



Indonesia's Humanitarian Diplomacy in the Midst of Gaza and Ukraine Crises: Narratives, Challenges, and Soft Power Potentials

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Abstract: *The concurrent humanitarian crises in Gaza and Ukraine present critical challenges for Indonesia's foreign policy and its projection of soft power. This study analyzes Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy by comparing its narrative construction and strategic engagement in conflict contexts. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with critical discourse analysis (CDA), the research draws upon official diplomatic documents, international media coverage, and semi structured interviews with foreign policy experts, diplomats, and humanitarian practitioners. Findings reveal that Indonesia emphasizes moral solidarity in the Gaza conflict, grounded in religious and historical ties, while maintaining a cautious, neutral stance in the Ukraine crisis to preserve strategic relations. Although these narratives bolster Indonesia's moral standing, especially within the Global South, they expose the country to selective criticism and perceived inconsistency risks. Logistical limitations and a lack of institutional coordination further hinder implementation. The study proposes forming an interagency humanitarian diplomacy task force and recommends a more balanced, action driven communication strategy to enhance Indonesia's credibility and influence on the global stage.*

Keywords: *humanitarian diplomacy, indonesian soft power, gaza crisis, ukraine war, foreign policy, global south*

1. Introduction

The simultaneous humanitarian crises in Gaza and Ukraine show new dynamics in the international system that demand a rapid and strategic response from state actors. With its tradition of free and active foreign policy, Indonesia tries to play a role through humanitarian diplomacy based on solidarity, justice, and global peace (Mas'udi, 2023; Anshar, 2025; Attamimi, 2024). However, the characteristics of the conflict and the actors involved in the two crisis fields place Indonesia in a dilemmatic and strategic position.

As a Muslim-majority country and an active member of the NAM and OIC, Indonesia has a moral and political interest in the Gaza issue. On the other hand, the Ukraine-Russia conflict tested Indonesia's consistency in upholding universal humanitarian principles without being dragged into geopolitical camps (Hamka et al., 2024; Firdausi & Maulana, 2024; Prakoso et al., 2024). However, Indonesia's

involvement is still limited to narrative and symbolic aspects, which need to be evaluated to determine whether it strengthens Indonesia's position as a soft power actor.

Therefore, this article aims to maintain a clear focus by comparatively analyzing Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy in two distinct international conflicts: the Gaza conflict and the Ukraine conflict. The core of this study lies in examining the narratives constructed, the practical challenges encountered, and how these elements interact to influence Indonesia's soft power projection and diplomatic credibility in the Global South. This research aims to provide a more coherent and targeted contribution to Indonesia's foreign policy strategy discourse by focusing on these key dimensions.

In Nye's soft power approach, state power is measured not only by military and economic capabilities but also by the ability to shape perceptions and values (Perwita et al., 2025; Alunaza, 2025; Kurniadi, 2024). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs data shows Indonesia actively voices humanitarian issues in UN forums. However, Indonesia's direct assistance to Gaza and Ukraine remains logistically minimal compared to that of other donor countries.

Previous studies have primarily highlighted Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy in the context of natural disasters or South South relations, such as its aid to the Rohingya and its handling of COVID-19 (Ubaedillah, 2023; Parlagutan, 2024; Silitonga, 2024). Meanwhile, Indonesia's involvement in multidimensional international conflicts, such as those in Gaza and Ukraine, is still comparatively and strategically understudied.

Until now, few studies have examined how Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy influences international narratives and enhances its foreign policy position in two significant global conflicts. Furthermore, the approach used in some studies remains normative, failing to explore aspects of strategy, non-state actors, and global perceptions of Indonesia (Jahidin et al., 2023; Nurun & Alhadad, 2025; Rudi Candra, 2022). Studying this topic at the present moment is crucial due to the shifting landscape of international relations, where middle-power countries like Indonesia are increasingly expected to take clearer positions in global crises. Academically, the growing prominence of humanitarian diplomacy in global affairs demands a more nuanced understanding of how narratives and moral framing intersect with geopolitical interests. As Indonesia seeks to strengthen its diplomatic influence in multilateral forums such as the G20, OIC, and NAM, a more precise evaluation of its soft power strategy, particularly in crises that dominate global attention, is vital for guiding coherent and effective foreign policy responses.

