

# Indonesian Foreign Policy under the Jokowi Administration: Variations on Traditional Ideas

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*Since independence in 1945, Indonesia has managed to carry out its foreign policy according to a unique doctrine described as “independent and active” (bebas dan aktif). To be independent means that Indonesia does not side with world powers, while being active means vigorously carrying out peaceful policies and actively participating in the peaceful settlement of international issues. The doctrine is not a neutral policy but does not align and bind the country with the superpowers or any military pact. Instead, being independent and active primarily serves the national interest while allowing the Indonesian government to collaborate with other nations. However, the doctrine’s implementation has varied according to the different interpretations of successive presidents. This paper explains Indonesia’s independent and active foreign policy during President Joko Widodo’s presidency. It contends that while the doctrine has continued to underlie Indonesia’s foreign policy, the formulation of President Joko Widodo’s foreign policy is unique in its practical approach, prioritizing the national interest and the domestic advantages of foreign relations. In the president’s worldview, foreign policy has been instrumental in promoting the nation’s development.*

**KEYWORDS:** functional and pragmatic foreign policy; economic diplomacy; worldview.

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This paper aims to explain how President Joko Widodo has reshaped Indonesia's foreign policy in the context of its history, struggle for independence, and geopolitical strategy. It explores the interaction of factors such as domestic political dynamics, external pressures, historical experiences, and economic capacity that have influenced the formation of President Joko Widodo's foreign policy. This foreign policy has sought national development through four primary objectives: prioritizing economic development, preserving internal and regional stability, protecting the country's territorial integrity, and safeguarding the role of the people in the shaping of national politics. Indonesian foreign policy has also addressed economic and political problems that are particularly relevant to its domestic circumstances. Each Indonesian president is unique and has shaped the country's foreign policy according to the particular domestic and international milieu. These circumstances have given rise to different strategies for addressing each challenge and different interpretations and implementations of the independent and active (*bebas dan aktif*) doctrine.

Joko Widodo won two successive presidential elections in 2014 and 2019. He is also the first president to be elected from outside the political and military elite. Given his unprivileged background, quick rise, and populist orientation, many Indonesians welcomed his first triumph in the 2014 presidential election as a victory for democracy and expected a more effective and transparent government. While many were optimistic, some voiced uncertainty about Jokowi's ability to balance domestic and international issues. Indeed, one scholar even predicted that Indonesia's foreign policy would likely "become less clear, less conciliatory and less cooperative, with negative consequences for Indonesian leadership in the region" (Connelly, 2015, p. 1).

President Widodo formally outlined his foreign policy before assuming his first term in 2014. In a document published by the Indonesian Election Committee, the president declared three commitments for his foreign policy: (1) repositioning Indonesia's role in global issues; (2) freedom in determining the direction of foreign relations that serve the national interest; and (3) placing Indonesia as a regional power with global involvement selectively by giving priority to issues that are directly related to the interests of the Indonesian nation and people (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2014, pp. 12–13). These commitments differed from those of his predecessor. President Yudhoyono had conducted a globalist foreign policy that emphasized participation in international forums (Lundry, 2018). He held that Indonesia's foreign policy should be based on diplomacy and multilateralism. This was both to fulfill national interests like unity and stability and achieve broader ambitions like the realization of peace at regional and global levels. Indonesia adopted a proactive and global profile foreign policy in the administration of President Yudhoyono (Fionna et al., 2018).

This paper employs qualitative analysis as it describes and explains problems based on interrelated facts. Data were collected from primary and secondary resources that include government documents, electronic journals, books, a wide range of Indonesian electronic newspapers, and related documents. It endeavors to provide a logical description of related issues in order to draw several conclusions. After briefly introducing the topic in this section, the second section revisits the origins of Indonesia's foreign policy and covers aspects such as the independent and active doctrine, the nation's strategic outlook, and its concept of concentric circles. The third section presents a historical overview of Indonesia's foreign policy through various presidencies, while the fourth section explores the unique characteristics of President Joko Widodo's foreign policy. The fifth and final section presents some concluding remarks.

