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Article

ENHANCING INDONESIA'S DEFENSE DIPLOMACY STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: AN OUTCOME-BASED FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY, ASEAN CENTRALITY, AND DEFENSE CAPACITY BUILDING

M. Taher AM[1], Joni Widjayanto[2], Rodon Pedrason[3], Arifuddin Uksan[4]

[1,2,3,4]Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Indonesia
*Correspondence: taher@doktoral.idu.ac.id

Abstract: Indonesia's defense diplomacy has become increasingly important amid the evolving security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, particularly as the region is shaped by great power rivalry, maritime security challenges, and shifting regional security institutions. As a major archipelagic state and a middle power in Southeast Asia, Indonesia faces the challenge of maintaining strategic autonomy while strengthening regional cooperation, defense capacity, and strategic partnerships. Although Indonesia has actively engaged in bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation, the effectiveness of these engagements depends on whether they can generate measurable strategic outcomes. This article develops an integrative framework for enhancing Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy through qualitative policy analysis of official documents, ASEAN defense cooperation mechanisms, and academic literature on defense diplomacy, Indo-Pacific security, strategic autonomy, and ASEAN Centrality. The article proposes the SACO Framework, consisting of Strategic Autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Capacity Building, and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy. The framework argues that Indonesia's defense diplomacy should move beyond symbolic engagement and be directed toward concrete outcomes such as interoperability, maritime security cooperation, defense education, technology transfer, defense industry collaboration, and regional trust-building.
Keywords: defense diplomacy; Indonesia; Indo-Pacific; strategic autonomy; ASEAN Centrality; capacity building; defense cooperation

1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has become one of the most dynamic strategic regions in contemporary international relations. The region is shaped by major power rivalry, maritime security challenges, technological competition, military modernization, and the growing importance of regional security institutions. For Indonesia, the Indo-Pacific is not merely an external geopolitical arena, but a strategic environment directly connected to national sovereignty, maritime security, regional stability, and long-term defense interests (Anwar, 2020; ASEAN, 2019).

As the largest archipelagic state in Southeast Asia, Indonesia occupies a strategic position between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Its maritime geography makes Indonesia highly relevant to regional security architecture, sea lines of communication, defense cooperation, and broader Indo-Pacific diplomacy. At the same time, Indonesia's traditional foreign policy principle of bebas aktif, or independent and active foreign policy, requires Indonesia to avoid

rigid alignment with any major power bloc while remaining active in shaping regional order (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

In this context, defense diplomacy has become an important instrument of Indonesia's national defense and foreign policy. Defense diplomacy can be understood as the peaceful use of defense institutions, armed forces, military cooperation, and security dialogue to build trust, reduce tension, support cooperation, and strengthen national interests. It includes military-to-military engagement, defense dialogues, joint exercises, education and training, defense industry cooperation, peacekeeping, maritime cooperation, and multilateral defense mechanisms (Cottey & Forster, 2004; Drab, 2018).

However, the increasing number of defense cooperation activities does not automatically mean that defense diplomacy is strategically effective. Defense diplomacy may become ceremonial if it is measured only through the number of meetings, visits, memoranda of understanding, or formal dialogues. Strategic effectiveness requires more than diplomatic visibility; it requires measurable outcomes such as improved interoperability, defense capacity, maritime domain awareness, technology transfer, defense education, operational readiness, and regional trust-building (Chang & Jenne, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

The central problem addressed in this article is that Indonesia's defense diplomacy has grown in scope, but its strategic outcomes still need to be more clearly conceptualized. Many studies discuss Indonesia's defense cooperation, ASEAN mechanisms, Indo-Pacific policy, or foreign policy orientation separately. Yet there remains a need for a framework that connects defense diplomacy with strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, capacity building, and outcome-based policy evaluation (Anwar, 2020; Putra, 2024; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

This article therefore asks: How can Indonesia enhance its defense diplomacy strategy in the Indo-Pacific through an outcome-based framework that integrates strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, and defense capacity building? To answer this question, the article develops the SACO Framework: Strategic Autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Capacity Building, and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy (Anwar, 2023; ASEAN, 2019; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

The article argues that Indonesia's defense diplomacy should not only maintain diplomatic engagement but also produce strategic benefits for national defense capability, regional stability, and Indonesia's bargaining position in the Indo-Pacific. This argument is important because Indonesia's defense diplomacy must operate in a regional environment where cooperation, rivalry, hedging, and institutional competition coexist (Anwar, 2023; Chang & Jenne, 2020; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defense Diplomacy

Defense diplomacy emerged as a key concept in the post-Cold War period to explain the use of military and defense institutions for peaceful foreign policy purposes. Cottey and Forster conceptualize defense diplomacy as a form of military cooperation and assistance that can support confidence-building, strategic engagement, and security cooperation. Unlike coercive military instruments, defense diplomacy emphasizes dialogue, cooperation, transparency, and institutional engagement (Cottey & Forster, 2004).

