INDONESIA’S DEFENSE DIPLOMACY THROUGH
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO FIJI

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Abstract
Natural disasters tend to be vulnerable to attack the Fiji Islands as a Pacific country which is geographically composed of large and small islands. On the other hand, this condition also occurs in Indonesia, which is also an archipelago country that is prone to natural disasters. Seeing the shared conditions experienced by Fiji, Indonesia often provides humanitarian assistance to Fiji when it is hit by natural disasters. This research explores disaster diplomacy, in which we will analyze diplomatic efforts in a state relationship, through disaster-based assistance between Indonesia and Fiji. Further disaster diplomacy can be defined as how and why disaster-related activities can or cannot cause the emergence of cooperation between parties or can reduce the occurrence of conflict. The purpose of this study is to analyze how Indonesia's defense diplomacy with Fiji is through disaster relief. The results of this study explain how disaster relief can be a means of Indonesia's defense diplomacy to provide a positive image and gain support in Pacific countries. This can be seen from Fiji who wants to expand cooperation by signing an MoU on defense with Indonesia after the assistance provided by Indonesia in 2017. After the establishment of this cooperation in the defense sector, a positive attitude was also shown by Fiji by providing support to Indonesia at the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) meeting. In this study, the method used is literature review by collecting credible data from various sources such as journals, website articles, news, and even official documents from the government.

Keywords. Defense Diplomacy, Disaster Relief, Humanitarian Assistance, Indonesia, Fiji

INTRODUCTION
Defence diplomacy has emerged as one of the most important tools of military statecraft amid this effort to move past the use of force. Typically used as an umbrella term, activities related to it are diverse, such as officer exchanges, ship visits, combined training missions, and joint military exercises, all these are denoted under practices of defence diplomacy (Maniruzzaman, 2020). The use of defense diplomacy as an implementation
of humanitarian assistance is one of the three characteristics according to Rodon Pedrason, it stated that Defense diplomacy is means to pursue broader foreign and security goals through support from other countries in the fields of defense, humanitarian assistance, security issues between countries and peace capacity (Chaer, 2021).

![Figure 1. Trinity Roles of Navy](source: Booth, 2004)

Andre Cottey and Anthony Forster who place defense diplomacy as the use of armed forces and related infrastructure in peacetime (especially the ministry of defense) as a tool of foreign and security policy.” Consistent with Cottey and Forster’s earlier definition, Martin Edmonds defines modern defense diplomacy as the use of armed forces in operations other than war, building on their experience and trained discipline to achieve national and
foreign objectives abroad. Based on the explanations of the researchers, Winger explained the definition of defense diplomacy with examples of activities such as warship diplomacy, peacekeeping, foreign disaster relief, and the construction of military bases abroad (Winger, 2014). The role of defense diplomacy through disaster relief is also in line with the concept of Trinity Roles of Navy described by Ken Booth, where Navy originating from a country’s defense sector is an actor in this diplomacy approach (BNPB, 2021).

Within defence diplomacy, countries may also cooperate within non-traditional security or defence issues, and are not limited to traditional security issues. For certain countries, non-traditional security issues may present a higher threat than traditional ones. Furthermore, in the 21st century countries are more likely to avoid getting involved in open-conflicts as they have realized the harm it tends to cause, which leads to the prominence of non-traditional security issues especially within third world nations with relatively low military capability. This especially rings true for countries located within remote regions or within the ring of fire, which are prone to earthquakes and other natural disasters. This character applies to Indonesia, being located between two oceans (Indian and Pacific) and also the Pacific Island countries spread across the Pacific Ocean.

Based on data from Indonesia’s National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB), Indonesia has an increasing amount of disasters per year, and an average of nine disasters per day all across the Indonesian territory. This increasing amount of disasters are also affected by climate change. In 2021 itself there were 5,402 amount of documented incidents such as earthquakes, drought, extreme weather, landslides, abrasion, and volcanic eruptions (The Fijian Government, 2022). In order to counter these natural disasters, the government of Indonesia mobilizes all parts of the Indonesian society as a part of Indonesia’s total defence doctrine (Sishankamrata), which includes civilians and military power. The military has logistical capability and manpower to help with disaster relief, as it is also a part of military operations other than war. For example, the manpower from the military can contribute with the reconstruction of damaged areas, while their logistical
capability can be used to transfer goods and medicine to victims of the disaster.

