

INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract. This paper examines Indonesia's foreign policy regarding the handling of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As the third most populous country in Asia after China and India, Indonesia has taken strategic steps to handle COVID-19, looking after its citizens both within the country and abroad. The study shows that Indonesia's foreign policy is carried out through the Alliance for Multilateralism. First, Indonesian citizens abroad are protected by the Indonesian government with the help of large-scale repatriation, especially in countries that have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the Indonesian government encourages the strengthening of governance within the global health framework by supporting the policies of the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, Indonesia cooperates with various countries, both regionally and multilaterally, in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The factors that influence Indonesia's foreign policy regarding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic include Indonesia's national interests and the international political situation. These have characterized foreign policy implementation under President Joko Widodo during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Indonesia, COVID-19, Pandemic, Mitigation

Introduction

The world is currently facing the Corona Virus Disease-19 pandemic, often referred to as COVID-19. A pandemic constitutes a global health crisis, which has an impact on the social and economic conditions of the affected countries. Under these conditions, countries around the world must adapt to new dynamics. The global pandemic caused

by the spread of COVID-19 has threatened international peace and internal security. COVID-19, rather than force every state to work together, has strengthened international competition. The two strongest superpowers, the United States and China, have used propaganda against each other regarding the origin of the virus. The United States' withdrawal from WHO membership also fits into this approach because Washington has accused the World Health Organization of being under Chinese control (Akhli, 2020). Geopolitical competition has also manifested in the aid policies of the two great powers. Through the U.S. Department of State and USAID, the US has disbursed more than USD 490 million in emergency medical assistance from the USAID Global Health Emergency Reserve Fund for the Infectious Disease Outbreak and Global Health Program funding post (U.S. Embassy Jakarta, 2020).

Meanwhile, China has assisted WHO with USD 30 million (Financial Times, 2020). Although this great power competition has remained in the spotlight, international cooperation has also been characterized by international solidarity. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted internal social, economic, political, and national security conditions, requiring comprehensive action. Internally, there is a need for cooperation from civil society groups and the government accompanied by responsive leadership at all levels and maintaining public trust with a transparent attitude, strengthening communication functions that are more humane and empathetic.

These external and internal challenges impact every country during the pandemic, and Indonesia has also made various efforts to resolve the impact of the pandemic. Indonesia is actively involved in international cooperation in handling COVID-19. This effort is inseparable from Indonesia's foreign policy in defending its national interests in a changing global context, which has impacted Indonesia's social, political, and national security conditions.

This study analyses Indonesia's foreign policy in handling the various problems the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, as well as explain the factors that influence Indonesia's foreign policy in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Indonesia

Indonesia announced its first positive case on 2 March, 2020. Following that, on 13 April, 2020, the Indonesian government declared COVID-19 a national non-natural disaster and has since implemented Large-Scale Social Restrictions (Pembatasan Sosial Skala Besar or PSBB) in various major cities in Indonesia, thus affecting the social and economic activities of the community.

The Large-Scale Social Restrictions policy implemented by the Indonesian government proved ineffective in reducing the number of people infected with COVID-19, and the number of COVID-19 victims kept increasing. Starting in January 2021, the Indonesian government introduced a new policy, the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities (Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat or PPKM). The first phase began between 11-25 January, 2021. Phase two took place between 9-22 February, 2021. From March to June, the implementation of Community Activity Restrictions was halted. However, in early July 2021, an emergency Community Activity Restriction was re-implemented between 3-20 July, 2021 because the number of people infected with COVID-19 was increasing (Tim Detik.com, 2021). The emergency PPKM was continued with PPKM level 4 between 21 July and September 2021. At the time of writing (September 2021), the Indonesian government was still implementing the PPKM (Farisa, 2021).

The total number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia at the time of submission (27 September, 2021) reached 4,209,403 cases since President Joko Widodo's first announcement on 2 March, 2020. By 27 September, 2021, the death toll from COVID-19 was 141,585. In addition, the government noted 388,341 people with a suspected COVID-19 status (Guritno, 2021).

The spread of COVID-19 has had a major impact on Indonesia, especially regarding the issuance of the COVID-19 health protocol policy, which is an effort by the Indonesian government to break the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the number of people who test positive.

