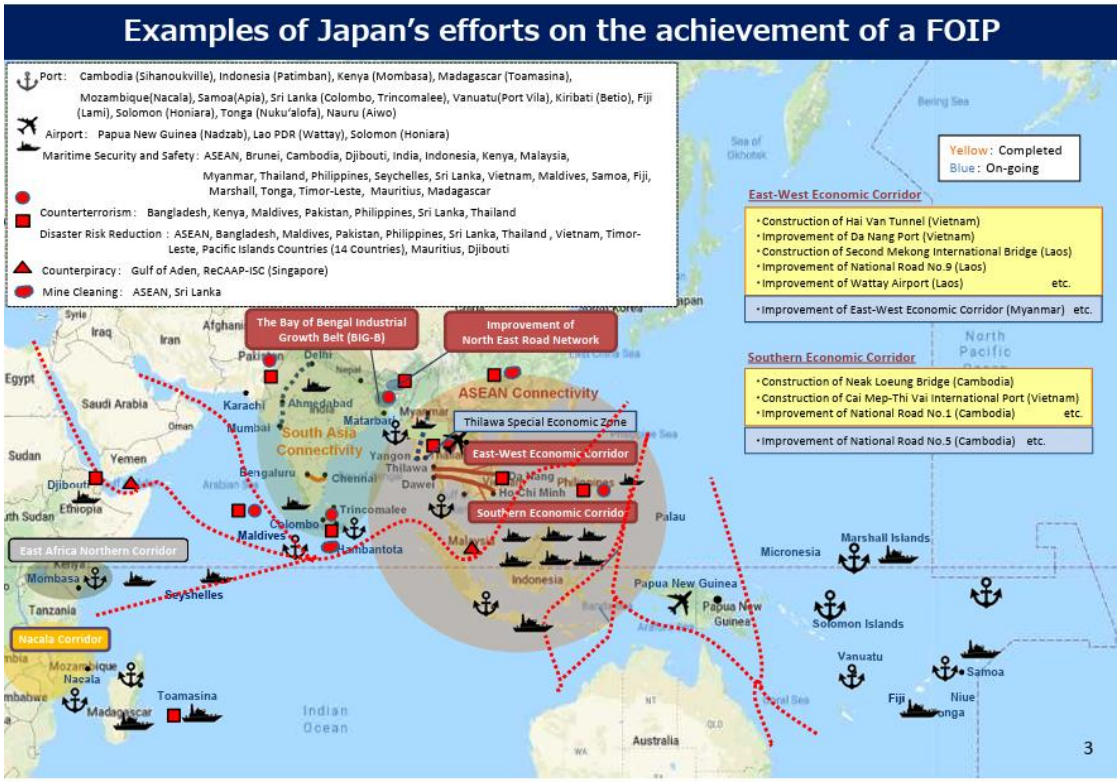


Figure 7. Examples of Japan's Efforts to Achieve FOIP

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2021

Based on the figure 7, the second pillar is Official Security Assistance (OSA). OSA is Japan's instrument for strengthening the security capabilities of partner countries through non-lethal assistance. According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense's policy (2025), this assistance includes coastal radar, patrol vessels, professional training, and maritime surveillance support. This approach aligns with the concept of comprehensive security, which integrates defense, economic development, governance, and institutional resilience (Soeya, 2017).

Official Security Assistance (OSA)

The second pillar is Official Security Assistance (OSA), which has emerged as a key instrument in Japan's defense diplomacy. Findings show that Japan increasingly provides non-lethal assistance such as coastal radar systems, patrol vessels, professional military training, and maritime surveillance support to partner countries. Indonesia is among the recipients of Japanese OSA assistance, particularly in maritime security cooperation through patrol vessel grants (figure 8).

