

# Unraveling Indonesia's Diplomacy in the Pacific Region

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## Keywords

*Diplomacy, Indonesia, Pacific Region.*

## ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine Indonesia's diplomacy in the Pacific Region, specifically during the Joko Widodo administration, focusing on the period spanning the last two decades. Emphasizing the significance of the Pacific Region in Indonesia's current foreign policy, the study employs qualitative research methods, utilizing international relations analysis, to explore diplomatic and cooperative efforts. Data for this study are derived from extensive literature reviews, including journals, books, regulations, and internet sources. The findings indicate that Indonesia, through its "look east" policy, has increasingly considered the Pacific Region pivotal for economic development, connectivity, and security. Notably, Indonesian diplomacy in the Pacific has evolved, with recent efforts showcased during Indonesia's chairmanship in Asean and the Asean-43 Summit. The latter has positioned the Pacific/Indo-Pacific Region as the Epicentrum of Growth, emphasizing its centrality for development and connectivity with ASEAN member countries and dialogue partner nations, such as China, Japan, and South Korea. In conclusion, this research sheds light on the evolving nature of Indonesia's diplomacy in the Pacific Region, offering insights into the country's strategic approach to fostering relations, economic development, and regional cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION

During the Indonesian nation, since independence in 1945, the use of regional cooperation in the Asia Pacific Region has changed shape by global conditions and Indonesia's national interests. At the beginning of independence, to benefit from international recognition of Indonesian independence and the struggle against colonialism, Indonesia participated actively in the regional forums of South and Southeast Asia at the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 and 1949 (Agastia, 2020; Anwar, 2020; Sabharwal, 2019). Furthermore, Indonesia became the main actor in organizing the Asian-African Conference in 1955 which was the forerunner of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the administration of President Soeharto, the use of regional cooperation was focused on economic and development interests. To support this utilization, Indonesia carries out a low-profile foreign policy strategy that avoids confrontation. Indonesia utilizes participation in ASEAN to build regional stability, peace, and security to be able to carry out development in the country (Aryani & Hapsari, 2021; Wardhani, 2023; Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). At this time, Indonesia began to apply a concentric circle approach by placing Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific as its inner circle.

After the end of President Soeharto's administration, the use of regional cooperation has not changed much, remaining as a supporter of national economic growth. The utilization of regional cooperation continues to be carried out by establishing cooperation in the Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific

Regions. The priority of cooperation is the Pacific Region by being a dialogue partner for the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) since 2001.

Furthermore, Indonesia participated in the establishment of the Southwest Pacific Dialogue in 2002, becoming an observer at the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in 2011 which was later upgraded to associate member status in 2015 (Deivasagayam, 2023; Zahidi & Musfiroh, 2019). In addition to domestic interests, Indonesia also assists abroad by providing support for economic development and improving the welfare of Pacific people through the Pacific Elevation policy (E-Vahdati et al., 2022; Herrador & Van, 2024; Lean et al., 2024). Indonesia has long ignored the Pacific region because it is too focused on ASEAN - Indonesia is one of the founders of this association of Southeast Asian countries.

Around the 1970s and 1980s, Indonesia often treated the South Pacific as a "neglected backyard". Indonesia has begun to change its relations with the Pacific region in the last 20 years through its "Look East Policy" foreign policy, the core of which is aid diplomacy. The purpose of this policy is to reverse Indonesia's negative image in the Pacific region. This "Looking East" policy prioritizes South Pacific countries such as Nauru, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji as development cooperation partners.

Since 1999, Indonesia has provided capacity-building assistance through training in nine sectors, including marine and fisheries; small and medium enterprises, economics, finance, and trade; Energy; democracy and good governance (Adisasmitho et al., 2019; Kickbusch & Liu, 2022; Wardhani, 2023). This program attracted many participants, so it was continued and modified and the scope increased to 10 sectors, including disaster risk management, tourism, women's empowerment, education, culture, and training, and public works (Doh et al., 2022; Jin & Feng, 2024; Yustiningrum et al., 2023).

