

INDONESIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN ASEAN: A CONCEPTUAL-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY PARADIGM

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Abstract

*This study examines Indonesia's Foreign Policy in ASEAN through a conceptual-critical analysis of the national peace and security paradigm. It explores how Indonesia reconciles its normative commitment to peace rooted in the *bebas dan aktif* (free and active) doctrine and Pancasila values with the pragmatic requirements of national defense and regional leadership. Using a qualitative, literature-based approach, this research synthesizes academic works, ASEAN documents, and official Indonesian policy statements to analyze the interaction between identity, norms, and security imperatives. The findings reveal that Indonesia's foreign policy embodies a hybrid paradigm combining constructivist ideals of peace, cooperation, and mediation with realist imperatives of deterrence and sovereignty. Within ASEAN, Indonesia positions itself as a peace entrepreneur, promoting dialogue, preventive diplomacy, and regional consensus as instruments of stability. However, this normative leadership is challenged by structural realities such as great-power competition, maritime disputes in the South China Sea, and non-traditional security threats like terrorism and migration. The study concludes that Indonesia's peaceful diplomacy is both an ethical commitment and a strategic instrument for maintaining domestic and regional stability. To sustain its leadership, Indonesia must strengthen institutional capacity for mediation, integrate peace diplomacy with credible defense preparedness, and align domestic governance with its international peace narrative.*

Keywords: *Indonesia foreign policy, ASEAN, Peace paradigm,*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia occupies a pivotal position in Southeast Asia: a large archipelagic state balancing external pressures and leadership ambitions within ASEAN. Its foreign policy, guided by the doctrine of *bebas dan aktif* (free and active), seeks independence from major power blocs while promoting diplomacy and conflict resolution. Through ASEAN, Indonesia aims to mediate disputes and strengthen regional stability amid diverse political systems and security capacities. Yet, this ideal of peace often clashes with imperatives of national security and geopolitical competition. ASEAN functions as both a diplomatic arena and a strategic

buffer. Since its founding in 1967, it has served Indonesia's interest in preventing external interference, mitigating Cold War divisions, and fostering cooperation. The *free and active* doctrine has allowed Jakarta to champion principles of non-interference, consensus, and regional identity. Under Joko Widodo's presidency, initiatives like the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) demonstrate Indonesia's drive to maintain order amid maritime tensions, great-power rivalry, and non-traditional threats such as terrorism and climate change (Zulkifli, Wibisono, & Perwita, 2023).

Indonesia's peaceful diplomacy manifests concretely in regional crises. In the South China Sea, Indonesia, though not a claimant, faces tensions around the Natuna Islands, where its Exclusive Economic Zone overlaps with China's "nine-dash line." Jakarta promotes confidence-building and a Code of Conduct while enhancing maritime enforcement (Gasim, 2022). In Myanmar, Indonesia has employed ASEAN mechanisms, including the Five-Point Consensus, to address humanitarian and political crises after the 2021 coup (Kartiwa & Jalianty, 2022). These cases reflect Indonesia's attempt to reconcile diplomacy with sovereignty protection. However, balancing ideals and realities creates contradictions. While ASEAN norms call for restraint and consensus, sovereignty threats compel Indonesia toward more assertive measures, such as responses to Chinese incursions near Natuna (Wahid, Perwita & Thamrin, 2022). Thus, Indonesia continually navigates between roles as norm-setter, defender of national interests, and actor constrained by domestic politics and external power rivalries.

Non-traditional threats like pandemics, cyberattacks, and climate change further test ASEAN's soft diplomacy and Indonesia's regional leadership. The tension between ASEAN's normative limits and the need for swift action underscores the complexity of Indonesia's foreign policy paradigm where peace ideals must coexist with security pragmatism. This research critically examines Indonesia's foreign policy paradigm in ASEAN, exploring how peace ideals and national security imperatives interact. It draws upon case studies, policy documents (e.g., AOIP, defence diplomacy), and theoretical frameworks of constructivism and security theory to reveal how Indonesia balances identity-driven norms and strategic necessities.