Indonesia has experienced a decline in the pace of the economy since the beginning of the pandemic and the implementation of large-scale social restrictions in various regions in Indonesia. Based on a report by Bank Indonesia (BI), Indonesia's economic growth in 2020 was -2,1%, although Indonesia's GDP expanded by 3.1% in the first half of 2021, as restrictions eased and demand picked up. Fixed investment and government spending showed healthy growth, while private consumption grew modestly, held back by continued uncertainty. Imports grew in step with domestic demand, but exports grew faster (Zhang, 2021).

In addition to Indonesia's economic conditions, social conditions in Indonesia have also been affected by the spread of COVID-19 and need serious attention from the Indonesian government:

COVID-19 has had an impact on the health system in Indonesia. The rapid spread of COVID-19 to various provinces in Indonesia has resulted in inadequate infection prevention and control measures, reduced availability and supply of essential medicines, reduced availability of beds and skilled health workers in hospitals, especially in disadvantaged areas, disrupting services in essential health care, such as antenatal care, safe delivery, and care of new-borns and toddlers. The impact is also felt by people with chronic diseases or diseases requiring routine care and follow-up (UNSDG, 2020).

COVID-19 impacts the functioning of public health centres. More than 6 percent of sub-districts in Indonesia do not have a public health centre, and many have limitations in terms of electricity, clean water, and adequate equipment. Around 21 percent of public health centres have limited referral transportation, and 35 percent have limited access to clean water and electricity (UNSDG, 2020).

COVID-19 has also had an impact on the education system in Indonesia. The policy issued by the Ministry of Education in Indonesia regarding online learning ordered the closing of schools, which has caused new problems for students and teachers. These include a lack of mastery of information technology, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, lack of preparation, and limited internet access. These have resulted in widening the gap between more and less capable students (Martoredjo, 2020).

Principles and Traditions in Indonesian Foreign Policy

Based on the Law on Foreign Relations No. 37 of 1999, Article 1, Paragraph 2, Indonesia's foreign policy is defined as the policies, attitudes, and steps taken by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in dealing with other countries, international organizations, and other subjects of international law in the context of dealing with global problems to achieve national goals. Foreign policy can also be defined as a series of government policies concerning the international community to achieve national goals. The government projects national interests into the society between nations (Sabir, 1987).

Perwinta and Yani argue that a country's foreign policy is essentially a mechanism for the nation-state to adapt to various changes in its environment (Perwinta & Yani, 2005). Indonesia's foreign policy is a 'Free-Active' policy, a foreign policy that is not neutral in essence but free to determine attitudes and policies towards international problems, not binding itself a priori to one world power. It actively contributes, both in the form of thoughts and active participation, to resolving conflicts, disputes, and other problems, for the sake of accomplishing world order. Indonesia's foreign policy instruments change in line with internal and external developments. A change will also influence the change in the government regime, which is marked by a new national leadership as a product of the existing democracy. Indonesia is confident in implementing diplomacy and foreign policy and plays an active role at the regional and global levels (Perwinta, 2007).

State protection for citizens is one of the rights of citizens. As stated in the Constitution, everyone has the right to recognition, guarantee, protection, fair legal certainty, and equal treatment before the law. Thus, through protection diplomacy, the state seeks to ensure the human rights of its citizens. One form of protection for Indonesian citizens is through consular assistance and protection provided by official representatives of the state within the framework of citizen services, as regulated in Regulation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 4 of 2008 concerning Citizen Services at Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia abroad.

Indonesia's foreign policy in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic is put into practice through the Alliance for Multilateralism, which focuses on the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad as well as encouraging the strengthening of governance within the global health framework through a framework of regional and multilateral cooperation. Its primary focus is the protection and rescuing of Indonesian citizens, which is one of the priorities of Indonesia's Foreign Policy 4+1. These priorities consist of strengthening economic diplomacy; protection diplomacy; sovereignty and national diplomacy; increasing Indonesia's contribution and leadership in the region and the world; and strengthening the diplomatic infrastructure (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

The Alliance for Multilateralism is an informal network of countries united in the belief that only a rules-based multilateral order can guarantee international peace and stability, and that international challenges can only be solved through cooperation. The Alliance aims to renew the commitment of countries in the world to maintaining the stability of the rules-based international order, upholding international principles. If necessary, countries can adapt to existing conditions. It also aims to protect and preserve international norms, international treaties, and institutions under pressure or in danger, generate a more proactive plan in policies that lack effective governance. This requires collective action and reform without neglecting core principles and values, so that multilateral institutions and the global economic and political order are more inclusive and effective for the entire international community. Through the Alliance for Multilateralism, countries will choose policy alternatives with the most beneficial consequences in meeting goals and objectives, without ignoring international norms (Alliance for Multilateralism, 2021).

