

# *Indonesia Foreign Policy Under President Jokowi In Facing The Covid-19 Pandemic*

Ayu Dhiya Gusmiarti

Defense Diplomacy Study Program, Republic of Indonesia Defense University

\*ayu.dhiya1@gmail.com



**Abstract** – The presence of the COVID-19 Pandemic has brought several challenges to the situation in the world order. This situation also cannot be avoided by Indonesia, who is also experiencing the impact of the Pandemic. Under President Jokowi's leadership, there have been various adaptations and shifting in Indonesia's policies that was affected by the pandemic. Indonesian policy adaptation during Joko Widodo's governed starting by giving attention to the needs of the people. Following to that, Indonesia's foreign policy was also directed to deal with the pandemic situation. As a form of efforts, Indonesia is implementing "4+1" strategy in its foreign policy that still remains based on the principle of free and active in seeking solutions that done through bilateral, multilateral and even internationally to find any possible solutions to deal on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Keywords** – COVID-19, Pandemic, 4+1 Strategy, Foreign Policy, Joko Widodo.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of Pneumonia case in Wuhan City Area of China has been reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. Then it was identified that pneumonia spread as a new type of virus which started to spread outside China and became a new problem concerning health issue. The case has been followed up as a worldwide health problem by the WHO and consider to become a global pandemic.

Following to that, there were several reports of cases or even new death case outside China that bring this pandemic continues to grow and led the WHO designated COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) which brought into the world trouble. However, the General guidelines for dealing with the COVID-19 virus has a fast-spreading Information to several countries pandemic when it compared with any other types of viruses that have been existed before this pandemic.

From what was happened above, it leads into a situation where the world has shifting in a more complicated ways nowadays since the Pandemic COVID-19 was happening. It was giving a lot of impact to the world situation and create a lot of new forms policy to limit the virus spreading. The pandemic had disintegrated the joints of the world's life since 2020. This pandemic has happened suddenly and changed the world's view. It created many restrictions on the existing scope have made conditions in the world change greatly and adapted many new things to survive in the existing conditions.

This pandemic emerged as a significant threat to the mental and physical health of human that dramatically affects to everyday life on a global scale. The pandemic affect to more than 200 states were trapped under the efforts of infection measures control, such as quarantine, lockdowns, mask wearing mandatory, and some physical distancing (Wang C. et al., 2021). The pandemic brings into the situation in which everyone never imagined before as it was hit the effect on the public health.

Same situation happened with Indonesia which was also facing the impact of the pandemic. Therefore, to taking it into account of the spread of the pandemic tends to continue to increase from time to time. It caused a great casualties and material losses, along with several implications for all aspects of life, especially to the social, economic, and community welfare aspects. Due to this situation, Indonesia needs and has to accelerate its handling ability to restrict the spread of the pandemic. The ability

has to be integrated with the prevention of COVID-19 spreading with fast, precise, focused, integrated, and synergistic steps between ministries-agencies and local governments.

Based on that consideration, the President of The Republic of Indonesia issued Presidential Decree No. 7 of 2020 concerning the Task Force for the Acceleration of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The objective of the decree is directly responsible below the President and aimed to increase the national resilience in the health sector, accelerating the handling of COVID-19 that worked with the synergies between ministries/agencies and local governments, increasing anticipation of the escalation of the COVID-19, increasing the synergy from the operational policy making and improving the preparedness and capabilities in preventing, detecting and responding to threat that might occur from the COVID-19 pandemic (Cabinet Secretary, 2020).

Through that decree, it can also be seen that the impact of Pandemic is giving its contribution to the change of several policy in Indonesia. Such as in Indonesia's foreign policy, the Pandemic has given the rapid spread of the virus and made Indonesia to carried out many restrictions in various aspects during the pandemic to protect its country. This also encourages Indonesia to adjust its foreign policy in accordance with existing conditions. Within the acceleration of Pandemic handling task force, it can be seen that Indonesia is already aware with the current global events and create the policy that guide into the more broadways of decision making in the issue of COVID-19 Pandemic. With the action taken by Indonesia to deal with the pandemic, it was in line with the understanding of foreign policy where the study of foreign policy focuses on the external behavior of states in the international/global system through their authorized representatives or governments to achieve their national interests. Therefore, this research is aimed to know more about Indonesia's Foreign Policy which have been adapted due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