Indonesia's diplomacy reflects both normative aspiration and strategic calculation. Constructivist theory, particularly Wendt (1992; 1999), illuminates how Indonesia's identity rooted in anti-colonialism, Pancasila, and regional solidarity shapes its commitment to peaceful dispute resolution. Wendt's notion that "anarchy is what states make of it" explains why Indonesia's prioritization of consensus and non-interference is not mere rhetoric but a constitutive element of its foreign policy identity. This helps clarify Jakarta's preference for dialogue over hard balancing, even amid external pressures. Security theory complements

this view. Jervis's (1978) security dilemma highlights how defensive measures can provoke mistrust, complicating Indonesia's efforts to defend sovereignty while sustaining ASEAN harmony. Buzan (1991) expands the security concept beyond military defence to include societal and political dimensions explaining how Indonesia's domestic vulnerabilities (e.g., separatism, social divisions) influence foreign policy. Combining Wendt and Buzan suggests a *conditional norm persistence*: Indonesia upholds ASEAN's peace norms until insecurity forces reinterpretation, blending diplomacy with deterrence.

ASEAN scholarship, particularly Acharya (2001), reinforces this synthesis. His concept of a Southeast Asian "security community" shows that ASEAN norms evolve through interaction enabling cooperation yet constraining rapid responses. Indonesia embodies this duality: invoking ASEAN's normative language to legitimate peaceful engagement while occasionally asserting defence measures to uphold sovereignty. Empirical studies (Sukma, 2017; Laksmana, 2017) confirm that domestic identity debates and civil–military dynamics periodically recalibrate Indonesia's peace-oriented diplomacy toward defence readiness. Taken together, the literature provides a conceptual lens for understanding Indonesia's national peace and security paradigm as a *hybrid identity*: peace-oriented yet strategically adaptive. Constructivism explains the persistence of Indonesia's normative diplomacy within ASEAN, while security theory elucidates the pragmatic adjustments necessitated by material threats. The interplay of these frameworks reveals that Indonesia's foreign policy is not a static adherence to ASEAN ideals but a dynamic negotiation between regional identity and national defence imperatives anchoring its role as both a norm entrepreneur and a security actor in Southeast Asia.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a conceptual-critical analysis design. This approach is most appropriate for understanding the philosophical and normative dimensions of Indonesia's foreign policy, particularly how the ideals of peace and security are constructed, interpreted, and practiced in the context of ASEAN regionalism. As the research aims to bridge conceptual frameworks with policy realities, qualitative methods enable deep interpretation of texts, discourse, and institutional behavior, focusing on meanings, values, and normative commitments rather than numerical generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The conceptual-critical analysis design is grounded in the tradition of critical international relations scholarship, which interrogates the assumptions underlying foreign policy doctrines and their practical implications. This design involves two analytical layers which are the conceptual analysis that examines the normative and theoretical underpinnings of Indonesia's "peace paradigm," and the critical reflection that assesses how these ideals are

operationalized in ASEAN's regional security dynamics. The conceptual layer draws from constructivist theory, which posits that state behavior is shaped not only by material interests but also by identity, norms, and intersubjective meanings (Wendt, 1999). The critical layer, meanwhile, engages with security theory and critical peace studies, questioning how Indonesia's peace-oriented diplomacy balances moral commitments with the pragmatic imperatives of defense and sovereignty (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

This research utilizes a literature review design, focusing on the systematic collection, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant secondary sources. The primary data sources include academic journal articles, books on Southeast Asian foreign policy, ASEAN official documents, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publications, and national strategic policy papers. By combining these diverse sources, the research ensures both theoretical and empirical depth. Literature review methodology enables the researcher to identify patterns, theoretical debates, and conceptual tensions across different scholarly interpretations of Indonesia's foreign policy (Snyder, 2019). The data corpus includes not only scholarly analyses but also official communiqués, speeches, and strategic documents, such as the *ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint*, the *Indonesian Foreign Policy White Paper*, and the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)*, all of which reveal Indonesia's framing of peace and security (ASEAN, 2019).

