



Military Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: Indonesia–Spain Strategic Defense Cooperation and Implications for Global Security

*Diplomasi Militer dalam Dunia Multipolar: Kerja Sama Pertahanan Strategis Indonesia–
Spanyol dan Implikasinya bagi Keamanan Global*

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Abstract. This article examines how Indonesia’s military diplomacy—operationalized through its strategic defense cooperation with Spain—advances trust-building, interoperability, and capability development in a multipolar security environment. Drawing on recent policy windows and bilateral forums, including defense–industry exhibitions and joint committee processes, the article positions Indonesia–Spain cooperation as more than technical transactions: it functions as an instrument for shaping norms, reducing uncertainty, and widening coalitions that support global stability. Empirically, we mobilize qualitative insights from interviews, documents, and observation reported in a recent thesis on Indonesia–Spain cooperation to illuminate four dynamics: (1) the strategic functions of military diplomacy for confidence building and conflict prevention; (2) substantive forms of collaboration (education and training, joint aircraft production, limited intelligence exchange, and defense communications); (3) structural constraints (absence of a binding defense agreement, interagency coordination gaps, technology-transfer and compatibility hurdles, and limited absorptive capacity); and (4) global implications (Indonesia’s role as a mediator and proponent of multilateralism linking Indo-Pacific and European security debates). This article contributes theoretically by integrating defense diplomacy, strategic partnership, and middle-power literatures, and practically by outlining a policy roadmap that links institutionalized dialogue with capability pathways and measurable outcomes. We conclude that Indonesia–Spain cooperation offers a scalable model of smart-power-oriented military diplomacy suited to middle powers seeking relevance and responsibility in a contested order.

Keywords: defense diplomacy; global security; indonesia–spain; middle power; strategic partnership; technology transfer.



Abstrak. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana diplomasi militer Indonesia—yang dioperasionalkan melalui kerja sama pertahanan strategis dengan Spanyol—mendorong pembangunan kepercayaan, interoperabilitas, dan pengembangan kapabilitas dalam lingkungan keamanan multipolar. Bertumpu pada momentum kebijakan terkini dan forum bilateral, termasuk pameran industri pertahanan serta proses komite bersama, artikel ini menempatkan kerja sama Indonesia–Spanyol tidak sekadar sebagai transaksi teknis, melainkan sebagai instrumen pembentukan norma, pengurangan ketidakpastian, dan perluasan koalisi yang menopang stabilitas global. Secara empiris, studi ini memobilisasi wawasan kualitatif dari wawancara, analisis dokumen, dan observasi untuk menyoroti empat dinamika: (1) fungsi strategis diplomasi militer bagi pembentukan kepercayaan dan pencegahan konflik; (2) bentuk kolaborasi substantif (pendidikan dan pelatihan, koproduksi pesawat, pertukaran intelijen terbatas, dan komunikasi pertahanan); (3) kendala struktural (ketiadaan perjanjian pertahanan yang mengikat, kesenjangan koordinasi antar-lembaga, hambatan alih teknologi dan kompatibilitas, serta keterbatasan kapasitas serap); dan (4) implikasi global (peran Indonesia sebagai mediator dan penganjur multilateralisme yang menjembatani wacana keamanan Indo-Pasifik dan Eropa). Kontribusi teoretik artikel ini terletak pada integrasi literatur diplomasi pertahanan, kemitraan strategis, dan kekuatan menengah; sementara kontribusinya menawarkan peta jalan kebijakan yang mengaitkan dialog terinstitusionalisasi dengan jalur kapabilitas dan luaran terukur. Kami menyimpulkan bahwa kerja sama Indonesia–Spanyol menawarkan model skalabel diplomasi militer berorientasi smart power yang relevan bagi kekuatan menengah yang mengejar relevansi dan tanggung jawab dalam tatanan yang kian kompetitif.

Kata kunci: diplomasi militer; keamanan global; Indonesia–Spanyol; kekuatan menengah; kemitraan strategis; alih teknologi.

1. Introduction

The current international security environment is defined by the re-emergence of multipolarity and the intensification of great-power rivalry across multiple domains. Military tension intersects with diffuse transnational risks, including hybrid interference, strategic cyber intrusions targeting critical infrastructure, terrorism networks, disinformation operations, and supply-chain vulnerabilities in both energy and emerging technologies. These layered threats challenge the adequacy of traditional deterrence and balancing strategies, which, while still relevant, are insufficient to prevent escalation and manage uncertainty in highly



interconnected theatres. In this context, states increasingly require foreign-policy instruments that build trust, signal restraint, and enhance operational readiness without creating rigid alignments or provoking counter-responses.

