

## Strengthening Security and Sovereignty: Madagascar's Defense Diplomacy with China for Capacity Building

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Kemitraan strategis Madagaskar dengan China bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan pertahanannya. Mengingat lokasi strategis dan sumber daya yang terbatas, Madagaskar semakin mengandalkan diplomasi pertahanan untuk membangun industri pertahanan yang kuat. Kolaborasi ini memanfaatkan pengalaman luas China dalam pengembangan industri pertahanan. Pertanyaan utama yang dijawab oleh peneliti dalam makalah ini adalah "bagaimana Madagaskar menavigasi lanskap geopolitik yang kompleks untuk mengembangkan industri pertahanan lokal dengan dukungan China." Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif, termasuk studi kasus, analisis kebijakan, dan wawancara dengan pemangku kepentingan, untuk memeriksa konteks sejarah, tujuan strategis, dan pelaksanaan diplomasi pertahanan. Tujuan utama meliputi modernisasi militer, pengembangan industri pertahanan lokal, dan peningkatan keamanan. Kerjasama ini mencakup bantuan militer, pelatihan, dan kerjasama industri. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan seperti risiko ketergantungan dan ketegangan geopolitik, kemitraan ini telah menghasilkan manfaat signifikan, termasuk peningkatan kemampuan militer dan perkembangan ekonomi. Makalah ini menyoroti pentingnya perencanaan strategis, pelaksanaan efektif, dan hubungan internasional yang seimbang. Studi ini menekankan peran kritis diplomasi pertahanan dalam mencapai tujuan keamanan nasional dan pembangunan bagi negara kecil seperti Madagaskar.

**Kata Kunci:** Madagaskar, Diplomasi Pertahanan, Peningkatan Kapasitas

### Abstract

*The Madagascar's strategic partnership with China aims to enhance its defense capabilities. Given its strategic location and limited resources, Madagascar has increasingly relied on defense diplomacy to build a robust defense industry. This collaboration leverages China's extensive experience in defense industry development. The main question that the researcher answers in this paper is «how Madagascar navigates the complex geopolitical landscape to cultivate a homegrown defense industry with China's support». The researcher employs qualitative methods, including case studies, policy analysis, and stakeholder interviews, to examine the historical context, strategic goals, and implementation of defense diplomacy. Key objectives include military modernization, developing a local defense industry, and improving security. The cooperation involves military aid, training and industrial cooperation. Despite challenges such as dependency risks and geopolitical tensions, the partnership has resulted in significant benefits, including enhanced military capabilities and economic development. The paper highlights the importance of strategic planning, effective implementation, and balanced international relations. This study underscores the critical role of defense diplomacy in achieving national security and development goals for small nations like Madagascar*

**Keywords:** Madagascar, Defense Diplomacy, Capacity Building

## Introduction

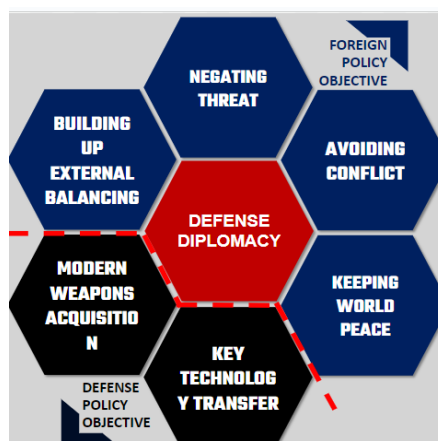
Madagascar, a strategically located island nation in the Indian Ocean, has increasingly recognized the importance of strengthening its defense capabilities. Over the past 20 years, Madagascar has been an attractive option for Chinese external investment due to its geographic location, substantial and well-established Chinese diaspora, low labor costs, and abundance of arable land and natural resources (Landry & Chen, 2021). Given its limited resources and geopolitical significance, the country has turned to defense diplomacy as a means to build its defense capacity. A critical element of this strategy involves cooperation with China, a global power with extensive experience in defense industry development. This paper explores how Madagascar navigates the complex geopolitical landscape to cultivate a homegrown defense industry with China's support, focusing on the mechanisms, benefits, and challenges involved.

Over the past few decades, defense diplomacy has grown to be an important tool on the international political scene for leaders looking to strengthen connections with their allies and project strength against their rivals. There is many definition of Defense diplomacy; according to (Muniruzzaman, 2020) Defence diplomacy, also known as military diplomacy, is the non-violent use of military forces, adapting public diplomacy, through activities like officer exchanges, combined training programmes, cultural exchanges, and ship visits, etc., to further a country's diplomatic ties and promoting its International agenda (Muniruzzaman, 2020). Then, the primary objective of defense diplomacy is to establish stable, long-lasting international ties in the defense sector through the co-formation and implementation of state security policy (Drab, 2018).

