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## **DEFENSE DIPLOMACY AND THE DEEPENING OF INDONESIA-TÜRKIYE DEFENSE COOPERATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE KAAAN FIGHTER JET PROCUREMENT**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines how the KAAAN fighter jet procurement deepened defense relations between Indonesia and Türkiye through defense diplomacy. Using Lech Drab's framework of defense diplomacy, the article argues that the KAAAN case should be understood not merely as a procurement decision, but as a form of strategic engagement that elevated bilateral defense relations to a more intensive and institutionalized level. Methodologically, the study applies a qualitative single case study design, with data collected through a structured desk review of official statements, policy documents, company releases, academic works, and reputable news reports, and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings show that the KAAAN procurement deepened Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations through three connected mechanisms: the strengthening of strategic trust, the expansion of defense-industrial cooperation, and the enhancement of Indonesia's defense capability. More broadly, the article finds that Indonesia's cooperation with Türkiye reflects an effort to build a stable long-term defense relationship that can widen Indonesia's strategic influence while preserving its autonomy amid great-power competition. The case also confirms that defense diplomacy remains a practical means through which middle powers can simultaneously build confidence, strengthen military capability, and develop the defense industry. In this sense, the KAAAN case demonstrates the growing sophistication of defense diplomacy among middle powers. Lastly, this study is limited to a single qualitative case and does not assess the long-term operational outcomes of the KAAAN program or compare it systematically with Indonesia's other procurement pathways.

**Keywords:** Defense Diplomacy; Indonesia-Türkiye; KAAAN Fighter Jet; Defense Procurement; Middle Power; Strategic Hedging



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## A. Introduction

Defense procurement is often discussed as a technical response to military need. Governments buy platforms to replace ageing systems, improve readiness, and close capability gaps (Ploom, Kalvet, Kütt, Veinla, & Tiits, 2024). Furthermore, arms procurement can also shape bilateral relations in ways that extend far beyond the transfer of hardware (Kinne, 2016; Willardson & Johnson, 2021). As Gindarsah (2016) notes, an arms contract usually carries longer-term commitments such as training, maintenance, spare parts, capability upgrades, and technology transfer. For that reason, procurement can foster closer military-to-military ties and wider political linkages between the recipient and supplier. Within Indonesia's own defense diplomacy, this broader role is already visible. Defense procurement as defense diplomacy has been used to pursue confidence-building, military capability, and defense-industrial development simultaneously.

This broader perspective is especially relevant to recent Indonesia-Türkiye relations. Over the past few years, bilateral ties have moved into a more institutionalized and strategic phase. These trends are exemplified by several developments, including the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSC) by both countries in November 2022, the first HLSC meeting in February 2025, and President Prabowo Subianto's visit to Türkiye in April 2025 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025; Susilo, 2025). Moreover, during that April visit, Prabowo publicly stated that Indonesia wished to participate in cooperation on the development of the fifth-generation KAAN fighter jet and submarines with Turkish industry (Ekşi, 2025; Shofa, 2025).

The KAAN fighter jet procurement is therefore an important case for studying defense diplomacy in practice. KAAN itself is a fighter jet developed by the Turkish industry. This jet completed its first flight on 21st of February 2024, which marked an important stage in Türkiye's effort to develop an indigenous fifth-generation fighter jet (Helou, 2024; Nisa, 2025). Within the development of this jet, in June 2025, during the Indo Defense event in Jakarta, a purchase agreement between Indonesia and Türkiye was signed for 48 KAAN fighter jets, described as Türkiye's first export deal for the aircraft (Martin, 2025; AP News, 2025). Consequently, in July 2025, Turkish Aerospace and Indonesia's Ministry of Defense signed a definitive contract for 48 aircraft at IDEF 2025 in Istanbul (Charpentreau, 2025). Turkish Aerospace also stated that the contract includes a broader cooperation model involving local manufacturing capabilities and training support (Strangio, 2025). Taken together, hence, these developments make the KAAN case analytically important because it combines advanced military technology, long-term support commitments, and formal industrial cooperation within a single bilateral arrangement.

Additionally, this context is especially relevant in an international environment shaped by renewed great-power competition and increasing strategic sensitivity surrounding advanced military technology (Cannon, Sim, & Aminjonov, 2025). For middle powers such as Indonesia, defense cooperation is therefore not only a matter of force modernization, but also a way to diversify partners, preserve strategic autonomy, and avoid excessive dependence on any single major power (Prasetya, Ladiqi, & Salleh, 2024). In this setting, engagement with Türkiye also becomes analytically important because it reflects a wider effort to build defense partnerships beyond traditional suppliers while maintaining room for maneuver in a contested international order.

Even so, the existing literature has not fully explained how such procurement between Indonesia and Türkiye deepens bilateral defense relations. The broader defense-diplomacy literature of Indonesia provides only a foundational discussion. As can be seen from Gindarsah (2016), who argues that Indonesian defense diplomacy serves two linked agendas, strategic engagement and military modernization, and that its main objectives include confidence building, harnessing military capability, and developing the defense industrial base. Moreover, to add to the background context, the literature by Sudarsono, Mahroza, & Surryanto, (2018) and Waluyo (2023) also treats defense procurement and defense-industrial cooperation of Indonesia merely as diplomatic tools. The literature, hence, remains less clear on the mechanism through which advanced procurement produces deeper bilateral defense ties, thus fostering the strategic engagement between Indonesia and Türkiye.