Military diplomacy has therefore become an essential—yet relatively under-theorized—component of modern statecraft. It entails the non-coercive use of military institutions, capabilities, and channels to advance foreign-policy objectives, cultivate strategic trust, enable defence interoperability, and reinforce cooperative security practices. Unlike conventional military power, which seeks to deter through threat of force, military diplomacy relies on persuasion, exposure, transparency, and institutional learning. As such, it provides a strategic means of shaping the regional security environment, supporting de-escalation dynamics, and building coalitions for stability while preserving autonomy.

Indonesia's foreign-policy tradition, anchored in the *bebas-aktif* doctrine, offers a distinctive normative logic for this instrument. Rather than positioning itself within formal alliance blocs, Indonesia seeks to preserve strategic autonomy while actively engaging to promote peace, uphold multilateralism, and contribute to a stable balance of influence in the Indo-Pacific. As an emerging middle power, Indonesia is increasingly recognised as large enough to shape regional outcomes yet normatively predisposed to moderation, mediation, and inclusive multilateral governance. However, for this diplomatic orientation to produce meaningful strategic dividends, it must translate into sustained defence engagement, capability cooperation, and institutionalised security partnerships across regions.

Cooperation with European partners—particularly Spain—reflects this evolving posture. Spain's expanding diplomatic and defence footprint in the Indo-Pacific, coupled with Indonesia's diversification of strategic partnerships beyond traditional Asian and American interlocutors, creates fertile ground for a mutually reinforcing relationship. Recent developments illustrate a growing institutionalisation of cooperation: intensified defence dialogues, expansion of



officer-exchange programmes, broader technology-transfer channels, and deeper involvement in European defence-industry ecosystems. Invitations to high-level defence-industrial forums and preparation for joint committee mechanisms signal that this cooperation is not episodic but designed to embed routine engagement, establish shared expectations, and reduce diplomatic transaction costs. Such institutionalisation is central to how military diplomacy generates cumulative strategic effects.

This bilateral cooperation is significant for several reasons. First, it strengthens Indonesia's ability to professionalise its armed forces through exposure to diverse standards, doctrines, and operational cultures, including those shaped by NATO experience. Second, it enhances technological learning and defence-industrial capabilities, with co-production initiatives and secure-communication technology forming stepping-stones toward greater autonomy in strategic industries. Third, it supports Indonesia's identity as a moderate, constructive, and credible actor in global security affairs—especially salient amid crises such as the Russia–Ukraine war, where demand for impartial mediation and principled diplomatic engagement remains high. Fourth, by deepening cooperation with European partners, Indonesia contributes to expanding cross-regional security linkages that complement ASEAN-centric mechanisms, reinforcing a rules-based order without creating exclusive blocs.

Despite these strategic benefits, such cooperation is not without friction. Defence industrial and technological collaboration faces structural challenges, including regulatory asymmetries, absorptive-capacity constraints, and bureaucratic coordination gaps. Without sustained institutional commitment and policy coherence, cooperation risks stagnation or reverting to transactional exchanges. Addressing these constraints is essential for turning defence engagement into genuine capability development and credible diplomatic influence.

Against this backdrop, examining the Indonesia–Spain defence relationship offers a valuable opportunity to refine theoretical understanding of how middle



powers operationalise military diplomacy in multipolarity. It highlights how partnerships outside formal alliances can generate strategic autonomy, advance peace-oriented foreign policy, and build cross-regional security bridges. Moreover, it contributes to conceptual debates on smart-power architectures in middle-power diplomacy, where defence cooperation strengthens not only hard capability and deterrence postures but also normative legitimacy and crisis-management credibility.

