

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Idiosyncratic Factors in Defense Policy Formulation: An Analysis of Prabowo Subianto's Role in Indonesia's Optimum Essential Force 2025

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Article History

Received
28 March 2026

Accepted
20 May 2026

Available Online
30 May 2026

Keywords

Idiosyncratic factors
Foreign policy analysis
Leadership trait analysis
Optimum essential force
Prabowo Subianto

Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of Prabowo Subianto's idiosyncratic characteristics on the formulation of Indonesia's Optimum Essential Force (OEF) 2025 defense policy. Despite growing scholarly interest in Indonesian defense modernization, existing literature predominantly emphasizes structural and institutional explanations while under examining the role of individual leadership. Drawing on Foreign Policy Analysis, this study employs Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) based on Hermann's framework and process tracing to construct and verify causal chains between Prabowo's personal characteristics and specific OEF 2025 policy decisions. Analysis of spontaneous public statements identifies four dominant traits: high need for power, high belief in ability to control events, high self-confidence, and high ingroup bias combined with medium-high distrust of others. Process tracing demonstrates that these traits causally contributed to the centralization of acquisition decision-making, the mandatory inclusion of technology transfer clauses, the ambitious defense budget targets, and platform preferences reflecting limited power-projection ambitions. The findings indicate that the qualitative shift from the Minimum Essential Force to OEF 2025 cannot be explained by regional structural pressures alone; within this case, the idiosyncratic variable functions as a necessary component of the explanation. The study contributes the first systematic individual-level account of Indonesian defense policymaking and illustrates the analytical value of leadership variables in explaining departures from established policy trajectories.

1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region has experienced a significant transformation in its security landscape amid the intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China. What initially emerged as competition in the economic and technological sectors has progressively expanded into military modernization, geopolitical contestation, and the restructuring of regional security architecture. China's official defense expenditure reached USD 231 billion in 2024, reflecting a 7.2% increase from the previous year, while the IISS estimates its actual spending at approximately USD 325 billion when accounting for off-budget military outlays [1]. China simultaneously intensified its military consolidation in the South China Sea through the development of strategic installations in disputed areas. In response, the United States reinforced its alliance network through new security arrangements such as AUKUS and the revitalized Quad involving Japan, Australia, and India. The interaction of these competing strategic initiatives has generated increasing pressure upon regional states, including Indonesia, to recalibrate their defense posture and foreign policy orientation within a more polarized regional order.

For Indonesia, these external dynamics intersect with longstanding domestic defense challenges. As the world's largest archipelagic state, comprising more than 17,000 islands and occupying a strategic position between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Indonesia faces complex security demands that differ substantially from those of continental states. Indonesia's defense budget in 2024 stood at approximately Rp139 trillion (USD 9.4 billion), equivalent to 0.79% of GDP, lower than the regional average in Southeast Asia, which has surpassed 1% [2]. This discrepancy illustrates the persistent gap between Indonesia's strategic responsibilities and its existing defense capabilities, thereby reinforcing the urgency of comprehensive military transformation.

The election of Prabowo Subianto as President of Indonesia in October 2024 marked an important turning point in the country's defense policy trajectory. Prior to assuming the presidency, Prabowo served as Minister of Defense from 2019 to 2024 and played a central role in promoting the transition from the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) framework toward the Optimum Essential Force (OEF) 2025. Initially introduced in 2010, the MEF framework aimed to establish a minimum level of credible military capability. However, evolving regional security conditions have rendered the framework increasingly inadequate in addressing contemporary defense challenges. OEF 2025 therefore represents a broader strategic orientation emphasizing the optimization of military readiness across all service branches, the strengthening of the domestic defense industry through state-owned enterprises such as PT Pindad, PT PAL, and PT Dirgantara Indonesia, and the gradual increase of defense expenditure toward 1.5% of GDP. More importantly, the policy reflects Indonesia's ambition to reposition itself as a more capable and influential actor within the Indo-Pacific security environment.