## **II. THE CASE STUDY: COVID-19 IN INDONESIA**

Pulling back at the beginning of the new COVID-19 virus pandemic case being discovered in Wuhan, China, the Indonesian government continues to closely monitor the development of the virus issue through representatives. Seeing that the development of the new coronavirus has resulted in around 2000 patients being infected, above 5000 patients were suspected of being infected, numbers of patients have died, and several areas have been infected with the virus. Around the restricted area, there were also Indonesian citizens living in quarantine areas, with the majority of them are students. At that time the information was that all Indonesian citizens were in good condition, healthy and no one had contracted the COVID-19 virus.

By building communication lines to communicate and monitor the condition of Indonesian citizens and provide the necessary assistance to their citizens there, Indonesia through its representatives at the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing is seeking logistical assistance for Indonesian citizens in quarantine areas and coordinating with local authorities. In overcoming this problem, there are also instructions from the President to be able to evacuate Indonesian citizens from Wuhan as soon as possible (MOFA, 2020). Hence, under the government of Joko Widodo Presidential era, Indonesia took its foreign policy in the basis of benefit the people and encouraging its diplomacy work to take the attention to the needs of the people. Where the main orientation of Indonesia foreign policy is coming from the public interest (UGM, 2015). Along with that, the government efforts to look at the people needs can be clearly seen from the evacuation process of Indonesia citizen from Wuhan during that time.

As the time passed, the COVID-19 pandemic founded in Indonesia on March 2, 2020 by a report of 2 positive cases. Then followed on March 6, another new positive case was found with additional 2 other cases (Damaledo, 2020). Since then, COVID-19 cases in Indonesia have started to spread and the data on positive cases of COVID-19 has increased, so far, more than 4 million people have been confirmed to have tested positive for COVID-19. Within that situation, Indonesia was starting to feel a quite hard time due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

Hence, according to a new UNICEF report, there were around 80 million young to middle age people in Indonesia who were affecting in their secondary needs, such in the field of health, education, and economic-security (UNICEF, 2021). Since beginning of COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia, it has brought every people across Indonesia were facing a challenging new normal. Where Indonesia has to adapt to the new environment and shifting its foreign policy in order to being able to survive in the pandemic condition.

### III. THE ANALYSIS: INDONESIA FOREIGN POLICY FACING THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19

Before analyzing more about Indonesia's foreign policy in adapting with the situation of COVID-19 Pandemic. It has to be underlined that the situation of this pandemic was happened under the government of Joko Widodo. Therefore, it has to be clearly explained what kind of foreign policy that was implement during his presidency. Under the government of President Joko Widodo, he formulated the foreign policy by adhering to the *principle of Tri-Sakti*. Where this principle has three pillars in it, such as the sovereign of Indonesia in its politics, independent in its economy, and cultural character distinct. Those principles become a guidance to overall government policies, including the foreign policy (Setiawan & Endang, 2017).

Moreover, Joko Widodo, the president of the Republic puts an advance foreign policy to face the current situation as used the 'down to earth diplomacy' (*Diplomasi Membumi*), and emphasizes the economic benefits and protection of Indonesian. Within that, it can be seen that the people of Indonesian were one of the top priorities under the government of President Joko Widodo.

Even though, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the ability of all nations to be able to take wisdom by continuing to strive and endeavor to find solutions to every problem that exists in pandemic, it was indeed a tough test for all nations. As a big nation, Indonesia must be able to overcome all existing problems, including this pandemic. Moreover, Indonesia likely to known as the natural leader in the region or in this matter is in the southeast Asia which was under the ASEAN arrangements.

However, during the pandemic, each countries seem to work only by themselves without coordinating to each other to find a way out. It all caused due to their own nationalist sentiment to protect their own states (Woods & Rajaie, 2020). In spite of that, Indonesia's government was still aligned its attention and interest in managing the pandemic and seems to not taking into a problem of the current situation, else was focusing in its domestic situation.