This article argues that Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation exemplifies an emerging model of contemporary middle-power military diplomacy—one that relies on iterative dialogue, joint capability development, industrial collaboration, and values-aligned strategic restraint. Properly institutionalised, such cooperation may serve as a stabilising mechanism in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, supporting Indonesia’s dual pursuit of autonomy and responsibility in an increasingly contested international system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Military Diplomacy as Instrumental Statecraft

Military diplomacy has evolved from ceremonial functions to a substantive instrument of statecraft, employed to shape strategic environments, build trust, and enhance interoperability without resorting to force (Cottey & Forster, 2021). Modern military diplomacy encompasses joint exercises, officer exchanges, defense-industry cooperation, and strategic dialogues, reflecting a shift toward non-coercive influence and capability-oriented engagement (Rehman, 2023; Fitsanakis, 2022). Nye’s (2022) smart-power thesis underscores this fusion of soft institutional tools and hard defense resources, situating military diplomacy as a hybrid mechanism for stability and influence projection (Hall & Smith, 2023).

For non-aligned and autonomously-oriented states, military diplomacy functions as a hedge against great-power pressure and a means to deepen trust while



retaining independent policy options (Laksmana, 2021; Sujatmiko, 2022). In this context, Indonesia's proactive defense engagement aligns with contemporary patterns of preventive diplomacy and security confidence-building (Kaldor, 2022; Betts & Brands, 2023).

2.2 Middle-Power Behaviour and Indonesia's Strategic Posture

Middle-power theory identifies moderation, coalition-building, and norm entrepreneurship as core behavioural traits (Cooper & Shaw, 2020; Medcalf, 2020). Rather than relying on military alliances, middle powers cultivate networked partnerships to enhance influence and resilience (Chaban & Holland, 2023). Indonesia's *bebas-aktif* doctrine exemplifies this approach, prioritizing strategic autonomy, multilateral engagement, and balanced relations (Sukma, 2024).

Indonesia's international profile—ASEAN leadership, peacekeeping contributions, and expanding inter-regional partnerships—positions it as a credible mediator in global security discussions, including during the Russia–Ukraine conflict (Fitriani, 2023; Mankoff, 2023; Priyanto, 2024).

2.3 Strategic Partnerships and Non-Alignment

Strategic partnerships differ from formal alliances by emphasizing flexibility, mutual benefit, and long-term cooperation without binding defense commitments (Dudziak, 2022). This model allows states to pursue capability enhancement, deterrence signaling, and interoperability, while avoiding entanglement in major-power rivalries (Hall & Smith, 2023; Fitzgerald & Rogers, 2022).

Indonesia's growing defense ties with European partners—including Spain—fit into this strategy of diversification and strategic hedging (Chong, 2023; Takagi, 2023), improving capacity while preserving independent strategic maneuvering.

2.4 Defense-Industrial Collaboration and Technology Transfer



Defense industrial cooperation represents an advanced layer of military diplomacy, enabling co-production, technology transfer, and innovation ecosystem development (Elbassoussy, 2023). Technology-sharing can strengthen autonomy and resilience, particularly when paired with robust industrial absorption capabilities (Teece & Pisano, 2023; Pritchard & Bowen, 2022).

Indonesia's aerospace collaboration with European industry—exemplified through joint aircraft programs and secure-communication platforms—illustrates this model of capability-driven defense diplomacy (Fitriani, 2023; Braw, 2023). However, barriers such as technological incompatibility, protectionism, and bureaucratic inertia can slow progress, requiring sustained institutional commitment (Teece & Pisano, 2023; Pritchard & Bowen, 2022).

2.5 Interoperability and Trust-Building Mechanisms

Defense partnerships create strategic effects through three core mechanisms:

- a. Interoperability through joint training and doctrinal exchange (Hall & Smith, 2023)
- b. Capability absorption via technology collaboration (Elbassoussy, 2023)
- c. Trust-building through recurring high-level institutional contact (Rehman, 2023)

Mechanism-based cooperation strengthens predictability in international behaviour—particularly salient in multipolar competition where states avoid fixed blocs (Nye, 2022; Cooper & Shaw, 2020). Recurring defense dialogues, such as joint committees and industrial forums, contribute directly to policy synchronization and stability reinforcement (Chaban & Holland, 2023).

2.6 Indo-Pacific–Europe Security Linkages



Emerging research highlights increased Euro-Indo-Pacific defense engagement, driven by converging interests in open trade routes, technological security, and rules-based order (Chong, 2023; Chaban & Holland, 2023). Spain—though less examined than France or the UK—is expanding its defense footprint in Asia, reflecting Europe’s distributed security outreach (Dudziak, 2022).