Between 1999 and 2016 Indonesia ran at least 182 programs for 1,457 participants from countries in the Pacific region. There are no official figures yet on how much budget is being used for this. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono continued this policy through the regional organization Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF). This climate-change-focused partnership involves the public sector, the private sector, and civil society, which is realized through green economy schemes (Aji & Indrawan, 2019; Bakry, 2017; Barston, 2019). Indonesia's assistance channeled through PIDF is considered by the needs of low-lying Pacific island countries, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands that are threatened with sinking due to climate change. In 2016, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo continued the policy by strengthening Indonesia's commitment after the 2nd PIDF Summit.

Given this historical context, it is crucial to analyze Indonesia's diplomatic track record in the Pacific Region to assess the benefits of its diplomacy and make predictions about its foreign policy in the coming years. The urgency of this research is underscored by the evolving geopolitical landscape and recent developments, emphasizing Indonesia's role and influence in the Pacific region.

## METHODS

The method used in this study is Qualitative Research Method. David William in Moleong's book says that qualitative research is the process of collecting data in a natural setting, using natural methods and carried out by someone or researcher naturally (Moleong, 2018). Another definition by Kirk and Miller states that qualitative research is a certain habit in the social sciences that fundamentally looks at human observation both in its area and in its terms. Another definition of. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that qualitative research methods are depictions of observations in scientific writings based on the results of data collection by a researcher.

Qualitative Research Methods are used to describe and analyze Indonesian diplomacy in the Pacific Region. The technique used in collecting data is through Literature Study research by collecting secondary

data through various mass media and online, using the internet and including various reliable data through Whatsapp groups in which there are key elements from regional actors including non-state actors. Data obtained through documentation from various sources will be processed, interpreted and described in words and elaborated through data verification.

## **RESULTS**

### **Indonesian Foreign Policy**

In addition to the pandemic, the world faces various other challenges, such as conflicts and tensions in various parts of the world, natural disasters, refugee crisis, climate change and much more. Amid these challenges, we see rivalries between big countries sharpening. This rivalry is also evident in the Indo-Pacific region. This is a challenge for ASEAN.

ASEAN needs to continue to strengthen its unity and centrality. At the same time, ASEAN faces a political crisis in Myanmar. ASEAN has taken a unanimous stance in Jakarta in April 2021 to help Myanmar overcome its political crisis through a "Five-Point Consensus" so that violence can be stopped and democracy can be restored through inclusive dialogue. ASEAN's solidity must continue to be strengthened. ASEAN must continue its work to build the ASEAN community and realize a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. For the world to recover, health is high on the agenda. For this reason, health diplomacy is Indonesia's priority in 2021. Throughout 2021, various diplomatic steps continue to be carried out both bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally.

First, of course, to meet the vaccine needs of the Indonesian people. By the end of December 2021, Indonesia had injected more than 270 million doses of vaccines. The fifth largest in the world after China, India, America and Brazil. Of all vaccines received by Indonesia, more than 20.15 percent came from COVAX and dose-sharing support from friendly countries. On December 22, 2021, Indonesia has met WHO's target of fully vaccinating 40 percent of its population. The next challenge is to meet the target of 70 per cent full vaccination of the total population by mid-2022.

Second, Indonesia continues fighting for equal access to vaccines for all countries. Indonesia brings this struggle in all international forums. As one of the COVAX AMC Engagement Group's co-chairs, Indonesia is fighting for vaccine equality. Amid all difficulties and challenges until the 4th week of December 2021, the COVAX Facility has successfully distributed 811 million doses of vaccines to 144 countries and entities. Going forward, COVAX will continue strengthening health workers' distribution infrastructure, logistics and capacity in recipient countries.

At the regional level, as chair of the ASEAN health cooperation sector body for 2020-2021, Indonesia leads and encourages various ASEAN initiatives to overcome pandemics and strengthen regional health security mechanisms. For 2022, health diplomacy has become one of Indonesia's priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught people to improve national and global health security. Long-term cooperation is needed to strengthen national health infrastructure and the health industry, both drugs and vaccines. Indonesia must be able to produce its own vaccines and become a hub for vaccine production in the region. Indonesia must be able to make its own medicines and meet the raw materials for medicines. The development of vaccine research and manufacturing networks is also continuously encouraged, including through CEPI. At the global level, the world's health architecture must be strengthened so that the world is better prepared to face the threat of future pandemics. Strengthening the global health architecture is one of the priorities of Indonesia's chairmanship of the G-20. Indonesia will continue to encourage the strengthening of WHO's central role in coordinating global action on health.