Furthermore, the gap is even more visible in the Indonesia-Türkiye context. The most relevant prior study is Elisabeth et al. (2021) research on the joint production of the Harimau medium tank. Elisabeth et al. (2021) show that Indonesia-Türkiye defense diplomacy was built through equality, mutual trust, and need, and business interests, while also relying on government-to-government and business-to-business channels. It further argues that the bilateral relationship was strengthened through technology transfer, legal ratification, and defense industrial collaboration. At the same time, Elisabeth et al. (2021) explicitly note that Indonesia's defense relationship with Türkiye has received less academic attention than its defense relations with East Asian or Asia-Pacific partners.

Against that background, therefore, this article asks: How did the KAAN fighter jet procurement deepen defense cooperation between Indonesia and Türkiye? Its aim is to explain how the KAAN fighter jet procurement deepened defense cooperation between Indonesia and Türkiye as part of defense diplomacy, which then promotes the strategic engagement between the two countries. The article, hence, argues that the procurement of the KAAN fighter jet strengthened Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations as a strategic engagement by transforming prior diplomatic alignment into deeper, more

institutionalized defense cooperation. More specifically, the procurement worked through three linked mechanisms. First, it reinforced strategic trust between the two governments. Next, it expanded defense-industrial cooperation beyond simple arms transfers. Moreover, it supported Indonesia's effort to enhance its defense capabilities. In this way, the KAAN case shows that defense diplomacy can serve as a practical instrument for long-term strategic engagement and a means of confidence-building. Finally, this article will argue that the procurement of the KAAN jet exemplifies the efforts of Indonesia to widen its strategic influence while preserving its autonomy amid great-power competition

### **1. Defense Diplomacy**

This article uses defense diplomacy as its main analytical framework, with particular emphasis on Lech Drab's (2018) formulation. Drab's arrangement of the concept of defense diplomacy, which builds upon Cottey and Forster's (2004) conceptualization, is especially useful for the present study because he defines defense diplomacy in a way that places dialogue, cooperation, and long-term relationship-building at the center of analysis. In detail, Drab defines defense diplomacy as *"diverse international peaceful activity based on dialogue and cooperation, implemented in bilateral, multilateral and international security organizations by the national defense ministry and institutions and forces subordinate to it. Armed forces with allies, partners, and other friendly countries to support the achievement of the objectives of [Polish] foreign and security policy."*

In his formulation, hence, defense diplomacy can be understood as a diverse and peaceful international activity based on dialogue and cooperation, implemented in bilateral, multilateral, and international security settings by defense ministries and the institutions and forces under them to support broader foreign and security policy objectives. This formulation is important because it broadens the focus from military interaction in a narrow sense to a wider process through which defense institutions help shape external relations (Muniruzzaman, 2020). Drab also stresses that the main task of defense diplomacy is to create stable, long-term relations and cooperation that foster transparency in defense, strengthen trust, and support common goals. For this article, that perspective is especially relevant because the KAAN case concerns more than the acquisition of military hardware. It involves a wider process of strategic engagement through which Indonesia and Türkiye build a more durable defense relationship.

Drab's framework is also helpful because it explains what defense diplomacy is expected to do in practice. He argues that defense diplomacy is generally focused on minimizing hostility and building trust between states. It also aims to create stable and long-lasting cooperation, promote transparency in the field of defense, influence the position of partners, support broader legal and security arrangements, and maintain

dialogue as both an end in itself and an instrument for advancing specific state interests. These features matter for the present study because they allow the KAAAN case to be analyzed as a process of relationship building rather than as a single procurement event.

In the same framework, Drab identifies a broad set of defense diplomacy tasks, including promoting bilateral and multilateral military cooperation, preparing and signing defense agreements, organizing meetings at different levels, conducting education and training, supplying military equipment, supporting defense infrastructure, and advancing cooperation in defense industries. He further notes that the main areas of defense diplomacy include bilateral and multilateral cooperation, military training, exercises, legal cooperation, confidence-building measures, and cooperation in the defense industry. Taken together, these elements provide a strong analytical basis for examining Indonesia-Türkiye defense cooperation, because the KAAAN case combines long-term dialogue, contractual cooperation, industrial collaboration, training support, and strategic trust within one framework.

