

Indonesia's Efforts to Maintain ASEAN's National and Regional Economic Stability through Air Defence Modernisation

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of President Prabowo Subianto's leadership, Indonesia carried out political manoeuvres by signing a large contract for the purchase of Rafale and KAAN jets. This aligns with the outbreak of conflicts in regions like the Middle East and Eastern Europe, such as Israel and Hamas, India and Pakistan, Iran and Israel, Russia and Ukraine. Additionally, there is a trade war conflict between America and China, which has the potential to escalate into open war. Southeast Asia has also seen the potential for an open conflict. In response to this dynamic, Indonesia is modernising its military to protect its sovereignty—not for expansion or offence—though this step has caused controversy, particularly regarding the stability of the national economy due to the high cost of the contracts signed and the regional stability of Southeast Asia, as it could trigger an arms race within ASEAN. This research urgently examines how Indonesia's actions to maintain national economic stability through large jet purchase contracts and how it seeks to uphold ASEAN regional stability amidst military modernisation, using a descriptive qualitative method based on the Theory of Defence Realism.

Keywords: Military Modernisation, National Economic Stability, ASEAN Regional Stability, Defensive Realism

Introduction

In the midst of the current complex global geopolitical conditions with conflicts in various countries making stability in some regions uncondusive (r, 2024), this has forced several countries, including Indonesia, to modernize defense equipment, especially in the Air sector. 2025,) because in the case of the India-Pakistan conflict it is not just a war, but there is a technological war between 2 Blocs that have great powers, namely the West with its advanced technology and the East represented by China which has a more affordable price (Kennedy, 2020). The action taken by ASEAN member countries is to modernize defense equipment because there are concerns about military penetration carried out by countries involved in the conflict (Ramadhanika, 2024).

What happened between India and Pakistan also had a significant impact on the increase in military standardization, especially in the ASEAN region. Indonesia during the administration of President Prabowo Subianto (Da Costa, 2025), he carried out a political maneuver in the step of modernizing defense equipment, especially in the air sector. The political maneuver carried out by President Prabowo Subianto in modernizing air defense by signing a contract with Dassault Aviation from France to purchase 42 Rafale fighter jets (Ministry of Defense, 2024), which is an advanced fighter jet generation 4.5+

that suits the needs of the Indonesian military. President Prabowo also signed a 5th generation fighter jet purchase contract with KAAN from Turkey (Nugraha, 2025) in a move to modernize Indonesia's Military Equipment. This raises questions about the current condition of the Indonesian economy but signing a very large Military Contract (Prabowo, 2025).

In the initial step of modernization of Indonesia, President Prabowo showed interest in buying 5th generation fighter jets, namely the F-35 made by American Lockheed Martin (Purnamasari, 2020), but this was rejected by Washington because it was considered that Indonesia was not ready to buy F-35 fighter jets, therefore instead Washington offered F-16 Block 3 and F-15 EX fighter jets (*Indonesia, Boeing Ink MoU on Procuring 24 F-15EX Fighter Jets*, 2023). however, what needs to be considered is the behavior of the United States that tends to intervene in the buyer country of the Defense Equipment (Charpentreau, 2020). On the other hand, Indonesia can have defense equipment with advanced technology even though it has to spend a higher price, but it gets dictation from the United States to the buyer country. In addition to the United States, Indonesia also entered into a contract with Moscow in the acquisition of SU-35 fighter jets, the price offered by Moscow for the SU-35 tends to be more affordable and does not dictate the user country (dangwal, 2025). Moscow's policy of not intervening in user countries is certainly more attractive to Indonesia, but Indonesia's steps in acquiring the fighter jet have been halted because it is threatened with sanctions by the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) (*Indonesia Cancels Deal With Russia to Acquire Sukhoi Su-35 Fighters*, 2020) which made Indonesia subject to an Embargo from the United States. This situation forced President Prabowo Subianto to form a modernization process by purchasing defense equipment that meets the needs of Indonesia, but did not intervene with User countries (IndoDefence, 2023).

Previously, Indonesia had used US-made fighter jets, namely the F-16 and Russian-made fighters, namely the SU-30 and SU-27, but these fighter jets had entered Retirement Age and had low combat readiness (Santoso, 2023,) because of the 11 units owned by Indonesia, only 5 units were in flightworthy condition, then with all the problems, President Prabowo Subianto carried out a political maneuver by signing a contract with Dassault Aviation from France to The purchase of 42 Rafale fighter jets with a contract value of \$8.1 billion US dollars or IDR 116.6 trillion and 5th generation fighter jets from KAAN produced in Turkey as many as 48 units with a contract value of \$10 billion US dollars or IDR 161 trillion Rupiah (Press Kits, 2022).

So with the steps, will President Prabowo Subianto affect the condition of the Indonesian economy? on the other hand, the payment of these defense equipment uses external debt (ULN) and export commodities (Cahyana, 2023,). However, in this study we want to discuss the impact of Indonesia's external debt which will affect the value of the Rupiah and affect the regional stability of ASEAN because Indonesia is de facto as the leader of ASEAN, if the value of the Rupiah falls it will affect the stability of the ASEAN Regional because it can affect the entry of foreign investment into the ASEAN Region.