## **Foreign Policy Foundations**

The principles of Indonesia's foreign policy were first set in 1948 by its first Vice President Mohammad Hatta in his speech entitled *Paddling between Two Reefs* (*Mendayung antara Dua Karang*) during a meeting of the Working Committee of the Central National Committee (*Badan Pekerja Komite Nasional Pusat* [BPKNP]) in Yogyakarta on September 2, 1948. It was clear at the time that the world had become polarized into a Western block headed by the United States of America and an Eastern one under the Soviet Union. Vice President Hatta argued in his speech that Indonesia should stand firm in its "independent" and "active" position in the face of a polarized, competing world order. To be independent meant that Indonesia should not side with either of the two competing blocks, while being active called for the government to maintain a policy of peace and participation in the peaceful settlement of international issues. This doctrine of being "independent and active" was publicly expounded upon by Hatta in articles published in 1953 and 1958 in the acclaimed journal *Foreign Affairs* (Hatta, 1953, 1958) and republished decades later with some additions in a book form (Hatta, 1988). The Indonesian government has subsequently used this doctrine as the basis for Indonesia's foreign policy. Indonesia sees itself through this doctrine as having a unique role in investing in a peaceful world order (Hatta, 1958).

The end of the Cold War raised several questions among scholars about the extent to which Indonesia needed to readjust the principles of its foreign policy. In response to this new world order, the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* [MPR]) released *Resolution No. II/MPR/1993*, a document that outlined Indonesia's foreign relations based on the following points: (1) an

emphasis on remaining independent and active at the heart of a foreign policy dedicated to achieving national interests; (2) the strengthening of regional and international collaborations through various multilateral and regional channels; (3) the protection of national stability and development from any possible negative impact of international development; (4) the intensifying of Indonesia's international role in the promotion and strengthening of friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation among nations; (5) the strengthening of solidarity and a shared call for cooperation among developing nations through various international organizations; (6) the importance of building a new world economic order with other developing nations, speeding up the realization of an international agreement on commodities and the removal of trade barriers and restrictions; and (7) intensifying cooperation in public and private sectors with ASEAN member countries while emphasizing economic, social, and cultural cooperation. As this resolution was drafted by the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly as the country's highest state institution, it was passed as a broad outline of state policy to which the government has been obligated to comply as it maintains the independent and active principles of Indonesian foreign policy. While it dictates that Indonesia's foreign policy is to be highly oriented toward domestic issues, it has also involved such essential concepts as strategic outlook and concentric circles.

### Indonesia's Strategic Outlook

Indonesia's strategic outlook and its perception of threat cannot be separated from the country's strategic culture<sup>1</sup> or the way it looks at itself and others based on such concepts as its Archipelagic Outlook (*Wawasan Nusantara*),<sup>2</sup> National Resilience (*Ketahanan Nasional*), and Total People's Defence (*Pertahanan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta/Hankamrata*) (Adhuri, 2003). While they are products of the New Order government, this strategic culture has continued through to the present. The Indonesian Archipelagic Outlook regards the land and water of Indonesia as an indivisible unity

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<sup>1</sup>Strategic culture analyzes state behavior in response to threats. Internal factors such as past experience, patterns of thinking, military culture, and past situations can determine the actions of a country (Snyder, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>The Archipelagic Outlook or *Wawasan Nusantara* embraces four aspects of the National Outlook (*Wawasan Nasional*): the Continental Outlook (*Wawasan Benua*), Maritime Outlook (*Wawasan Samudra*), Aerospace Outlook (*Wawasan Dirgantara*), and a Combined Outlook of Continental and Maritime (*Wawasan Benua-Bahari/Kombinasi*). Each outlook was to be developed by the army, navy, air force, and police, respectively. In 1966, the concept of the National Outlook was integrated into the Archipelagic Outlook (*Wawasan Nusantara*) which served as Indonesia's defense doctrine in the form of the Four Obligations with One Aim (*Catur Dharma Eka Karma*). The police force separated from the military at the end of the year 2000, however, and the Combined Outlook of Continental and Maritime was no longer enforced. The *Catur Dharma Eka Karma* was therefore changed to the Three Obligations with One Aim (*Tri Dharma Eka Karma*) (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, 2018).

where Indonesia lies geographically in the middle of the world's busiest maritime crossroads. The championing of sovereign Indonesian territory has become a key element of this outlook. As an archipelagic state, Indonesian policymakers are aware of the country's vulnerability to national fragmentation considering its multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious nature. The country's experience of Dutch colonization shows that the Indonesian people have been easily divided by colonial powers and are incredibly vulnerable to the politics of *divide et impera* (divide and rule).