The data analysis technique employed is content analysis combined with critical reflection. Content analysis allows systematic interpretation of textual materials to uncover latent meanings, policy orientations, and recurring themes (Krippendorff, 2018). In this study, the analysis begins with the identification of key concepts, such as "bebas-aktif" (independent and active), "peace diplomacy," "regional leadership," and "security community" which are then categorized according to their manifestation in official discourse and academic interpretations. Each concept is examined for its ideological and strategic dimensions, revealing how Indonesia constructs a narrative of peaceful engagement while simultaneously responding to regional security pressures, such as the South China Sea dispute, maritime security threats, and great-power competition (Emmers, 2014; Caballero-Anthony, 2016).

The critical reflection component evaluates the congruence between Indonesia's peace-oriented foreign policy paradigm and the realities of regional security practice. This stage involves contrasting the normative ideals espoused in Indonesia's diplomatic rhetoric with the actual strategic behaviors and constraints observed in ASEAN's security architecture. The analysis explores whether Indonesia's emphasis on consensus, dialogue, and non-interference strengthens or limits ASEAN's collective ability to manage conflicts. It also critically examines how Indonesia navigates the tension between maintaining its normative

identity as a promoter of peace and responding to the realpolitik pressures of safeguarding sovereignty and regional influence (Gindarsah, 2015).

Furthermore, this research applies triangulation to ensure validity and reliability. By cross-referencing interpretations from different types of sources such as academic literature, ASEAN policy documents, and Indonesian official statements, the study mitigates bias and reinforces analytical consistency (Yin, 2018). The triangulated approach allows for the identification of both continuity and change in Indonesia's foreign policy discourse over time, especially in relation to shifting regional dynamics and evolving global order. Through this methodology, the research not only reconstructs Indonesia's peace paradigm conceptually but also evaluates its critical implications for ASEAN's political-security community and Indonesia's national strategic posture.

In essence, the chosen qualitative, conceptual-critical, and literature-based methodology is designed to illuminate the interaction between Indonesia's foreign policy ideals and regional realities. It positions Indonesia's peace paradigm not as a static doctrine but as an evolving construct shaped by historical experience, identity formation, and regional engagement. The combined use of content analysis and critical reflection thus enables a comprehensive understanding of how Indonesia operationalizes peace as both a value and an instrument in managing security challenges within ASEAN.

3. RESULT

Table 1. Key Dimensions of Indonesia's Peace Paradigm in Foreign Policy

Dimension	Description	Illustrative Evidence
Foundational Values (Pancasila and Bebas-Aktif)	Serves as the moral and strategic base for Indonesia's diplomacy; stresses independence, peaceful coexistence, and multilateral engagement.	Emphasis on dialogue, non-alignment, and active participation in global and regional institutions.
Normative Leadership in ASEAN	Promotes regional norms of non-interference, consensus, and cooperation as part of Indonesia's diplomatic identity.	Advocacy for the "ASEAN Way" and creation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
Peaceful Mediation and Conflict Resolution	Uses dialogue and consensus-building to resolve disputes regionally.	Active role in Myanmar's crisis diplomacy and peacekeeping operations.

Dimension	Description	Illustrative Evidence
Pragmatic Security Adaptation	Balances peace ideals with defence modernization and sovereignty protection.	Maritime patrols around Natuna Islands; maritime law enforcement enhancement.
Flexible Application Across Administrations	Shifts emphasis according to leadership style and external context.	From post-Suharto democratization to Jokowi's strategic hedging diplomacy.

Table 2. Major Security Challenges in the ASEAN Region

Security Challenge	Nature of the Threat	Regional Impact	ASEAN/Indonesia's Response
South China Sea Disputes	Overlapping maritime claims, "nine-dash line," and naval standoffs.	Threatens regional stability, navigation, and ASEAN unity.	Promotion of Code of Conduct; AOIP for inclusive dialogue.
Great Power Rivalry (U.S.–China)	Strategic competition and influence contests in Southeast Asia.	Divides ASEAN and pressures small states to take sides.	Neutral hedging, ASEAN centrality, diversified diplomacy.
Terrorism and Transnational Extremism	Regional terrorist networks exploiting porous borders.	Challenges law enforcement and deradicalization.	Counterterrorism cooperation; intelligence-sharing platforms.
Irregular Migration and Human Trafficking	Displacement, smuggling, and cross-border human rights abuses.	Humanitarian crises and regional governance challenges.	Regional task forces, Bali Process cooperation.
Maritime Security and IUU Fishing	Illegal fishing, piracy, and environmental degradation.	Economic loss and ecological stress on coastal communities.	Joint naval patrols, capacity building, and marine governance.