In dealing with the pandemic situation, Paul Sharp (2009) explained that when there is something difficult need to be accomplished, or when a settlement or general improvement in international relations is in prospect, there is a "more and better diplomacy" that often called for. This mean Indonesia needs to improve more and adapting to a better diplomacy to deal with the pandemic. Within the "more and better diplomacy", Indonesia has to deal with various policies and adaptation on the policy that could combine countermeasures without sacrificing its interest.

Along with that, the Pandemic has brought the Indonesian economy into a dreary situation for what happened in the world. As consequences, the government forced to made several revisions in the development targets in 2020. This is also followed by a cutting of the nation Budget which has to be relocated for the counter measurement of COVID-19 pandemic. The result has made the government revised the set of objectives in the National Mid-Term Development Plan 2020-2024 and Government Work Plan 2020 to be transferred and shifted to push the government achievement in 2021 and thereafter (Muhyidin & Nugroho, 2021).

Moreover, the government was determined to complete unfinished economic acceleration targets in 2020 by shifting it to 2021 and beyond. Then, the program development was launched by the government in 2020 as stated in the workplan 2020 and development plan 2020-2024 experienced consequential challenges with the present of pandemic. After several adaptation and implementation of the new policy towards the pandemic countermeasure, the government then understood the way to implement programs properly for economic recovery and intensity it well.

Although, the pandemic situation has not passed yet, the positivity rate started to be stable at a relatively high range in April 2021. However, the death rate due to COVID-19 was still quite threatening. There still need several policies regarding health protocol which cannot be eliminate yet and the government needs to be more watchful and accurate to respond the ongoing situation. Thus, the government need to be careful on the need to push for policies on economic recovery that might bring the situation into the loosen of health protocols.

Diplomatically, Indonesia keeps on trying its best to face and eliminate the pandemic. Indonesia efforts in several initiatives, such as the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA), where Indonesia promotes its first contribution on advising the resolution about the Pandemic. However, considering Indonesia position in ASEAN as a nature leader of this organization. Indonesia should already take its action in mitigating the crisis regionally. But in fact, Indonesia's regional diplomacy was not that promising as its role in the global level through the UNGA, as during that time the regional movement was still limited.

The pandemic had posed crucial challenges for Indonesia since the starting of the first case was founded. In the beginning of the pandemic, Indonesia considered as lacking of medical supplies and did not have enough capacity and capability to conduct massive rapid test to track the spread of the virus around its citizen. Moreover, under Indonesia free and active policy, it forbids Indonesia to enter any alliances in order to prevent a loss of sovereignty, which could be exercised by its alliance partners in matters of health issues during the pandemic of COVID-19. Thus, if traced by the track record, Indonesia's diplomacy activism which is directly related to global health issues, has not received priority and a significant portion of the budget.

The Indonesian diplomats' activities in the bilateral and multilateral arenas are highly concentrated on efforts to maintain the continuity of the free and active pillars, including nationalism, accommodative multilateralism as well as regional and global institutions that oversee them. But for this, the perception and realization of foreign policy Indonesia, which is currently having serious consequences for its ability to develop independent and accurate strategies, especially when facing a strategic shock such as the rapid and massive transmission of the disease that caused the pandemic. Therefore, it has not been fully responded as early as possible in relation to the area of effective foreign diplomacy.

In the time of the pandemic, Indonesia also occupying a seat on the executive board of WHO, for a working period of 2017 to 2021, which means there is an opportunity to directly promote global policy ideas related to health diplomacy in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with that, the foreign policy is most commonly implemented by specialist foreign policy arms of the state bureaucracy, such as a Ministry of Foreign Affairs or State Department and supporting with the other departments which also have a role in implementing foreign policy, such as departments for: trade, defense, and aid.

Therefore, Indonesia's Foreign Minister said that the COVID-19 pandemic provided valuable lessons about the importance of global cooperation to strengthen infrastructure and health governance, economic resilience, and the importance of multilateralism. To continue to contribute to world change, Indonesian diplomacy must be anticipatory, adaptive, and agile. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, Indonesia's diplomatic priorities have undergone a refocusing into: strengthening efforts to protect Indonesian citizens, support for efforts to overcome the pandemic both from the health aspect and socio-economic impact, and continue to contribute to world peace and stability.