In practice, defense diplomacy may include defense attaché networks, high-level defense dialogues, military education, joint exercises, peacekeeping cooperation, defense industry partnerships, and humanitarian assistance. These activities are designed to build trust, reduce misunderstanding, and create channels of communication among states. Therefore, defense diplomacy can function as both a foreign policy tool and a defense management instrument (Cottey & Forster, 2004; Drab, 2018).

However, defense diplomacy is not always neutral or purely cooperative. Chang and Jenne argue that defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia contains a paradox. While it can promote trust and cooperation, it can also coexist with

military competition, secrecy, and strategic signaling. This means that defense diplomacy must be carefully designed so that it does not become a symbolic exercise or a tool for competitive military posturing (Chang & Jenne, 2020).

For Indonesia, this paradox is highly relevant. Indonesia conducts defense diplomacy with major powers, ASEAN members, and extra-regional partners. These engagements provide opportunities for capacity building and trust-building, but they also require careful management to avoid strategic dependence, misperception, or alignment pressure (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

2.2 Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics

The Indo-Pacific is increasingly characterized by strategic competition and institutional complexity. The rise of China, the continued role of the United States, the emergence of minilateral arrangements, maritime disputes, cyber threats, and military modernization have produced a more uncertain regional environment. For Southeast Asian countries, this environment creates both opportunities and risks (Anwar, 2020; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

Indonesia's response to the Indo-Pacific is shaped by its preference for inclusivity, cooperation, ASEAN-led mechanisms, and avoidance of bloc politics. Rather than supporting an exclusive Indo-Pacific strategy, Indonesia has supported a regional outlook that emphasizes openness, dialogue, cooperation, and respect for international law. This position reflects Indonesia's interest in preventing the Indo-Pacific from becoming an arena of great power confrontation (Anwar, 2020; ASEAN, 2019).

Indonesia's defense diplomacy must therefore operate in a complex environment. It must support national defense interests while avoiding excessive dependence on any single partner. It must strengthen maritime security without escalating regional tensions. It must cooperate with major powers while preserving strategic autonomy. It must also use ASEAN-led mechanisms to maintain regional legitimacy (Anwar, 2023; ASEAN, 2019; Putra, 2024).

2.3 Strategic Autonomy and Bebas Aktif

Strategic autonomy refers to the ability of a state to make independent strategic decisions, diversify partnerships, and avoid overdependence on external powers. In Indonesia's case, strategic autonomy is rooted in the principle of bebas aktif. This principle does not mean neutrality or passivity. Rather, it means that Indonesia seeks to remain independent in decision-making while actively contributing to peace, cooperation, and international order (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

Anwar describes Indonesia's approach to US-China rivalry as a form of hedging plus. Indonesia seeks to gain benefits from multiple relationships while reducing strategic risks. This approach is important for defense diplomacy because defense cooperation with major powers can strengthen capacity but may also create political and strategic sensitivities (Anwar, 2023).

Strategic autonomy requires Indonesia to diversify defense partnerships. Cooperation with one partner should not create dependency. Defense procurement, military training, technology transfer, joint exercises, and education should be distributed across multiple partners while remaining aligned with national defense priorities. In this sense, strategic autonomy is not only a foreign policy concept but also a defense management principle (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

2.4 ASEAN Centrality

ASEAN Centrality is a foundational principle in Southeast Asian regionalism. It refers to the role of ASEAN as the primary platform for regional dialogue, cooperation, and institution-building. In the Indo-Pacific context, ASEAN Centrality is important because it provides a regional mechanism to manage major power competition and prevent Southeast Asia from being marginalized (ASEAN, 2019; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific places ASEAN Centrality at the core of regional cooperation. It emphasizes inclusivity, transparency, rules-based cooperation, mutual respect, and practical cooperation. For Indonesia, ASEAN Centrality is not only a diplomatic principle but also a strategic tool. Through ASEAN-led

mechanisms such as ADMM, ADMM-Plus, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, Indonesia can strengthen regional defense dialogue and cooperative security (ASEAN, 2019; ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