The Pacific islands countries share a similar situation with Indonesia, as a group of tropical archipelagos situated in a naturally hazardous environment (Precillia, 2018). They thus share the same issues and concerns of disasters being one of their primary threats to society. This shared concern provides a template for Pacific Island countries, along with other regional partners to cooperate on mitigating the dangers of natural disasters. The Pacific islands are mainly inhabited by ethnic Melanesian people, which are also present in Indonesia (especially in eastern parts). Islands in the Pacific were formerly part of European colonial territory, which became independent during the cold war era. Their status as a newly-established power after the second world war categorises them as a third world developing country, similar to other countries in South East Asia including Indonesia. This commonality further adds a reason for Indonesia to cooperate with nations in the Pacific, aside from the regional proximity.

In the 1990s, then-Foreign minister of Indonesia Ali Alatas highlighted the importance of the Pacific Island region in the coming years. This statement shows Indonesia's concern regarding the region and presents a possible shift-of-focus towards the region when it comes to future co-operations and spreading influence (Putra, 2018). One of the main collaborators with Indonesia from this region is Fiji, an Archipelago in the South Pacific region located north of New Zealand which was formerly a British colony until 1970. Not long after its independence, Fiji established diplomatic relations with Indonesia starting from 1974. The cooperation between Fiji and Indonesia has expanded from trading and security, to a defence cooperation, which so far is the only Pacific Island country involved in a bilateral defence cooperation with Indonesia, as shown by the signing of the MOU by the defence ministers of Fiji and Indonesia in 2017 (Takinana, 2019).

**Research Method**

This research focuses on Indonesia’s effort on disaster relief diplomacy, using the relations between Indonesia and Fiji as a case study. As a country
positioned in the center of the Indo-Pacific Region, Indonesia lies within close vicinity to the Pacific Island Countries which are very prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, typhoons, and floods. For the pacific islands, natural disasters are one of the primary threats to security, thus it can be inferred that these countries primarily use their defence and/or security forces to deal with non-traditional security issues. As a power within the region, Indonesia attempts to form relations with countries in the Pacific, such as The Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Fiji. The relation between Indonesia and Fiji can be considered an important one in the region, as it has established diplomatic relations since 1974. This research thus attempts to highlight the progression of relations between Indonesia and Fiji as one of Indonesia’s most consistent partners in the Pacific region.

This research conducts a literature review, using data collected from various credible sources available within the internet. These sources include journals, article website, online news networks, even articles from both countries governments’ official website. There has been similar previous researches, such as *Disaster relief as Indonesia Soft Power Diplomacy: Case of Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu* written by Wati, Sari, and Sutisna in 2018. We aim to provide research that focuses on a similar case covering a different country, which is Fiji. Unlike Fiji, Indonesia’s soft power diplomacy towards Vanuatu does not involve a defence agreement.

This research explores disaster diplomacy, in which we will analyze diplomatic efforts in a state relationship, through disaster-based assistance between Indonesia and Fiji. Further disaster diplomacy can be defined as how and why disaster-related activities can or cannot cause the emergence of cooperation between parties or can reduce the occurrence of conflict. The keyword for disaster diplomacy is “disaster-related activities”, because it refers to pre-disaster activities such as prevention, mitigation, and preparedness; alongside with post-disaster activities such as response, recovery, and reconstruction (Indonesian Ministry of Defense, 2017). Disaster issues were seen from a new perspective by disaster diplomacy. Disaster is
viewed and examined from both the positive and negative perspectives. This viewpoint also sees Indonesia’s national disaster management capability, as well as Indonesia’s contribution and role in developing regional skills.