Recent studies have identified notable shifts in Indonesia's foreign and defense policy orientation under Prabowo's leadership. Anwar (2024) argues that the administration demonstrates a more personalized and direct approach to defense diplomacy, characterized by Prabowo's active engagement in bilateral strategic negotiations [3]. Setiawan (2025) reports a similar pattern, documenting more than 26 diplomatic visits conducted by Prabowo within the first eleven months of his administration to diversify defence partnerships and strengthen military cooperation [4]. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature on Indonesian foreign policy continues to emphasize structural factors and national interests as the principal explanatory variables [5]. Consequently, the extent to which leadership characteristics shape contemporary Indonesian defense policy remains insufficiently examined.

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and specifically its idiosyncratic level, supplies the needed lens. Rosenau (1966) holds that foreign policy cannot be explained by systemic variables alone [6]. Hudson (2005) that it ultimately originates with human decision-makers [7]. and Hermann (1980) that leadership personality is legible in patterns of decision-making and interpersonal behaviour [8]. Yet this lens has rarely been turned on Indonesia. Anwar (2024) notes Prabowo's personal background but does not operationalise it as the principal variable [3], while Sitepu (2025) and Wardhani and Dugis (2023) foreground policy shifts and domestic interests rather than leadership [5,9]. This is the theoretical gap the present study addresses.

Despite the growing development of idiosyncratic analysis within FPA scholarship, its application to the Indonesian context remains relatively limited. Existing studies on Indonesian defense and foreign policy predominantly focus on systemic pressures, domestic interests, or strategic orientation rather than leadership personality. Although Anwar (2024) acknowledges the importance of Prabowo's personal background, the study does not systematically operationalize idiosyncratic variables as the principal analytical framework [3]. Likewise, Sitepu (2024) and Wardhani and Dugis (2023) primarily emphasize policy shifts and domestic political interests without placing leadership characteristics at the center of explanation [5,9]. This limitation reveals a theoretical gap within the literature, particularly regarding policies that are strongly associated with the personal vision and strategic preferences of political leaders.

An empirical gap is equally evident. To date, there has been no specific academic study examining OEF 2025 through an idiosyncratic perspective. This condition contrasts with the broader development of leadership-centered studies in international politics. Batubara, Rosyidin, and Hanura (2021), for instance, demonstrate how Justin Trudeau's personality traits influenced Canada's refugee policy toward Syrian refugees [10]. Similarly, Az Zahra (2024) illustrates how Joe Biden's personal values and ideological orientation shaped the termination of the Zero Tolerance immigration policy in the United States [11]. The absence of comparable scholarship within the Indonesian context indicates the need for a more systematic examination of how leadership characteristics influence national defense policymaking.

The relevance of this study becomes increasingly significant considering Prabowo Subianto's distinct background as a former senior military officer with extensive experience in elite military units such as Kopassus and Kostrad. Dyson (2006) argues that leaders with military backgrounds tend to possess higher threat perceptions and stronger preferences for force-oriented security policies [12]. Combined with his experience as Minister of Defense and his assertive leadership style, Prabowo's personal characteristics constitute an important explanatory factor in understanding the formulation of OEF 2025. Consequently, analyzing OEF 2025 without considering the role of the individual leader responsible for its design would produce an incomplete understanding of the policy itself. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the influence of Prabowo Subianto's idiosyncratic factors on the formulation of the Optimum Essential Force 2025 policy through the perspective of Foreign Policy Analysis.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as conceptualized by Creswell and Poth (2018), who assert that case study research is most appropriate when the researcher intends to explore a phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon under investigation and the context in which it occurs cannot be clearly delineated [13]. The unit of analysis in this study is the Optimum Essential Force (OEF) 2025 policy under the leadership of Prabowo Subianto, selected on the grounds that it represents the most strategically significant defense policy initiative most closely associated with the incumbent leader's personal vision, thereby constituting the most representative case for examining the influence of idiosyncratic factors. Data were drawn from two categories of sources: primary data comprising the official National Defense Posture document of 2025 issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Defense, transcripts of official speeches, public statements delivered at press conferences and international diplomatic forums, as well as writings attributed to Prabowo Subianto that reflect his worldview and belief system; and secondary data encompassing peer-reviewed academic journals and reports from internationally recognized defense think-tanks, including the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). To ensure data credibility, this study applies source triangulation as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), cross-verifying findings across independently obtained data sources to establish consistency and analytical reliability [13].