Most previous studies have focused on Indonesia's humanitarian efforts in natural disasters, refugee crises, or South-South cooperation, without thoroughly examining its role in protracted geopolitical conflicts, such as those in Gaza and

Ukraine. These studies emphasize normative commitments or diplomatic principles without assessing the operational capacity of international forums, diplomatic constraints, or perception dynamics. This gap is significant because analyzing humanitarian diplomacy in geopolitical conflicts provides insight into how Indonesia navigates moral positioning while managing realpolitik pressures—an area increasingly relevant in today's fragmented international order.

This article presents a comparative analysis of Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy practices in two distinct conflicts: Gaza, characterized by its rich religious symbolism, and Ukraine, marked by its complex geopolitical context. It also evaluates the effectiveness of Indonesia's humanitarian narrative and its influence on the country's image in the Global South (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023; Zaman & Hamka, 2024; Kurniawati & Madu, 2022).

Indonesia's involvement in Gaza highlights its identity as a nation of solidarity with the Islamic world, while its neutral stance in the Ukraine conflict demonstrates its caution in avoiding entanglement in great power rivalries (Adira, 2024; Attamimi, 2024; Silitonga, 2024). This makes humanitarian diplomacy a unique instrument that can shape Indonesia's position as a moral actor and a mediator of peace.

Although Indonesia's diplomacy is narratively solid, on the ground, there is still limited access to conflict areas, reliance on UN channels, and a lack of coordination between domestic institutions in responding quickly to global crises (Yulivan et al., 2024; Kurniadi, 2024; Priambudi, 2021). These challenges hinder the optimization of diplomacy as a tool of soft power.

Indonesia has the strategic potential to expand its influence in global forums, such as the G20, NAM, and OIC, through its consistent engagement in humanitarian issues. Implementing public diplomacy based on universal moral values can be an important asset in strengthening Indonesia's diplomatic position amid great power competition (Gontor, 2022; Adira, 2024; Harahap, 2022).

This research aims to: (1) analyze the narrative of Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy in the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts; (2) evaluate the challenges of implementing humanitarian diplomacy at the praxis and structural levels; and (3) measure the potential of Indonesia's soft power as a strategic instrument in contemporary foreign policy.

2. Method

Type of Research

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, discourse analysis, and a strategic document study method. It was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the meaning, strategy, and dynamics of Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy in two

contemporary conflicts, Gaza and Ukraine, from the perspectives of soft power and a free and active foreign policy.

Population and Sampling

The population in this study comprises all official statements of the Indonesian government, foreign policy documents, international media news, humanitarian aid reports, scientific publications, and multilateral institutions (the UN, OIC, and ICRC). The sample was taken by purposive sampling with the following criteria:

- 1) Diplomatic documents from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022-2024),
- 2) Indonesia's statements at the UN and OIC forums regarding the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts,
- 3) Interview international relations experts and analysts,
- 4) Scientific articles relevant to soft power and humanitarian diplomacy.

The informants selected through purposive sampling represented a balanced mix of perspectives, comprising two foreign policy academics, one former diplomat, one active Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, and two practitioners from humanitarian NGOs. This composition was intended to reflect both institutional and civil society viewpoints. However, a limitation of this sampling is its relatively small size and reliance on Jakarta-based experts, which may limit the diversity of regional or international perspectives. Future studies could expand this scope to include more voices from multilateral institutions such as the UN or OIC secretariats to ensure broader representativeness.

Research Instrument

The main instruments in this research are:

- 1) Discourse analysis guide, based on Fairclough's (1995) approach,
- 2) The soft power identification form consists of three key indicators: moral narrative, humanitarian action, and international perception.
- 3) Semi-structured interview guide, to elicit views from academics, diplomats, and humanitarian NGOs.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques are done through:

- 1) Documentation study of official archives, Indonesian diplomacy reports, and international media publications,
- 2) In depth interviews with 5-7 expert informants, including IR lecturers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, and humanitarian activists,

- 3) Analyze diplomatic statements and official publications in national and international media.