Table 3. The Paradox of Peaceful Foreign Policy

Aspect	Normative Ideal	Realist Constraint	Illustrative Example
Diplomatic Idealism vs. Strategic Survival	Prioritizes peace, dialogue, and non-coercion.	Requires deterrence and defence preparedness.	Maritime build-up despite peace rhetoric.
Domestic Consensus vs. Security Pressures	Uses peace narrative to maintain political legitimacy.	Public demands stronger defence amid external threats.	Debates on Natuna patrols and military funding.
Institutional Norms vs. Power Politics	Relies on ASEAN's consensus-based multilateralism.	Great-power competition bypasses ASEAN mechanisms.	U.S.–China tensions over Indo-Pacific strategy.
Soft Diplomacy vs. Material Credibility	Soft power through peacebuilding and mediation.	Lack of hard power may invite coercion.	Balancing AOIP with bilateral defence cooperation.

Table 4. Conflict Resolution as a Foreign Policy Instrument

Function	Strategic Purpose	Example of Application	Policy Outcome
Preventive Diplomacy	Avoid escalation and maintain ASEAN unity.	Indonesian facilitation in Myanmar crisis.	Prevented further regional division and legitimized ASEAN's mediating role.
Peace Mediation	Transform internal or regional conflicts into dialogue frameworks.	Aceh Peace Process (2005).	Reinforced Indonesia's image as peacebuilder.
Norm Diffusion and Localization	Embed peace values in regional institutions.	AOIP, ARF, ADMM-Plus initiatives.	Institutionalized cooperative security norms.
Capacity Building and Defence Diplomacy	Enhance institutional resilience through non-military means.	UN peacekeeping participation.	Improved crisis management and professionalization.

Function	Strategic Purpose	Example of Application	Policy Outcome
Strategic Deterrence through Cooperation	Create high political costs for aggression.	ASEAN joint patrols and maritime confidence-building.	Reinforced credibility of peace paradigm.

4. DISCUSSION

Indonesia's foreign policy in ASEAN reflects a sophisticated synthesis between normative commitment and pragmatic adaptation. The "peace paradigm," as evidenced in the results, functions as a dual instrument anchoring diplomacy in moral legitimacy while preserving strategic flexibility. Rooted in Pancasila and the bebas-aktif doctrine, Indonesia's external orientation upholds an image of independence and moderation (Wicaksana & Karim, 2022). These foundational values shape Indonesia's approach to international politics as a moral actor rather than a coercive power, a perspective deeply embedded in its historical experience of anti-colonialism and regional leadership.

However, the tables illustrate that this paradigm operates within a complex environment characterized by security challenges and power asymmetries. As Table 2 demonstrates, ASEAN's regional landscape combines traditional disputes, such as the South China Sea conflict, with non-traditional threats including terrorism, migration, and maritime insecurity. Indonesia's diplomacy thus unfolds within what Acharya (2004) calls a "norm localization process", where universal norms like peace and democracy are adapted to fit regional realities. The AOIP and ASEAN Regional Forum embody this adaptive model institutions that internalize peace norms while responding to new strategic pressures.

The first major finding concerns the hybrid nature of Indonesia's peace paradigm. The data show that Jakarta's diplomacy is neither pacifist nor purely defensive but hybrid and conditional. Indonesia champions the "ASEAN Way" of consensus and non-interference to maintain unity, yet simultaneously upgrades its maritime and defence capabilities to deter sovereignty violations (Gasim, 2022). This tension aligns with Buzan's (1991) argument that security operates across multiple levels the individual, societal, and state requiring flexibility in policy. In practice, Indonesia's military modernization, coupled with its peace rhetoric, demonstrates what Jervis (1978) identified as the security dilemma: actions taken to ensure self-defence may be perceived as assertive by others. Consequently, Indonesia must engage in strategic reassurance, using diplomacy to signal peaceful intent even as it strengthens its deterrent posture.