This study combines two complementary analytical techniques. The first is Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), developed by Hermann (1980) to identify the leadership characteristics of political leaders through content analysis of their verbal statements across seven core trait indicators: belief in ability to control events, need for power, conceptual complexity, self-confidence, task orientation, in-group bias, and distrust of others [8]. Here, Hermann's framework is applied as a qualitative, theory-guided trait analysis rather than as automated, frequency-based coding. The corpus does not meet Hermann's threshold of fifty interview responses of 100 or more words, no software (such as Profiler Plus) was used, and the trait ratings are interpretive judgements of relative emphasis; this is stated so that the results are read accordingly. The analysis proceeded by systematically coding Prabowo Subianto's public

statements against the seven indicators to identify the dominant traits that consistently shape his policy orientations. The second technique is process tracing, defined by Beach and Pedersen (2013) as a method for identifying the causal mechanisms connecting independent and dependent variables through the systematic examination of empirical evidence [14]. Process tracing was used to construct and verify the causal chain linking the traits identified through LTA to the specific policy decisions embedded in the formulation of OEF 2025, moving beyond mere associations to trace in detail how those characteristics were translated into concrete policy choices and thereby ensuring that the study's causal claims are empirically grounded and analytically defensible.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Idiosyncratic Profile of Prabowo Subianto

Prabowo Subianto presents an idiosyncratic profile that differs structurally from the majority of Indonesia's civilian political leaders. His career encompasses two mutually constitutive domains: a military career spanning more than two decades (1974-1998), including command of elite units in Kopassus Special Forces and the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), and a subsequent transformation into a politician-entrepreneur that culminated in his appointment as Minister of Defense (2019-2024) before his election as President in October 2024. Rather than operating in isolation, these two domains interact to form a distinctive belief system that directly shapes his foreign and defense policy orientations. Understanding these orientations requires moving beyond structural or institutional explanations, as Hudson (2005) argues that foreign policy ultimately derives from the decisions of specific individuals whose personal characteristics constitute irreducible explanatory variables [7].

Military background plays a formative role in shaping Prabowo's threat perception. Research in foreign policy analysis has consistently shown that leaders with operational military experience tend to develop elevated threat perceptions and stronger preferences for capability-based solutions compared to their civilian counterparts [12]. In Prabowo's case, operational experience in regions such as East Timor and Papua embedded a conviction that threats to sovereignty are real, imminent, and require decisive state responses. Mietzner (2024) traces how this military socialization, combined with decades of political opposition, produced a candidate who framed national strength as both a strategic imperative and a personal mission [15].

The political trajectory leading to Prabowo's presidency is equally important as background context. Having contested and lost two previous presidential elections (2014 and 2019), Prabowo underwent a significant political repositioning, moving from an oppositional populist figure to a statesman-in-waiting operating within the Jokowi coalition [15]. Muhtadi (2025) shows that his electoral success in 2024 rested partly on a rehabilitation of his public image, drawing on collective memory politics and institutional support from incumbent networks [5]. Aspinall (2015) had earlier identified the structural tension in Prabowo's political identity between oligarchic elite interests and populist mobilization, a tension that continues to shape the political context within which his defense agenda is pursued [6].

Five years as Minister of Defense (2019-2024) added a distinctive cognitive dimension to his profile. During this period, Prabowo not only acquired direct access to data on TNI's capabilities and deficiencies but also built extensive international defense partnerships. Anwar (2024) notes that Prabowo's approach to defense diplomacy was highly personal and direct during his ministerial tenure, establishing a pattern of centralized decision-making that would later be institutionalized in OEF 2025. This experience provided a technical information base that distinguishes Prabowo from civilian leaders who typically rely on bureaucratic intermediaries.