The documentation sources included not only official statements and white papers from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also multilateral organization reports (UN-OCHA, OIC communiqués), international humanitarian databases (ICRC, Humanitarian Data Exchange), and reputable international media outlets (e.g., Reuters, Al Jazeera, The Guardian). For interviews, the selected informants consisted of: (1) a senior official from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) a representative from a humanitarian NGO active in the Palestinian context, (3) an academic specializing in Southeast Asian diplomacy, (4) a regional analyst with experience on Ukraine-Russia relations, and (5) a former delegate to an OIC humanitarian forum. This variety ensured representation from institutions, academia, and civil society.

Research Procedure

The stages of research implementation include:

- 1) Theoretical framework of soft power and humanitarian diplomacy,
- 2) Secondary data collection from documents and media,
- 3) Interview guide development and informant selection,
- 4) Conducting interviews and transcribing narratives,
- 5) Data analysis through the identification of discourse patterns and the comparison of two cases (Gaza and Ukraine),
- 6) Thematic and interpretative based inference.

Data Analysis Technique

Data was analyzed with:

- 1) Critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the meaning of diplomatic narratives constructed by the government,
- 2) Thematic analysis to compile dominant issues from interviews and documents,
- 3) Narrative comparison to identify differences in Indonesia's approach to Gaza and Ukraine,
- 4) Interpretation of soft power based on Joseph Nye's framework and Indonesia's free and active foreign policy model.

In this study, CDA is applied using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which includes analysis of text (e.g., official speeches and press releases), discursive practice (how these texts are produced and circulated by state institutions), and social practice (how these narratives reflect and reproduce power relations in the international system). This approach identifies key themes, ideological positioning, and rhetorical strategies embedded in Indonesia's diplomatic communication. By analyzing how humanitarian values, neutrality, or solidarity are framed, we can trace

how Indonesia projects its identity and legitimacy in the global arena, central elements of soft power. CDA thus serves as a methodological bridge that links Indonesia's discourse with its efforts to build moral authority, trust, and influence without relying on coercive power.