A second key pattern concerns ASEAN's constrained institutional capacity. As Table 2 reveals, ASEAN's collective responses to great-power rivalry and non-traditional threats often lack coherence. The South China Sea issue, for example, exposes how diverging national interests and dependency patterns undermine consensus (Hu, 2023; Zha, 2023). Indonesia's response prioritizing ASEAN centrality and promoting AOIP illustrates an effort to reaffirm ASEAN's relevance as a stabilizing institution. Through this approach, Jakarta repositions itself as both a guardian of regional norms and a mediator of strategic anxieties among member states. The policy of neutrality and inclusive dialogue functions as both moral signalling and practical containment of geopolitical rivalry (Khoo, 2022; Zhang, 2023).

Yet, the peace–security paradox (Table 3) remains persistent. As Chandler and Heins (2018) note, states that embrace peace-oriented foreign policies often face dilemmas between moral legitimacy and strategic survival. Indonesia's challenge lies in maintaining its normative leadership without appearing naïve or unprepared. This dualism has manifested repeatedly from its cautious stance in Myanmar's crisis to its measured responses to Chinese incursions near Natuna (Wahid, Perwita, & Thamrin, 2022). Theoretical frameworks from constructivism (Wendt, 1999) and security theory (Buzan, 1991; Jervis, 1978) provide an explanatory lens: Indonesia's identity-based norms define the acceptable boundaries of state behavior, but material constraints and power realities periodically force pragmatic recalibration.

The domestic political dimension further complicates this balance. As Kertzer (2021) emphasizes, public opinion and leadership narratives influence how foreign policy ideals are operationalized. Indonesian leaders often frame peace-oriented diplomacy as an extension of national identity, yet domestic audiences may interpret restraint as weakness. Consequently, governments must maintain legitimacy by demonstrating capability, hence the coexistence of peace rhetoric and investments in defence modernization. This interplay of idealism and realism supports the constructivist claim that norms and interests are co-constitutive rather than mutually exclusive (Wendt, 1992).

The results in Table 4 underscore the instrumental value of conflict resolution in Indonesia's diplomacy. Conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation, preventive diplomacy, and capacity-building serve as both tools of peace and strategies of influence. The Aceh peace process (2005) exemplifies Indonesia's ability to translate internal conflict management into a showcase of diplomatic skill (USIP, 2006; Awaluddin, 2008). This success strengthened Indonesia's legitimacy as a mediator and reinforced the perception of ASEAN as a viable regional framework for peacebuilding. In constructivist terms, this represents norm diffusion, where Indonesia's identity as a peacebuilder shapes regional expectations and behaviors (Acharya, 2004; Caballero-Anthony, 2022).

At the regional level, Jakarta's reliance on ASEAN-centric conflict management also reflects a strategic calculus. By embedding conflict resolution in ASEAN mechanisms, Indonesia prevents the intrusion of external powers into regional affairs, thus preserving strategic autonomy. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) and AOIP are not merely symbolic but institutional innovations that operationalize Indonesia's normative entrepreneurship. As Capie (2016) argues, peace operations and security dialogues enhance not only legitimacy but also state capacity, by improving coordination and readiness for humanitarian and security contingencies.

The discussion must also address the limits of peaceful diplomacy. Although Indonesia's mediation efforts have contributed to ASEAN's credibility, they are sometimes criticized for excessive caution or lack of enforcement. Kaufman (2010) and Klimov (2007) argue that "quiet diplomacy" can unintentionally sustain stalemates, as seen in Myanmar's crisis where ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus faced implementation challenges. For Indonesia, sustaining credibility requires complementing normative rhetoric with tangible mechanisms such as legal frameworks, early-warning systems, and international partnerships capable of providing guarantees when crises escalate (Caballero-Anthony, 2022). This illustrates the operational paradox: peace diplomacy demands both moral authority and technical capability.