The concept of security in successive Indonesian governments has been based on a holistic view of society that covers all aspects of national life, known in Indonesian policy circles by the acronym "ipoleksosbudmil." This is in short for the ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural, and military. The related concept of national resilience was a product of Indonesia's long struggle against colonial powers and internal conflicts. Essential to this concept is that Indonesia will strive to avoid any conflict with neighboring countries, especially those associated with ASEAN. This has been a significant priority in the country's foreign policy since its foundation in 1967. Stability and security within the broader ASEAN neighborhood are considered a prerequisite to advancing national development, and Jakarta has long believed this to be ensured by its forging of friendly relations with its neighbors. By nurturing unity and solidarity among ASEAN member countries, Jakarta intends that intra-regional conflicts be solved within Southeast Asia without external interference that might threaten national or regional stability.

Another aspect of Indonesia's strategic culture is the concept of Total People's Defence (*Pertahanan Rakyat Semesta*). This stresses the importance of unity between military forces and ordinary civilians for securing internal security and regime stability. Threats to this unity were seen as taking the ill-defined form of "threats, annoyances, obstacles, and challenges" (Badan Besar Penyuluhan dan Pengembangan Industri, 2015). Therefore, safeguarding the state is not only the responsibility of the military but also that of civilians. Again, Indonesia's historic struggle for independence has played an essential part in shaping the country's defense outlook. During the war against the Dutch and Japan, the nascent Indonesian military fought alongside ordinary citizens to defeat colonialism. This victorious moment gave Indonesia a sense of confidence in its ability to defend itself against external threats. These early historical and geopolitical factors gave a significant impetus for the formation of Indonesia's national security outlook and foreign policy (Anwar, 1996).

With a strategic outlook that perceives threats mainly as emanating from within, Indonesian defense was principally inward-looking in posture, and the military apparatus has perceived its core duty as upholding the unity of the republic. Colonial experiences and national revolution during the Old Order leadership provided powerful

justification for the military's involvement in Indonesian politics. The Indonesian Armed Forces (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* [ABRI]) consistently saw itself as the people's soldiers and the relationship between the military and society as a key to maintaining national harmony and prosperity.

### **Indonesia's Concentric Circles**

Since the New Order regime of Suharto began in 1966, Indonesian foreign policy has been based on the "concentric circles" approach. This concept in Indonesian foreign policy gained currency notably when Mochtar Kusumaatmadja served as the Indonesian foreign minister from 1978 to 1988 (Anwar, 2013). The concept essentially dictates prioritizing Indonesian relations with its neighbors depending on their importance to the country's interests. This notion of the national interest radiating outward from the center is taken from the Javanese tradition in which the leader resides as the center of power. As applied to Indonesian foreign policy, the principle of concentric circles is composed of regional, organizational, and functional spheres. The regional sphere includes Indonesia's geographic location, the organizational sphere represents Indonesia's membership in international organizations as a means of achieving national interests, and the functional sphere relates to Indonesia's position in a global context. The concentric circles approach is not the only standard model for implementing Indonesian foreign policy, however. History informs that implementing Indonesian foreign policy depends on issue priorities at a given time and on more comprehensive geopolitical conditions (Wirengjurit, 2001).

The first concentric circle is Indonesia's immediate neighborhood and particularly its ASEAN partners which form a significant pillar of its foreign policy. The second concentric circle includes its Southwest Pacific neighbors, including all member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Southwest Pacific Dialogue, and the recently established Tripartite Consultation between Indonesia, Australia, and Timor Leste. The "ASEAN plus three" partners of Japan, China, and South Korea are included within the second concentric circle. Beyond this, Indonesia prides itself on its relations with the United States and European Union, its major economic partners. Finally, the third circle includes various third-world countries among which Indonesia has traditionally assumed itself to act as a leader.

The idea of concentric circles reflects how Indonesians view the outside world, offering valuable insight into how foreign policy is perceived and implemented. Suharto adopted "stability" as the primary vehicle for economic prosperity and political and social harmony. This is pursued by improving stability domestically and regionally. National stability together with regional stability should go hand in hand and support

each other. National stability can be achieved by eliminating any “threats, annoyances, obstacles, and challenges” that might cause a disturbance. Meanwhile, regional stability can be accomplished by nurturing Indonesia’s neighborhood, primarily through non-intervention. Thus, national and regional stability should construct national and regional “resilience” (Pedrason, 2018).