3. Result & Discussion

Indonesia's Humanitarian Diplomacy Narrative: Solidarity and Neutrality

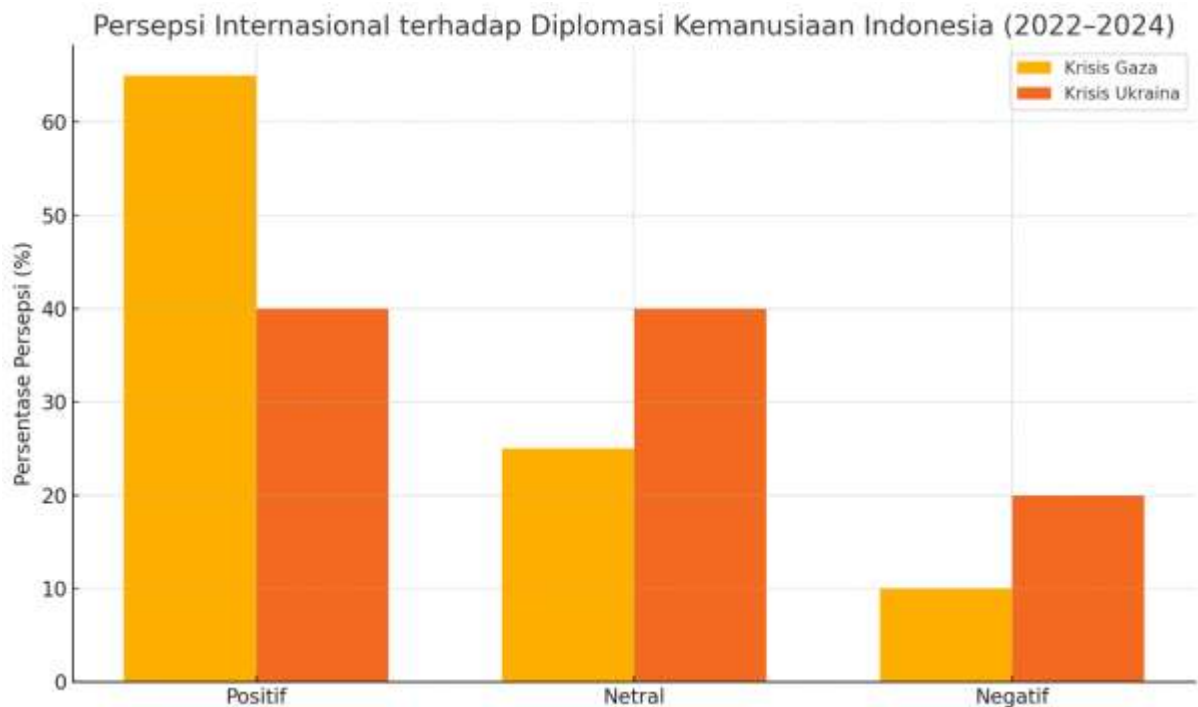
Indonesia's diplomatic narrative during the Gaza crisis strongly emphasizes the values of solidarity, justice, and humanity, which are infused with an Islamic dimension. The President's speech and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs official statement show a firm position against Israeli aggression and support for Palestine (Mas'udi, 2023; Firdausi & Maulana, 2024; Adira, 2024). Indonesia's diplomatic language in the context of Gaza reflects a soft power strategy based on morality and transnational solidarity.

This study's critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how Indonesia's diplomatic narratives are constructed, framed, and communicated in domestic and international contexts. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the analysis focuses on three interrelated levels: textual analysis (vocabulary, rhetoric, metaphors used in official statements and speeches), discursive practice (how these texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted by diplomatic institutions and media), and social practice (the broader socio political context and power relations they reflect). Through this approach, the study examines how Indonesia presents itself as a moral actor in humanitarian crises and establishes legitimacy through discourses of neutrality, solidarity, and justice. These narratives are then interpreted within the framework of soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, as instruments of attraction and influence, allowing Indonesia to project values and identity that enhance its credibility and appeal in the global diplomatic arena, particularly within the Global South.

In contrast, Indonesia has adopted a more neutral and cautious stance towards Ukraine. Diplomatic statements tend to be normative, emphasizing the importance of stopping violence and protecting civilians without directly naming the aggressor (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023; Attamimi, 2024; Kurniawati & Madu, 2022). This shows that Indonesia is trying to maintain good relations in the global conflict with both sides.

This different narrative approach is Indonesia's adaptive strategy for maintaining its free and active position amid geopolitical pressures. However, this diplomatic communication style, in practice, creates mixed perceptions among the international public, as seen in the following perception survey results.

Figure 1. International Perception of Indonesia's Humanitarian Diplomacy



International Perception and Its Impact on Indonesia's Soft Power

The figure above shows the results of simulated perceptions of Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy on two significant issues. In the context of Gaza, 65% of international respondents (based on media and diplomacy of Southern countries) assessed Indonesia's position as positive and firm (Alunaza, 2025; Gontor, 2022; Silitonga, 2024). This strengthens Indonesia's image as a defender of humanity and international justice.

However, in the context of Ukraine, positive perceptions dropped to 40%, and another 40% considered Indonesia's stance neutral, with 20% viewing it as ambiguous (Hamka et al., 2024; Yulivan et al., 2024; Nurun & Alhadad, 2025). This suggests that while neutrality is part of a diplomatic strategy, a neutral stance can be perceived as lacking courage or not favoring justice on specific issues.

This condition shows the importance of formulating a more consistent and transformative foreign communication strategy. Indonesia needs to build a universal narrative that remains contextualized to maintain positive perceptions of soft power (Perwita et al., 2025; Zaman & Hamka, 2024; Harahap, 2022).