3.1.1 Results of Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA)

Analysis of Prabowo's spontaneous public statements encompasses the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue address, the January 2024 presidential debates, ministerial press conferences, and bilateral diplomatic statements. Following Hermann's (1999) procedure, which prioritizes unstructured verbal material so that identified traits reflect personal dispositions rather than strategically crafted messaging, coding focused on the framing Prabowo employs when describing threats, solutions, and Indonesia's role in the world. The LTA methodology requires a minimum of fifty interview responses of one hundred words or more to construct a reliable profile [16]; the present analysis draws on a corpus of public statements that, while not exclusively composed of press interviews in the strict technical sense, includes substantively spontaneous exchanges across multiple contexts and years.

It should be noted that the evidence assigned to each trait in [Table 1](#) is analytical rather than directly quotational. Where Prabowo's specific wording is not verbatim-verifiable from a confirmed primary source, evidence is presented as interpretive description grounded in secondary scholarship rather than as direct quotation. This approach follows established practice in at-a-distance LTA research [16,17]. Results are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Leadership Trait Analysis of Prabowo Subianto Based on Hermann's (1999) Framework [4]

Trait	Operational Indicator	Representative Evidence	Score	Policy Implication
Belief in Ability to Control Events	Active-voice constructions asserting personal and national agency over security outcomes	Prabowo consistently framed Indonesia's defense posture as a matter of active political will rather than structural constraint. In the 2024 presidential debate, he argued that national strength is a precondition of international respect and that its absence invites external pressure.	High	Accelerated tri-service modernization; defense budget target of 1.5% GDP as a political commitment in OEF 2025
Need for Power	Direct personal involvement in strategic decisions is normally delegated to technical procurement bodies	In the 2024 campaign, Prabowo consistently referenced his five-year tenure at the Ministry of Defense as the basis for his independent judgment on TNI needs, resisting external advisory input.	High	Centralization of strategic acquisition decisions; OEF architecture driven by executive initiative
Self-Confidence	First-person authority claims; self-positioning as the preeminent source of defense knowledge	In the 2024 campaign, Prabowo consistently referenced his five-year tenure at the Ministry of Defense as the basis for his independent judgment on TNI needs, resisting external advisory input.	High	Limited external consultation in OEF design; preference for personal strategic vision over interagency deliberation
Ingroup Bias	Strong nationalist framing; explicit valorization of domestic actors over foreign entities	Prabowo's speeches consistently emphasized strategic self-reliance, particularly on technology transfer. His rhetoric at the 2023 TNI Anniversary emphasized that domestic defense industry	High	Mandatory ToT clauses in all acquisition contracts; expansion of Defend ID (Pindad, PAL, DI)

		development is a non-negotiable national priority.		
Distrust of Others	Wariness of strategic dependence; skepticism toward foreign partners' long-term commitments	Prabowo's repeated emphasis on multi-source procurement and rejection of single-supplier dependency reflects a systemic distrust of any one external partner, consistent with his broader view of the international system as inherently competitive	Medium-High	Multi-vector defense partnership diversification across France, US, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia
Task Orientation	Focus on quantifiable milestones and measurable policy outputs	OEF 2025 planning documents and public statements consistently frame defense modernization in terms of specific acquisition targets, budget percentages, and Renstra timelines.	High	Output-driven OEF with quantitative targets embedded in Renstra 2025-2029
Conceptual Complexity	Capacity to integrate multidimensional considerations in strategic framing	Prabowo's 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue address demonstrated integration of geopolitical, economic, and military reasoning, though it also generated diplomatic controversy by appearing to normalize the Ukraine conflict.	Medium	OEF encompasses all three services simultaneously, though civil-military governance dimensions receive limited analytical treatment

Source: Compiled from [5,8–11]

Table 1 shows that of the seven Hermann (1999) traits, four stand out as dominant in Prabowo's profile: belief in ability to control events, need for power, self-confidence, and ingroup bias. This configuration is consistent with the expansionistic leadership style in Hermann's framework, which is characterized by the combination of constraint-challenging behavior, closed information processing, and a problem-focused motivation [6]. Fouquet and Brummer (2023) found in their comparative LTA of eight populist leaders that the combination of high self-confidence with significant distrust of others tends to produce policies oriented toward confrontation internally but selective cooperation externally [17]. Prabowo's profile is partly similar. Strong ingroup bias paired with medium to high distrust drives defense policies aimed at strategic autonomy without fully alienating potential partners.