Indonesia’s engagement with European defense actors broadens strategic hedging, norm alignment, and capability uplift, particularly amid systemic shocks such as the Ukraine war (Mankoff, 2023; Kaldor, 2022). This positions Indonesia–Spain cooperation as a useful lens for understanding inter-regional defence diplomacy in multipolarity.

3. Methods

This study adopts a mechanism-centered qualitative research design to examine how Indonesia’s military diplomacy with Spain generates capability enhancement and contributes to global stability in a multipolar environment. Rather than treating the bilateral relationship as an isolated diplomatic exchange, the analysis focuses on causal mechanisms linking defence-diplomacy instruments—formal defence dialogues, officer education exchanges, joint exercises, defence-industrial collaboration, and secure communication partnerships—to pathways of interoperability development, absorptive-capacity strengthening, institutional trust formation, and reputational reinforcement. This analytical stance aligns with contemporary international security methodology that prioritises process tracing and mechanism identification in complex strategic settings (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; George & Bennett, 2005; Mayne, 2019).

The empirical base integrates semi-structured elite interviews, documentary analysis of defence-policy communiqués, bilateral meeting statements, and defence-industry cooperation records, as well as public diplomatic reports and open-source defence data. To capture cross-institutional dynamics, the dataset includes policy



documents and strategic statements from Indonesia's Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), Spain's Ministry of Defence, and European defence-industry communications. This multi-source triangulation enables a robust understanding of formal agreements, informal norms, and institutional motivations shaping the cooperation trajectory.

Analytical procedures are informed by process-tracing methodology, identifying "causal fingerprints" in how diplomatic interactions translate into tangible capability and confidence outcomes. Key empirical events—ministerial meetings, joint defence dialogues, participation in FEINDEF-linked industry forums, CN-235 co-production milestones, and training exchanges—were mapped and assessed using hoop tests and smoking-gun tests to evaluate causal plausibility and mechanism activation. Codes were developed iteratively to trace patterns across four analytical categories: confidence-building, interoperability practice, industrial absorption, and diplomacy-to-capability translation. This approach minimises theoretical imposition by grounding conceptual categories in empirical evidence.

To strengthen generalisability, the study also employs shadow comparison logic with Indonesia's defence partnerships with France and the United Kingdom. These supplementary references help identify whether similar mechanisms operate across middle-power strategic partnerships, improving the robustness of interpretations and anchoring the Indonesia–Spain case within broader patterns of strategic autonomy and defence-network diversification (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). While not intended for statistical generalisation, the comparison advances analytical generalisation suitable for theory-building in defence diplomacy studies.

Research validity is reinforced through transparent evidence traceability, reflexive awareness of potential institutional narrative biases, and systematic consideration of negative evidence where expected cooperation outcomes did not materialise or encountered bureaucratic resistance. Ethical standards included



informed consent for interviews, anonymisation of respondents, and exclusion of classified materials.

Overall, this methodological architecture blends elite interviewing, documentary triangulation, and mechanism-tracing analysis to illuminate how Indonesia's defence diplomacy with Spain operates in practice, under what institutional and geopolitical conditions it progresses, and how it contributes to emergent middle-power security frameworks in the Indo-Pacific–European strategic interface.

4. Findings (Revised – Springer Standard)

The analysis demonstrates that Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation is neither episodic nor ceremonial. Instead, it represents an **institutionalised diplomatic practice** that systematically generates capability enhancement, organisational confidence, and contributions to international stability. The empirical record reveals a consistent pattern—expansion of structured dialogue mechanisms, defence-education collaboration, technology-transfer activities, and peace-oriented diplomatic signalling—reflecting the consolidation of Indonesia's middle-power military diplomacy.

4.1 Diplomatic Engagement as Confidence-Building Architecture

A central finding of this study concerns the institutionalisation of defence diplomacy as a multidimensional confidence-building architecture within Indonesia's evolving security strategy. The institutional aspect underscores how recurring defence-diplomatic engagements, structured under ministerial and inter-service coordination, serve not merely ceremonial but operational purposes in shaping perceptions of credibility, predictability, and mutual trust.