However, ASEAN Centrality faces challenges. The Indo-Pacific has seen the rise of minilateral security arrangements and major power-led initiatives. These developments may reduce ASEAN's influence if ASEAN-led mechanisms do not produce practical results. Therefore, Indonesia's defense diplomacy must help operationalize ASEAN Centrality by turning it into concrete cooperation in maritime security, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, cyber defense, and capacity building (Putra, 2024; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

2.5 Capacity Building and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy

Capacity building is a critical dimension of defense diplomacy. Defense cooperation should not only produce political statements but also strengthen practical defense capability. Capacity building may include military education, training, exercises, interoperability, doctrine development, maritime domain awareness, cyber defense, defense logistics, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and defense industry cooperation (Cottey & Forster, 2004; Drab, 2018).

Outcome-based defense diplomacy refers to the evaluation of defense diplomacy based on measurable benefits. Instead of asking how many meetings or agreements have been conducted, policymakers should ask what strategic outcomes have been achieved. Relevant indicators include improved operational readiness, enhanced interoperability, stronger institutional networks, better maritime security cooperation, increased technology transfer, and improved regional trust (Chang & Jenne, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

This article argues that Indonesia needs to move from activity-based defense diplomacy to outcome-based defense diplomacy. The shift is essential because defense diplomacy must support national defense modernization, regional stability, and Indonesia's strategic bargaining position (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative policy analysis approach. This method is appropriate because the study does not seek to measure defense diplomacy statistically. Instead, it interprets policy documents, institutional mechanisms, strategic narratives, and academic literature to understand how Indonesia's defense diplomacy can be enhanced (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Bowen, 2009).

The research is designed as a conceptual-policy study. It combines document analysis, thematic interpretation, and framework development. The main analytical output is the SACO Framework, which integrates Strategic Autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Capacity Building, and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2 Data Sources

The study uses secondary data from five categories. First, it examines official defense and foreign policy documents related to Indonesia's defense cooperation, defense diplomacy, and regional security. Second, it analyzes ASEAN documents, particularly those related to ADMM, ADMM-Plus, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Third, it reviews academic literature on defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Indo-Pacific security, and capacity building (ASEAN, 2019; ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

The fourth category consists of policy reports from reputable research institutions, while the fifth category consists of official public communications related to Indonesia's defense cooperation when relevant to the research

focus. These sources are used to support policy interpretation and conceptual synthesis rather than to claim access to confidential policy deliberations (Bowen, 2009; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

3.3 Document Selection Criteria

Documents were selected based on four criteria. First, they must be relevant to Indonesia's defense diplomacy, Indo-Pacific security, ASEAN defense cooperation, strategic autonomy, or capacity building. Second, they must come from credible sources, such as official institutions, peer-reviewed journals, reputable publishers, or established research organizations. Third, they must contain substantive policy or conceptual information. Fourth, they must contribute to the development of the SACO Framework (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Bowen, 2009).

Documents that were promotional, unverifiable, politically partisan, or unrelated to defense diplomacy were excluded. This exclusion criterion is important to ensure that the study remains academically credible and avoids using sources that may distort the analysis of defense diplomacy and regional security policy (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic policy analysis. The analysis was conducted in five stages. First, policy mapping was used to identify the main platforms of Indonesia's defense diplomacy, including bilateral cooperation, ASEAN mechanisms, ADMM-Plus, defense education, military exercises, maritime cooperation, and defense industry collaboration (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Second, thematic coding was used to classify the data into four themes: strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, capacity building, and outcome-based defense diplomacy. Third, strategic interpretation was used to examine how these themes interact with Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Fourth, gap analysis was conducted to identify weaknesses in current defense diplomacy practices, particularly fragmentation, symbolic engagement, and limited outcome measurement. Fifth, framework development was conducted by synthesizing the findings into the SACO Framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bowen, 2009).