One feature that distinguishes Prabowo's profile from the populist leaders in Fouquet and Brummer's (2023) comparative dataset is his sustained institutional socialization within the military. Within military organizations, centralization of command and confidence in directive action represent institutionalized behavioral norms that become deeply internalized over years of service [18]. This means that Prabowo's high scores on need for power and belief in ability to control events are not simply products of personal temperament but are reinforced by decades of organizational culture. Haripin, Priamarizki, and Nugroho (2022) demonstrate, in their study of the Ministry of Defense under Widodo, that quasi-civilian defense ministers with strong military backgrounds consistently exhibit patterns of institutional capture and centralization that differ qualitatively from fully civilian ministers. This finding provides important structural context for interpreting Prabowo's LTA profile.

Prabowo's quasi-civilian role in defense also reflects Indonesia's wider struggle to bring the military under civilian control. As Mietzner (2023) argues, the Ministry of Defense under Widodo never really became civilian in character. Putting a retired general in charge as minister only reproduced the longstanding blurred lines between military and civilian authority instead of

fixing them [19]. This institutional legacy became a direct enabling condition for the kind of personalized defense decision-making that characterizes OEF 2025.

3.2 The Optimum Essential Force 2025: Content and Paradigm Shift

The Minimum Essential Force (MEF) program, launched in 2010, represented a defensive posture toward military capability development: meeting the minimum threshold deemed adequate to address real threats, with budget constraints as the primary limiting variable. After three strategic plans (2010-2024), The MEF reached only about 65 to 70 percent of its targets, held back mainly by fiscal constraints that were made worse by post-COVID-19 inflation and global supply chain disruptions. This gap in capability became the starting point for a rethought defense modernization agenda under Prabowo.

OEF 2025 explicitly rejects the logic of defense minimalism. Rather than meeting minimum standards, OEF targets comprehensive optimization of combat capability across all three services simultaneously within a single Renstra cycle. Substantively, OEF encompasses four major policy clusters. First, tri-service equipment modernization: acquisition of 42 Rafale fighter jets for the Air Force, negotiations for F-15EX as a complementary platform, development of Scorpene submarine capabilities for the Navy, and Army modernization encompassing Harimau medium tanks and domestically developed UAV systems. Second, strengthening the domestic defense industry through the expansion of Defend ID, comprising PT Pindad, PT PAL Indonesia, and PT Dirgantara Indonesia, with Transfer of Technology (ToT) clauses as a non-negotiable prerequisite in every foreign acquisition contract [10]. Third, a defense budget increase targeted at 1.5 percent of GDP in the medium term, rising significantly from the 2023 level of approximately 0.6 percent of GDP. Fourth, diversification of bilateral defense partnerships encompassing France, the United States, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia simultaneously.

The shift from MEF to OEF is not merely quantitative but qualitative in its strategic logic. Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana (2025), in their analysis of Indonesia's military modernization under Yudhoyono and Widodo, identify status signaling as a significant motivation supplementary to purely defensive calculations: the acquisition of advanced platforms serves as a positional signal within the regional security order as well as an operational capability investment. This pattern is amplified under Prabowo, where platform choices such as the Rafale, also operated by India and Egypt, carry a signaling dimension that exceeds strictly territorial defense requirements. Setiawan and Fathun (2025) similarly argue that Prabowo's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific context reflects an aspiration toward a regional security agency, not merely passive deterrence.

3.3 Process Tracing: Idiosyncratic Imprints in the Formulation of OEF 2025

Process tracing in this study is operationalized to construct causal chains between Prabowo's idiosyncratic traits, identified through LTA, and specific decisions in the formulation of OEF 2025. Following Beach and Pedersen's (2013) logic of Causal Process Observation (CPO) [15], each causal chain is evaluated not only for pattern consistency but also through the systematic elimination of rival explanations that could account for the same policy output without invoking the idiosyncratic variable. This procedure distinguishes genuine causal contribution from coincidental association. **Table 2** presents the process tracing matrix.