**Defense Capacity Building and Small Powers: Definition and Importance** Defense capacity building refers to the process through which nations enhance their military capabilities, infrastructure, and human resources to effectively safeguard their sovereignty and address security challenges. This involves various activities, including training and education of military personnel, acquisition of advanced technology and equipment, and development of strategic and tactical doctrines. The importance of defense capacity building cannot be overstated, especially for small powers. It provides these nations with the means to defend themselves against external threats, contribute to regional stability, and participate in international peacekeeping missions. By strengthening their defense capacities, small powers can enhance their resilience and autonomy in an increasingly complex and volatile global security environment (Anak A. P., Ayu D., Hassan R., 2022)

There are several ways to define small powers. As a result, they have been described in numerous ways. According to Thorhallsson and Steinsson, most definitions of small powers have as one of their distinguishing characteristics the inherent lack of resources and capacities that define power and influence. But the most common criterion for determining a state's size is its population. Other variables, such as geography, the economy, and military might, are also taken into account in addition to the population size (Thorhallsson, 2006).

For small powers like Madagascar, Defense Diplomacy often involves partnerships with larger nations to enhance their military capabilities. Through Defense Diplomacy, there is several benefits:



**Figure 1.** Relation of Defense Diplomacy and Defense Industry (Source: Defense diplomacy for defense industry UNHAN-DP, 2024)

From this figure, the modern weapons acquisition and the key technology transfer are part of the defense diplomacy in the defense industry. Defense diplomacy for the defense industry focuses on utilizing diplomatic channels to support the growth and development of defense industries. This includes facilitating technology transfer, fostering collaboration on research and development projects, promoting defense exports, and advocating for favorable policies and regulations to support the defense sector (Chalmers, 2017)

The defense diplomacy highlights several key themes. One significant theme is the formation of strategic partnerships, where many small nations leverage relationships with global powers to gain access to advanced technologies and training (Gegenheimer & Gegenheimer, 2021). Another important theme is capacity building, which involves developing local defense industries as a sustainable approach for long-term security and economic benefits. Additionally, the literature discusses the complex geopolitical dynamics at play, particularly the involvement of major powers such as China, which introduces both opportunities and risks, including dependency and heightened geopolitical tensions (Landry & Chen, 2021).

## Method

This article employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing case studies, policy analysis, and interviews with key stakeholders in Madagascar and China. Data is gathered from official reports and academic journals. The analysis focuses on several key areas. First, it examines the historical context by exploring the evolution of Madagascar's defense policies and its relationship with China. It then identifies Madagascar's strategic goals in pursuing a defense partnership with China. Lastly, the analysis assesses the implementation of defense diplomacy by evaluating the mechanisms through which it is conducted and its overall effectiveness and then some recommendations.

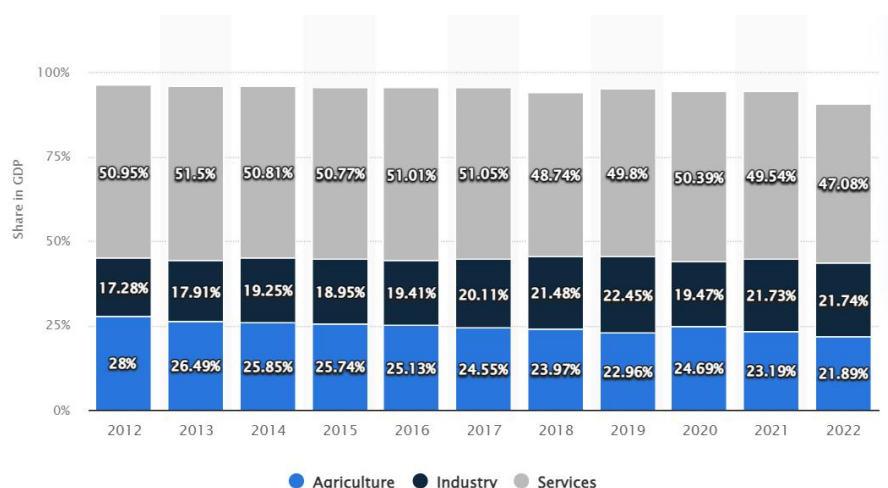
## Result and Discussion

### Historical Context

Madagascar's defense policies have historically been shaped by its colonial past and its strategic location. Post-independence, the country has faced numerous internal and external security challenges, necessitating a robust defense strategy. Because of its geographical