Indonesia also considers the importance of a new Pandemic Treaty so that the world is better prepared to face pandemics. Indonesia is ready to contribute constructively to the Pandemic Treaty

negotiation process. New health funding mechanisms for developing countries should also be established. Throughout 2021, economic diplomacy will also continue to be strengthened. Economic recovery efforts are carried out without sacrificing health aspects. It is also important to emphasize that economic recovery efforts are also carried out by considering the environment and SDGs.

First, Indonesian diplomacy is working to establish a travel corridor arrangement (TCA) to restore safe cross-border travel. The mutual recognition of vaccination certificates and the interoperability of platforms also continue to be explored. Intensive discussions are underway with Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, India, Australia, UAE, Turkey, Netherlands, Serbia, Hungary, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the European Union. Second, expanding market access as well as promotion and protection of investment through, among others: The commencement of CEPA negotiations with the UAE and the launch of CEPA with Canada and MERCOSUR and ASEAN-Canada FTA; Indonesia also successfully concluded the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) negotiations with Switzerland; Entry into force of CEPA Indonesia with EFTA, November 1, 2021; In addition, it also held several hybrid business meetings, such as: Indonesia-Latin America and the Caribbean (INA-LAC) Business Forum III with transactions and business potential of IDR 1.23 trillion; Indonesia-Central and Eastern Europe (INA-CEE) Business Forum 2021 with business transactions worth IDR 44 billion;

Indonesia also participated in Dubai Expo 2020 and investment commitments during the President's visit to the UAE amounted to US\$ 44.6 billion; The diplomacy that we carry out also strengthens the strategic presence / outbound investment of Indonesian SOEs and private companies abroad, among others, through the BUMN Go Global program; Indonesia also strengthens strategic industries such as health, medicinal raw materials, defense industry, petrochemicals and renewable energy; Diplomacy is also driven to fight for fair-treatment for Indonesian commodities including palm oil; Third, diplomacy strengthens the digital economy, creative economy and green economy, among others, through: Organizing the ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum (ACEBF) within the framework of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF); The promotion of green economy investment and energy transition was carried out with British businesses on the sidelines of the COP26 meeting in Glasgow which resulted in an investment commitment of US \$ 9.29 billion dollars; French Government energy transition project funding commitment of EUR 500 million; In the field of economic diplomacy, fourth, diplomacy is also driven to strengthen Pacific Elevation policies in the Pacific, including through the virtual holding of the 2nd Pacific Exposition in October 2021 which was visited by more than 11 thousand people with trade transactions worth US \$ 104 million dollars; Fifth, strengthening development cooperation, through grant support to eleven friendly countries, namely Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Palau, Suriname, Timor Leste, PNG, Zimbabwe and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. With a focus on cooperation on empowering women, increasing the digital literacy of MSMEs, utilizing agricultural technology and mitigating the impact of climate change.

For 2022, global economic recovery efforts, as they have been passed, still face various challenges. The implementation of economic diplomacy will continue to be strengthened, among others, though, first:

1. Strengthening access to national strategic industrial products such as health, railways, defence industry, shipping to Asia, the Middle East and Africa
2. Organizing the Pacific Forum for Development to enhance development cooperation in the Pacific in a more structured manner which was carried out in November 2022 in Bali;
3. Then increase engagement with investors abroad to strengthen partnerships with Indonesia's Sovereign Wealth Fund.
4. Strengthening partnerships to support the energy transition, green and sustainable economy
5. Then, continue efforts to accelerate the completion of various CEPA negotiations, among others,

with the UAE and the European Union. Turkey and Chile

6. At the multilateral level, diplomacy is carried out to continue to encourage a fairer and more transparent international trading system.

The pandemic also presents its own challenges for the protection of Indonesian citizens. Protection machines continue to be strengthened to help Indonesian citizens abroad. If, in early 2020, the evacuation of Wuhan presented a very high challenge, then in 2021, the evacuation from Kabul also had a very high difficulty level.