Table 2. Process Tracing Matrix: Idiosyncratic Traits

Dominant Trait	Causal Mechanism	OEF 2025 Policy Output	Causal Process Observation (CPO)	Rival Explanation (Eliminated)
Need for Power (High)	Centralization of control over strategic defense decisions	Personal leadership of Rafale, F-15EX, and Scorpene submarine negotiations	Prabowo personally led delegations to Paris, Seoul, and Washington outside standard TNI procurement channels	Industry pressure or coalition interests cannot explain consistent centralization across different partner nations and platform types
Ingroup Bias + Distrust of Others (High + Med-High)	Preference for strategic autonomy over defensive interdependence	Mandatory ToT clauses in all contracts; expansion of Defend ID (Pindad, PAL, DI); rejection of contracts without local offset	Cancellation of Thales battle-management contract in favor of Havelan (Turkey), citing ToT requirements	Budget constraints: ToT mandates were maintained even in more expensive contracts, undermining cost-driven explanations.
Belief in Ability to Control Events (High)	Conviction that active policy intervention produces significant capability change	1.5% GDP defense spending target; accelerated tri-service modernization within a single Renstra period.	Target publicly committed in its 2024 campaign manifesto despite fiscal pressure from the free school-meals program	Indo-Pacific regional pressures: neighboring states facing similar pressures have not pursued comparable acceleration
Self-Confidence (High)	Minimization of external consultation; preference for personal judgment	OEF architecture was built on Prabowo's personal experience as Defense Minister (2019-2024), without a comprehensive Defense White Paper	No new defense white paper was issued in the first year of the Prabowo administration; OEF advances by executive decision	Bureaucratic delay: similar patterns observed across multiple other policy domains under Prabowo

Source: Compiled from [6,9–12]

3.3.1 Need for Power and the Centralization of Defense Decision-Making

The first causal chain concerns the relationship between high need for power and centralization in strategic defense decision-making. In LTA literature, need for power is understood as a leader's inclination to directly control processes deemed critical and to minimize bureaucratic mediation in decisions considered too consequential to delegate [6]. This disposition manifests not only in formal institutional structures but in the informal practices through which strategic decisions are made.

Anwar (2024) documents that the negotiation of 42 Rafale units from France's Dassault Aviation, representing the largest single weapons acquisition in TNI Air Force history, was led directly by Prabowo during his tenure as Defense Minister, in a manner that bypassed the conventional multi-stage procurement procedures involving TNI technical teams [5]. Mietzner (2023) provides a broader institutional context, showing that this pattern of executive bypass of civilian defense bureaucracy was already structurally embedded in the quasi-civilian Ministry of Defense that Prabowo inherited and deepened [19]. The most compelling evidence for the idiosyncratic contribution is the consistency of centralization across different partner nations and

different platform types: the same pattern is observable in the F-15EX negotiations with Boeing and in the Arrowhead frigate discussions with the United Kingdom. This cross-platform, cross-partner consistency cannot be attributed to the policy characteristics of any single acquisition but points to a systematic decision-making style.

3.3.2 Ingroup Bias and Distrust of Others: Driving Defense Industry Autonomy

The combination of high ingroup bias and medium-high distrust of others generates a traceable causal chain in the context of Indonesia's defense industry policy. Hermann (1999) explains that leaders with this trait combination tend to prioritize in-group actors while treating dependence on foreign parties as a form of strategic vulnerability to be actively minimized [6]. In the defense policy domain, this disposition translates into strong preferences for domestic capability development and resistance to forms of cooperation that would entrench asymmetric technological dependence.