Fig. III-1-3-4 OSA Results in FY2023-2024

Fiscal Year	Nation	E/N signed/ exchanged	Amount	Equipment
2023	Philippines	November 3, 2023	600M yen	Coastal surveillance radar system
	Bangladesh	November 15, 2023	5.75M yen	Patrol boat
	Malaysia	December 16, 2023	400M yen	Rescue boat
	Fiji	December 18, 2023	400M yen	Patrol boat, etc.
2024	Philippines	December 5, 2024	1,600M yen	Air surveillance radar system-related equipment, etc.
	Djibouti	December 25, 2024	1,100M yen	Coastal surveillance radar system, etc.
	Indonesia	January 10, 2025	1,000M yen	High-speed patrol boat
	Mongolia	February 10, 2025	1,300M yen	Air traffic control system

(Note) E/N is a document exchanged between the Government of Japan and the Government of the recipient country.

Figure 8. OSA Results for Fiscal Year 2023–2024
Source: Japan's Defense White Paper, 2025

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020) notes that development assistance is often coordinated with security objectives, making OSA a form of normative diplomacy that promotes transparency and responsible defense practices. For Indonesia, OSA offers a model of defense diplomacy that does not create dependency but strengthens institutional capacity through technological cooperation and enhanced professionalism. Figure 9 (above) illustrates that as of January 10, 2025, Indonesia had received OSA assistance from Japan totaling 1,000 million yen, with the grant consisting of high-speed patrol vessels.

The third pillar is alliance-based diplomacy between Japan and the United States. This third pillar demonstrates that the Japan–U.S. partnership serves as the primary strategic foundation underpinning Japan's Indo-Pacific posture. According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense (2022), this alliance now encompasses coordination in space operations, cyber defense, electromagnetic warfare, and layered missile defense systems. International relations literature categorizes this strategy as a hallmark of *"middle-power alignment,"* that is, a state with intermediate capabilities that leverages institutional alliances to enhance its capacity, credibility, and deterrence (Chapnick, 2013).

The 2022 and 2023 Security Consultative Committee (SCC) documents between Japan and the U.S. highlight cooperation in:

1. Integrated Deterrence: synchronization of operational plans and enhanced readiness.

2. Technological Superiority: research collaboration in the fields of AI, quantum computing, and hypersonic technology.

3. Operational Interoperability: joint exercises such as Keen Sword and Resolute Dragon.

For Indonesia, a study of the Japan-U.S. alliance offers insights into how strategic partnerships can enhance defense credibility without forming a formal military pact.

The Fourth Pillar is Technology Diplomacy and Capacity Building. This final pillar represents the most modern aspect of Japan's defense diplomacy: the use of advanced technology as a diplomatic tool. Academic analysis indicates that Japan is increasing its use of surveillance satellites, radar networks, and AI-based ISR systems as part of its multidomain defense strategy (Government of Japan, 2022).

Bayne and Woolcock (2011) state that technology diplomacy enables high-capability nations to shape regional norms, safeguard strategic supply chains, and expand influence in the space and cyber domains.

In addition to technology, Japan has long invested in human resource capacity building through:

- officer exchanges,
- technical training,
- academic and defense research cooperation.

Bayne and Woolcock (2011) further explains that this approach reflects network governance as the formation of networks of experts and institutions to build long-term security resilience. For Indonesia, this cooperation opens opportunities for capacity building in satellite technology, cyber defense, and professional military education.

These four pillars reflect the emergence of what is referred to in the literature as a networked security architecture, that is a pattern of cooperation grounded in institutions, technology, and long-term capacity, rather than merely bilateral military alliances. This approach also illustrates a hedging strategy, in which a country expands its network of partners to manage uncertainty without explicitly choosing a bloc (Cheng-chwee, 2008). Thus, Japan combines deterrence, capacity building, technological innovation, and normative diplomacy to shape a stable Indo-Pacific security environment.

Alliance-Based Diplomacy

The third pillar is alliance-based diplomacy centered on Japan's strategic partnership with the United States. Findings suggest that the Japan–U.S. alliance increasingly incorporates multidomain operations, including cyber defense, space

cooperation, missile defense, and operational interoperability through joint exercises such as *Keen Sword* and *Resolute Dragon*.

Technology Diplomacy and Capacity Building

The fourth pillar concerns technology diplomacy and institutional capacity building. Findings indicate that Japan increasingly uses advanced technologies, including surveillance satellites, radar systems, and AI-based ISR capabilities, as instruments of regional engagement. Additionally, Japan continues to promote officer exchanges, technical training programs, and defense-related academic cooperation.