Mitigating COVID-19 in the International Arena

Countries have taken various steps in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has united the interests of countries around the world, affecting the foreign policy of every country, including Indonesia. The Indonesian government continues to prioritize people's interests in the implementation of its foreign policy. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused several countries to accuse each other and suspect each other of using propaganda regarding the origin of the virus and made them

doubt the performance of the WHO as an international organization that regulates global health. Instead of being involved in the conflict, the Indonesian government has protected Indonesian citizens both at home and abroad.

On 23 January, 2020, the city of Wuhan was quarantined by the Chinese government; the safety of several Indonesian citizens who were there was indirectly threatened, and they were not allowed to leave Wuhan. In response to this, on 31 January, 2020, President Jokowi ordered the cabinet to immediately repatriate Indonesian citizens residing in Wuhan, China, with several procedures considering that COVID-19 is easy to spread through physical contact. The plan to repatriate Indonesian citizens from Hubei Province is supported by several aircraft alerted by the TNI (Setiawan, 2020). This repatriation effort shows the Indonesian government's exceptional attention to the safety of Indonesian citizens. In the repatriation scheme, the main priority of the Indonesian government is to protect Indonesian citizens so that the Indonesian state is present abroad as a form of policy from the Indonesian government in responding to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from April to July 2020, several Indonesian citizens returned to Indonesia via air, sea, and land routes. The Indonesian citizens who were repatriated came from various countries. Furthermore, Indonesian citizens affected by lockdown policies have received assistance from the Indonesian government. The Indonesian government is aware of the increasingly complex problems that have arisen due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increasing migration and the possibility of cross-border organized crime such as trafficking in persons. Given this impact, the Indonesian government seeks to create a corridor for safe and fair migration for Indonesian citizens and Indonesian Migrant Workers through a multilateral process in the United Nations, by agreeing to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM). GCM has four objectives, the first of which is the need for accurate data. To obtain accurate and up-to-date data on Indonesian Citizens/Migrant Workers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has used a public service 4.0 approach through two digital platforms, namely Portal Peduli WNI and Safe Travel. The second objective is to provide accurate and timely information at every stage of migration,

the third is to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment patterns, while the fourth objective aims to prevent, eradicate, and eliminate human trafficking (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Government policies for mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic focus on efforts to repatriate Indonesian citizens so that it runs smoothly and pays special attention to Indonesian citizens who test positive for COVID-19. Based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, until the end of August 2020, the number of Indonesian citizens exposed to COVID-19 was 24,000. From them, 1,370 Indonesian citizens were declared dead in the country. The government is trying to monitor the safety of Indonesian citizens by providing treatment and compensation, especially to Indonesian citizens who are affected by lockdown policies and are experiencing difficulties due to a reduced income. The Indonesian government has provided aid packages to Indonesian citizens affected by lockdown, with a total of 522,086 aid packages distributed worldwide. Of this figure, 451,098 aid packages have been given to Indonesian citizens in Malaysia (Setiawan, 2020).

The implementation of Indonesia's foreign policy in mitigating the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic by prioritizing the safety of Indonesian citizens is inseparable from bilateral cooperations with various countries and the private sector, as well as the United Nations. With the Safe Travel digital application, the Indonesian government can monitor the data regarding Indonesian citizens abroad, even though the data obtained are not all Indonesian citizens because some are not legally registered. Repatriating Indonesian citizens is also not a simple process because the government and Indonesian citizens must follow the applicable health protocols. This procedure requires collaboration between stakeholders, at every stage of migration.

The second focus of the Indonesian government's state policy in mitigating COVID-19 is strengthening governance within the Global Health framework. Global Health is a concept that emerged from a process of political and historical change. Global Health can be defined based on five categories: geographic reach, level of cooperation, target individual or population, access to health, and range of disciplines. Global Health focuses on issues that directly or indirectly affect health, which can transcend national boundaries based on geographic reach.