DISCUSSION

Tropical Disasters

As stated in the introduction, Indonesia and Fiji are both tropical archipelagos located in a disaster-prone environment. Naturally, disasters are known to be damaging towards the environment and also citizens. However, humans are always able to adapt to the environmental challenges including ways to mitigate or minimize natural disasters, such as constructing sea-walls to prevent high-tides or tsunamis to harm rural areas or constructing buildings which are more resistant to earthquakes. To a certain extent, this disaster mitigation effort would also necessitate cooperation with other countries, as natural disasters may strike more than one country at once which thus opens an opportunity for diplomacy (Aries, 2014). This is especially prominent for tropical countries, which is located in a more disaster-prone environment.

Within the region surrounding Indonesia and the Pacific Islands, there lies three tectonic plates which are the Eurasian continent, Oceania or Indo-Australia, and the Pacific plate. The movement of these plates may cause earthquakes which could devastate lands. Earthquakes too can cause tsunamis which form large scale tidal waves which can potentially submerge an entire settlement. Furthermore, this geographical location is also riddled with volcanoes, with many islands in the Pacific formed from volcanic rocks and mountains. Eruption from volcanoes can also cause earthquakes aside from the damage generated by the eruption itself. The recent changes in climates are especially dangerous to the Pacific islands, as these small islands may completely become submerged as water levels rise. Additionally, the large amount of water territory adds to a tendency for rain and thunderstorms, which may cause flooding and to a larger extent may cause landslides or avalanches towards unstable surfaces. Strong winds may form cyclones or hurricanes which are also capable of destroying settlements and also prevent
flights and sailing.

As much as disasters cause damage, sometimes they also cause unity between societies. During the early 2000s, insurgency under the banner of Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement/GAM) in the Aceh region of Indonesia (in the northern end of Sumatra Island) sparked and resulted in a long and bloody conflict against the Indonesian National Army. The fighting lasted all the way until December 2004, when a Tsunami devastated Aceh. After this disaster the insurgency ceased and they agreed to stop fighting (BNPB, 2016). Not only did the insurgency stop, but internationally, the United States also assisted Indonesia in recovering from this disaster, including by sending US marines and Navy personnel to assist in helping the victims along with Indonesian military forces. Before, Indonesia’s relation with the US was sparse due to their arms embargo towards Indonesia since the 1990s. This embargo was enacted due to Indonesia’s alleged human rights violation in East Timor (BPHN, 2020).

The case of Aceh not only proves the diplomatic opportunity from disaster relief, but also the capability of military forces in order to handle natural disasters. Even if they are not able to prevent or stop it from happening, they may be able to help reduce the effects and help the victims in need. Aside from helping the victims, the military are useful to maintain order in the disaster-struck region. A town or city struck by disaster can lead to chaos within the society as infrastructure breaks down and people become desperate as they lose their homes and wealth, which potentially increase criminal tendencies. They are also capable of assisting in search-and-rescue operations, especially if it happens in more remote or dangerous environments such as tropical rainforest and mountains. Their large manpower, transport, and training to survive harsh environments prove useful in navigating through uncharted territories.

**Actor, Process, Issue**

Ever since its inception, Indonesia has adopted the foreign policy of ‘independent and active’ (Bebas-Aktif). This translates to Indonesia’s persistence to always remain non-aligned to other major powers (in the
context of its first creation, there was a cold war between eastern and western blocs), while also remaining active in promoting independence of nations and world peace. This prompts Indonesia to be involved in a lot of international activities, including the establishment of ASEAN along with the non-bloc organization with like-minded countries (OCHA, 2016). Throughout the years, Indonesia has formed partnerships in multiple dimensions with multiple countries, while also maintaining public neutrality. For example today Indonesia still has strong trade partnership with both the United States and People’s Republic of China instead of only favouring one side over another.