From a theoretical standpoint, Indonesia's approach embodies what can be termed conditional norm persistence, a dynamic process in which peace-oriented norms endure until material threats compel reinterpretation. This concept synthesizes Wendt's (1999) constructivism with Buzan's (1991) security theory: identity provides continuity, while threat perception drives adaptation. Indonesia's diplomacy exemplifies this hybrid model, where values and pragmatism interact dialectically rather than hierarchically.

The long-term implication of this paradigm is that Indonesia positions itself as a regional stabilizer through moral authority, not coercive dominance. Its leadership in ASEAN's peace and security architecture demonstrates that middle powers can exert influence through ideational and institutional means. This aligns with Caballero-Anthony's (2022) notion of cooperative security, which integrates peace promotion with collective preparedness. The gradual expansion of joint maritime exercises and peacekeeping cooperation in ASEAN illustrates how normative leadership can evolve into concrete security contributions.

Finally, Indonesia's foreign policy trajectory reveals an emerging integrative strategy. Rather than viewing peace and security as oppositional, Jakarta increasingly treats them as mutually reinforcing. Conflict resolution becomes a mechanism for safeguarding national security, while defensive readiness legitimizes Indonesia's moral standing in promoting peace. This synthesis represents the maturation of Indonesia's diplomacy, a balance between idealism and realism that is adaptive to changing regional dynamics.

In conclusion, the analysis of results shows that Indonesia's peace paradigm is not static doctrine but a living strategy rooted in identity and sustained by pragmatic adjustments. The integration of constructivist and security perspectives demonstrates that Indonesia's commitment to peace operates as both a normative compass and a strategic instrument. Through ASEAN, Indonesia continues to mediate between power politics and cooperative norms, exemplifying how a middle power can sustain stability in a contested Indo-Pacific. The enduring challenge, however, remains balancing moral leadership with credible deterrence, a paradox that will define Indonesia's regional diplomacy in the decades ahead.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that Indonesia's foreign policy within ASEAN operates within a complex paradigm that seeks to reconcile the ideals of peace with the imperatives of national security. The country's long-standing commitment to the doctrine of *bebas dan aktif* (free and active) and the principles of Pancasila has shaped its diplomatic culture as one grounded in moderation, dialogue, and multilateralism. This "peace paradigm" positions Indonesia as both a moral and strategic leader in Southeast Asia, one that consistently promotes consensus, mediation, and conflict prevention as the foundation of regional stability. However, this idealism exists in continuous tension with the realities of regional insecurity, including traditional threats such as maritime disputes in the South China Sea and non-traditional challenges like terrorism, human trafficking, and humanitarian crises.

From a conceptual-critical perspective, Indonesia's foreign policy is best understood as a hybrid construct of one that integrates constructivist norms of identity, cooperation, and regionalism with realist concerns for deterrence, defense, and sovereignty. The peace paradigm thus functions as both a moral compass and a strategic framework. While Indonesia's identity as a peace actor reinforces its credibility and legitimacy in ASEAN diplomacy, its leadership also requires the pragmatic ability to safeguard national interests and respond to coercive pressures from great powers. This duality reflects what can be termed the "paradox of peace": the pursuit of peaceful engagement often demands strength, preparedness, and strategic foresight. The ability to sustain this balance determines whether Indonesia's foreign policy can continue to serve as a stabilizing force in the evolving Indo-Pacific order.

In practical terms, Indonesia's reliance on mediation, dialogue facilitation, and preventive diplomacy has elevated its standing as a regional bridge-builder. Through initiatives such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), its leadership in the Myanmar crisis mediation, and its advocacy for a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, Indonesia has reaffirmed ASEAN's centrality while subtly reinforcing its own influence. Nevertheless, the

study highlights that such normative leadership must be matched by institutional capacity and political will. The limits of “quiet diplomacy,” for instance, become evident when regional crises demand swift collective action that consensus-driven mechanisms struggle to deliver.

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