3.5 Trustworthiness

The study applies source triangulation and conceptual triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing official documents, ASEAN publications, academic literature, and policy reports. Conceptual triangulation is conducted by comparing perspectives on defense diplomacy, strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, and capacity building (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The study does not use confidential defense information, classified materials, or human subject data. Therefore, it does not claim access to internal policy deliberations. The analysis is limited to publicly available sources and should be understood as a conceptual-policy contribution rather than an empirical evaluation based on classified or internal institutional data (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4. Results

4.1 Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy Is Expanding but Requires Strategic Consolidation

The analysis shows that Indonesia's defense diplomacy has expanded through bilateral, regional, and multilateral platforms. Indonesia engages with defense partners through meetings, military education, joint exercises, peacekeeping cooperation, maritime security dialogue, and defense industry cooperation. These activities demonstrate Indonesia's active role in regional and international defense engagement (Anwar, 2020; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

However, the expansion of activities does not automatically indicate strategic effectiveness. Defense diplomacy may become fragmented if different activities are not connected to national defense priorities. For example, military

education, joint exercises, defense industry cooperation, and maritime security dialogue may be managed separately without a unified outcome framework (Chang & Jenne, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Therefore, the first finding is that Indonesia's defense diplomacy needs strategic consolidation. This means that every defense engagement should be linked to clear objectives, expected outcomes, and national defense priorities. Strategic consolidation is necessary to ensure that defense diplomacy produces measurable contributions to capability, interoperability, trust-building, and regional stability (Anwar, 2023; Drab, 2018).

4.2 Strategic Autonomy Is the Core Principle of Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy

The second finding is that strategic autonomy is the foundation of Indonesia's defense diplomacy. Indonesia's bebas aktif principle requires the country to cooperate widely without becoming dependent on one major power. In the Indo-Pacific, this principle becomes increasingly important because defense cooperation often occurs within the context of major power rivalry (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

Strategic autonomy does not mean avoiding cooperation. Instead, it requires selective, diversified, and interest-based cooperation. Indonesia can cooperate with the United States, China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, India, Türkiye, France, and ASEAN partners, but such cooperation must support national defense priorities and avoid strategic dependency (Anwar, 2023; Putra, 2024).

Strategic autonomy should be reflected in procurement policy, joint exercises, military education, technology transfer, and defense industry cooperation. The key question is not only who Indonesia cooperates with, but whether the cooperation strengthens Indonesia's independent defense capability (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

4.3 ASEAN Centrality Remains Important but Must Be Operationalized

The third finding is that ASEAN Centrality remains an important foundation for Indonesia's regional defense diplomacy. Through ASEAN-led mechanisms, Indonesia can support regional stability, confidence building, and inclusive security cooperation. ADMM and ADMM-Plus provide platforms for dialogue and cooperation among ASEAN members and external partners (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

However, ASEAN Centrality cannot remain only a diplomatic slogan. It must be operationalized through practical cooperation. This includes maritime security exercises, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, military medicine, cyber defense, peacekeeping, and defense education. ASEAN Centrality will remain relevant only if it generates practical regional security value (ASEAN, 2019; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

Indonesia can play a leading role in strengthening ASEAN-led defense cooperation. As a major ASEAN member, Indonesia has the diplomatic weight to encourage more practical and measurable cooperation. This is important because ASEAN Centrality will remain relevant only if it can produce concrete value for regional security (Putra, 2024; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

4.4 Capacity Building Should Become the Main Output of Defense Diplomacy

The fourth finding is that capacity building should be treated as the main output of defense diplomacy. Defense cooperation should strengthen military professionalism, interoperability, maritime security capability, cyber defense, logistics readiness, defense education, and defense industry development (Cottey & Forster, 2004; Drab, 2018).

Capacity building is especially important for Indonesia because the country faces a wide range of defense challenges, including maritime security, border protection, disaster response, cyber threats, and technological modernization. Defense diplomacy can help address these challenges if it is designed to produce practical benefits (Anwar, 2020; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

This article identifies five priority areas for capacity building: maritime security cooperation, defense education and training, joint exercises, cyber defense cooperation, and defense industry cooperation. These areas are relevant

because they connect defense diplomacy with operational capability, institutional resilience, and long-term defense modernization (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-b; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

4.5 Defense Diplomacy Needs Outcome-Based Indicators

The fifth finding is that Indonesia needs outcome-based indicators to evaluate defense diplomacy. Activity-based indicators, such as number of meetings or agreements, are insufficient. Outcome-based indicators should focus on strategic benefits such as interoperability, implementation of agreements, defense education, maritime coordination, cyber defense capacity, and technology transfer (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Possible indicators include improvement in interoperability, number and quality of joint training programs, progress of technology transfer, defense industry cooperation outcomes, maritime security coordination, cyber defense capacity, peacekeeping readiness, implementation status of defense agreements, institutional continuity of defense partnerships, and contribution to regional trust-building (Drab, 2018; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

These indicators can help policymakers assess whether defense diplomacy produces real strategic value. Without outcome-based indicators, defense diplomacy risks being evaluated only through diplomatic visibility rather than its contribution to national defense capability and regional stability (Chang & Jenne, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