As rivalries between major powers tightened within the 21st century, particularly between China and The United States, the Indo-Pacific region became increasingly highlighted in contemporary international politics. The importance of the Pacific Islands thus becomes more visible, and countries start to pay more attention to them, for various interests ranging from hegemonic influence to acquisition of their rich maritime natural resources. Indonesia is no exception to this. As a fellow archipelago within the proximity of the Pacific Ocean, and also having a significant amount of melanesian population, Indonesia and The Pacific Islands have a lot in common and a lot to learn from each other. The Pacific Island countries present an opportunity for Indonesia to spread their relations and also influence in staying as non-aligned countries together, cooperating for peace instead of making military alliances. Indonesia’s interest towards the Pacific Islands are manifested by their “look-east” policy, in which Indonesia takes effort to provide aid for Pacific Island countries, which are neighbours to their east. By conducting this policy they are also bolstering cooperations between developing countries, or “south-south”\(^1\) cooperation, while simultaneously building their image as a peaceful power willing to co-develop with each other.

The countries within the Pacific Islands as a whole are relatively under-developed and are prone to natural disasters due to their geographical

\(^1\) “South” in this case refers to the idea of global north vs south, north representing the mostly-developed established power within the northern hemisphere (such as Western Europe, Russia, United States), while global south is used to represent new-developing powers mostly in southern hemisphere (such as Southeast Asian or African countries)
location. Islands in the Pacific mostly rely on fishing and other maritime activities for their primary income, and they have relatively low technological capability as small powers. With most countries being a former European colony, they become independent and have to fend for themselves. Their relatively remote location within the ocean also means they are hard to access and far away from any main continent, with Australia being the closest. The seas separating the islands also mean there are many opportunities for illegal activities to slip by, such as drugs smuggling or human trafficking. Climate change also adds to an increasing threat from the environment, sometimes making disasters more frequent and deadlier.

The Pacific Island Countries thus bond with each other, forming several associations such as The Pacific Islands Forum, Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and Polynesian Leaders Group. These cooperations would help the island countries to contribute to the development of each other, and attempt to maintain security. With their relatively low technological and military capability however, there is very limited that they can do to minimise the impacts of disaster, or to handle criminal activities within the ocean next to them. This leads them to form partnerships and actively look for contributions from countries outside of their region, such as Australia, The United States, and China to give them additional means to increase their security. As part of Indonesia’s commitment and interest towards the region, Indonesia’s Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) engaged in dialogues regarding potential disaster management cooperation with the MSG. Aside from dialogues Indonesia also participated in providing trainings to Pacific Island countries regarding this subject starting from 2014, along with humanitarian assistance.

As one of the Pacific Island countries, Fiji too needs these assistance as much as other countries. Cyclones and Floods are relatively common in Fiji and tend to be quite destructive, even if they don’t always cause large fatalities. Aside from natural disasters, organized crime is a common occurrence in Fiji which proves difficult to erase. These crimes include drug and human trafficking, and Fiji is a common destination for human trafficking in forced prostitution from other nations. Development (both physical and
human resources) is also a challenge for Fiji and the Pacific islands, as their remoteness means they are isolated and importing assets would be more expensive, which gives them severe limitations to facilities and materials needed for development in order to keep up with the latest technology and science. Further emphasizing Fiji’s need for security, historically there has been multiple coup-d’etat within Fiji’s government starting from 1987, for multiple reasons including constitutional issues and also racial or ethnical tensions between natives and other major ethnic groups, such as those of Indian descendants (Indo-Fijians).

Since 2011, Indonesia has become one of Fiji’s primary partners in security cooperation. In May 2011, a Development of Cooperation Agreement (DCA) was signed to endorse the cooperation of the two countries in a wide range of sectors including fisheries, agriculture, trade, education, defence, legal, and tourism (Fiji Government, 2014). An Indonesian-Fiji Police Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed to enhance training and technical assistance in terrorism and national security (Sun, 2011). Indonesia and Fiji cooperated in training their police forces and Indonesia contributed with providing funds to the establishment of a Police Academy in Fiji in 2014. This partnership expands gradually until eventually deciding on a more dedicated defence cooperation. Fiji also acknowledges Indonesia’s independent and active foreign policy, which is said to be something they can learn from Indonesia as a small and independent island country (Booth, 1997).