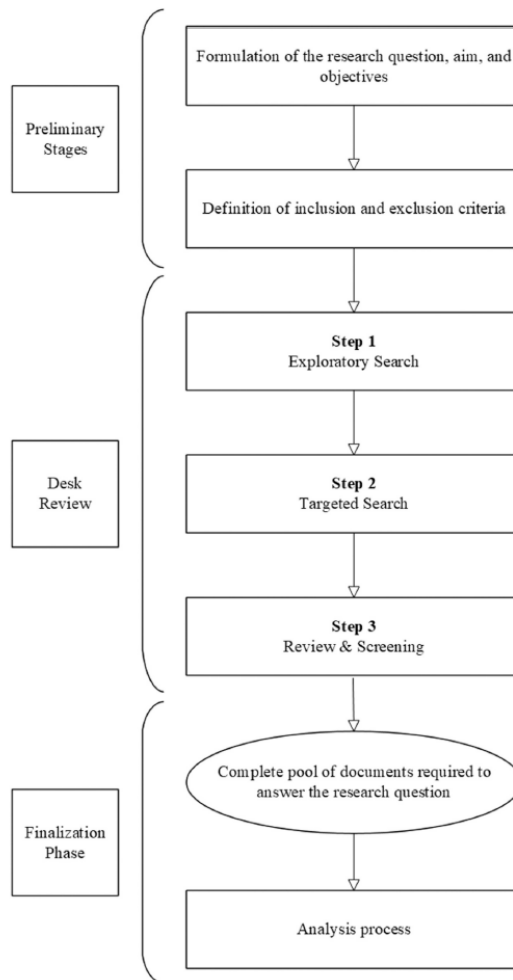
Furthermore, within the Indonesian defense diplomacy context, Gindarsah (2016) also provides a relevant bridge between this general framework and Indonesia's actual defense diplomacy practice. He argues that Indonesia's defense diplomacy serves two linked agendas, namely strategic engagement and military modernization. He also identifies three main strategic objectives of Indonesian defense diplomacy: confidence building, harnessing military capability, and developing the defense industrial base. In addition, Gindarsah shows that Indonesia has increasingly used bilateral defense diplomacy to expand strategic partnerships, reduce security dependence, and preserve strategic autonomy under its independent and active foreign policy. This point is crucial for the present study. When read together, Drab and Gindarsah provide a stronger analytical framework for the KAAAN case. Drab helps explain defense diplomacy as a process of building stable, long-term defense relations through dialogue, agreements, military cooperation, and defense-industry linkages. Gindarsah then helps explain why Indonesia uses such diplomacy in the first place, namely to pursue strategic engagement while strengthening military capability and defense-industrial development. In that sense, Indonesia's cooperation with Türkiye should be understood as a form of strategic engagement designed to deepen a stable, long-term defense relationship, expand Indonesia's strategic room for maneuver, and support its effort to strengthen national defense capability in a competitive international environment.

Based on this framework, this article understands the KAAAN fighter procurement as an instance of defense diplomacy that works through three connected dimensions. The first is strategic trust, which captures how long-term dialogue, formal agreements, and repeated political engagement reduce uncertainty and stabilize bilateral defense relations. The second is defense-industrial cooperation, which captures how

procurement is embedded in wider forms of cooperation such as production, technology sharing, training, and institutional linkage. The third is capability development, which captures how defense diplomacy supports Indonesia's military modernization and long-term strategic autonomy. In this way, the article treats the KAAN case as part of a broader strategic engagement between Indonesia and Türkiye, in which defense diplomacy serves both to deepen bilateral relations and to position Indonesia more effectively within a wider environment shaped by great power competition and middle-power agency.

## **B. Method**

This study uses a qualitative single case study design (Yin, 2018). This approach is appropriate because the article seeks to explain how one specific procurement case deepened bilateral defense relations through defense diplomacy. In this respect, the study is concerned with process, meaning, and relationship-building rather than with measurement across a large number of cases. Furthermore, the study relies on desk review as its main data collection strategy. This approach is appropriate because the KAAN case is documented across grey literature, official releases, policy statements, legal materials, and scholarly sources that are often dispersed across different institutional repositories rather than indexed in standard academic databases. In line with Barbieri et al. (2025), the desk review was conducted as a structured but iterative process designed to ensure rigor, transparency, and adaptability. More specifically, the process began by defining the research objective and specifying the thematic focus of the review, which in this study centered on Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations, the KAAN fighter procurement, defense-industrial cooperation, and the diplomatic significance of the procurement.



**Figure 1.** Stages for conducting a desk review

Source: Barbieri et al., (2025)

Following this logic, data collection proceeded through three interrelated stages (see Figure 1). The first one is an exploratory search that was conducted to map the documentary landscape of the case and identify the main actors, institutions, and source repositories relevant to Indonesia-Türkiye defense cooperation. Next, a more targeted search was undertaken using relevant and recurring keywords across official government websites, ministry documents, presidential statements, defense industry releases, academic publications, policy reports, and reputable news sources. In this study, primary sources included official government statements, ministry documents, bilateral memoranda where available, speeches, press releases, and official company statements. Secondary sources included academic journal articles, policy reports, reputable news coverage, and defense analysis publications.