The purpose of this study is to examine the urgency of President Prabowo Subianto's political strategy in modernizing defense equipment that can affect the National Economy and ASEAN Regional Stability by using the Theory of Defensive Realism in this theory discusses the behavior of a country in building strength but not to dominate but to survive in the International System.

Methodology

Previous studies on the purchase history of Indonesian air alusistas, the history of the purchase of alusista India and Pakistan, studies on global geopolitical conditions. Theoretical Framework used in this research is Defensive realism about the balance of power and Complex Interdependency. Research approach: descriptive qualitative with a case study of Indonesia's large investment in the purchase of alusista. Data source: Journal previous articles that discussed the purchase history of alusista indonesia, international news. Technical analysis: content analysis and document studies

Discussion

In this discussion we will explain using the theory of defensive realism, what is defensive realism? Defensive realism is one of the variants of the grand theory of international relations, namely the theory of realism, which emphasizes that the state basically always behaves rationally and defensively in order to maintain survival in an anarchist world (Maulida, 2020,). This theory evolved, walked, and evolved in response to resistance to the more aggressive views of classical realism and offensive realism. This theory was developed by a figure named Kenneth Waltz, through his work "Theory of International Politics" written in 1979, he was a key figure in the development of structural realism or neorealism, from which defensive realism began (Steinsson, 2014). Kenneth Waltz argues that the international system encourages countries to behave prudently in order to maintain stability and balance of power (Pashakhanlou, 2018).

In his book Waltz argues that the State must gain power because a system of structural anarchy forces them to be forced to have many options in survival (Dunne et al., 2007, 72). In this theory, it is explained that the state does not have to increase its power to achieve a hegemony, but rather the state builds its military to suppress the hegemonic state. Indonesia is modernizing its military with the aim of protecting Indonesia's national sovereignty and not to become a hegemon in the ASEAN region, because within ASEAN there are allies of the United States, namely Singapore which is a member of NATO and Thailand which is a close ally of the United States and Vietnam which has defense equipment that is heavily imported from Russia and Cambodia from China (Suryanti, 2021, 31).

In conclusion, defensive realism provides a moderate view in looking at state behavior. Rather than seeing the state as a greedy and power-hungry actor, this theory emphasizes that the state more often acts cautiously, considers threats, and avoids direct conflict in order to maintain its existence (Waltz, 1979).

A. Will Prabowo's strategy affect Indonesia's economy and what are the government's steps?

Updating or modernizing defense equipment is very crucial for Indonesia, considering that some old Indonesian defense equipment is already in sufficient condition in need of update. Therefore, President Prabowo Subianto gave a decision, namely the renewal of defense equipment (Akbar, 2021). However, that does not mean that there are no risks in it considering the current economic conditions of Indonesia. Payments made by President Prabowo carry out a long-term payment system, using installment payments and using payments from export commodities (European Union, 2025). Payments like this are certainly full of risks considering the geopolitical conditions that are in an uncertain state (Seto, 2025), the payment system used on paper has become a profitable system for a number of parties. If studied further, the Indonesian government has the duty to maintain the value of Indonesia's foreign export commodities and ensure that the price of Indonesian products remains at competitive prices and if possible, can increase the export value of Indonesian products (Alfitrah, 2025).

It can be said that Indonesia's economic condition is in a stable condition, but it needs to be studied further that the contract with a fantastic amount agreed by President Prabowo has an impact on the domestic economy (Seftiana, n.d.). In the Ministry of Defense's report, it is stated that Indonesia's military defense budget has increased almost 2 times from the initial 0.8% to 1.5% of the state budget, this budget will be used to optimize military modernization in Indonesia (Nurfitra, 2025). President Prabowo Subianto stated that military modernization will improve national welfare, as president Prabowo Subianto said that national prosperity is linked to Indonesia's national security (Siregar, 2025). And this national budget will continue to increase when Indonesia receives Rafale fighter jets from France and KAAN fighter jets from Turkey, this is due to the cost of maintenance and upgrades or updates so that fighter jets owned by Indonesia have better combat readiness (Cahyana, 2023). This can also be a side that must be studied considering that TNI funding must be centralized from the State Budget, and if funding for the TNI is disrupted or very minimal, it will affect the quality of the TNI, especially the TNI Air Force because it concerns the cost of training for Pilots and Rafale Operations and KAAN jets (Bakrie, 2007, 5).

President Prabowo's decision in the step to modernize defense equipment is indeed full of pros and cons, because it concerns several economic and national security matters that are indicators of the security of the Indonesian state. It is necessary to review again that the payment system carried out poses several risks that should not be underestimated by the government, including the government must be more careful in controlling the value of the Rupiah, and the quantity of Indonesia's external debt (ULN) so that there is no severe depreciation that will cause an economic crisis in Indonesia. The government must also maintain the value or price of export commodities of Indonesian products so that they remain at competitive prices and must improve the quality of Indonesian export products by rationalizing to increase state revenue without having to burden the Indonesian people (Wahyuningsih, 2019).