**Disaster Relief as Defense Cooperation**

Fiji’s year-round balmy tropical climate is one of the key draws for travelers from all over the world. However, the hot heat, humidity, and location in the South Pacific can all contribute to catastrophic and life-threatening natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and tsunamis. A cyclone is a tropical form of hurricane that is the most common natural disaster in the Pacific region. From 2015-2016, The Pacific Islands was struck with a series of strong cyclones, which had its highest point during February 2016 with the Winston Cyclone. Fiji was
particularly devastated by Winston Cyclone which caused 40 deaths, and severe infrastructural damage in a lot of towns and villages, including more than 200 damaged schools and domiciles which left thousands of citizens without a home (Seva, 2021). Indonesia, with whom Fiji conducts long-term partnership with, became one of the countries to send help after the disaster.

Indonesia has a humanitarian mission to alleviate the suffering of affected people and to reconstruct the damaged infrastructure after the destructive Cyclone happened. During this disaster relief mission, Indonesia sent personnel from both civilian, police, and military sectors, along with goods such as food and construction material. In this case, Indonesian military personnel helped with the reconstruction of Queen Victoria school in Tailevu. This reconstruction was handled by about 70 personnel from the Indonesian military. Along with the field reconstructions, Indonesia donated USD $5 million to disaster relief funds. This marks the beginning of Indonesia’s involvement in defence diplomacy in disaster relief with Fiji. Indonesia’s involvement within this disaster relief is also marked by their need to bring home several Indonesian citizens (primarily seamen or sailors) that are in Fiji.

This cooperation in disaster management is to be expanded as Fiji and Indonesia signs an MoU on Disaster Management, conducted by Indonesia’s National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana) and Fiji’s Agriculture, Maritime Development and Disaster Mitigation Minister in Suva, Fiji, 6 June 2016. This MoU involves education and knowledge exchange in several aspects of disaster management, including disaster risk reduction, prevention, and preparedness, human resource development, climate change adaptation and recovery, and joint training and workshops (Sukma, 2006).

The usage of military and police forces in disaster relief is seen as a major advantage to Fiji, who has relatively low military capabilities (with only about 3.500 active military personnel). The military has the cohesion, manpower, and logistical capability to handle a lot of large-scale duties outside of a war, also known as military operations other than war (MOOTW).
This display of efficiency later prompted Fiji to approach Indonesia for a dedicated defence cooperation, expanding from previous security and disaster management cooperations to a more focused one involving the military. This case can be seen as Indonesia acting as a mentor-figure to Fiji in terms of military and security capabilities.

The defensive cooperation, officially known as “Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the Republic of Fiji on Cooperation in the Field of Defence” was signed in Jakarta in 29 September 2017, by Indonesia’s then-defence minister Ryamizard Ryacudu and Fiji’s minister of Defence and Security Ratu Inoke Kubuabola. This agreement is meant as bilateral measure to face the new threats within the international sphere. It was hoped that the cooperation will also lead to an advance in cooperations within other sectors outside of defence, such as the maritime sector. So far, Indonesia has provided multiple assistance to Fiji within the defence sector, such as military uniforms for Fiji’s UN peacekeeper units, training for peacekeeping, security, and counter terrorism, providing a number of CN219 transport aircrafts, and small arms. This cooperation was also aimed to cover the military and security institutions’ ability in handling non-traditional security issues which are increasingly more common throughout the 21st century.

During late 2019, the COVID-19 virus pandemic started in Wuhan, and the following year it spread all over the world, including Indonesia and Fiji. Despite having a small population of less than one million, Fiji continues to experience additional COVID-19 cases. Most of the COVID-19 cases in Fiji have come from tourists in border quarantine areas. Fiji is known as a country that prioritizes the tourism sector. Therefore, it is natural that many tourists visit and ultimately indirectly have implications for the health condition of this archipelagic country. Just like other countries, the capacity of health facilities and equipment as well as handling Fiji has not been able to cope with this sudden situation. This difficult condition was exacerbated by a natural disaster that had just hit Fiji, namely a typhoon. According to the Fijian government, the impact of the incident that occurred in the midst of this pandemic situation will affect 850,000 people or equivalent to 95% of
Fiji’s total population.