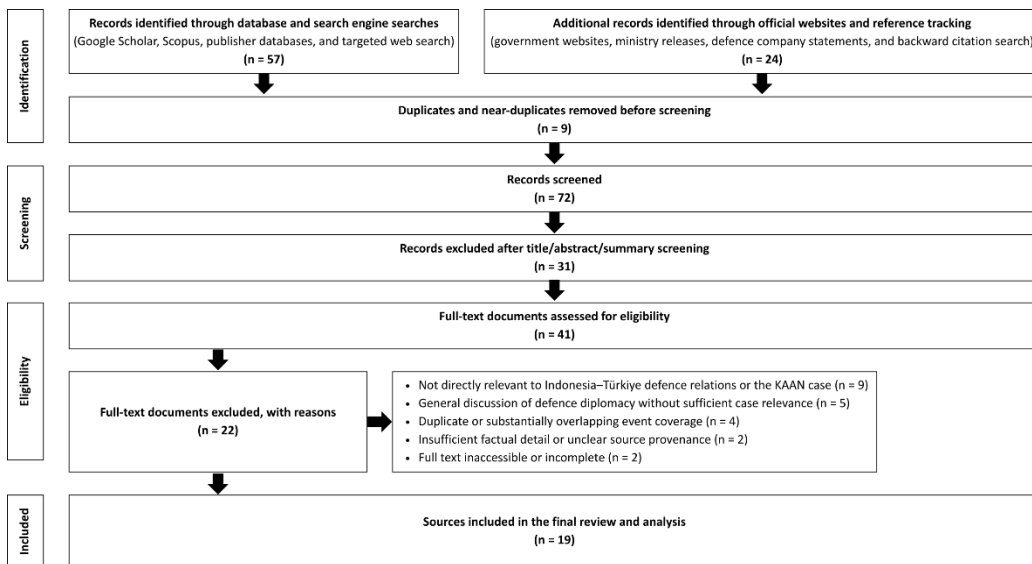


Figure 2. Review and screening stages

Source: Author’s creation

The final stage involved review and screening as outlined in Figure 2. At this point, the collected materials were assessed more closely to determine their relevance to the research question, while additional documents were included through cross-referencing, and less pertinent materials were excluded after closer reading. The use of both primary and secondary sources also strengthened source triangulation. Official documents provided direct evidence of how Indonesia and Türkiye publicly framed the procurement and its strategic significance, while secondary sources helped contextualize those claims, identify broader patterns, and support a more balanced interpretation.

Furthermore, for the data analysis, the study uses thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is appropriate because the article seeks to interpret recurring patterns of meaning across a body of documentary material rather than test a formal hypothesis through numerical indicators. Following Byrne’s (2021) worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach, the analysis treats coding and theme development as an active and interpretive process in which the researcher plays a central role in knowledge production. In this sense, codes are understood as analytic interpretations of meaningful patterns in the data, while themes are developed through the identification of a shared central organizing concept across groups of codes.

In practical terms, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s recursive six-phase process as outlined in Byrne’s (2021). First, the collected materials were read and reread to build deep familiarity with the dataset. Next, initial codes were generated across the documents, with attention to both explicit and underlying meanings relevant to the research question. The analysis was predominantly theory-informed because the defense diplomacy framework helped orient attention to politically meaningful patterns,

yet it remained open to new interpretations emerging from the documents themselves. After coding, related codes were grouped into candidate themes, which were then reviewed against the dataset as a whole. At this stage, the analysis examined whether each theme formed a coherent internal pattern and was meaningfully distinct from the other themes. Finally, the themes were refined, defined, and named to capture their analytical contribution to the study.

## **C. Finding and Discussion**

### **1. Finding**

#### **a. From Prior Cooperation to Deeper Defense Relations: The Indonesia-Türkiye Trajectory**

To begin discussing the KAAAN case, it is important to understand that the KAAAN procurement did not result from a sudden policy shift. Instead, it grew out of a defense relationship that had gradually expanded and had already developed a meaningful institutional base (see Figure 3). Elisabeth et al.'s (2021) study on Indonesia-Türkiye defense cooperation shows that bilateral recognition between Indonesia and Türkiye dates back to 1949 and that defense ties gained momentum during President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's tenure, especially after his 2010 visit to Türkiye (Kusumaputra, 2010). That visit resulted in a defense industry agreement, followed by a derivative protocol on defense and security cooperation signed in April 2011. Furthermore, this growing defense relationship later acquired a firmer legal basis through Law No. 19 of 2014 on defense industry cooperation between Indonesia and Türkiye (BPK RI, 2026). In other words, the relationship had moved from diplomatic contact to formalized defense cooperation over a relatively long period.

This early stage matters because it shows that bilateral defense cooperation between Indonesia and Türkiye was already being built through repeated engagement and institutional mechanisms. Moreover, Indonesia and Türkiye have routinely held defense industry meetings since 2011 and established a Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, with its inaugural meeting held on 19 to 20 January 2011 (Elisabeth et al., 2021; Luerdi & Marisa, 2019). These meetings focused on logistics, procurement, and defense industry cooperation, which suggests that both governments were already treating defense ties as a continuing agenda rather than an occasional exchange.



**Figure 3.** The trajectory of Indonesia-Türkiye defense cooperation

Source: Author's creation

At the same time, the bilateral relationship was becoming broader in substance. The two countries cooperated in several defense-related sectors before the KAAAN fighter jet procurement. These included joint research and development in defense radio software between Aselsan, Wellracom Megahjaya, and LEN (Akreciani, 2025; Elisabeth et al., 2021; Luerdi & Marisa, 2019), as well as aerospace cooperation between Turkish Aerospace Industries and PT Dirgantara Indonesia on the development of the N219 and N245 platforms, the upgrading of the CN235 digital cockpit, and drone-related development (Luerdi & Marisa, 2019). These earlier projects are important to note because they demonstrate that the bilateral relationship was never limited to a single platform. Instead, it gradually expanded across communication and land systems, as well as in aerospace collaboration.