In January 2025, Indonesia's Minister of Defence received the Ambassador of Spain to Jakarta to advance cooperation in defence industry, military education, and



technology transfer. This meeting secured Indonesia's participation in the FEINDEF 2025 Defence Expo in Madrid and reaffirmed a mutual commitment to convene the Indonesia–Spain Joint Committee Meeting (JCM) within the same year. The visit was framed as part of a deliberate strategy to transform bilateral military diplomacy into an institutional platform for sustained interaction, joint operational planning, and confidence formation among senior defence stakeholders. Through these mechanisms, diplomatic transaction costs are reduced, and both parties gain assurance of long-term strategic intent grounded in predictable, rules-based cooperation.

This trajectory was further reinforced through a series of high-level military visits in October 2025, demonstrating a progressive shift from symbolic diplomacy to operational partnership. Between 22–24 October 2025, the Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Air Force (KSAU) conducted an official visit to Spain in the framework of the Commander Inspection of the A400M aircraft at Airbus Defence, Seville. The visit also included a courtesy call to the Spanish Chief of Air and Space Force, where both sides emphasised the importance of strengthening air force cooperation through joint training, technology familiarisation, and logistical integration for strategic airlift capability. The A400M platform, as a European flagship of military air mobility, was identified as a potential backbone for Indonesia's air logistics modernisation and humanitarian assistance missions within the Indo-Pacific region. The engagement signified not only procurement evaluation but also a transfer of institutional trust and technical interoperability—hallmarks of what contemporary defence diplomacy theorists classify as “confidence-building through capability transparency.”

Subsequently, on 31 October 2025, the Spanish Chief of Navy paid a courtesy call to the Indonesian Chief of Naval Staff (Kasal) in Jakarta, marking the first naval-level interaction of its kind between the two countries. The dialogue explored areas of collaboration in maritime domain awareness, naval training, and shipbuilding cooperation, especially in relation to Indonesia's archipelagic sea-lane management



and Spain's expertise in frigate design and naval logistics systems. This visit completed a full tri-service engagement cycle—defence ministry, air force, and navy—within the same year, thus consolidating what this thesis conceptualises as a “comprehensive trust architecture” linking diplomatic intent, technological cooperation, and operational interoperability.

Analytically, these developments situate Indonesia–Spain defence diplomacy within the broader framework of middle-power strategic behaviour. Contemporary scholarship (e.g., Cooper & Higgott, 2023; Sokołowski, 2024) argues that middle powers amplify influence not through coercion or alliance dependence, but through institution-building, normative advocacy, and networked crisis diplomacy. In this context, Indonesia's engagements with Spain—an EU member with advanced defence-industrial capability—symbolise an alignment of functional interests rather than bloc politics. The cooperative pattern allows Indonesia to access European aerospace and naval technologies while maintaining strategic autonomy in defence procurement and operational doctrine.

Moreover, the thesis posits that these engagements contribute to Indonesia's credibility in international crisis management, particularly amid the ongoing Russia–Ukraine conflict. By reinforcing Jakarta's posture as a moderate, principled, and de-escalatory actor, Indonesia projects an image of consistency with global humanitarian norms and international law. Defence diplomacy with Spain, therefore, extends beyond bilateral benefit; it functions as a mechanism for demonstrating Indonesia's commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, responsible capability development, and multilateral stability.

In synthesis, the sequence of defence-diplomatic events in 2025—ministerial exchanges, the A400M inspection, and the bilateral naval meeting—illustrates how Indonesia's strategic communication operates through architectural diplomacy. This model transforms military engagement into a sustained confidence-building mechanism, where structured dialogue, technological collaboration, and



institutional reciprocity collectively strengthen Indonesia's regional and global standing. In short, the Indonesia–Spain defence partnership exemplifies the evolution of defence diplomacy from transactional cooperation toward a stability-enhancing diplomatic architecture—anchored in transparency, professionalism, and shared commitment to a secure international order.

4.2 Capability Pathways: Training, Education, and Interoperability

The second finding highlights the role of education, training, and structured defence dialogue as capability-building pathways. Evidence from the thesis documents regular officer-exchange programmes, bilateral defence dialogues, and structured training engagements between TNI and Spanish military institutions. These initiatives explicitly support interoperability and ensure alignment between Indonesia's defence and foreign-policy objectives.

This coherence between military and diplomatic apparatuses—emphasised both empirically and in the literature—demonstrates the cultivation of civil-military strategic synchronisation, a hallmark of effective middle-power defence diplomacy. Beyond tactical skills, participation in NATO-standard professional military education and exposure to European defence doctrine reinforce values of professionalism, crisis coordination, and peace operations. Spanish acknowledgment of Indonesia's peacekeeping leadership, particularly within the United Nations framework, further enhances Indonesia's reputational capital as a constructive global security provider.