This pandemic encourages the implementation of foreign policy and the consequences of domestic political dynamics for dealing with the pandemic in Indonesia. Considering that foreign policy analysis is a policy which starts or begins at home. Another thing is analyzing a foreign policy is a little bit complicated, because it is related to every crucial sector of a country. As well as another field of study, the analysis of foreign policy is characterized by certain actor and focus. In the simplest terms, foreign policy analysis was also study of the process, effects, causes, or outputs of decision-making in either a comparative or case-specific manner. Especially situation in global has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemics. Indonesia to this point should be careful in finding a way and adapting to the situation, especially to its foreign policy.

In this matter also, the analysis goes as the President Jokowi was a rational actor model as a leader of a nation who have the highest authority to implement the foreign policy. The inputs of this foreign policy were the external or international environment by the happening of COVID-19 Pandemic, which give impact to the situation on the domestic environment and to Indonesia's national interest in finding a way to protect the citizen on the pandemic situation. Afterward, the process here is the decision making or the formulation of the policy toward the input status quo. The output was implemented in Indonesia foreign policy to face the country situation in dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemics.

Subsequently, in facing various challenges in the future, Indonesia needs strong collective global leadership. Therefore, with the value of Recover Together, Recover Stronger. In 2021, Indonesia's diplomacy will focus on five priorities, which are around the building of independence and national health resilience, Support the sustain economic recovery; strengthened the protection system of Indonesian citizens, and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation on land and sea borders as the strengthening efforts to protect Indonesia's integrity and sovereignty (MOFA, 2021).

Remembering that COVID-19 was also exposes the deep inequalities between countries and hits hardest among others to the poorest. As has always been the case, developing and least-developed countries are facing greater risks. COVID-19 is fueling mistrust among countries. Questions of the virtue of globalization and interconnectedness arise. Through this pandemic, many countries resorted to isolationism and protectionism. From sealing their borders, expelling foreign nationals, to limiting their medical equipment export. On the other hand, the COVID-19 knows no border. No country is immune from it, no matter how

powerful or prosperous. The world hits the impact from it, everyone's hands are tied and need to take this is as what makes international cooperation a challenge at this moment.

Indonesia firmly believes that no country is strong enough to tackle COVID-19 on its own. Only by synergizing the strength of Indonesia and keeping the international cooperation alive can we win this battle. Pandemics need more time and energy as it must only be focused on what is important, which is tackling the virus. Facing these all, crucial modalities to defeat COVID-19 and the engagement with other countries is always geared to promote these ideals. Indonesia in this matter, is also have been applying an adjustment to the priorities of Indonesia diplomacy in this situation.

Indonesia implementing on top of the 4+1 priorities, the immediate priorities of Indonesia right now are covering the addressing point due to COVID-19 by ensuring availability and access to medical equipment, medicine, as well as vaccine, next, strengthening the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad. Because on the first priority, Indonesia must ensure all countries have what it takes to defeat COVID-19. Moreover, it has to be underlined and aware that pandemic has encounter shortages of various medical supplies. There is no other option but to strengthen cooperation among countries in the provision of medical supplies. Experience from countries hit earlier has taught the world that availability and steady supply of medical supplies could make a difference in terms of lives that could be save. Therefore, cooperation and supporting each other are a must. Along with this also, Indonesia diplomatic machinery must work creatively on bilateral level to fill these shortages, making full use of each country's comparative advantages, raw materials, technology, and labor resources (MOFA, 2020).

Under the President Joko Widodo governed, Indonesia continues to build new policies to adapt towards the situation. Several improvements in the field of recovery on health and economic starting by its domestic. Indonesia used its "4+1" strategy in the foreign policy in order to tackle the pandemic challenges that also has bring several cooperation to handle the pandemic. Indonesia believes through this strategy, Indonesia can accelerate the recovery of its economic, protection of the citizens, secure the nation sovereignty, and strengthening its regional and international leadership.