The relationship also gained stronger political momentum in the mid-2020s. According to the Turkish Embassy in Jakarta (2025), the two countries upgraded their relations by establishing the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council in November 2022. That framework then became operational through the first HLSC meeting in February 2025, followed by President Prabowo Subianto's visit to Türkiye in April 2025. Furthermore, bilateral relations between the two countries had already moved beyond routine engagement into a more strategic phase (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). In February 2025, the two governments also signed a series of cooperation documents in Bogor, including a memorandum on strategic cooperation in the defense industry and a joint venture agreement between Republikorp and Baykar for a drone factory in Indonesia (Republikorp, 2025).

These agreements indicate that, even before the KAAAN procurement was formalized, Indonesia and Türkiye were already deepening defense ties through institutional frameworks and industrial commitments (Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2025b, 2025a). Seen together, these developments

show that the cooperative basis for the KAAN procurement had already been built. The bilateral relationship had legal support, recurring defense consultations, industrial linkages, and high-level political endorsement. The KAAN deal, therefore, should be read as the continuation of a broader trajectory rather than as an isolated acquisition.

Moreover, the important thing to note is that the KAAN case marks a new stage in Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations, as it shifts the bilateral relationship from earlier defense-industrial cooperation to a far more strategic engagement and demanding domain. It is because fighter aircraft cooperation, which is the KAAN procurement, is more sensitive than medium tank cooperation; it requires a longer time horizon, deeper trust, more complex technical support, and stronger political commitment. In this sense, KAAN is not simply a larger version of earlier cooperation. It is a qualitatively different form of cooperation.

Henceforth, this shift became visible in 2025. In April 2025, during his visit to Ankara, President Prabowo stated in a joint press statement that Indonesia wished to participate in cooperation with Turkish industry on the development of the fifth-generation KAAN fighter jet and submarines (Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2025b). This statement is important because it shows that the KAAN project was already being framed as part of a broader strategic partnership rather than as an ordinary procurement negotiation. Two months later, on 11 June 2025, Turkish Aerospace announced that an agreement signed at Indo Defense 2025 in Jakarta covered the sale of 48 KAAN fighters to Indonesia (Kadidal, 2025). The same official statement added that delivery would be completed within 120 months and that the agreement included technology transfer in aviation, knowledge sharing, and the use of Indonesia's domestic capabilities in KAAN production (TUSAS, 2025).

Henceforth, these features mark a clear escalation from earlier projects. The platform itself is far more strategic, which plays the role of a strategic engagement between the two countries. As noted before, KAAN is Türkiye's fifth-generation multirole combat aircraft, and Indonesia's entry into this program therefore connects bilateral defense cooperation to advanced airpower and future-oriented force modernization, which exemplifies the strategic engagement that Indonesia is conducting toward Türkiye. Furthermore, the institutional commitment is stronger. The June 2025 purchase plan was followed by a definitive contract signed at the International Defense Industry Fair (IDEF) 2025 in Istanbul, which Turkish Aerospace described as the formal and binding stage of the procurement process.

Moreover, the industrial dimension is deeper. According to Turkish Aerospace, the signed contract does not only cover procurement. It also includes a comprehensive cooperation model with local manufacturing capabilities and training support. The KAAN case, thus, shows that Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations have entered a deeper phase

of strategic engagement. The deal reflects a relationship that already had diplomatic, legal, and industrial foundations, yet it also pushes that relationship into a more demanding and more strategic form of cooperation. For that reason, KAAAN should be understood as the culmination of an earlier trajectory and, at the same time, as the clearest evidence that bilateral defense diplomacy between the two countries has matured into a more institutionalized strategic partnership.

#### **b. The KAAAN Fighter Procurement and the Deepening of Indonesia-Türkiye Defense Relations**

The KAAAN fighter jet procurement, therefore, becomes a defense-diplomacy mechanism that deepens both countries' relations and is part of strategic engagement in several ways. The first way in which the KAAAN procurement deepened Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations was by institutionalizing strategic trust. In political terms, Indonesia's decision to place a major future airpower requirement with Türkiye carried significance beyond a normal supplier choice. Waluyo (2023) shows that Indonesia's defense diplomacy is closely tied to the preservation of strategic autonomy under an independent and active foreign policy orientation. In that setting, bilateral defense cooperation is used to widen strategic options while managing dependence on any single external partner. The KAAAN decision fits that broader pattern. It signaled that Jakarta saw Ankara as a credible long-term partner for one of the most sensitive segments of military modernization, namely future fighter capability.

This trust was built and then formalized through repeated high-level engagement. As mentioned before, in April 2025, President Prabowo publicly stated in Ankara that Indonesia wished to participate in cooperation on the development of the fifth-generation KAAAN fighter and submarine development with the Turkish industry. Two months later, at Indo Defense 2025 in Jakarta, the Indonesian Ministry of Defense and Türkiye's Secretariat of Defense Industries signed a memorandum of understanding for KAAAN procurement. That MoU was signed by Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin and SSB President Haluk Görgün and was witnessed directly by President Prabowo (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2026). In July 2025, the relationship moved from political commitment to a definitive and binding stage when Turkish Aerospace and Indonesia's Ministry of Defense signed the official contract in Istanbul for 48 aircraft. This sequence matters because strategic trust is more credible when expressed across several formal moments rather than through a single announcement.