With the use of the long-term payment system used by President Prabowo Subianto, the Indonesian government has taken various steps to maintain the value of Indonesia's export commodities (Patunru, 2023). The Government of Indonesia is increasing export products and simplifying Export and Import regulations, in order to streamline the export and import process (Thea, 2022). Some of the steps taken by President Prabowo Subianto to provide export stability are to reduce dependence on traditional markets such as China, the United States, and the European Union by encouraging exports to developing countries such as countries in the Middle East, several African countries, and regional countries in South Asia (Bata, 2025). Then it was continued by strengthening bilateral and regional relations such as accelerating the implementation of IEU-CEPA (Indonesia-EU Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement), IK-CEPA (Indonesia-Korea), and RCEP. and continued by increasing the added value of exports by increasing export commodities or processing raw materials into semi-finished materials or finished materials (Dewanto, 2025).

So, what are Indonesia's next steps in maintaining regional stability in ASEAN? Considering the existing facts, Indonesia is a de facto ASEAN leader (Putra, 2015). This is because Indonesia is a country that has the largest territory in the ASEAN region. And of course, Indonesia bears a little more responsibility to strengthen its defense equipment to prove its existence as an ASEAN leader country. In addition, Indonesia needs superior strength to maintain the balance of power in the ASEAN region itself (Mahroza, 2024).

B. Indonesia's Steps in Maintaining ASEAN Regional Stability

Indonesia emphasized that the modernization of its air defense is only for defense, aka without any offensive elements in it (Cahyana, 2023). And this certainly has a significant impact on ASEAN regional stability (Ferdiansyah, 2025). The impact is quite visible, among others: reassuring some ASEAN countries that there is no element of provoking conflict between them, showing seriousness in guarding the air dimension of the ASEAN region and protecting the sovereignty of the countries they patronize. In addition, Indonesia also emphasized that it does not take sides with the western bloc and the eastern bloc (non-bloc) (Putra, 2024). This can be proven by Indonesia's efforts to buy Rafale jets from France and Kaan from Turkey, where the two countries do not take sides with the western bloc or the eastern bloc, despite the reality that France and Turkey are in the western bloc or are members of NATO, they tend to remain independent in policy. And of course this has a positive impact on ASEAN, namely: Indonesia is considered a balancer and independent, preventing the division of ASEAN due to the geopolitical conditions of the US and China.

Based on Presidential Decree No. 7/2008, the MEF aims to build a minimum defense force capable of ensuring national security, with selective modernization (although the TNI budget is relatively light, around 0.8–2% of GDP) which means that Indonesia has a focus on guarding national territory and readiness not only for military territorial expansion (NABABAN, 2023). The above statement is in line with the defense doctrine according to the 1945 Constitution, the TNI will only "act if attacked", in accordance with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution and the principles of non-aggression of ASEAN

(ZOPFAN, TAC). which also means that ASEAN prioritizes the doctrine of non-interference or it can also be called that member countries do not interfere in each other's internal affairs, create an atmosphere of trust and prevent military dominance (Widiastut, 2022).

The Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) can be a way for Indonesia to maintain regional stability in ASEAN (*ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting (ADMM)*, 2025) because in its participation, Indonesia has consistently voiced in the ADMM forum regarding the importance of regional stability through defense diplomacy. In the ADMM forum, Indonesia voiced regarding Initiating the Transparency Mechanism: Such as the idea of establishing the ASEAN Arms Transparency Mechanism, which aims to prevent strategic misunderstandings due to the procurement of defense equipment between ASEAN countries. Fostering Non-Traditional Cooperation: Focus on maritime security, counter-terrorism, and disaster management cooperation. Becoming a Mediator in 9 (Wahyudi, 2020) Regional Tensions: As in the South China Sea issue, Indonesia plays a mediator and promotes peaceful settlements based on international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

Therefore, the Indonesian government should refresh the transparency at the ASEAN ADMM Forum to state that the purchase of Rafale and KAAN jets is for defensive or defensive measures and not for expansion, given that ASEAN is characterized by non-intervention. Indonesia's attitude must immediately be transparent to maintain non-intervention and not cause suspicion among ASEAN member countries themselves. Indonesia must develop cooperation in the ASEAN military field, especially at the ADMM forum by establishing Peace, Regional Stability which has the potential to invite foreign investment to the ASEAN regional region so that Indonesia can become a key player in ASEAN's economic growth and can make Indonesia's image proud in the international arena.

Conclusion

The purchase of Rafale and KAAN jets is not just the purchase and modernization of defense equipment but is a bold step by Indonesia to show its commitment to maintaining the country's sovereignty and taking part in maintaining global peace through maintaining regional stability. Although the purchase of Rafale and Kaan jets raises suspicions from observers, the political maneuvers carried out by Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto can show that Indonesia is a country that cannot be underestimated from all aspects and becomes a symbol that Indonesia is an important pillar in maintaining peace and stability in the ASEAN Region.

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