In 2021, as many as 33 people (26 Indonesian citizens and 7 foreigners) were evacuated from Kabul; more than 73 thousand people were facilitated with repatriation, including 1,300 crew members; nearly 240 thousand basic food aid was distributed; 7 Indonesian citizens were exempted from the death penalty; 4 Indonesian citizens released from hostage-taking; more than Rp79.3 billion of financial rights saved; and vaccine facilities for 88,637 Indonesian citizens were given in various regions of the world. The government also strengthens the protection system by strengthening infrastructure to establishing bilateral cooperation and norm settings at the multilateral level. For 2022, with the high complexity of protection cases, the main focus of protection diplomacy will be given with the focus: First, accelerating digital transformation through:

1. Strengthening the Integrated Data Operating Centre (IDOC) to manage Big Data on protection
  2. Integration of the Safe Travel Application with the Peduli Lindungi Application to increase a sense of security when Indonesian citizens travel during a pandemic.
  3. Development of preliminary data on overseas voters for the 2024 Election
- Second, we will improve infrastructure and human resources protection through:
4. Construction of Indonesian Seafarers' Corner in Busan, South Korea.
  5. Improving the quality of infrastructure and shelter governance in the Indonesian Representative.
  6. Strengthening the capacity of gender-responsive diplomats

Third, the development of legal frameworks and cooperation at the national and international levels through:

1. MoU on information system integration between Ministries/Agencies
2. MoU on PMI Placement and Protection
3. Finalization of IMO-ILO Guidelines for handling cases of seafarer neglect
4. Strengthen migrant worker protection standards within the UN framework.

Diplomats also continue to work to strengthen Sovereignty Diplomacy, of which border negotiations are an important element. In 2021, 17 negotiations were held with the Philippines, Malaysia, Palau and Vietnam.

What is interesting to note is that the number of negotiations carried out during the pandemic has doubled compared to 2020 which was only 7 times. In 2022, efforts to accelerate the intensity of land and maritime border negotiations will continue to be increased.

1. For maritime boundaries: With Malaysia, it is expected that the Territorial Sea Boundary Agreement on the Sulawesi Sea segment and the Southern Malacca Strait segment can be signed
2. With Palau, negotiations at the Technical Team level for EEZ boundary lines will continue with the target of reaching a partial agreement.
3. With the Philippines, there are two plans: starting negotiations on the delimitation of the continental shelf at the Technical Level and following up on the agreement to demarcate the continental shelf and EEZ into two different boundary lines.
4. With Viet Nam, continuing negotiations at the Technical Team level to obtain an EEZ boundary line agreement. Maritime boundary negotiations are, of course, always based on UNCLOS 1982.

In particular, it would like to emphasize one principle related to sovereignty and sovereign rights in Indonesian waters that any claim by any party must be made in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS 1982. And Indonesia will continue rejecting claims without an internationally recognized legal basis.

As for land boundaries in 2022, priority will be given including:

1. Malaysia demarcated the Eastern sector of Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP), including Sebatik Island.
2. With Timor Leste, completing the remaining 2 (two) Unresolved Segments in accordance with the "Agreed Principles" agreed in 2019.

The two negotiating teams also agreed that maritime boundary negotiations would begin after the land boundary was completed. In addition to fighting for national interests, Indonesian diplomacy is carried out to contribute to peace and humanity in the region and the world. On this occasion, I would like to express our gratitude for the support and trust IORA member countries gave during the selection of the new IORA Secretary General. Ambassador Salman Al Farisi has been elected as Secretary General of IORA for the 2022-2024 term. Indonesia hopes that IORA can contribute to building a strong Indian Ocean to create a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

The implementation of diplomacy in the region or the world has begun with Afghanistan. Towards the close of 2021, the Foreign Minister attended the OIC Foreign Ministers' Extraordinary Session on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Considering Afghanistan's deteriorating humanitarian situation, Indonesia was among the initiators of the meeting. Indonesia's position has always been consistent, wanting to see Afghanistan peaceful, stable and prosperous. In Indonesia's engagement with the Taliban, Indonesia continues to encourage that the promises made on August 16, 2021, can be fulfilled, including respect for women's rights. At the instigation of Indonesia, a Roadmap for the fulfilment of Taliban commitments has been included in the Resolution of the OIC meeting. In the humanitarian sector, Indonesia also continues to be committed to contributing. Two Indonesian planes will soon arrive in Afghanistan in cooperation with UN agencies, carrying food and nutrition aid for the Afghan people. In 2022, Indonesia has continued to focus on education and empowerment issues for Afghan women, including through the provision of Education scholarships.