5. Discussion

5.1 From Symbolic Engagement to Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy

The findings suggest that Indonesia must move from symbolic engagement to outcome-based defense diplomacy. Symbolic engagement is not useless because it can create diplomatic visibility, political goodwill, and communication channels. However, symbolic engagement becomes insufficient when the regional security environment is increasingly complex and requires practical cooperation (Chang & Jenne, 2020; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Outcome-based defense diplomacy requires each engagement to be connected to measurable goals. For example, a joint exercise should not only be recorded as an event but evaluated based on interoperability, lessons learned, doctrinal improvement, and operational readiness. A defense industry agreement should not only be seen as a diplomatic achievement but assessed based on technology transfer, local content, and industrial capability (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Drab, 2018).

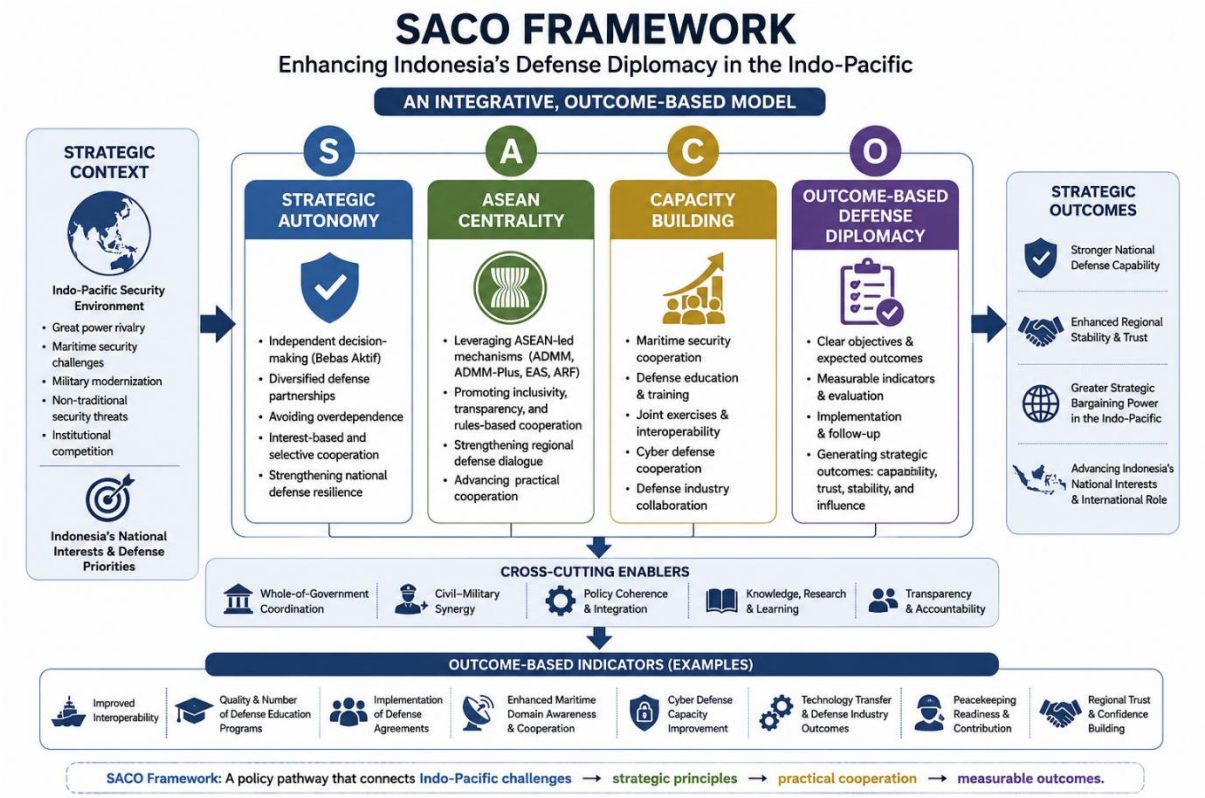
This shift requires better coordination among defense policymakers, military institutions, foreign policy actors, and defense industry stakeholders. Without coordination, defense diplomacy may remain scattered across multiple programs and fail to generate strategic value for Indonesia's defense posture (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

5.2 The SACO Framework

This article proposes the SACO Framework as an integrative model for enhancing Indonesia's defense diplomacy. The framework consists of Strategic Autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Capacity Building, and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy. These four components are designed to connect Indonesia's diplomatic engagement with measurable defense and regional security outcomes (Anwar, 2023; ASEAN, 2019; Cottey & Forster, 2004).

