

Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is a prolonged conflict that began during the Cold War between the Western bloc, in this case NATO led by the United States, and the Eastern bloc, namely the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union. In 1999, during the reign of President Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, a political revolution called Glasnost and Perestroika occurred which resulted in the division of the Soviet Union into the Russian State and several small countries that separated themselves. Ukraine as a free country to cooperate in security with the Western bloc, to protect its country from Russian influence. In addition, there are minority groups in Luhansk and Donest who are ethnic Russians who want to join Russia. This prompted Russia to launch a special operation which was followed by a full-scale operation in Ukraine. The purpose of this study is to analyze Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach, according to Sugiyono (2022), the descriptive qualitative research method is a study based on the philosophy of postpositivism used to examine the conditions of natural objects where researchers are key instruments. The results of the study show that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a conflict of interest between large countries that want to expand their influence to other countries. Indonesia's diplomatic efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict began with President Joko Widodo communicating directly with Ukrainian President Zelensky and Russian President Putin to resolve the conflict between the two countries and inviting them to attend the G20 meeting. Indonesia's role as the holder of the presidency and host of the G20 Summit in 2022. In organizing the G20 in 2022, geopolitical conditions and the global security crisis are among the issues discussed. Therefore, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine automatically becomes a topic of discussion.

Keywords: *Diplomacy, War, Conflict, Russia, Ukraine*

INTRODUCTION

History: Russia and Ukraine have a related historical background because they were both breakaway countries from the Soviet Union which collapsed in 1991. This made Russia see Ukraine as a "separate brother" so that there was a historical justification for invading Ukraine (Shulman, 2004). Economy: The adjacent territories of Russia and Ukraine make the economies of the two countries interdependent. This happens because Russia is a gas supplier to Europe from pipes routed through Ukraine. On the other hand, Ukraine also has several strategic port locations such as the Black Sea as one of the most populous ports in the world (Susetio et al., 2022). Not only that, Ukraine is also known as a country that has abundant natural resource reserves, especially in the mining and agricultural sectors (Atok, 2022).

Political-Security: Ukraine's more pro-western attitude and the potential to join as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO is a threat to Russia (Pridham, 2014). In this context, the territory of Ukraine should function as a buffer zone or separation zone between Russia and NATO which are "rivals". However, if Ukraine actually joins NATO, the separation zone disappears and could threaten Russia's security (Widiasa, 2018). That is why Russia considers its invasion of Ukraine an effort to prevent even bigger security problems.

Separatism: Since 2014, the Donbas region which includes Donetsk and Luhansk has experienced conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatist groups who declared independence from Ukraine (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023). Russia actively supports this separatist group with military, logistical and political assistance with the justification that the

group is ethnically Russian. In the end, Russia's invasion of Ukraine also aimed to support the separatist actions of pro-Russian groups there (Ginano & Riyanto, 2022).

Then, on February 24 2022, President Putin, via a media broadcast, gave a speech containing an announcement about Russia's military operations into Ukrainian territory. Following the announcement, Russian army troops mobilized to invade Ukraine. This attack targeted strategic Ukrainian cities such as Berdyansk, Kharkiv, Odesa, Sumy, and even parts of the Kyiv region as the capital of Ukhantororaina (Saeri et al., 2023). In the end, war broke out between Russia and Ukraine.

The large military force deployed by both countries, coupled with the increasingly sophisticated development of destructive military technology, has made this conflict a humanitarian crisis. Based on data by Statista (2024), this conflict has claimed 30,457 civilian victims in a period of 2 years. Of this figure, 19,875 people were injured and 10,582 civilians died. Apart from that, there were 1,885 minors who did not escape becoming victims as a result of this conflict.

Indonesia's role in handling the Russia and Ukraine conflict began with telephone communication between President Joko Widodo and the leaders of the two countries, namely President Zelensky and President Putin, for conflict resolution and an invitation to attend the G20 meeting in Bali.

Previous research was conducted by Atok, F. in 2022 with the title Analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian Conflict. Research was also conducted by Ginano, R. S., & Riyanto, S. in 2022 with the title Russification In Modern Days: Analyzing Georgia And Ukraine Separatists As Russia Strategy Against Nato's Expansion.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research according to Cresswell (2014) is a research method that uses ideas, assumptions and frameworks of thought as a starting point that influence the study of research problems related to the meaning that individuals or collectively give to a community or social problem

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian Diplomacy

Indonesia's diplomatic efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict began with Indonesia's role as holder of the presidency and host of the G20 Summit in 2022. During the implementation of the 2022 G20, geopolitical conditions and the global security crisis were among the issues. Therefore, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine automatically became a topic of discussion (Julian, 2022). This is a challenge faced by Indonesia, especially because several G20 member countries side with one of the conflicting parties, such as the United States and France which supports Ukraine and China which supports Russia.