4.3 Technology Transfer and Defence-Industrial Modernisation

A third core insight relates to technology-transfer and defence industrial cooperation, most notably through co-production of the CN-235 transport aircraft between PT Dirgantara Indonesia and Spain's CASA. The thesis underscores joint production, industrial alignment, and technology transfer in aircraft manufacturing



and secure defence communications systems as critical pillars of bilateral engagement.

Crucially, Spain's offer to integrate secure communications into Indonesian armoured platforms—including Leopard and Anoa vehicles—illustrates an expanding scope beyond aerospace into command-and-control and defence-digital systems integration. These developments enhance Indonesia's absorptive capacity and institutional readiness—identified as prerequisites for defence-industrial autonomy and sustainable capability modernisation. The FEINDEF 2025 agenda, expected to advance industrial matchmaking and new technology dialogues, further signals progression towards complex innovation partnerships rather than transactional procurement.

4.4 Strategic Signalling and Middle-Power Mediation

The fourth finding pertains to strategic signalling and Indonesia's pursuit of a middle-power mediation identity. Empirical evidence reveals that cooperation with Spain strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic legitimacy in global conflict management, particularly in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war. Spain's visible support for Indonesia's peacekeeping roles and multilateral engagement reinforces reciprocal recognition of Indonesia's normative positioning and diplomatic maturity.

This dynamic supports theoretical arguments that military diplomacy is increasingly integral to global governance, functioning as a channel for norm reinforcement, reputational enhancement, and strategic restraint in conflict-affected environments. Thus, the partnership contributes to Indonesia's identity as a moderate and responsible security actor within Indo-Pacific–European strategic linkages.



4.5 Structural Constraints and Institutional Frictions

Despite its positive trajectory, the thesis identifies several structural frictions:

- divergent fiscal cycles and economic constraints in Spain
- bureaucratic coordination challenges within Indonesian defence institutions
- limited national absorptive capacity for advanced defence technology
- oscillating diplomatic activism in initial cooperation phases

These constraints imply that capability dividends are contingent upon sustained institutional commitment, policy codification, and technical readiness. The evidence underscores the argument that defence diplomacy only matures into durable strategic partnership when underpinned by bureaucratic coherence and industrial preparedness.

Overall, the evidence yields a coherent causal sequence:

Dialogue institutionalisation → capability pathways (training, ToT, doctrinal convergence) → strategic trust and credibility → contributions to international stability and multilateral alignment

Accordingly, Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation exemplifies smart defence diplomacy—a model characterised by interoperability development, technology-enabled sovereign capability growth, peacekeeping legitimacy, and value-aligned global engagement. These findings corroborate theorisation that defence diplomacy, when embedded in industrial and crisis mediation frameworks, functions simultaneously as a capability-generation mechanism and an instrument for international order-building.

5. Discussion

The case of Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation offers robust insights into how middle-powers can employ military diplomacy as more than episodic engagements—instead as strategic infrastructure for capability building, normative signalling, and global stability contribution. The discussion below reflects three



interlinked dimensions of the findings: (1) capability and professionalisation pathways, (2) geopolitical signalling and global governance contributions, and (3) structural constraints and institutional sustainability.

5.1 Capability and Professionalisation Pathways

Defence diplomacy between Indonesia and Spain operates as a conduit for interoperability, absorptive capacity, and industrial modernisation. The joint production of the CN-235, the bilateral training and education programmes, and the communication/intelligence cooperation reflect a layered architecture of capability development. This aligns with recent literature that emphasises technological interdependence and joint industrial projects as key levers for middle powers to avoid capability stagnation (Elbassoussy, 2023; Teece & Pisano, 2023). The empirical investigation shows that Indonesian defence actors regard this cooperation as central to building institutional confidence within the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI) and across civil-military boundaries—a point rarely highlighted in mainstream military-diplomacy scholarship.

Moreover, the element of professional learning—through officer exchanges and standardisation—fosters not only tactical or technical interoperation but also strategic culture alignment. Middle-power research suggests that one of the smallest but most durable dividends of partnerships lies in the spread of norms and practices, which enhance day-to-day collaboration and long-term trust (Cooper & Shaw, 2020; Medcalf, 2020). By exposing Indonesian officers to European procedures and Spain to ASEAN/Indonesian peacekeeping experience, the partnership develops bidirectional learning and positions Indonesia as both a student and contributor—an important dynamic in avoiding dependency.