The long-time horizon of the agreement reinforces the same point. The 48 aircraft are planned for delivery within 120 months (Asian Defense Journal, 2025). Furthermore, the Indonesia-bound aircraft are expected to use the TF35000, a domestically developed Turkish engine still under development by TUSAŞ Engine Industries, with completion targeted for 2032 (Türkiye Today, 2026). This means Indonesia accepted a relationship

that involves developmental risk, long-term coordination, and confidence in Türkiye's technological roadmap. That kind of commitment is analytically important. Drab (2018) treats defense diplomacy as a means of building trust, reducing uncertainty, and reinforcing perceptions of common interest. The KAAAN case clearly illustrates that logic. Indonesia was not simply buying an off-the-shelf platform. It was entering a future-oriented defense relationship that presupposed sustained political reliability on both sides.

For that reason, the KAAAN deal can be read as a form of strategic signaling between two middle powers. It showed that Indonesia viewed Türkiye as a partner capable of supporting long-term defense modernization, while Türkiye viewed Indonesia as a trusted destination for the first export of its flagship fighter program. Turkish Aerospace itself described the July 2025 contract as part of the largest defense agreement in the history of the Republic (Defense Turkey, 2025). In diplomatic terms, this transformed earlier goodwill into a more institutionalized expression of trust (Defense Security Asia, 2025; Türkiye Today, 2025).

The second mechanism was the expansion of defense industrial cooperation. Here, the available evidence shows that the KAAAN arrangement moved the bilateral relationship beyond a simple buyer-seller model. The June 2025 agreement already included a significant transfer of technologies, knowledge sharing, and the use of Indonesia's industrial infrastructure and production capacities for the KAAAN program (Defense Turkey, 2025). The subsequent July 2025 contract went further. Turkish Aerospace stated that the signed contract included a comprehensive cooperation model covering local manufacturing capabilities and training support. The Turkish Aerospace is reported to sign an agreement with PT Republik Aero Dirgantara and PT Dirgantara Indonesia covering production, engineering, and technology sharing (Ergocun, 2025). Hence, the core point is already clear: the procurement framework was designed to embed industrial cooperation into the deal itself.

This matters because it places KAAAN within a longer Indonesia-Türkiye pattern. As referred to in the preliminary cooperation, the Harimau medium tank project had already established a bilateral template in which defense diplomacy operated through both government-to-government and business-to-business channels (Elisabeth et al., 2021). As Elisabeth et al. (2021) note, this earlier cooperation involved a 2014 G-to-G MoU, a 2015 B-to-B MoU between PT Pindad and FNSS, routine defense industry meetings, a Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, and technology transfer that began in Türkiye and continued in Indonesia. It also combined Indonesia-Türkiye defense industry cooperation as a form of direct offset through joint production and notes aerospace cooperation between Turkish Aerospace Industries and PT Dirgantara Indonesia in projects related to the N219, N245, CN235 digital cockpit upgrade, and drone

development. In that sense, KAAN did not create industrial cooperation from nothing. It elevated an existing pattern into a more advanced aerospace domain.

This continuity is important to this article's argument. Defense diplomacy, hence, deepens bilateral relations more effectively when procurement is connected to industrial learning, local capability development, and organizational linkages across state and corporate actors. That is exactly what the KAAN case suggests. The Indonesian Ministry of Defense, the Turkish SSB, TUSAŞ, PT Dirgantara Indonesia, and PT Republik Aero Dirgantara were all drawn into the same cooperative framework. As a result, the procurement extended bilateral relations from diplomacy into production, engineering, and training. This is a deeper form of institutional linkage than a transactional sale.

Moreover, the third mechanism was capability development. This point is important because the political significance of KAAN is inseparable from Indonesia's defense modernization goals. KAAN is designed as a fifth-generation multirole fighter with low observability, internal weapons bays, high maneuverability, sensor fusion, AI-supported mission systems, interoperability, super cruise capability, and both air-to-air and air-to-ground combat functions (Helou, 2024). For Indonesia, therefore, participation in this program links bilateral cooperation to access to a future-oriented air combat ecosystem rather than only to airframe acquisition.

Taken together, the findings show that the KAAN procurement deepened Indonesia-Türkiye defense relations through three connected mechanisms. It institutionalized strategic engagement by converting political alignment into a long-term, formalized commitment to a sensitive defense platform. Moreover, it expanded defense-industrial cooperation by embedding local manufacturing, technology sharing, engineering cooperation, and training support within the relationship. Lastly, it supported Indonesia's capability development by linking bilateral cooperation to future airpower modernization and longer-term sustainment value.