As a further matters in the 4+1 strategy, Indonesia has collaborated in bilateral, regional, and global action in the counter measurement of the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as Indonesia believes that within the national resilience, it can also enhance the regional resilience, and vice versa (Fitriani, 2021). Indonesia prioritized the health and economic well-being of its people while protecting its sovereignty, projecting the regional leadership, and promoting the multilateral cooperation. Overall, Indonesia foreign policy has shifting into a very significant policy which have been a new change for Indonesia across pandemic COVID-19 response and recovery priorities.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION:**

As well as another country in the world, Indonesia is also facing the global situation due to the present of COVID-19 Pandemic. Since the first case of this virus was find, Indonesia was already doing its best to save its citizen who lived in the area where the first case of COVID-19 happened. In this matter also goes in line with Indonesia Foreign Policy in facing the Pandemic of Covid 19 which has shifting into a new model of priorities. By the rational model of decision making under the President Indonesia who was focusing the policy based on the domestic situation, Indonesia set the foreign policy by emphasizing its priority on the safety of its citizens. Therefore, by implementing on top of the 4+1 priorities, the immediate priorities of Indonesia right now are covering the addressing point due to COVID-19 by ensuring availability and access to medical equipment, medicine, as well as vaccine in order to strengthening the protection of Indonesian citizens. As what it matters that the priority of Indonesia is about ensuring of what it takes to defeat COVID-19. With the value of Recover Together, Recover Stronger, Indonesia deals with the global situation nowadays.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Cabinet Secretary of the Republic Indonesia. (2020). Presiden Teken Keppres Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan Covid-19. Retrieved from <https://setkab.go.id/presiden-teken-keppres-gugus-tugas-percepatan-penanganan-covid-19>
- [2] Damaledo, Y. D. (2020). Maret 2020 corona pertama kali masuk ke Indonesia dan diumumkan oleh Presiden Jokowi dan Menkes Terawan. Retrieved from <https://tirto.id/gaKw>
- [3] Fitriani. (2021, October 26). Indonesia's Foreign Policy and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved from Think Global Health: <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/indonesias-foreign-policy-and-covid-19-pandemic>



- [4] MOFA RI. (2020, September 23). Statement by President of the Republic of Indonesia H.E. Joko Widodo at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Retrieved from Indonesia For The World: <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/1715/berita/statement-by-president-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-he-joko-widodo-at-the-general-debate-of-the-75th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-22-september-2020>
- [5] MOFA, M. o. (2020). Speeches of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/1285/pidato/remarks-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-indonesias-foreign-policy-in-addressing-the-threat-of-covid-19-foreign-policy-community-indonesia-fpci-virtual-public-discussion>
- [6] MOFA, M. o. (2021). Pernyataan Pers Tahunan Menteri Luar Negeri. Retrieved from <https://kemlu.go.id/manama/en/news/10500/menlu-ri-sampaikan-capaian-politik-luar-negeri-indonesia-2020-dan-prioritas-diplomasi-2021>
- [7] Muhyiddin & Hanan Nugroho. (2021). Indonesia Development Update a Year of Covid-19: A Long Road to Recovery and Acceleration of Indonesia's Development. The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning, Volume V No. 1 April, Bappennas.
- [8] Setiawan, Asep & Endang Sulastri. (2017). People-Oriented Indonesia's Foreign Policy in Support of Protecting Citizen. Proceeding The 1st International Conference on Social Sciences.
- [9] Sharp, P. (2009). Diplomatic Theory of International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [10] UGM, U. o. (2015). Membaca Orientasi Kebijakan Luar Negeri Jokowi. Retrieved from <https://www.balairungpress.com/2015/04/membaca-orientasi-kebijakan-luar-negeri-jokowi/>
- [11] UNICEF. (2021). New UNICEF report highlights the severe impact of the pandemic on children. Retrieved from at: <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/press-releases/80-million-children-indonesia-face-widespread-impact-covid-19-pandemic>
- [12] Wang C, Wang, Z., Wang, G., Lau, J. Y. N., Zhang, K., & Li, W. (2021). COVID-19 in early 2021: current status and looking forward. *Signal Transduction and Targeted Therapy*, 6(1): 1-14.
- [13] Woods, Ngaire & Rajaie Batniji. (2020). There's only one option for a global coronavirus exit strategy, *World Economic Forum*, April. England: oxford. .