Second, regarding peacekeeping missions. Indonesia's participation in peacekeeping missions has never subsided. Currently, more than 2,800 Indonesian personnel serve in eight UN peacekeeping missions. Indonesia is the 7th largest contributor to UN peacekeeping forces worldwide, up from 8th place over the past three years. The percentage of Indonesian female peacekeepers rose from 5.9 per cent in 2020 to 6.7 per cent in 2021. Indonesia is also active in drafting norms and governance of UN Peace Missions. Indonesia is one of the Chairs of the Group of Friends on Safety and Security of UN Peacekeeping, launched in April 2021. This is an initiative to ensure increased security and safety of peacekeepers.

To advance the issue of Women, Peace and Security, Indonesia, together with the Southeast Asia Network of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators, has organized a Regional Forum of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators. The regional network joined the Global Alliances of Regional Women Mediator Networks in April 2021 as the 6th member and the only Asian representative. For 2022, Indonesia has sent 5 (five) military Task Forces with a total of 950 personnel and one police Task Force with a total of 198 personnel. Indonesia will also organize various peacekeepers' training and capacity-building programs, including under the UN Triangular Partnership Project (TPP) scheme.

Third, in the field of human rights and democracy. Throughout 2021, Indonesia has been a penholder or sponsor of various resolutions related to the rights of the Palestinian people and Rohingya, human rights issues, and business activities. Indonesia has also held various activities in encouraging the

promotion of human rights in the region, among others, through:

1. Regional Conference on Business and Human Rights 2021
2. Second Regional Conference on Humanitarian Assistance

ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue, which has been on hiatus for the last 6 years and Indonesia successfully held it again last year. In addition, Indonesia also held the 14th Bali Democracy Forum in 2021. Secretary Blinken and State Councillor Wang Yi participated in the 2021 Bali Democracy Forum. BDF is a form of Indonesia's commitment to continue to advance democracy and human rights in the region and globally. Our commitment to democracy goes beyond our borders. For 2022, in the field of human rights, Indonesia, among others, has held a Regional Conversation on Human Rights and a Regional Seminar on Anti-Torture and Indonesia will also again submit a Progress Report on the implementation of its Human Rights Fulfillment through the 4th Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Fourth, regarding ASEAN. it has been almost a year since the political crisis occurred in Myanmar. If this situation continues, it will not only disrupt stability and security in Myanmar but also ASEAN and the wider region. From the beginning, Indonesia has continued to show commitment to contribute. At the proposal of the President of Indonesia, the ASEAN Para-Leaders Meeting was held in Jakarta in April 2021 and resulted in a "Five-Point Consensus".

As mentioned earlier, the "Five-Point Consensus" will guide ASEAN in helping resolve the political crisis in Myanmar. If there is no progress on implementing the "Five-Point Consensus", it will be difficult for ASEAN to invite political-level representatives from Myanmar to the ASEAN meeting. ASEAN must uphold this shared commitment. The safety and well-being of the people of Myanmar have also always been a concern for Indonesia. In this context, Indonesia has provided humanitarian assistance. Aircraft carrying humanitarian aid were delivered in September 2021, as part of ASEAN's humanitarian assistance.

For 2022, Indonesia has sought to strengthen ASEAN's centrality and solidity. ASEAN must continue to serve as an anchor of stability, peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN must remain relevant and respond appropriately to new challenges in the region and the world. And ASEAN must continue to benefit its people.

For this reason, Indonesia will continue to encourage concrete cooperation in the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific with partner countries. Indonesia will also encourage the High-Level Task Force also to work to strengthen ASEAN institutions as an integral part of the discussion of the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision.