## **2. Discussion**

### **a. What the KAAN Case Adds to the Study of Defense Diplomacy**

The first analytical implication of the KAAN case is that it should be understood as a form of strategic engagement rather than as a stand-alone procurement event. This point matters because the Indonesia-Türkiye relationship is more intense than an ordinary buyer-seller interaction. Recalling from Gindarsah's (2016) arguments, Indonesian defense diplomacy serves two linked agendas, namely strategic engagement and military modernization. In this context, strategic engagement refers to the use of defense ties to widen partnerships, manage uncertainty, and embed external relations in more durable patterns of cooperation. Gindarsah further shows that Indonesia's broader hedging strategy works by engaging external powers while preserving strategic autonomy and avoiding overdependence on any single actor. The KAAN case fits that

logic closely. Indonesia did not merely purchase an aircraft. It entered a more ambitious and future-oriented framework of cooperation with Türkiye that includes long-term delivery commitments, industrial participation, and structured defense collaboration. For that reason, the KAAAN case is better read as a strategic engagement project that elevated bilateral defense relations to a more institutionalized and intensive level.

This interpretation becomes even stronger when read through Drab's framework. Drab argues that defense diplomacy is not limited to symbolic contacts or narrow military liaison. Instead, it is a broad, peaceful activity based on dialogue and cooperation, conducted through defense institutions to support foreign and security policy objectives. More importantly, he emphasizes that the task of defense diplomacy is to create stable, long-term relations and cooperation that promote transparency, strengthen trust, and achieve common goals. He also notes that one of the most important instruments of defense diplomacy is sustained dialogue with partners, while its areas include bilateral and multilateral cooperation, confidence-building measures, legal cooperation, military training, and defense-industry cooperation. In light of that framework, the KAAAN case clearly exceeds the level of routine procurement. It reflects a denser and more durable form of bilateral engagement in which dialogue, contractual cooperation, industrial linkage, and strategic trust are all combined. In that sense, strategic engagement is not simply a contextual label for the Indonesia-Türkiye relationship. It is the most appropriate analytical description of the relationship that the KAAAN procurement helped produce.

The second implication is that this strategic engagement serves a wider Indonesian objective, namely the construction of a stable long-term defense relationship that can expand Indonesia's strategic influence while preserving its autonomy in a system shaped by major-power rivalry. Here again, the point resonates with what Gindarsah (2016) notes. He argues that Indonesia's defense diplomacy is part of a broader hedging strategy aimed at moderating the impact of geopolitical change while maintaining the country's defensive ability under regional uncertainty. He further explains that Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy seeks to preserve strategic autonomy and avoid being trapped in direct alignment with competing great powers. In this approach, Indonesia combines engagement with modernization in order to preserve the widest possible range of strategic options. The KAAAN case, hence, should therefore be understood not only as bilateral cooperation with Türkiye, but also as a strategic move that helps Indonesia widen its defense partnerships, reduce excessive dependence on older suppliers, and strengthen its position in a contested international environment.

At this point, Drab's framework adds a useful conceptual layer. He stresses that defense diplomacy maintains dialogue with partners both as a goal in itself and as an instrument for advancing specific state interests. He also argues that defense diplomacy is designed not only to build trust and reduce hostility, but also to influence the position

of partners and support the implementation of broader foreign and security policy goals. This is highly relevant to the KAAN case. Indonesia's cooperation with Türkiye is not merely a technical arrangement in the aerospace sector. It is part of a broader effort to position itself more effectively among competing external powers by building strong ties with another strategically autonomous middle power. In that sense, the relationship with Türkiye gives Indonesia more than access to equipment. It gives Indonesia additional diplomatic room for maneuver, greater leverage in diversifying partners, and a stronger ability to avoid overreliance on the major powers that dominate the global arms market. Therefore, the KAAN case shows Indonesia using defense diplomacy to expand strategic influence and preserve strategic autonomy within a competitive order shaped by great-power rivalry.

The third implication is that the KAAN case confirms, but also extends, what earlier studies have already said about the pattern of Indonesian defense diplomacy. Gindarsah (2016) identifies three strategic objectives of Indonesian defense diplomacy: confidence building, harnessing military capability, and developing the defense industrial base. Next, Waluyo (2023) studies identify that Indonesia's defense diplomacy is focused on the preservation of strategic autonomy under an independent and active foreign policy orientation. Furthermore, Jamilah and Sari (2024), who studied the defense diplomacy of Indonesia towards France, argue that Indonesia's defense diplomacy toward France was driven by strategic engagement, confidence-building measures, capacity building, and international reputation, while also warning that such cooperation should enhance Indonesia's capability and independence rather than create dependency. Likewise, Saleo, Perwita, & Hendarwoto (2025) also argue that defense procurement between Indonesia and France can strengthen long-term bilateral trust, institutional cooperation, and strategic autonomy when it is embedded in a broader diplomatic and strategic framework. The KAAN case confirms these arguments clearly. It shows that Indonesian defense diplomacy is still fundamentally oriented toward strategic engagement, trust building, capability enhancement, and defense-industrial development.