As Indonesia has perceived itself as the core of these concentric circles, it also sees itself as responsible for the stability of the entire system contained within them. Through this lens, the military was essential in creating national stability and resilience<sup>3</sup> by eradicating all “security disturbances” (Departemen Pertahanan dan Keamanan, 1982). While this doctrine was created by the New Order, its implementation is still relevant today. On the other hand, regional stability and peace should be based on sovereignty and not interfering with the affairs of other countries. External interference harms regional stability by allowing other players to take advantage of domestic conflicts to challenge a country’s rulers. To this end, Indonesia needed to contribute to regional peace and stability by not interfering in the affairs of its neighbors.

Similarly, Indonesia expects its neighbors to do the same by not interfering in its affairs. Apart from achieving economic prosperity, the country’s membership in ASEAN is also aimed at protecting its sovereignty and national unity. ASEAN is also necessary for Indonesia’s national and regional resilience, as national resilience is a prerequisite for regional resilience (Anwar, 1997). Indonesia has therefore prioritized cooperation in all fields with ASEAN member countries as a part of its concept of concentric circles as it works toward becoming a pillar of regional solidarity in Southeast Asia.

## **Indonesia’s Foreign Policy under Successive Presidents**

Foreign policy has always been an extension of national policies that is aimed at foreign audiences. It has been supposed time and again that there is an inseparable relationship between foreign policy and domestic politics and their relationship is reciprocal. Domestic politics provides an essential context within which foreign policy is formulated, while foreign policy is an instrument to achieve specific national

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<sup>3</sup>The Guidebook for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia on the Dual Functions of the ABRI (Buku Petunjuk Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia tentang Dwi Fungsi ABRI) states that national resilience is “a dynamic condition of the nation consisting of our capability, integrity, perseverance, and stamina in the face of all challenges, threats, obstacles, and disturbances, both external and internal, directly or indirectly endangering the integrity, identity, and continued existence of the nation-state” (Departemen Pertahanan dan Keamanan, 1982, pp. 13–15).

interests. Indonesia offers a unique case for this discussion due to a combination of three factors: (a) a strong sense of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, (b) the heterogeneous nature of its population, and (c) its preoccupation with national unity and territorial integrity.

Since the beginning of its independence, Indonesia's foreign policy has reflected and advanced a national interest based on core values, principles, and premises in parallel with a wide range of political, ideological, and cultural differences. Its policies of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism and the doctrine of an independent and active foreign policy have been two of its core characteristics (Hatta, 1953). Indonesia's foreign policy is also inseparable from the history of its struggle for independence (Hatta, 1958). The country experienced several difficult periods in which it struggled to gain international recognition due to a lack of support from the United States, which had allied with the Dutch, and this necessitated the country's self-reliance in seeking its independence. With its independence as a republic in 1945, Indonesia's founders adopted a philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) as the basis for a shared national identity. As a country formed from various ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural groups, this motto encapsulates the desire to bind together all peoples living across the archipelago and constitute a sense of Indonesian-ness among them.

The problem of nation-building has always been problematic for a nation-state like Indonesia, as the most serious threats faced by most third-world countries come from within rather than abroad (David, 1991). The fact that Indonesia was not a nation before independence has made its subsequent survival all the more dependent on national unity and territorial integrity. Despite being an asset, its status as an archipelago has also posed political and security concerns (Trihartono et al., 2021), and it has had many secessionist issues. Policymakers and analysts therefore believe that problems of nation-building are still ongoing. As Drake (1989) stated, "... Indonesia still has a long way to go in creating a fully integrated nation-state...." This view is inseparable from the country's strategic outlook that identifies its security first as a domestic matter. In its early years after gaining independence, Indonesia under President Sukarno adopted a high-profile foreign policy (Bunnell, 1966). This staunch and left-leaning foreign policy eventually led Indonesia out of the United Nations in 1965. Hence, the doctrine of President Sukarno's administration was active and independent. With its strong sense of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, President Sukarno's foreign policy was high in its profile and strong in solidarity with the "global south," rejecting the idea of East-West confrontation and initiating a non-aligned movement. This high-profile foreign policy of President Sukarno reflects a combination of anti-colonial attitudes and the failure to build national cohesion due to the country's many civil conflicts.