Cooperation within the global health framework includes developing and implementing solutions that require international cooperation. Individual or population targets include prevention programs within the population and individual clinical care. The main goal is access to health that all countries and communities can reach. Research related to global health is related to health sciences and includes multidisciplinary sciences (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that global health governance is still weak. Many countries are creating their own policies rather than coordinate with the World Health Organization (WHO) in responding to the current global health crisis because WHO is not considered to be quick enough to resolve the pandemic. However, many countries continue to support the WHO policies, including Indonesia, seeking to build multilateral cooperation to support global health governance in mitigating the risk of COVID-19.

Indonesia is one of the countries that initiated the resolution “Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019” on 27 March, 2020. This resolution is an effort to build global coordination when superpower countries do not participate. It focuses on intensive cooperation efforts in preventing and mitigating pandemics through sharing information, disseminating knowledge on best practices, and encouraging WHO to prepare an informative guide (Rum, 2020).

Indonesia’s efforts to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic were also seen at the 25th Meeting of the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) via video conference on 9 April, 2020. The foreign ministers who attended this meeting agreed to increase efforts to handle COVID-19. The Indonesian foreign minister underlined four main elements. First, Indonesia emphasized the importance of implementing the results of the ASEAN Health Ministers and ASEAN Plus Three meetings and proposed at the ASEAN Summit related to the COVID-19 pandemic that the leaders of ASEAN member countries could instruct the mechanism for drafting a protocol for cross-border public health responses. Second, Indonesia proposed that the Supply chain and flow of goods policy during the outbreak be discussed at the ASEAN Plus Three Summit. Third, Indonesia emphasized the importance of ASEAN’s role in protecting vulnerable groups and migrant workers by applying health protocols.

Indonesia even proposed post-pandemic recovery steps through the protocol of the movement of people within the ASEAN Member States. Fourth, Indonesia proposed that ASEAN member countries ensure the availability of medical equipment by establishing the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund through the ASEAN Development Fund and the APT Cooperation Fund (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

On 14-16 April, 2020, the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings were held virtually, attended by Central Bank governors and finance ministers from various countries. In this meeting, Indonesia encouraged implementing a coordinated policy mix response to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19. All countries present, including Indonesia, supported the G20 Action Plan to deal with the crisis as a reference for policy responses to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak (Bank Indonesia, 2020).

Indonesia is also part of the Foreign Policy and Global Health (FPGH) forum with six other countries (Brazil, France, Norway, Senegal, South Africa, and Thailand). In March 2007, the Oslo Ministerial Declaration was agreed upon at the FPGH Foreign Ministers meeting in Oslo, Norway. The declaration emphasizes the purpose of FPGH to build synergy between foreign policy and global health in various bilateral, regional, and multilateral forums (Widyawati, 2021).

On 18 May, 2020, the Ministers of Health of the FPGH held a Virtual Meeting led by the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia and produced a Joint Statement on two topics, cooperation in handling COVID-19 and affordable health care for all, which contained the commitments of FPGH countries to increase international solidarity and cooperation in the preparedness and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen health systems focusing on primary health care. The Virtual Meeting also emphasized the need for similar activities to ensure the availability of health services to everyone, achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Widyawati, 2021).

Indonesia is also participating in the Solidarity Trial, which aims to find a suitable vaccine for COVID-19. On 19-21 August, 2020, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Minister of

State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) visited China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in cooperation in developing a COVID-19 vaccine. In the context of cooperation in developing COVID-19 vaccines by several companies such as G-42, UAE with Sinopharm, China, and Kimia Farma, the UAE is committed to providing 10 million vaccines for Indonesia (BPOM RI, 2020).

On 24-26 August, 2020, the Head of BPOM of the Republic of Indonesia made a working visit to the United Arab Emirates. A meeting was held with Amin Hussain Al Amiri from the UAE Ministry of Health, Jamal Alkaabi from the Abu Dhabi Ministry of Health, and Peng Xiao, the CEO of Group-42, Sinopharm, visiting the Vaccine Testing Center located at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre. This collaboration provides an opportunity for Indonesia to obtain vaccines according to Indonesia's needs and develop the pharmaceutical industry by exporting medicines and vaccines from Indonesia to the Middle Eastern countries as well as encouraging the implementation of the OIC Action Plan to support drug and vaccine independence in OIC member countries (BPOM RI, 2020).