Fifth, regarding the G20. Indonesia's presidency at the G20 has started running from December 1, 2021 to November 30, 2022. In 2022, Indonesia's diplomatic work will be used to support the success of Indonesia's presidency at the G-20. Inclusiveness is the spirit of Indonesia's presidency. Indonesia wants the G20 to catalyse global recovery and concrete cooperation that benefits developing countries. For this reason, the Indonesian Presidency at the G-20 is focused on strengthening the global health architecture, energy transition, and digital transformation. The Indonesian presidency will be run with high transparency to achieve maximum results. As stated by President Widodo, Indonesia will warmly welcome all G20 delegates at more than 150 meetings. The Foreign Minister said that diplomacy will continue to work under any circumstances. The focus remains on supporting the recovery process for the health and economic sectors. Protection diplomacy will be strengthened by using technological innovation.

The rivalry challenge between major powers is not expected to decrease, including in the Indo-Pacific region. This is where implementing Indonesia's free and active foreign policy will be more relevant. This is where a solid ASEAN is needed. Indonesia will continue to be active in peace and humanitarian diplomacy, including in Afghanistan, for our Rohingya brothers and the resolution of the political crisis in Myanmar. Indonesia's commitment to help the Palestinian people's struggle will continue. Indonesia will

use its chairmanship of the G20 to contribute more to the world's efforts to narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in health and economic recovery.

In addition, commitment to environmental issues and climate change will continue to be strengthened by paying attention to meeting the SDGs target. Thus, no party or country is left behind. Quoting President Joko Widodo at the reception of Indonesia's G20 Presidency in October 2020 in Rome: "Joint efforts for world economic recovery, inclusive, people-centred, environmentally friendly and sustainable growth must be carried out in extraordinary ways, especially through stronger world collaboration and continuous innovation." According to Melu Retno, Indonesia must strengthen cooperation and solidarity for a peaceful, stable and prosperous world. Recover Together, Recover Stronger.

### **Indonesia's Diplomacy in the Pacific Region**

The Indonesian Ambassador to New Zealand in 2021, Samoa, the Kingdom of Tonga, the Cook Islands and Niue who also serves as the Roving Indonesian Ambassador to the Pacific, Tantowi Yahya delivered a presentation on Indonesia's Priorities in the Pacific at an academic meeting organized by the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA). Representatives from the Kingdom of Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, academics, students, observers, politicians, and diplomats were present in Wellington, New Zealand. Ambassador Tantowi discussed Indonesia's priorities for the Pacific region. He explained Indonesia's relationship with the Pacific from geographical, historical, social, and cultural perspectives. "Indonesia is part of the Pacific, so, naturally, we want to participate in the dynamics in this region," he said.

Former Ambassador Tantowi also expressed Indonesia's desire to improve economic relations and cooperation and increase human resource capacity. The Pacific is a potential market for Indonesian products and an investment destination for Indonesian investors. Meanwhile, Indonesia is also a large market for Pacific products. Indonesia also held the largest and most comprehensive trade, investment and tourism exhibition, the Pacific Exposition to open markets. This activity is carried out every two years and is clear proof of Indonesia's helping countries in the Pacific. The Pacific Elevation program, which is a refinement of the previously run Pacific Engagement, was launched by the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi in Auckland, New Zealand in July 2019. Foreign Minister Retno said this program was not to compete but wanted to complement it. Through this program, Indonesia is committed to helping economic development to improve the welfare of people in the Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific region has a strategic role for ASEAN countries. In order to expand cooperation, the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum was held at the 43rd ASEAN Summit. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Pahala Mansury, in addition to cooperation, the forum also emphasized ASEAN centrality, especially related to green infrastructure, manufacturing, resilience, and digitalization to the creative economy.

Over the past two decades, Indonesia has provided developing countries in the Pacific with assistance, as a diplomatic tool, with one aim to secure territorial integrity – particularly on the issue of Papuan separatism. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Pahala that he was involved in a study on the role of Indonesia's aid diplomacy in rebuilding, restoring and improving its image in Pacific countries, such as Nauru, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The study found that aid diplomacy could relatively increase Indonesia's influence in the South Pacific. The diplomatic effort also had an impact on the declining support of several countries in the region for Papuan separatism.