After coming into power in 1966, President Suharto showed a disinterest in foreign policy issues well until the 1990s. In stark contrast to his predecessor, Suharto chose to conduct a foreign policy that was low in profile under the first three decades of his New Order regime (1966–1998). Before the 1990s, “there was... less written about Indonesian foreign policy because there was less to write about” (Sukma, 1995, p. 304). Suharto’s strong anti-communism distanced him from China and was a tool for closer relations with Western powers. Suharto adhered to the principles of Indonesia’s strategic outlook through the means afforded by his military background. He also tried his best to implement the principle of concentric circles in his foreign policy with some adjustments (Suryadinata, 1996). For instance, Suharto took a more proactive role after the Cold War by putting institutionalizing ASEAN as the cornerstone of the country’s foreign policy (Anwar, 2010).

For Suharto, regional stability is a prerequisite for national stability. His stances and policies have therefore shown a certain opposition to the influence of great powers. Whereas Sukarno showed characteristics of xenophobia, Suharto demonstrated a foreign policy of “Sino-phobia.” His foreign policy made referred heavily to a historical “abuse of national pride” that leaders were determined to overcome. The early years of Indonesia’s foreign policy were therefore “bound to be preoccupied with the task of overcoming or making palatable the humiliating condition of weakness” (Weinstein, 1972, p. 365). Having recently gained independence, Indonesian leaders were especially sensitive to foreign interference from a hostile outside world. Therefore, efforts by major powers outside the region to seek dominance in Southeast Asia and exclude Indonesia were seen as violations of its independence.

B. J. Habibie became Indonesia’s transitional president following the fall of President Suharto in May 1998. While his office was short-lived and he dedicated most of his time to restoring Indonesia’s international image over the East Timor issue, President B. J. Habibie laid the foundation for the country’s human rights diplomacy (He, 2008; Singh, 2000, pp. 237–261). Habibie was followed by Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur. Wahid’s foreign policy during his almost two years of office was instead marked by an extensive revival of Indonesia’s role in bilateral and multilateral relations (Smith, 2000). This included a controversial issue plan to open diplomatic relations with Israel. His foreign policy also called for “united diplomacy” as he acted as the nation’s chief diplomat, visiting more than 80 countries to gain international support for Indonesian sovereign territory in the face of national disintegration. President Wahid was succeeded by Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of President Sukarno. Megawati visited a total of 27 countries during her term in office to gain international trust in Indonesia’s fight against national disintegration and human rights violations related to regional separatist movements. One common

thread in Indonesia's foreign policy during the Wahid and Megawati administrations was that Indonesia was in the process of democratic transformation and the increased influence of public and domestic political power over foreign policy decision-making (Dugis, 2017).

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took office in 2004 and began a foreign policy that is best described as charismatic. Unlike his predecessors, Yudhoyono took the lead with a substantive agenda. His was an independent, active, and omnidirectional approach according to his principle of "a million friends and zero enemies." Indonesia's objectives were chosen according to this spirit of bridging various interests and positions in the international arena (Fionna et al., 2018).

### **Joko Widodo's Strategic Pragmatism**

With Widodo's inauguration in 2014, there was considerable hope that this would increase Indonesia's status and global profile. In his speech on the 60th Anniversary of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in 2015, Widodo made a bold call for a reform of the global order in a moment that was reminiscent of Sukarno. Widodo's leadership style has differed greatly from his predecessor, however. Yudhoyono had strived in spite of the country's limitations to show a high profile by focusing on an identity as a democratic and moderate Islamic nation and taking a proactive role in various international institutions (Dharmaputra, 2019, p. 81). Widodo, on the other hand, has shown little interest in high-profile diplomacy, diplomatic formalities, or engagement in international forums. He has yet to attend or give a speech at the UN General Assembly since coming to office. Widodo's choice to rely on his then-Vice President Jusuf Kalla to represent Indonesia at international fora in his first five-year term did not go unnoticed. Some officials have noted the president's disdain for extensive travel, while others argued that his overseas presence is unnecessary to pursue the nation's interests. It is clear that Widodo has been selective in the international events he attends and shown a clear preference for economic forums like the G20 and the Belt and Road Initiative. His key priorities of promoting economic growth and infrastructure development are central to his focus on whoever has the most funds and meets the minimum requirements for investment. One scholar has argued that Indonesia's approach under Widodo is the one of "pragmatic equidistance" which "captures the idea of fully engaging one great power in various forms of cooperation — from economic to defense — while simultaneously both maintaining strategic autonomy and keeping equal balance with other great powers" (Laksmana, 2017, p. 113). In other words, "it is about how a developing country with a rising regional and global profile like

Indonesia can fully exploit the benefits of strategic partnerships with different great powers while maintaining autonomy and not being pegged as too close to one great power at the expense of another” (Laksmana, 2017, p. 113). President Widodo’s pragmatic style can be further seen in the following issues.