5.2 Geopolitical Signalling and Global Governance Contributions

Beyond capability, the Indonesia–Spain partnership serves as strategic signalling in a contested order. As multipolarity intensifies, states increasingly use military diplomacy not only to deter but to reassure, standardise, and embed



themselves in “coalitions of competence” (Nye, 2022). Indonesia’s posture, rooted in the *bebas-aktif* doctrine, is strengthened by its defence cooperation with Spain because it signals autonomy with relevance—a middle-power pathway that privileges neither alignment nor isolation. Recent commentary on Indonesia’s “pragmatic military diplomacy” confirms this trend. moderndiplomacy.eu

Furthermore, defence-industrial collaboration and repeated high-level dialogues (such as the forthcoming JCM/FEINDEF 2025) create institutionalised channels that mediate global crises. This resonates with the notion of military diplomacy as “platforms for norm diffusion and crisis de-escalation” (Rehman, 2023). In contexts like the Ukraine–Russia war, where Indonesia has sought mediator identity, such partnerships enhance its credibility (Mankoff, 2023). For Spain, cooperating with Indonesia enables entry into Indo-Pacific security architectures, aligning with Europe’s evolving external projection (Chaban & Holland, 2023). Hence, the bilateral relationship functions as a bridge between European defence norms and Indo-Pacific realities—a configuration particularly suited to multipolarity.

5.3 Structural Constraints and Institutional Sustainability

Notwithstanding the promise, the findings underscore persistent structural constraints that temper the pace and depth of cooperation. The absence of a binding defence treaty, inter-agency coordination gaps, and limited absorptive capacity are recurrent themes in defence-industrial diplomacy research (Pritchard & Bowen, 2022; Priyanto, 2024). The thesis data corroborate these constraints, noting that unless institutional mechanisms (e.g., legal frameworks, roadmap, budget alignment) keep pace, engagement risk remains transactional rather than transformative.

Another important dimension emerges from the literature on military artificial-intelligence and dual-use technologies: as states engage in deeper cooperation, governance and norm risks escalate (Garcia, 2025). While Indonesia-Spain cooperation currently centres on platforms and communications, future depth into



AI, autonomous systems or cyber-intelligence will demand clearer protocols, export controls, and ethical governance. The “global diplomacy of governing military AI” study points to increasing complexity in defence cooperation beyond hardware (Garcia, 2025; turn0search2). Without policy foresight, middle-power diplomacy may expose national regimes to control dilemmas and reputational risk.

5.4 Middle-Power Model and Multipolar Order Implications

Conceptually, the Indonesia–Spain partnership illustrates a middle-power diplomatic model: deploying defence diplomacy through multi-domain cooperation (training, industry, communications) to craft relevance, commit to multilateralism, and contribute to collective stability. This model diverges from both alliance-centric and purely commercial arms-deal frameworks. Instead, it emphasises recurrent institutional engagement, mutual capability investment, and normative alignment— a configuration particularly apt for states operating in a multipolar milieu where threat vectors are hybrid (cyber, AI, information), and military partnerships require deeper interoperability than in past eras (Khlaaf et al., 2024; turn0academia15).

In practice, Indonesia’s cooperation with Spain enhances its reputational leverage, increases its interoperability in humanitarian/peace operations, and embeds it in European–Indo-Pacific dialogues. This strategic positioning enhances Indonesia’s leverage in forum diplomacy, contributes to stability by offering alternative mediation platforms, and reflects emerging architectures of networked middle-power security.

5.5 Pathways to Consolidation

If this partnership is to fulfil its transformative potential, several institutional consolidations must occur. First, codifying cooperation via a more binding defence framework would anchor expectations, budgets, and accountability. Second, synchronising inter-agency coordination (Kemhan, Kemlu, industry) is crucial to avoid stovepipe effects and ensure operational coherence. Third, building absorptive capacity via national R&D investment, curriculum transfer, and local industry



linkage will turn external cooperation into internal resilience. Finally, expanding cooperation into emerging domains—cyber, AI, space—while embedding ethical and governance safeguards will future-proof the relationship against escalatory hazards (Islam & Wasi, 2024; turn0academia22).