Geographically, the South Pacific region is located to the east of Indonesia. There are twelve countries (Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomons, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu), two non-sovereign territories (Cook Islands, and Niue), and several dependent territories (such as American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam Hawaii, New Caledonia, Norfolk Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, Wallis and Futuna, and Tokelau) stretching over the Pacific



Ocean). This area is directly adjacent to the easternmost region of Indonesia. Pacific residents share Melanesian race and culture with 10% of Indonesian Melanesian ethnicity spread across the provinces of East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, North Maluku, West Papua, and Papua.

In general, countries in the Pacific region view Indonesia with its vast area and large population with suspicion and insecurity. For small countries in the Pacific, Indonesia's large territory brings potential security concerns. Pacific countries are mini-states in size (mostly under 1,000 square kilometers) and sparsely populated. Indonesia's poor record of military aggression, such as the "Ganyang Malaysia" campaign and the annexation of East Timor, as well as human rights abuses in Papua, contributed to Pacific countries' suspicion and insecurity towards Indonesia. Some Pacific countries, such as Vanuatu, Nauru and Tuvalu support morally and diplomatically for Papuan independence.

The ethnic similarity of Melanesian peoples underlies the continued support of the South Pacific for Papuan independence. Indonesia's aid diplomacy has long ignored the Pacific region because it is too focused on ASEAN - Indonesia is one of the founders of this association of Southeast Asian countries. Around the decade of the 70s and 80s, Indonesia often treated the South Pacific as a "neglected backyard". Indonesia has begun to change its relations with the Pacific region in the last 20 years through its "Look East Policy" foreign policy, the core of which is aid diplomacy. This policy aims to reverse Indonesia's negative image in the Pacific region. This "Looking East" policy prioritizes South Pacific countries such as Nauru, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Fiji as development cooperation partners.

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In 2016, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo continued the policy by strengthening Indonesia's commitment after the 2nd PIDF Summit - Jokowi has used no official budget figure report. One indication of the success of Indonesia's diplomacy in the Pacific is the elevation of its membership status in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) from observer status obtained in 2013 to associate member in 2015. The MSG is an exclusive group whose members consist of ethnically Melanesian countries.

Indonesia's intensive diplomacy to the Pacific resulted in a change in attitude from several countries, such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru, who initially opposed Indonesian territorial control over Papua. Only Vanuatu still insists on rejecting Indonesia's membership because it believes that the United Liberation Movement for West Papua is more worthy of being a member of the MSG. Still, in reality the August 2023 MSG Summit also rejected UMLPW as a member of the MSG. This certainly provides good for the foreign relations of Indonesia and Vanuatu. As in July 2023, Indonesia has assisted in the construction of airport buildings for the country of Vanuatu in addition to other humanitarian assistance that Indonesia provided in March 2023 when cyclones Judy and Kevin occurred in the Vanuatu region.

In an economic context, Indonesia also links the MSG and Asia, enabling Pacific countries to benefit from Asia's fast-growing economies. After more than 50 years of receiving development aid, Indonesia now

also plays a role as a donor country, even though the amount of aid is relatively small and limited.

Indonesia's assistance to the Pacific region has a strategic objective for the central government in Jakarta which is interested in gaining the support of countries in the region to secure its territorial integrity. It is foreseeable that Indonesia's aid diplomacy will continue to be carried out and increase in the coming year.

## CONCLUSION

Indonesia's extensive two-decade relationship and diplomatic engagement in the Pacific Region have significantly influenced its foreign policy and strategic positioning. The current perspective recognizes the Pacific region, including the Indo-Pacific, as strategically vital, requiring careful maintenance and adherence to established norms due to its density and rapid economic activities. While partnerships with Pacific countries have been generally fruitful, acknowledging challenges, particularly concerning human rights violations in Papua and security issues, is essential for sustaining and strengthening diplomatic ties. The traces of diplomacy in the region, marked by humanitarian and technical assistance, form a robust foundation. As Indonesia assumes the chair of ASEAN in 2023, it is crucial to deepen cooperation within ASEAN and extend collaborative efforts to Pacific nations and key partners like China, South Korea, and Japan. A more comprehensive conclusion should summarize key achievements, explicitly address challenges, and articulate specific strategies while emphasizing the economic dimension and providing a forward-looking perspective, as Indonesia's diplomatic endeavors in the Pacific Region continue to shape the region's growth and stability in the foreseeable future.

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International Journal of Social Service and Research (IJSSR)

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