Overall, the series of international collaborations established by the Indonesian government is a form of support strengthening governance within global health. Countries worldwide, including Indonesia, no longer expect WHO to resolve the pandemic because the current pandemic is different from what has happened before. Therefore, cooperation from various countries worldwide is needed to prevent its spread and find a suitable vaccine for the international community to use.

Indonesia also emphasizes the importance of bilateral cooperation to reduce the number of Indonesian citizens who are positive for COVID-19. Indonesia cooperates with South Korea because it is one of the countries in Asia that has succeeded in suppressing the number of positive people for COVID-19. The effort made by the South Korean government is to conduct large-scale rapid tests so that the government can easily track and quickly respond to the spread of COVID-19. In addition, there is also support from South Korean biotechnology companies Kogene Biotech and Seegene in providing COVID-19 test kits. Through this bilateral cooperation, the South Korean government has provided assistance worth USD 500,000 to the Indonesian government to support efforts

to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia. The assistance has consisted of COVID-19 test kits and rechargeable power sprayers. Private parties from South Korea, such as the LG Group, have also assisted the Indonesian government with as many as 50,000 COVID-19 diagnostic kits (RT-PCR type), while Hyundai Motor has assisted with 40,000 PPE (Berita Indonesia, 2020).

Indonesia's foreign policy in mitigating COVID-19 has also been influenced by the polemics of international politics. When COVID-19 began to spread rapidly, the United States government began to issue a suspension policy to persons with a history of travel from China planning to enter the United States (Akhli, 2020). The United States government first referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as the Chinese Virus or the Wuhan Virus based on the place where the virus was first found. This was later opposed by the WHO because the name encouraged racial stigmatization. The United States government ignored the WHO and claimed that WHO Secretary-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was a Chinese accomplice. WHO was considered slow in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic (Akhli, 2020).

The United States government received a response from the Chinese government, but the accusations levelled against the Chinese government have not affected China's ambitions in carrying out its foreign policy. When the European Union and the United States showed unpreparedness in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, China carried out diplomacy in several countries through medical assistance. China even claims that the United States wants to start a Cold War through COVID-19, which the United States military may have brought to Wuhan (Akhli, 2020).

The international political environment became increasingly heated when the United States government stopped its WHO funding, worth around USD 500 million a year, and planned to leave the WHO (Sushanti, 2020). On the other hand, China has been taking advantage of this moment by further demonstrating its role within the WHO. The Chinese government has provided a budget of USD 30 million to the WHO to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic (Akhli, 2020). This happened because of the competition in the vaccine trade in the health industry, between the United States and China.

The state of international politics is one of the considerations of the Indonesian government in its efforts to mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic. With its Free-Active foreign policy principle, Indonesia is not involved in the feud between the two superpowers and focuses on its domestic politics rather than fight for the interests of other countries. As part of the international community, the Indonesian government shows its solidarity in mitigating the risk of COVID-19 by establishing cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally. As for choosing a vaccine, Indonesia meets its domestic needs from various countries, be it China, America, or another country. The Indonesian government seeks to make Indonesia's foreign policy adaptive to the conditions of the pandemic with the help of protective diplomacy. It tries to present the state in society rather than being involved in the propaganda actions of countries that take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic in international politics.

Conclusion

Indonesia's foreign policy is an embodiment as mandated in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution, namely participating in implementing world peace. This means that through a multilateral framework, the Indonesian government recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer related to the national security issues of one country, but it is a threat to human security around the world. Through the Alliance of Multilateralism, the Indonesian government seeks to invite countries to cooperate in the handling of the pandemic, providing essential medical equipment, personal protective equipment, medicines, and vaccines for countries in need, as well as making efforts to facilitate the movement and flow of goods to continue to support global trade and supply chains during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that requires joint action on the part of the international community. The deteriorating world economic conditions and the high death rate caused by the pandemic show that mitigation is the appropriate step to be taken by the international community instead of using political propaganda to accuse each other of the origins of the virus. The international community has no other option but to adjust the series of policies prepared by the WHO, to be implemented in their respective countries, and use the WHO as a forum for cooperation for all UN member countries.

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