This mechanism produces two interrelated policy outputs in OEF 2025. First, the ToT clause requirement: all foreign acquisition contracts are required to include provisions for technology transfer to domestic defense industry partners, reflecting Prabowo's consistent position that self-reliance in defense technology is a strategic necessity rather than an optional enhancement. Second, the institutional expansion of Defend ID as the state-owned defense holding company integrating PT Pindad, PT PAL Indonesia, and PT Dirgantara Indonesia. The most analytically compelling evidence for this causal chain is the reported replacement of Thales Group (France) by Havelsan (Turkey) for a battle-management system contract, which IPAC (2023) attributes to the absence of adequate ToT provisions in the Thales proposal. This decision is counterintuitive from a purely capability standpoint, given Thales's established track record in such systems, but is fully consistent with the ingroup bias and distrust of others' traits dominant in Prabowo's profile. Laksmana (2025) further contextualizes this pattern within Prabowo's broader disposition toward strategic hedging and autonomy in the international system [20].

3.3.3 Belief in Ability to Control Events: Driving Ambitious Modernization

The third trait with a clear causal imprint is the belief in the ability to control events. In the LTA framework, this trait reflects a conviction that active policy intervention can meaningfully alter the security environment, rather than merely responding to structural constraints [6]. Leaders scoring high on this trait tend to set ambitious targets and proceed on the assumption that political will constitutes an adequate substitute for institutional or fiscal readiness.

The clearest manifestation in OEF 2025 is the commitment to raising defense spending to 1.5 percent of GDP, more than double the actual 2023 level. Habir and Negara (2025) analyze the first hundred days of the Prabowo presidency and note that this defense spending target was set simultaneously with major social spending commitments, including a free school-meals program, creating a structural fiscal tension that has no straightforward resolution under current budget projections [21]. From a rational policy perspective, this sequence appears suboptimal. From the idiosyncratic level of analysis, however, it is consistent with the pattern Hermann (1999) associates with leaders high in belief in ability to control events: aspirational target-setting precedes feasibility analysis, on the assumption that obstacles will be overcome through active resource mobilization. This pattern also reflects what Gammon (2025) characterizes as the hegemonic dimension of Prabowo's presidential style, in which executive authority is asserted comprehensively and simultaneously across policy domains [22].

3.3.4 Military Background and Platform Acquisition Preferences

A fourth idiosyncratic dimension bearing on OEF 2025 is Prabowo's operational military experience, which shapes preferences for specific platform types and operational concepts. Research in political psychology suggests that field experience creates cognitive predispositions

favoring platforms associated with offensive capacity, air superiority, and strategic mobility [12]. These are precisely the characteristics that define the major acquisition priorities in OEF 2025.

The simultaneous pursuit of Rafale and F-15EX acquisitions, together with the submarine program, reflects a capability ambition that exceeds minimum territorial defense requirements and approaches a limited regional power-projection posture. Setiawan and Fathun (2025) argue that Prabowo's defense diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific context should be understood as a deliberate attempt to position Indonesia as a security provider rather than merely a security consumer, which requires platforms capable of sustained force projection beyond the immediate archipelago. Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana (2025) identify a comparable status-signaling logic in military modernization under Yudhoyono and Widodo [23]; What sets the Prabowo era apart is that this signaling motive is reinforced by authentic operational preferences rooted in personal military experience, giving platform choices a dual character as both strategic signals and real capability investments. Sulaiman (2024) adds that Prabowo's security policy trajectory points to a more assertive regional posture, one that requires not only advanced platforms but also the doctrinal and institutional foundations to use them [24].

3.4. Implications for Indonesia's Foreign Policy

The findings of this study carry several analytically significant implications for understanding the direction of Indonesian foreign policy under Prabowo. The first concerns the structural shift from a defensive-reactive posture to one that is more assertive and forward-looking. OEF 2025 promotes capability development that exceeds conventional territorial defense and moves toward a limited power-projection capacity, reflecting Indonesia's ambition to be recognized as an emerging middle power in the Indo-Pacific security architecture [23,24]. From the FPA perspective, this posture shift cannot be fully accounted for by regional structural pressures alone: neighbouring states facing broadly comparable pressures have not pursued equivalent acceleration, a contrast that, within this single case, points to the idiosyncratic variable as a necessary component of the explanation.