Strategic Implications for Indonesia

The findings demonstrate that Japan's transformation creates both opportunities and challenges for Indonesia. In the maritime sector, Japan's evolving defense diplomacy contributes to Indonesia's maritime domain awareness, patrol capacity, and maritime security resilience, particularly in the North Natuna Sea. In cyber and space domains, Japan offers opportunities for institutional strengthening through cybersecurity training, intelligence-sharing, and satellite surveillance cooperation. However, findings also suggest potential concerns regarding technological dependency and strategic autonomy. At the regional level, Japan's more active defense posture may strengthen ASEAN maritime stability while simultaneously increasing the risk of regional polarization amid U.S.–China rivalry.

Table 3. The Strategic Impact of Japan's Defense Diplomacy Transformation in the Indo-Pacific on Indonesia

Category	Main Implications for Indonesia
Opportunities	- Strengthening maritime security - Cybersecurity and space cooperation - Technology transfer and defense equipment modernization - Convergence of FOIP and AOIP - Enhancing Indonesia's diplomatic leverage in the region
Challenges	- Maintaining strategic autonomy - The risk of negative perceptions from China - The high cost of Japanese defense technology - Differences in approach among ASEAN countries
Risks	- Reliance on Japanese technology - The pull of U.S.-China rivalry - The potential for ASEAN fragmentation

Source: compiled by the author

Table 3, The Strategic Impact of Japan's Defense Diplomacy Transformation in the Indo-Pacific on Indonesia, illustrates that Japan's evolving defense diplomacy presents both opportunities and challenges for Indonesia. On the one hand, Indonesia may benefit from enhanced maritime security cooperation, cybersecurity and space collaboration, technology transfer, and the convergence between the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which may strengthen Indonesia's strategic position in the region. On the other hand, Indonesia faces several challenges, including maintaining strategic autonomy, managing perceptions related to closer engagement with Japan amid China's growing influence, and addressing the relatively high costs of Japanese defense technology. Furthermore, the table highlights risks associated with technological dependence, the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, and the potential fragmentation within ASEAN, all of which require Indonesia to adopt a balanced and carefully calibrated defense diplomacy strategy.

DISCUSSION

Japan's defense diplomacy transformation in the Indo-Pacific demonstrates a substantial shift from a traditionally constrained and reactive security posture toward a more proactive, multidomain, and technologically driven strategic approach. The findings reveal that the evolution from FOIP 1.0 to FOIP 3.0 reflects not merely policy continuity across political administrations but also a broader transformation in Japan's strategic orientation. Initially centered on maritime security and freedom of navigation during the Abe administration, Japan's defense diplomacy has gradually expanded to encompass multidomain security concerns, including cybersecurity, space governance, intelligence-sharing, and technological cooperation. This transformation reflects Japan's increasing recognition that contemporary security threats are no longer limited to conventional military aggression but also involve hybrid, cyber, and technological vulnerabilities. Koga (2019) argues that the initial formulation of FOIP was intended primarily to preserve maritime stability and maintain a rules-based regional order amid China's increasing maritime assertiveness. However, the findings of this study indicate that FOIP has evolved significantly beyond its initial maritime orientation into a broader strategic architecture integrating defense, diplomacy, economic resilience, and technology. In this regard, Hosoya (2019) similarly emphasizes that Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy reflects a long-term effort to

institutionalize regional stability through multilateral engagement rather than solely relying on deterrence mechanisms.

The findings further demonstrate that Japan's defense transformation is shaped not only by structural security pressures but also by domestic political continuity and institutional legitimacy. This finding aligns with the perspective of Neoclassical Realism advanced by Rose (1998), which argues that foreign policy behavior is influenced by systemic pressures filtered through domestic intervening variables, including elite perceptions, bureaucratic institutions, and political legitimacy. In Japan's case, China's expanding military capabilities, North Korea's missile development, and intensifying strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific represent important structural pressures. However, as Rose (1998) suggests, these threats alone do not automatically determine policy outcomes. Rather, domestic political actors interpret and respond to threats through institutional mechanisms. The continuity of defense reforms from Abe to Suga and subsequently Kishida illustrates how domestic consensus has increasingly legitimized a more proactive Japanese security posture. Hughes (2009) similarly argues that Japan's post-Abe defense transformation reflects not a sudden strategic rupture but a gradual normalization process aimed at expanding Japan's strategic flexibility while remaining within constitutional constraints.