A useful comparison can be drawn with Indonesia's defense procurement relationship with France, especially in the Rafale case analysed by Saleo, Perwita, & Hendarwoto (2025). That study argues that procurement with France strengthened long-term bilateral trust, institutional cooperation, and strategic autonomy when it was embedded in broader diplomatic engagement rather than treated as a narrow acquisition process. In that sense, the Rafale case supports the same general conclusion reached in this article: defense procurement can operate as a diplomatic instrument when it creates strategic dialogue, industrial cooperation, and long-term military linkages. At the same time, the KAAN case differs in an important respect. While the Rafale case still reflects a partnership between Indonesia and an established external

supplier with a wider Indo-Pacific strategy, the KAAN case involves a more reciprocal and developmental form of cooperation between two middle powers that both exemplify a strategic engagement, seek strategic autonomy, industrial advancement, and a longer-term defense partnership. For that reason, it shows that procurement-based defense diplomacy is not limited to Indonesia's relations with major or established external partners, but is increasingly visible in more ambitious and institutionalized cooperation among middle powers themselves

At the same time, the KAAN case also extends the body of literature in an important way. An earlier study of Indonesia-Türkiye cooperation of the Harimau project made by Elisabeth et al. (2021) had already demonstrated that bilateral defense diplomacy could operate through joint production, technology transfer, and institutional coordination. Yet the KAAN program moves the relationship into a more complex aerospace domain with a longer time horizon, greater developmental risk, and deeper industrial integration. This makes the case analytically significant beyond bilateral history alone. It suggests that defense diplomacy among middle powers is becoming more sophisticated. In other words, the KAAN case is not simply an example of middle powers copying older patterns of great-power military cooperation. It is an example of middle powers constructing their own denser forms of defense partnership through long-term dialogue, industrial linkage, and shared strategic purpose.

Taken together, the larger theoretical payoff of the KAAN case is clear. It shows that defense diplomacy, understood through Drab, is not only a low-intensity practice of visits, dialogue, or symbolic reassurance. It can also be a purposeful strategy for building and strengthening strategic engagement, stable long-term defense relations, and expanding a state's room for maneuver in a competitive international system. The KAAN case, therefore, demonstrates three broader points. 1) Indonesia's cooperation with Türkiye should be read as a form of strategic engagement that raised bilateral relations to a more intensive level. 2) This cooperation helps Indonesia pursue long-term stable relations that strengthen its strategic influence and preserve autonomy amid great-power competition. 3) The KAAN case confirms that defense diplomacy remains a practical means through which middle powers, especially Indonesia, can simultaneously build confidence, enhance defense capability, and develop the defense industry. In that sense, the KAAN case offers evidence that defense diplomacy is becoming an increasingly important way for middle powers to build more ambitious and more institutionalized strategic partnerships with each other.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This article has asked how the KAAN fighter jet procurement deepened defense cooperation between Indonesia and Türkiye. The answer is that the procurement,

analyzed through the framework of Drab's defense diplomacy, strengthened bilateral defense relations by transforming an already expanding relationship into a deeper, more institutionalised form of cooperation. Rather than functioning as a stand-alone arms purchase, the KAAAN case operated as a strategic engagement that linked political trust, industrial cooperation, and military modernisation within one bilateral framework as a form of defense diplomacy.

The findings of how the procurement deepened defense relations between Indonesia and Türkiye, hence, rest on three main mechanisms. First, the procurement strengthens the institutionalised strategic engagement between Indonesia and Türkiye. The procurement showed that both countries were willing to enter a long-term and politically sensitive defense relationship centred on advanced fighter jet capability. In this respect, the procurement worked as a confidence-building measure in the sense emphasised by Drab (2018). Moreover, the procurement expanded defense industrial cooperation beyond a buyer-seller model. The bilateral relationship was deepened through production-related cooperation, technology-oriented collaboration, training support, and stronger institutional links between state agencies and defense firms. Next, the procurement supported Indonesia's capability development by connecting bilateral defense cooperation to a major airpower modernisation agenda. These three mechanisms, hence, show that the KAAAN case combined trust building, industrial collaboration, and capability enhancement in a mutually reinforcing way.

Furthermore, this article contributes to the study of Indonesia-Türkiye defense cooperation and also Indonesia's defense diplomacy by showing that the KAAAN procurement represents a deeper and more intensive stage in the bilateral defense relationship, best understood as a form of strategic engagement. In this sense, the case shows that Indonesia's cooperation with Türkiye has moved beyond earlier patterns of defense collaboration into a more institutionalized and long-term framework of aerospace cooperation. This strategic engagement also serves a broader Indonesian objective. It helps Indonesia build stable, long-term defense relations that can strengthen its strategic influence while preserving autonomy amid great-power competition. At the same time, the KAAAN case confirms that defense diplomacy remains a practical means through which middle powers, especially Indonesia, can simultaneously build confidence, enhance defense capability, and develop the defense industry. Therefore, the case does more than show continuity in bilateral defense ties. It also demonstrates how defense diplomacy is becoming more technological, more institutionalized, and more ambitious in the way middle powers construct strategic partnerships.

Last but not least, this study has focused on a single case, which creates an obvious limitation. It explains the significance of the KAAAN procurement, but it does not evaluate the program's long-term operational outcomes or systematically compare them with

Indonesia's other procurement pathways. For that reason, future research could compare the KAAAN case with the Harimau project, the Rafale acquisition, or Indonesia's other major defense partnerships. Such a comparison would help clarify when procurement most effectively functions as defense diplomacy, and when it remains closer to a conventional acquisition process.

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