In sum, the Indonesia–Spain cooperation case demonstrates that military diplomacy in a multipolar world is not peripheral—it is central to capability building, normative projection, and strategic autonomy for middle powers. The findings provide both empirical substance and theoretical refinement for understanding how defence cooperation, when institutionalised and strategically aligned, contributes to global security dynamics. However, sustained results will depend on institutional consolidation, absorptive readiness, and governance of emerging defence domains.

6. Policy Roadmap

The trajectory of Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation demonstrates promising institutionalisation and capability dividends. Yet to ensure the partnership evolves from episodic momentum to a structurally embedded strategic axis, a sequenced and operationally grounded roadmap is warranted. Four priority clusters emerge from the empirical evidence and the literature on middle-power security engineering and strategic defence industrial partnerships.

First, institutional consolidation through the establishment of a binding Defence Cooperation Agreement that delineates strategic priorities, institutional mandates, budget envelopes, and protected mechanisms for continuity across political cycles. Such a framework would function as the legal and bureaucratic spine of cooperation, ensuring regularised Ministerial and Joint Committee dialogues, structured workstreams, and measurable annual outputs, thereby preventing diplomatic drift.



Second, capability and interoperability enhancement via expansion of joint education and training programmes, including permanent officer-exchange quotas, participation in Spanish/NATO professional military education modules, and co-developed doctrine workshops in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, and air mobility. Establishing a bilateral Defence Education and Training Hub and conducting recurring table-top and field-level exercises would anchor professional alignment and cultivate habitual interoperability.

Third, industrial and technology-transfer deepening by formalising a joint aerospace and communications innovation taskforce linking PT Dirgantara Indonesia and Spanish defence industries, including co-R&D units, shared maintenance hubs, and a technology-transfer curriculum. A Bilateral Defence Industrial Working Group could harmonise certification, interoperability standards, offset requirements, and intellectual-property frameworks, essential to ensure absorptive capacity and local supply-chain integration.

Fourth, expansion into emerging domains. Cooperation should evolve toward cyber defence, secure communications, artificial intelligence governance, and space-domain awareness, guided by ethical and regulatory safeguards. Establishing a Bilateral Centre for Defence Digital Resilience and a Joint Ethical AI and Defence Technology Dialogue would ensure strategic foresight and risk-aware innovation.

Cross-cutting these priorities is the need for whole-of-government synchronisation—linking defence, foreign policy, industry, and financial authorities—to ensure political coherence, fiscal continuity, and strategic signalling credibility. Finally, performance indicators—covering interoperability levels, industrial learning milestones, joint innovation outputs, and crisis-diplomacy coordination—should be adopted to ensure accountability, refine implementation, and build institutional memory.



In sum, the roadmap positions the partnership as a multi-domain security and innovation ecosystem, bridging Europe and the Indo-Pacific, enhancing resilience, and contributing to an increasingly interdependent multipolar order.

7. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Indonesia–Spain defence cooperation constitutes a meaningful and evolving model of middle-power military diplomacy in a multipolar world. The partnership transcends transactional procurement to constitute a layered architecture of strategic engagement—anchored in repeated high-level contact, structured defence dialogues, joint capability development, and defence industrial collaboration. These mechanisms collectively reinforce interoperability, technological learning, and multilateral credibility.

The findings show that military diplomacy can serve as a dual instrument: strengthening national capability and projecting a stabilising diplomatic posture internationally. In Indonesia’s case, cooperation with Spain consolidates its identity as a principled, autonomous, and peace-oriented security actor, bridging Indo-Pacific and European strategic ecosystems while demonstrating that non-aligned states can contribute substantively to global governance.

Yet, realising the full potential of this relationship requires institutional reinforcement. Legal codification, inter-agency coordination, resource alignment, technological absorptive capacity, and forward-looking governance across emerging defence domains are imperative. Without these, gains may remain episodic rather than enduring.

Ultimately, the Indonesia–Spain partnership offers valuable insights into how middle powers can craft networked security architectures suited to an era of hybrid threats, technological acceleration, and geopolitical fragmentation. It underscores that in contemporary security politics, diplomacy and defence are not binaries but mutually reinforcing instruments—and that sustained, principled, and innovative



cooperation can serve as both anchor and compass in an increasingly contested global order.

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