The findings also indicate that Japan increasingly employs defense diplomacy as a strategic instrument to shape regional order without relying exclusively on military coercion. This finding strongly supports the theory of defense diplomacy proposed by Cottey and Foster (2004), who define defense diplomacy as the use of military-related instruments during peacetime to foster trust, prevent conflict, strengthen institutional cooperation, and shape strategic environments. Japan's growing emphasis on Official Security Assistance (OSA), professional military training, information-sharing, maritime surveillance cooperation, and interoperability programs demonstrates the practical manifestation of defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Rather than pursuing traditional military balancing alone, Japan increasingly utilizes non-coercive instruments to strengthen regional resilience. This finding is also consistent with Soeya's (2011) concept of comprehensive security, which argues that national security in contemporary international relations increasingly integrates economic development, institutional capacity, governance, and technological resilience. In this context, Japan's provision of coastal radar systems,

patrol vessels, cybersecurity cooperation, and maritime training to Indo-Pacific partners reflects a broader effort to shape a favorable regional security environment.

Moreover, the findings suggest that Japan's alliance with the United States remains central to its defense diplomacy architecture but has undergone substantial adaptation. According to the Government of Japan (2022), recent revisions in Japan's National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy emphasize integrated deterrence, cyber defense, space cooperation, and multidomain interoperability with the United States. Chapnick (2013) characterizes such arrangements as forms of middle-power alignment, whereby states with intermediate capabilities maximize strategic leverage through institutional alliances rather than unilateral balancing. The Japan–U.S. alliance therefore functions not merely as a traditional security umbrella but increasingly as a platform for technological cooperation, military modernization, and regional deterrence. This finding supports Midford's (2011) argument that Japan is gradually transitioning from a passive security actor under U.S. protection toward a more active contributor to regional stability. However, unlike realist interpretations emphasizing hard balancing, the findings suggest that Japan combines alliance dependence with broader diplomatic engagement and institutional networking.

The expansion of technology diplomacy further demonstrates an important transformation in Japan's strategic behavior. The findings reveal that Japan increasingly employs advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, surveillance satellites, cybersecurity systems, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities as instruments of defense diplomacy. Bayne and Woolcock (2011) argue that technology diplomacy allows states to shape international norms, safeguard supply chains, and extend strategic influence beyond traditional military means. Similarly, Keohane and Nye (2012) emphasize that increasing interdependence in global politics requires states to integrate political, economic, technological, and security dimensions simultaneously. In this regard, Japan's multidomain defense strategy reflects a shift from conventional territorial defense toward strategic resilience based on technology and institutional cooperation. The findings therefore extend existing scholarship by demonstrating that FOIP has evolved not only into a geopolitical framework but also into a multidomain governance architecture.

For Indonesia, the findings reveal both significant opportunities and considerable strategic dilemmas. The convergence between Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)

and ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) creates substantial room for defense cooperation while reducing normative barriers to engagement. Zacharias (2020) argue that both frameworks emphasize openness, maritime connectivity, and adherence to a rules-based order, thereby facilitating strategic compatibility. In practical terms, Japan's assistance in maritime domain awareness (MDA), patrol vessel provision, and maritime security capacity-building may significantly strengthen Indonesia's maritime resilience, particularly in the North Natuna Sea, where Indonesia continues to face gray-zone challenges and maritime incursions. Lipscy (2023) argues that gray-zone coercion increasingly requires technological and institutional responses rather than purely military reactions, making Japan's assistance particularly relevant for Indonesia's maritime strategy.

Nevertheless, Indonesia's engagement with Japan must be carefully managed to preserve strategic autonomy amid intensifying great-power rivalry. This finding is consistent with Tamaki (2020), who argues that Indonesia traditionally prioritizes strategic flexibility and avoids formal alignment with major powers. Cheng-chwee (2008) conceptualizes such behavior as hedging, whereby states simultaneously engage competing powers to maximize strategic gains while minimizing geopolitical risks. In this context, Indonesia's expanding defense cooperation with Japan should not necessarily be interpreted as alignment behavior but rather as a pragmatic effort to diversify strategic partnerships while preserving policy independence. However, concerns regarding technological dependence, the relatively high cost of Japanese defense technology, and potential perceptions of strategic alignment remain important constraints requiring careful diplomatic management.