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situation and desire to develop, in 2019-2023, Madagascar implemented a general state program called “ Plan Emergence Madagascar” (MEP). This document contains 13 strategic objectives and 7 strategic development axes. Then the 3rd axis is “Industry, engine of development and high value added” and three of the objective contracts of the president are respectively: “1st Peace and security a priority, 7th the industrialization of Madagascar and 11th The modernization of Madagascar” (Gouvernement, 2019). Despite this model of development and economic recovery with a view to improving the well-being of the population, Madagascar is still a poorer country and is the 5th poorest country in the world with a GDP of 15.75 billion US dollars according to Statista GDP report in 2023. And the following figure shows that the industry sector only creates 21% of GDP average between 2019-2022. By initial finance law in 2019 and 2020, the budget allocated to the defense industry is only 0.4% of the defense ministry’s budget (Malagasy, 2019).



**Figure 2.** Budget for Defense Industry (Source: Ordonnance N ° 2018-001 Portant Loi De Finances Pour 2019. 75–107)

Furthermore, there exists a pervasive sense of disquiet stemming from a fragmented collective memory. This inadequacy is particularly evident in the neglect and underinvestment in military heritage, exacerbated by the absence of a comprehensive public policy framework aimed at preserving and promoting such historical assets (Dominique, 2018).

Turning into the 21st century, the Malagasy defense landscape began exploring new dimensions of security cooperation, ushering in an era of defense diplomacy. Strategic partnerships were seen as a necessary step toward building a robust national defense capability. In this context, China emerged as a pivotal player, offering an alternative source of military aid, training, and equipment, often without the stringent political conditions of Western counterparts. Then, the partnership with China began as part of a broader strategy to diversify Madagascar’s defense relationships beyond traditional Western allies. China’s economic involvement in Madagascar is still relatively low, particularly when measured with other African nations, despite being the country’s largest exporter. But its actions on the island need to be taken seriously, since Madagascar seems to be on China’s list of possible locations for a military station it wants to build in sub-Saharan Africa in order to strengthen its presence there. China deployed a military attaché to Madagascar in 2021, and according to IFRI’s research, Beijing showed interest in Diego Suarez, an abandoned French naval base in

the island's north (Veronika, 2023).

## **Strategic Goals**

The national interests of Madagascar, as outlined in its Constitution, are primarily focused on ensuring the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the nation. These interests are framed within the broader context of promoting peace, security, and cooperation both within the nation and in its international relations. Take the base from the constitution, The country's development plan (MEP), aims to transform Madagascar into a strong, united and welfare-oriented emerging nation (Stiftung, 2024). Then, according to MEP objectives, Madagascar's primary goals in engaging with China encompass several strategic objectives. One key goal is modernizing its military by accessing advanced military technology and training to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces. Another important objective is building a local defense industry, aimed at establishing a sustainable defense sector to reduce reliance on foreign suppliers. Additionally, Madagascar seeks to enhance its overall security posture in a volatile region, thereby strengthening its national security and stability and at the same time strengthening its relation with China (1).

## **Implementation**

The implementation of defense diplomacy with China involves several key components. One crucial aspect is military aid and training, where China provides Madagascar with military equipment and training programs to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces. In December 2023, China offered computer equipment to the Malagasy military. Additionally, industrial cooperation plays a significant role, as China assists in the development of Madagascar's defense industry through personal training, maybe later technology transfers, and infrastructure development. In October 2023, China provided 10 slots of training for civilians, military personnel and officers at training centers in China. This training enhanced the skills of employees at the Moramanga military factory in cartridge manufacturing, mechanical engineering, metalwork and woodwork (1). Another important component is joint exercises, with regular joint military exercises helping to improve interoperability and readiness. On April 10 2024, the 45th Chinese naval escort taskforce landed in the port of Toamasina and began its five-day tour of goodwill to Madagascar (2).

## **Challenges**

While the cooperation with China presents significant opportunities, it also comes with challenges. One major concern is the risk of dependency, as there is a potential for Madagascar to become overly reliant on Chinese technology and support, even though there is evidence suggesting that technology and skill transfers are limited through Chinese firms operating in Madagascar (Landry & Chen, 2021). A defense industry overly reliant on external support can find itself constrained by the policies and strategic interests of its benefactors. Madagascar must establish clear frameworks ensuring technology transfer facilitates eventual self-sufficiency rather than perpetual reliance. It necessitates clear safeguards, including provisions for localized production, technology absorption, and skills development, to cultivate an ecosystem that progressively leads to autonomous capabilities (Stock & Tatikonda, 2000).