### **A “Non-ideological” Domestic Policy**

In his first and second terms, the Jokowi administration has been characterized by an orientation that is domestic-focused, populist, and seeking the benefits of friendship. Indonesia’s foreign policy is described as *pragmatic* in its posture and character, though there is no agreed-upon definition of the word. This pragmatic foreign policy has been marked by a willingness to solve the country’s major problem through a non-ideological approach. President Widodo’s foreign policy aims to boost the economy and make “utility-maximizing decisions” like an individual in the *homo economicus* model (Phua, 2022, p. 1). Policymakers throughout history have utilized pragmatism in foreign affairs according to their unique circumstances. Phua (2022, p. 109) holds that each state has used unique “‘varieties of pragmatism,’ showing that while the situation of each state was different, they were nevertheless able to produce similar pragmatic outcomes.”

To learn from Widodo’s foreign policy, we must look at the determinants affecting his decisions. Indonesian presidents are the drivers of the foreign policy-making process, and foreign policy is influenced by their beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotions, traits, styles, memories, and national- and self-conceptions. A president is a microcosm of variables that shape the decision-making process, including “culture, history, geography, economics, political institutions, ideology, [and] demographics, and innumerable other factors shape the societal context in which the decision makers operates” (Hudson, 2005, p. 10). While Indonesia’s foreign policy is not a unique example of how a president dominates foreign policy, it does offer a typical example. The decision flows from how its leaders understand what is happening at a given time.

Indonesian presidents have interpreted and implemented foreign policy according to their preferences, personality, style of leadership, and personal background without violating the constitution or state ideology. As shown elsewhere, every Indonesian president has a way of translating free and active principles and shaping foreign policy at a given time. The process of Indonesian foreign policy also fits the poliheuristic theory of decision-making (PHT) proposed by Mintz (2004), which explains how the leaders see domestic politics as “the essence of decisions” by “simplifying complex foreign policy decisions.” Mintz contends that decision-makers employ two methods in which “rejecting alternatives that are unacceptable, they select an alternative from

the subset of remaining alternatives while maximizing benefits and minimizing risks” (2004, pp. 6–7).

The correlation between decision-makers and their worldviews is clear and explanatory. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) first introduced the concept of *weltanschauung*, a comprehensive worldview or framework through which individuals interpret and understand reality. To Naugle (2002, p. 2), a worldview is “more basic, more fundamental, more determinative than any of these matters” as it “...provides the philosophical foundations of leadership” (Auxier, 2015, p. 2).

President Widodo’s foreign policy decisions are based on his understanding of foreign policy in specific circumstances, and his worldview has shaped him into a developmental leader who prioritizes action. He also lacks experience in diplomacy, making him naturally less interested in matters of foreign policy. For Widodo, foreign policy is a means to increase Indonesia’s economic growth and make it competitive globally. In his second term in office, Widodo has focused on delivering tangible benefits to the domestic economy. His pragmatic style which reflects various foreign policy decisions based on profit-and-loss considerations derives from his background as a businessman. This perspective has affected his diplomatic style, which prefers a bilateral rather than multilateral approach.

### “Market” Diplomacy

President Widodo’s domestic-oriented and “pro-people” policies can be seen from his *Nawa Cita* (nine aspirations), an agenda he used during his 2014 campaign. Widodo emphasized “the realization of sovereign, independent, national identity, and mutual-based cooperation” in which foreign policy is driven by domestic affairs. Presidential Chief of Staff Moeldoko has stated that the President always prioritizes policies for the people’s welfare (“Setahun Jokowi-Ma’ruf,” 2020). Similarly, a document from the Kementrian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia) (2019) asserts that Indonesia’s foreign policy prioritizes its identity as an archipelagic country. This identity is the foundation for implementing diplomacy and building international cooperation while strengthening a middle-power diplomacy that places Indonesia as a regional power with selective global engagement.