The findings also suggest broader implications for regional security governance in the Indo-Pacific. Acharya (2014) argues that ASEAN centrality depends heavily on the ability of member states to maintain institutional cohesion despite intensifying geopolitical competition. Japan's increasingly active defense diplomacy may contribute positively to regional maritime stability through joint exercises, security assistance, and institutional cooperation. However, diverging strategic preferences among ASEAN member states may also create risks of fragmentation, particularly regarding relations with China and the United States. Therefore, Indonesia's leadership within ASEAN remains crucial in balancing external engagement while preserving regional cohesion.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Neoclassical Realism by demonstrating that middle powers such as Japan respond to structural threats not solely through military balancing but also through institutionalized defense diplomacy, technological engagement, and multidomain cooperation. The findings also contribute to defense diplomacy literature by illustrating how non-coercive military instruments increasingly function as mechanisms for shaping regional order and enhancing strategic resilience. Unlike earlier studies focusing primarily on Japan's maritime strategy, this study demonstrates that Japan's defense diplomacy has expanded into multidomain governance encompassing cyber, space, technological innovation, and alliance interoperability. Practically, the findings provide useful insights for Indonesian policymakers in designing adaptive defense diplomacy strategies that balance cooperation, deterrence, and strategic autonomy amid increasingly complex regional security dynamics.

This study is limited by its reliance on qualitative document analysis and secondary data sources, including official government reports, defense white papers, strategic policy documents, and academic literature. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture informal diplomatic interactions, elite-level strategic calculations, or operational dimensions of defense diplomacy implementation. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on Japan and Indonesia within the Indo-Pacific context, limiting broader comparative generalization across other regional middle powers. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative approaches involving countries such as South Korea, Australia, or India to better understand patterns of defense diplomacy transformation in the Indo-Pacific. Further studies may also integrate interviews with policymakers, military officials, or defense practitioners to provide deeper empirical insights into the implementation and effectiveness of multidomain defense diplomacy initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that Japan's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific has undergone a significant transformation from a traditionally reactive and constrained security posture toward a more proactive, multidomain, and technology-oriented approach. The evolution from FOIP 1.0 to FOIP 3.0 demonstrates Japan's increasing strategic engagement in maritime security, cybersecurity, space governance, alliance interoperability, and institutional capacity building.

The study finds that Japan's transformation is driven not only by external security pressures, particularly China's growing assertiveness and North Korea's military threats, but also by domestic political continuity and institutional legitimacy. Consequently, Japan is increasingly positioned not merely as a security consumer under the U.S. alliance framework but as a more active security provider shaping regional stability through multidomain defense diplomacy instruments.

This study contributes to the development of the literature on Neoclassical Realism and defense diplomacy by demonstrating that middle powers such as Japan respond to changing strategic environments not solely through military balancing but also through institutionalized cooperation, technological engagement, and non-coercive security instruments. The findings extend previous scholarship on FOIP by showing its evolution beyond maritime concerns toward a multidomain governance framework integrating cyber, space, technology, and alliance cooperation. Practically, this study highlights important implications for Indonesia, suggesting that defense cooperation with Japan presents opportunities for strengthening maritime security, cybersecurity, defense modernization, and institutional capacity building while simultaneously requiring careful management to preserve Indonesia's strategic autonomy and free and active foreign policy.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on qualitative document analysis and secondary data sources, which may not fully capture informal diplomatic dynamics and operational aspects of defense diplomacy implementation. Future studies are encouraged to expand comparative analysis by involving other Indo-Pacific middle powers, such as Australia, South Korea, or India, to better understand broader patterns of defense diplomacy transformation. Further research may also integrate interviews with policymakers, military practitioners, and defense institutions to provide deeper empirical insights into the implementation and effectiveness of multidomain defense diplomacy strategies in the Indo-Pacific region.

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