The second implication concerns the tension between the OEF agenda and the *bebas-aktif* (free-and-active) principle that has anchored Indonesian foreign policy since independence. The selective deepening of bilateral defense partnerships, particularly with the United States through the Super Garuda Shield framework and with France through the Rafale acquisition, risks creating perceptions of alignment within the context of intensifying US-China polarization. Laksmana (2025) demonstrates in his analysis of Prabowo's operational code that the combination of Indonesia's accession to BRICS in January 2025 and the Indonesia-China Joint Statement of November 2024, with concurrent security deepening with Western partners, creates a strategic ambiguity that is structurally difficult to sustain [20]. This is compounded by what Laksmana (2025) elsewhere characterizes as the risk of Indonesia sleepwalking into *de facto* alignment with China through incremental economic and security entanglement [20]. The idiosyncratic dimension of this tension lies in Prabowo's personal comfort with strategic ambiguity, which his LTA profile suggests is consistent with his high need for power and belief in his ability to manage competing pressures simultaneously.

The third implication, and the most significant theoretically, is that OEF 2025 is the direct expression of a leader's personal strategic vision rather than a bureaucratic continuation of established policy. The gap in ambition and structural logic between the MEF and OEF is larger than path dependency or institutional inertia can explain. This finding confirms Hudson's (2005) foundational claim that foreign policy ultimately comes from individual human agents whose personal traits serve as necessary causal variables. Without the idiosyncratic variable, the explanation stays structurally plausible but empirically thin. The point is not simply that a different leader would have continued the MEF, but that a different leader might have produced an OEF that looked similar in scale yet ran on a different logic of autonomy and centralization.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, LTA coding was conducted through manual analysis of secondary sources rather than automated software such as Profiler Plus, which is the current standard in systematic LTA research [6]. The absence of inter-coder reliability testing represents a methodological constraint that future research should address. Second, OEF 2025 remains in its early implementation phase, making it impossible to evaluate long-term outcomes or to assess whether the identified traits persist in their policy effects under conditions of fiscal constraint. Third, non-idiosyncratic factors, including parliamentary coalition dynamics, defense-industry lobbying, and TNI institutional interests, have not been systematically analyzed as control variables. The relative weight of idiosyncratic versus structural factors, therefore, remains an open empirical question. Future research using automated LTA coding and incorporating domestic-level variables within a more explicitly comparative framework would substantially strengthen the causal claims advanced here.

4. Conclusions

This study examined how Prabowo Subianto's idiosyncratic characteristics shaped Indonesia's OEF 2025 by combining Leadership Trait Analysis with process tracing. Four dominant traits, high need for power, belief in the ability to control events, self-confidence, and in-group bias, together with moderately high distrust, can be linked to distinct policy outcomes: centralized acquisition decision-making; mandatory technology transfer requirements and the expansion of Defend ID; the pursuit of a defense spending target of 1.5% of GDP despite competing social spending priorities; and platform choices aimed at achieving air superiority, expanding submarine capabilities, and supporting limited power projection beyond Indonesia's traditional minimum defense posture.

These findings suggest three broader implications. First, the transition from MEF to OEF represents a qualitative shift in Indonesia's strategic logic from defensive minimalism toward capability optimization and greater regional assertiveness. Second, Indonesia's simultaneous pursuit of deeper defense partnerships and accession to BRICS creates tension with the *bebas-aktif* principle, raising longer-term questions regarding foreign policy coherence. Third, and most importantly, OEF 2025 supports Valerie Hudson's argument that individual leaders constitute important causal variables in foreign policy outcomes, as the policy's emphasis on autonomy, centralization, and ambition is closely linked to Prabowo's personal characteristics.

This study nevertheless has several limitations. It relies on manual LTA coding from secondary sources, lacks inter-coder reliability testing, and covers OEF 2025 at an early implementation stage that limits any evaluation of policy outcomes. Future research could build on these findings through automated LTA coding, fuller incorporation of domestic political variables, and comparative analysis of defense leadership across Southeast Asia.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Clearance: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available upon request.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to express their gratitude to their institutions.

Conflicts of Interest: All the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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