Following the *Nawa Cita*, President Widodo outlined his priorities of border diplomacy; strengthening the country’s role in ASEAN; strengthening economic diplomacy; protecting the rights and safety of Indonesian workers, citizens, and legal entities abroad; and engagement in global cooperation (Kementrian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2019, p. 37). These priorities aim to improve Indonesia’s leadership in international forums. Economic and, particularly, trade diplomacy have

become the focus of Widodo's foreign policy as a part of his focus on economic development.

The country's economic diplomacy uses international political tools to achieve economic goals through various forms of international cooperation. According to the 2015–2018 Strategic Plan of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

... political advantages can be used to gain economic benefits among others through increasing exports of goods/services or future market expansion. Therefore, in the next five years, Indonesia's economic diplomacy focuses on supporting the elimination of non-tariff barriers in trade with crucial [traditional] markets and opening prospective markets. (Kementrian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2019, p. 40)

As Widodo's economic diplomacy gives economic and business weight to diplomatic activities (Haryono, 2019, p. 51), he has asked his diplomats and representatives overseas to focus on it both as marketers and opportunity seekers. Opportunities related to investment and exports are being prioritized, as they are what Indonesia currently needs to boost its economy and reduce its dependence on imported goods (Kusumawardhani, 2020). For example, the country aims to improve its trade diplomacy by harnessing the untapped markets of Belgium, France, India, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, Spain, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vietnam. At the same time, it seeks to strengthen relations with the existing markets of Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and China (including Hong Kong).

Economic diplomacy is a response to a 16.59% decline in Indonesia's exports from 2011 to 2015 (Sabaruddin, 2016, pp. 205–206). President Widodo has therefore sought to strengthen trade diplomacy especially where it offers the most advantages. Thus, foreign policy is being conducted according to his preoccupation with the country's economic progress. In contrast to his predecessor's approach of "a million friends, zero enemies," Widodo's administration is no longer interested in image-building, and *bebas dan aktif* is understood as the befriending of countries that can provide Indonesia with benefits. He asserts, "What is the benefit of making friends if it is aimed merely at image-building and if it risks our national interests? It does not mean that we are creating enemies. It is just that we will not be close [with countries providing no benefit to Indonesia]" (Bland, 2020; Witular, 2014).

Economic diplomacy is instrumental in bringing Indonesia out of a middle-income trap, and the country must befriend those who can benefit its interests. Indonesia decided to remain neutral in the US–China rivalry to reiterate its stance of independence and benefit from both countries. Okano-Heijmans (2011) stated that "[t]he practices of economic diplomacy were well-established long before foreign policy and diplomacy we know today." She added, "Governments are more likely to employ

economic tools in pursuing foreign-policy interests when the legitimacy and power of existing structures of international cooperation decrease” (Okano-Heijmans, 2011, p. 13). President Widodo sees that the US–China rivalry is not conducive to the world economy as it could lead to another Cold War (Arbar, 2020).

Widodo has advised that Indonesia must take advantage of the trade war, expressing regret that Chinese companies relocated their operations to Southeast Asia and bypassed Indonesia in favor of Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia. He demanded his cabinet to work harder by affirming: “Don’t act like bureaucrats, demanding to be served...” (Yuniar, 2019).

### **Chinese Foreign Direct Investment**

President Widodo has focused on parties that are prepared to provide funds and foreign direct investment (FDI) to promote economic growth. He has continued this FDI-friendly policy since taking office in 2014. He therefore sees China as a beneficial ally, and relations have improved dramatically during his administration. Bilateral trade in 2020 reached US\$78.37 billion with imports from Indonesia increasing by 10.13% over the previous year, indicating that trade is becoming more balanced. Chinese FDI in Indonesia has reached US\$2 billion, an increase of 86.5% over the previous year (Qian, 2021). Widodo has asked all related ministries to seek more opportunities for FDI. His mobilizing of diplomats as economic agents indicates an urgency to make use of their formerly low-profile jobs in Indonesian foreign policy. Widodo urged diplomats to be more innovative, requiring critical performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate their ability to bring investment (Hanni Sofia 2020). Diplomats are also required to conduct trade policy intelligence by observing economic policies implemented by local governments (Wangke, 2015, p. v).

Despite a long-standing mistrust toward China due to historical factors, President Widodo sees China as more beneficial than the United States, especially concerning cooperation in investment, trade, and tourism. Indonesia joined the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to materialize concrete outcomes in the form of many infrastructure projects funded by China. The value of China–Indonesia trade skyrocketed from US\$8.7 billion in 2005 to US\$48.2 billion at the beginning of his administration in 2015. Indonesia seeks further Chinese investment, placing the country as its third-largest foreign investor after Singapore and Japan. China has also replaced Japan as Indonesia’s largest trading partner (“Relasi Indonesia-China,” 2019). The government has also cooperated with China to invest in many major state infrastructure projects, including the Jakarta–Bandung high-speed railway.