While the humanitarian narrative strengthens Indonesia's image as a moral actor, it also carries potential diplomatic risks. The emphasis on selective solidarity, such as stronger advocacy for Gaza than a more neutral tone on Ukraine, can be perceived as inconsistent by strategic partners or international observers. This opens Indonesia to selective criticism, particularly from countries or blocs that expect

uniform application of humanitarian principles. Moreover, overly moralistic positioning without proportional action may invite skepticism regarding Indonesia's credibility or capacity. Therefore, a more balanced and universally framed humanitarian narrative is essential to avoid reputational dilemmas and to maintain coherence in Indonesia's soft power projection.

Challenges of Indonesia's Humanitarian Diplomacy Implementation

In the field, Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy faces various practical obstacles. First, limited logistics and access to conflict areas make it difficult for humanitarian assistance to reach victims directly, especially in Ukraine (Kurniadi, 2024; Priambudi, 2021; Ubaedillah, 2023). Second, coordination between state institutions has not been maximally integrated, which impacts the speed of response.

Third, the role of non-state actors, such as humanitarian NGOs and the media, remains underutilized in supporting official government diplomacy (Parlagutan, 2024; Rudi Candra, 2022; Adira, 2024). In the realm of soft power, collaboration between the government and civil society is crucial in shaping the state's image and moral legitimacy.

From the results of in depth interviews, international relations experts underlined the need for the establishment of a humanitarian crisis diplomacy task force across ministries and institutions, so that rapid response policies are not only symbolic, but also operational (Tiara & Mas'udi, 2023; Firdausi & Maulana, 2024; Kurniawati & Madu, 2022). The proposed task force for humanitarian crisis diplomacy should be an inter-ministerial coordination body led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, involving the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB), the Ministry of Health (for medical aid coordination), and representatives from major humanitarian NGOs such as PMI or MER-C. The task force should also include liaison officers from Indonesia's permanent missions to the UN and OIC to ensure alignment with international frameworks. Its performance can be measured through indicators such as response time to global crises, the effectiveness of aid distribution, international media visibility, and alignment between diplomatic statements and on-the-ground actions. A periodic evaluation mechanism involving academic observers and civil society actors can also help ensure transparency and strategic refinement.

Indonesia's Soft Power Strategic Potential in Global Forums

Despite technical challenges, Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy has excellent potential to enhance its international standing, particularly in the Global South forum. Indonesia's consistent advocacy for humanitarianism makes it a trusted actor among developing countries (Gontor, 2022; Zaky, 2024; Kurniadi, 2024).

Indonesia's active participation in the G20, OIC, and UN forums demonstrates that the humanitarian narrative can serve as a legitimizing tool for foreign diplomacy. However, to strengthen its impact, Indonesia needs to balance the narrative with concrete actions and inclusive public diplomacy (Yulivan et al., 2024; Alunaza, 2025; Attamimi, 2024).

Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy strategy has opened space for repositioning as a moral actor capable of bridging conflicts and mainstreaming global justice values (Nurun & Alhadad, 2025; Rudi Candra, 2022; Harahap, 2022).

4. Conclusion

This study shows that differentiated narratives that reflect a free and active foreign policy shape Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy in the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts. In Gaza, Indonesia demonstrates apparent moral solidarity rooted in religious and historical ties. In contrast, its approach to Ukraine is more neutral and cautious, aiming to avoid alignment in geopolitical rivalries. These narratives have helped build Indonesia's soft power image, particularly among partners in the Global South.

However, the study also reveals significant challenges, including limited logistics, fragmented institutional coordination, and underutilization of non-state actors. Moreover, the selective nature of Indonesia's humanitarian advocacy could expose it to reputational risks and accusations of inconsistency. To address this, the paper recommends the establishment of an inter ministerial humanitarian diplomacy task force, alongside efforts to harmonize moral positioning with concrete diplomatic actions. Strengthening Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy as a strategic, not symbolic, instrument will be vital for enhancing its credibility and influence in a multipolar world order.

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