Then, there was a push from Western (Pro-Ukrainian) countries to exclude Russia from the G20 Summit and invite Ukraine instead. As a result, this pressure brought Indonesia into a dilemma, because it wanted to maintain neutrality and did not want to exacerbate tensions (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023). This condition prompted Indonesia to initiate proactive diplomatic efforts, with the aim of finding a peaceful solution and easing tensions between the two countries.

First track diplomacy

One of the most common forms of diplomacy in the international world is diplomacy at the government level. Another term for inter-governmental diplomacy is first track diplomacy. Wehrenfennig (2008) defines first track diplomacy as a traditional form of diplomacy through discussions between heads of state or government officials with the aim of finding conflict resolution. Thus, first track diplomacy requires diplomats to identify sources of conflict and seek peace in a peaceful manner for the common good (De Magalhães & Pereira, 1988).

Indonesia's diplomacy efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict are a form of first track diplomacy where the main actor is the government. In this case, the Indonesian government communicated and negotiated directly with both the Russian government and the Ukrainian government. The Indonesian government carries out this diplomacy through telephone channels and direct visits to both countries (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023). The aim of diplomacy is to fight for humanitarian issues.

First, via telephone, President Joko Widodo communicated with President Zelensky on April 27 2022 (Hantoro, 2022). In this conversation, President Zelensky explained the developments and dynamics of the conflict from Ukraine's perspective to President Joko Widodo. President Zelensky also used this opportunity to ask for Indonesian assistance, especially weapons assistance. Responding to this, President Joko Widodo said that Indonesia would only provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. This is because providing weapons assistance is not in accordance with the constitutional mandate and the principles of Indonesia's free and active foreign policy. Apart from that, President Joko Widodo also invited Ukraine to attend the G20 Summit which will be held soon (Komala et al., 2023).

After communicating with President Zelensky, President Joko Widodo also called President Putin on April 28 2022. Through this conversation, it was President Putin's turn to explain the situation conflict from Russia's point of view. President Putin said that negotiations with Ukraine would still be ongoing. President Joko Widodo then expressed his hope that the Russia-Ukraine conflict would soon find a solution. President Joko Widodo also invited Russia to attend the G20 Summit. During the conversation, President Putin mentioned that Russia would attend the G20 Summit hosted by Indonesia.

The next stage of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts is to visit the two countries directly. On June 29 2022, President Joko Widodo paid a diplomatic visit to Ukraine to meet with President Zelensky (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b). Through this meeting, President Joko Widodo reiterated Indonesia's commitment to assisting in the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Not only that, the visit also celebrated 30 years of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Ukraine, and noted that Indonesia was the first Asian country to visit Ukraine after the Russian invasion (Komala et al., 2023).

During the meeting between President Joko Widodo and President Zelensky, there were four main issues that became the topic of discussion. First, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine must be ended immediately in order to achieve global peace. Second, President Zelensky's request for President Joko Widodo to convey a message to President Putin to open supply chain routes including exports and imports of food. Third, there is a need for stability in the price of basic food costs and energy availability. Fourth, President Joko Widodo's invitation to President Zelensky to attend the G20 Summit in Bali (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b).

After meeting President Zelensky, President Joko Widodo rushed to Russia to meet President Putin on June 30 2022 (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a). The meeting, which was held at the Kremlin Palace, discussed peace and humanitarian issues in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. President Joko Widodo then expressed concern about the threat to the global food supply chain which threatens the economies of various countries. Thus, Indonesia is ready to act as a mediator between the two countries to end the conflict.

President Joko Widodo and President Putin also discussed two specific matters as the topic of the diplomatic meeting. First, Indonesia conveyed Ukraine's message to Russia to open and maintain the security of food supply routes, so that the availability of food supplies is maintained. President Putin responded to this request by committing to opening Ukraine's wheat export route and ensuring that the two countries' commodities are able to enter the world supply chain. Second, Indonesia also invited Russia to take part in the G20 Summit, despite criticism from western countries. As a result, President Putin at that time confirmed that Russia would attend the G20 Summit in Indonesia. Not only that, President Putin also invited Indonesia to cooperate in the fields of rail transportation and nuclear energy for the development of the Indonesian Archipelago Capital project (Komala et al., 2023; Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In the end, despite Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict still continues to this day. Apart from that, Russia and Ukraine were also not present directly at the 2022 G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia. However, Indonesia as the holder of the G20 presidency in 2022 has shown its commitment to realizing peace through first track diplomacy or government level diplomacy. In this way, Indonesia is recognized as a neutral and credible country in mediating conflicts, and its efforts have paved the way for the opening of food supply routes to maintain the availability of global food supplies.

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