Strategic Autonomy refers to independent decision-making and diversified partnerships. ASEAN Centrality refers to the use of ASEAN-led mechanisms for regional defense cooperation. Capacity Building refers to cooperation directed toward concrete defense capability. Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy refers to evaluation based on strategic results rather than ceremonial activity (Anwar, 2020; ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Drab, 2018).

The SACO Framework can be understood as a policy pathway in which Indo-Pacific security dynamics create challenges for Indonesia's defense diplomacy, these challenges are processed through strategic autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, capacity building, and outcome-based evaluation, and the expected outputs are stronger national defense capacity, regional stability, and strategic bargaining power (Anwar, 2023; Putra, 2024; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).



5.3 Strategic Autonomy as a Filter for Defense Cooperation

Strategic autonomy should function as a filter for defense cooperation. Indonesia should evaluate whether each partnership strengthens or weakens its independent strategic position. Cooperation that creates excessive dependency, political pressure, or technological lock-in should be carefully managed (Anwar, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

This does not mean Indonesia should reduce defense cooperation. On the contrary, Indonesia should expand cooperation, but in a diversified and balanced way. Strategic autonomy is strengthened when Indonesia has multiple options, not when it isolates itself from regional and global defense partnerships (Anwar, 2023; Putra, 2024).

5.4 ASEAN Centrality as a Platform for Regional Legitimacy

ASEAN Centrality provides legitimacy for Indonesia's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Through ASEAN-led mechanisms, Indonesia can promote cooperation that is inclusive, non-confrontational, and regionally accepted. This is important because the Indo-Pacific contains competing strategic visions from major powers (ASEAN, 2019; Qiao-Franco et al., 2025).

Indonesia should use ASEAN Centrality to advance practical cooperation in maritime security, cyber defense, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping, and military education. The future relevance of ASEAN Centrality depends on its ability to produce practical cooperation, not merely diplomatic consensus (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-b; Putra, 2024).

5.5 Capacity Building as the Measure of Strategic Effectiveness

Capacity building should become the core measure of defense diplomacy effectiveness. A defense diplomacy program is effective if it strengthens Indonesia's defense institutions, improves operational capability, enhances military professionalism, supports defense industry development, and contributes to regional trust (Cottey & Forster, 2004; Drab, 2018).

In this regard, Indonesia needs a defense diplomacy dashboard. The dashboard can monitor agreements, exercises, training programs, technology transfer, institutional follow-up, and strategic outcomes. Such a tool would help decision-makers evaluate which partnerships are productive and which need redesign (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

5.6 Policy Implications

The SACO Framework has several policy implications. First, Indonesia should develop a national defense diplomacy roadmap that links bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation with national defense priorities. Second, every defense cooperation agreement should include expected outcomes, implementation mechanisms, and review indicators (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020; Anwar, 2023).

Third, ASEAN-led mechanisms should be used not only for dialogue but also for practical cooperation. Fourth, defense industry cooperation should prioritize technology transfer, joint production, local content, and national industrial capability. Fifth, Indonesia should institutionalize outcome-based evaluation to prevent defense diplomacy from becoming ceremonial (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, n.d.-b; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This article has examined how Indonesia can enhance its defense diplomacy strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The article argues that Indonesia's defense diplomacy must move beyond symbolic engagement and become an outcome-based strategic instrument that links diplomatic activity with national defense capacity, regional stability, and strategic bargaining power.

Using qualitative policy analysis, the article identifies four key findings. First, Indonesia's defense diplomacy is expanding but requires strategic consolidation. Second, strategic autonomy is the core principle that should guide Indonesia's defense cooperation. Third, ASEAN Centrality remains important but must be operationalized through practical cooperation. Fourth, capacity building should become the main output of defense diplomacy.

The article proposes the SACO Framework, consisting of Strategic Autonomy, ASEAN Centrality, Capacity Building, and Outcome-Based Defense Diplomacy. This framework contributes to defense diplomacy literature by linking diplomatic engagement with measurable strategic outcomes. It also offers policy guidance for Indonesia to strengthen national defense capacity, preserve strategic autonomy, and contribute to regional stability.

The limitation of this study is that it relies on secondary data and public documents. Future research may test the SACO Framework through interviews with defense policymakers, military officers, diplomats, and regional security experts. Comparative research may also examine how other middle powers conduct outcome-based defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific.

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