As Madagascar expands its defense cooperation with China, it encounters the contemporary specter of neocolonialism: the apprehension of external entities exerting disproportionate economic or political influence under the guise of partnership. Critically, the

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Malagasy government must counter these perceptions by demonstrating that alliances bolster, rather than undermine, national sovereignty. Building a domestic defense infrastructure with foreign assistance is a delicate prospect, where the balance of power in the partnership must be meticulously maintained to fend off any semblance of subservience (Stiftung, 2024).

Additionally, the partnership may exacerbate geopolitical tensions, potentially straining relations with other global powers and regional neighbors. Madagascar's long-term cooperation with France, its former colonial ruler, may face friction due to its growing ties with China. Implementation hurdles also pose significant challenges, as bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption can impede the effective execution of defense projects. Weak political and economic performance, coupled with widespread corruption, further complicates the successful implementation of these initiatives (Stiftung, 2024).

### Benefits

Despite these challenges, the partnership with China has yielded several benefits for Madagascar. Enhanced capabilities have been a significant outcome, with Madagascar's military capabilities seeing substantial improvement. This includes increased training in China and the introduction of Chinese language instruction within the Ministry of Armed Forces, the Antsirabe Military Academy, and the Sekoly Miaramilam-pirenena Fianarantsoa as part of the vision to strengthen cooperation by 2024 (1). Economic development has also been positively impacted, with the growth of a local defense industry contributing to economic growth, job creation, and improved competitiveness of companies in the national market. Furthermore, a stronger defense sector has bolstered Madagascar's strategic autonomy, enabling it to pursue its national security interests with greater independence (Saputro, 2022).

### Strategic Policy Recommendations for a Resilient Defense Industry

Madagascar's ambition to support its ascendancy through a sustainable domestic defense industry necessitates the synthesis of long-term strategic policies with robust implementation mechanisms. These policies must address economic viability, technological innovation, security imperatives, and the cultivation of a skilled workforce, all under the umbrella of national sovereignty and autonomy.

Economic viability is the cornerstone of a sustainable defense industry. Policymakers must craft fiscal strategies that attract investments, incentivize local production, and define a clear path to economic returns, all while managing resource allocation to prevent overreliance on the defense sector at the cost of other national priorities. Implementing transparent public procurement processes and fostering competition within the industry can promote efficiency and value generation, ensuring that the defense sector thrives without undue strain on the national budget (M Kravchenko, 2023).

Technological innovation stands as a pillar of modern defense industries. Madagascar should advance a policy framework that encourages research and development (R&D) within both military and civilian domains. This can be achieved by establishing R&D centers, forging partnerships with academia, and providing tax incentives for tech-based defense enterprises. Policies should safeguard intellectual property rights to nurture a climate of creativity and invention, ensuring the originality and competitiveness of domestically produced defense technologies (M Kravchenko, 2023).

Human capital development is essential for a resilient defense industry. The emphasis should be on education, training, and retention strategies that cultivate a pipeline of qualified professionals. Policies should advocate for the upskilling of the workforce, including through

vocational programs, military-academic cooperation, and international scholarships in defense-related fields. Engaging the populace in the country's defense narrative can enhance recruitment and instill a sense of ownership and pride in the industry (McDonald III, 2021).

The pursuit of sustainable development within Madagascar's nascent defense industry is a tapestry of intricate policy interweaving, requiring the harmonious interaction of multiple facets of governance, society, and international partnerships. The ultimate aim will be to foster a sector that is not only economically and technologically vibrant but one that steadfastly enhances Madagascar's strategic posture, security, and sovereignty.

## **Conclusion**

Madagascar's use of defense diplomacy to build its defense capacity, particularly through cooperation with China, illustrates the complex interplay of opportunities and challenges faced by small powers in the global arena. By strategically leveraging its partnership with China, Madagascar has made significant strides in modernizing its military and developing a homegrown defense industry. However, the country must navigate the associated risks and geopolitical dynamics carefully to ensure sustainable and balanced growth in its defense capabilities (Stiftung, 2024). This case study underscores the importance of strategic planning, effective implementation, and the balancing of international relations in achieving defense and development goals for small nations.

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