President Widodo has also focused on infrastructure for four reasons: (1) building infrastructure means building civilization; (2) it increases the country's competitiveness; (3) it is an effort to realize social justice for all Indonesians; and (4) it increases connectivity among regions, provinces, and islands. Widodo immediately increased the state's infrastructure budget to 14.64%, and he is aware that the economy will not grow without proper infrastructure. Growth has been slow if not stagnant since the 1998 Economic Crisis, however. According to a 2007 World Bank report, Indonesia since the crisis has sloped down in the quality of its infrastructure, and its competitiveness has fallen far below that of China, Thailand, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka since 1996 (The World Bank, 2007). It is therefore no wonder that Widodo has prioritized infrastructure, and he has expressly invited Chinese cooperation on three megaprojects: (1) an integrated economic corridor, connectivity, industry, and tourism project in North Sumatra; (2) investment in North Sulawesi to improve the quality of infrastructure in Bitung–Manado–Gorontalo by building access roads, railways, ports, and airports; and (3) cooperation opportunities for investment in energy infrastructure projects and the development of power plants in North Kalimantan Province (“Jokowi Tawarkan Tiga Megaproyek,” 2017).

The relationship between the two is increasingly positive, and they are approaching the comprehensive strategic agreement signed in 2013 under the Yudhoyono administration. Although Indonesia is still striving to reduce its trade deficit, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi has stated that exports to China went from US\$12.32 billion in the first half of 2019 to US\$13.77 billion in 2020, an increase of 11.74%. With this increase in exports and an 11.86% decrease in imports from China, Indonesia's deficit was reduced by 46.08%. Meanwhile, China's investment is still the second largest after Singapore. For the first semester of 2020, there was an increase in investment from US\$2.2 billion to US\$2.4 billion compared to the first semester of 2019 (Berty, 2020).

Marsudi commemorated the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations with China with a visit on August 20, 2020, where he held talks on cooperation in the vaccine sector and the economy during and after COVID-19. Chief Executive of the COVID-19 Handling Committee and National Economic Recovery Erick Thohir stated that the mutually beneficial cooperation was on an economic transaction and a transfer of medical technology and knowledge between Sinovac and Bio Farma. During the visit, Indonesia and China signed a Preliminary Agreement of Purchase and Supply of Bulk Product of the COVID-19 Vaccine between Indonesian Pharmaceutical Company PT Bio Farma and the Chinese Company Sinovac. Sinovac is committed to providing bulk vaccine supplies of up to 40 million doses from November 2020 to March 2021 (“Sinovac Komitmen,” 2020). This collaboration succeeded in distributing raw

vaccine materials from Sinovac since the end of 2020 and allowing widespread use of the vaccine since 2021. Trade and investment cooperation between China and Indonesia have grown in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating a strong resilience and an enormous potential while both countries oppose “vaccine nationalism.” China will continue to collaborate with Indonesia on vaccines to help build regional vaccine production centers and jointly fight the “immunization gap” (“China dan Indonesia,” 2021).

## Conclusion

With their significant power in decision-making, Indonesia’s leaders have dynamically implemented the country’s foreign policy according to their preferences. The doctrine of *bebas dan aktif* has given presidents flexibility in their foreign policy so long as they do not violate the national interest based on the country’s constitution and ideology. President Widodo’s foreign policy has focused more on dealing with trade and investment to boost economic growth, refocusing on domestic interests. The administration indicated that its diplomacy is focused on the people. This style of diplomacy has been described as “down to earth” and characterized by “pro-people” policies and agendas. By focusing on the role of diplomats as agents, Indonesian foreign policy may provide insights into the role of the agent rather than the state in maximizing economic benefits.

President Joko Widodo’s ascendancy in Indonesian foreign policy proves that Indonesian presidents drive foreign policy-making. Foreign policy is influenced by beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotions, traits, styles, memories, and national- and self-conceptions. To this end, Indonesia’s is not a unique example of how presidents dominate the implementation of foreign policy. As the prime decision-maker and implementer, however, Widodo’s leadership offers a typical example of how leaders direct foreign policy.

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