In fact, this fund is not only used for handling and restoring health situations. However, there is an economic and humanitarian issue that must be addressed in response to the pandemic crisis in Fiji. Therefore, Indonesia has allocated COVID-19 assistance for humanity. The support was distributed in the form of tents, food and drinks with a total weight of 13 tons for the people on Kadavu Island, Fiji. The assistance is expected to be able to restore the tourism service sector as one of the main drivers of Fiji's economy. The bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Fiji is also seen as an effort to strengthen regional solidarity for the sake of creating security and sustainable development in the Pacific region. This effort is in line with Fairman et al’s thinking about the purpose of health diplomacy which often involves other interests. In this case, Indonesia carries out a health diplomacy which is done as part of diplomacy for disaster management. On the other hand, this is done in order to strive for and uphold the integrity of the partnership in the Pacific region.

Indonesia’s decision to implement health diplomacy can be studied using Rational Choice Theory (RCT). In other words, this bilateral diplomatic relationship can be categorized as a rational policy. This is evidenced by the transfer of the main goal that does not stop at the health aspect. On the other hand, Indonesia has succeeded in directing its health diplomacy towards humanitarian, economic, and most importantly, solidarity within the region. Although only a small island nation, Fiji holds a significant portion of the Pacific's maritime assets. Based on this interest, Indonesia seeks to create a good relationship with Fiji that will generate long-term benefits in the strategic dynamics of the region.

In 2020, Indonesia lent support for Fiji and Solomon Islands, as part of Indonesia Aid program established in December 2019 by the foreign ministry. These support includes Indonesian-produced health tools such as protective suits or masks, logistical support such as tents and consumables. Indonesia and Fiji has multiple things in common ranging from cultures and shared environmental issues. Aside from being impacted from COVID-19, Fiji was
also struck by Tropical Cyclone Harold. Indonesia sent additional humanitarian assistance, by employing Indonesian Air Force’s C130 aircraft to both send supplies and also deport Indonesian citizens which are not able to come home due to government-imposed flight restrictions as part of the pandemic lockdown. As of 2021, about 149 Indonesian citizens, including seamen, workers, and personnel from Indonesian embassy and their family are located in Fiji during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiji’s government provided masks, sanitizers, and gloves for their citizens and also foreign workers, these helped ensure the survival of the residents of Fiji. as a result, no Indonesian citizens in Fiji was infected with the virus.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia and the Pacific Island countries such as Fiji has a lot in common, starting from the people, in which Indonesia has a large population of ethnic melanesian (which further shares similar language and culture), the shared environmental properties of a tropical Archipelago, and their shared status of being a ex-colonial developing country. Thus, Indonesia and Fiji share a lot of similar hazards such as tropical disasters and later on, both are impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As co-developing countries, both countries need to cooperate in order to maintain their existence within international relations. The political stability of the Pacific islands is important to Indonesia as a neighbouring country. Relations thus are formed between Indonesia and Pacific countries in order to show their willingness and consistency in handling regional problems, as part of Indonesia’s Foreign Policy principle of ‘independent and active’ which also includes contributing to maintaining world peace and development. Indonesia

Indonesia and Fiji has multiple cooperations in several dimensions, from economy, education, to security and defence ever since the establishment of embassies in both countries by 2011, which includes multiple MOUs between police forces of both countries and later defence ministries. In 2016, Fiji was struck by the devastating Winston Cyclone which led to a more intensive cooperation between Fiji and Indonesia, as Indonesia provided multiple form of aid including humanitarian assistance and reconstruction by Indonesian military personnel. The following year, defence
cooperation was intensified by the signing of an MOU between ministry of defence of both countries. This defence cooperation also involves training in dealing with non-traditional security issues such as food security and disaster management, issues which are actively present for both countries. This cooperation is further necessitated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Indonesia contributed in delivering healthcare related items such as masks and protective suits for residents of Fiji.

REFERENCES


