

Critical Discourse of Indonesia's Free and Active Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Neutrality in The Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Zulkifli Usman., Frengki Napitupulu

Master of Communication Studies, Universitas Sahid Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's free and active foreign policy, rooted in Mohammad Hatta's 1948 doctrine, faced a significant test during Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, as Indonesia adopted a neutral stance, resisting Western pressure to impose sanctions on Russia. This study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the Indonesian government constructed a critical discourse of its free and active policy through narratives emphasizing peaceful diplomacy and multilateralism. By integrating Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory and Rizal Sukma's foreign policy frameworks, the research analyzes discourses in official speeches, statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and media coverage spanning February to December 2022.

Key narratives, such as peaceful diplomacy and multilateral legitimacy, positioned Indonesia as a neutral global mediator, evident in President Joko Widodo's diplomatic visits to Kyiv and Moscow in June 2022 and Indonesia's abstention in UN General Assembly votes. These actions reflect a commitment to the UN Charter and non-alignment principles. However, the analysis reveals that these discourses also obscured Indonesia's economic dependence on Russia, particularly for wheat (3.4 million tons) and fertilizer (250,000 tons of ammonia) imports in 2022, as reported by the Central Statistics Agency. Media framing, both domestic and international, shaped public perceptions, with national media reinforcing government narratives and social media reflecting polarized sentiments. This study contributes to political communication scholarship by elucidating how Indonesia's neutrality discourse navigates geopolitical tensions and domestic economic constraints, offering insights into strategic communication in a multipolar world.

Keywords: Critical discourse, free and active policy, neutrality, Critical Discourse Analysis, Indonesia, Russia-Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a global geopolitical upheaval, creating a divide between Western and non-Western nations, including Indonesia. Western powers, led by the United States and the European Union, pressed for economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia (Reuters, 2022). Indonesia, adhering to its free and active foreign policy as articulated by Mohammad Hatta in his 1948 speech *Rowing Between Two Reefs*, opted for neutrality. This stance was evident in Indonesia's refusal to impose sanctions and its decision to maintain Russia's invitation to the G20 Summit in Bali in 2022 (Kompas.id, 2022). This neutrality reflects a complex dilemma: balancing political sovereignty with economic dependence on Russia, particularly for wheat (3.4 million tons) and fertilizer (250,000 tons of ammonia) imports in 2022 (Central Statistics Agency, 2022).

The free and active principle, grounded in Pancasila and the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, emphasizes non-alignment and active contributions to global peace. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Indonesia faced challenges in maintaining autonomy amid Western accusations of passive alignment (BBC, 2022). President Joko Widodo's diplomatic visits to Kyiv and Moscow in June 2022 and Foreign Minister

Retno Marsudi's statements affirming commitment to the UN Charter underscored Indonesia's role as a mediator (Jokowi, 2022a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

This study is significant as it analyzes political communication in a multipolar geopolitical context, where discourse shapes domestic and international perceptions. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1995), this research explores how Indonesia constructed a critical discourse of its free and active policy to sustain neutrality. The research question is: How was the critical discourse of the free and active policy constructed to support Indonesia's neutral stance following Russia's invasion of Ukraine? The study examines official speeches, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements, and media coverage from February to December 2022, focusing on narratives of peaceful diplomacy and multilateralism. This research contributes to political communication and international relations scholarship by illuminating discourse strategies in foreign policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1995), views discourse as a social practice that reproduces and challenges power relations. It comprises three dimensions: text (linguistic structure), discursive practice (production and consumption of discourse), and social practice (socio-political context). Van Dijk (1993) asserts that CDA is effective in uncovering ideologies in political communication, such as neutrality narratives that shape public consensus. In Indonesia's context, CDA is relevant for analyzing how government discourse navigates global pressures while maintaining domestic legitimacy.

Hegemony Theory

Gramsci (1971) defines hegemony as domination through ideological consensus rather than coercion. In geopolitics, Western hegemony (via sanctions and anti-Russia narratives) clashes with Indonesia's counter-hegemonic free and active stance. National media, as "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971), reinforce government discourse, while social media reflects public polarization (Appendix 1). Hegemony theory is pertinent for understanding how neutrality discourse conceals economic dependencies (Dos Santos, 1970).

Dependency Theory

Dos Santos (1970) explains that developing nations like Indonesia often rely on advanced economies (or Russia, in this case) for strategic resources, such as wheat and fertilizers. This dependency influences foreign policy, encouraging neutrality to maintain economic ties. Indonesia's imports of wheat and energy cooperation with Russia (Central Statistics Agency, 2022) create a dilemma between political autonomy and economic needs.

Free and Active Principle

Introduced by Mohammad Hatta (1948), the free and active principle emphasizes independence from great power alliances and active contributions to global peace. Sukma (1999) notes that this principle is shaped by Indonesia's anti-colonial history and domestic dynamics. During the 2022 G20 Summit, Indonesia leveraged this principle to position itself as a global mediator, notably by inviting Russia despite Western pressure (Kompas.id, 2022). Weinstein (1976) highlights Indonesia's dependency dilemma, where neutrality balances domestic and international interests.

Political Communication and Neutrality Discourse

Political communication involves crafting narratives to influence public perception and legitimize policies (McNair, 2011). In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Indonesia's neutrality discourse was constructed through official speeches, diplomatic statements, and media amplification. Narratives like "peaceful diplomacy" and

“multilateralism” reflect strategic communication to maintain global image while managing domestic polarization (Appendix 1). This study addresses a gap in the literature by analyzing critical discourse in non-Western foreign policy amid geopolitical conflicts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on Indonesia’s neutrality discourse post-Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (February–December 2022). A qualitative approach captures the complexity of discourse in socio-political contexts (Creswell, 2014).

Research Object

The research object is the critical discourse of Indonesia’s free and active policy to sustain neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This discourse is manifested in:

- **Official Texts:** Speeches by President Joko Widodo (e.g., in Kyiv and Moscow, June 2022) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements (e.g., commitment to the UN Charter, March 2022).
- **Media Coverage:** Articles from national (Kompas.id, ANTARA) and international media (BBC, Reuters) reflecting neutrality framing.
- **Social Media:** Public opinions on Twitter (hashtag #IndonesiaNetral) and Reddit discussions, indicating public responses to neutrality (Appendix 1).

These sources were selected as they represent key channels of government and public political communication.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data were collected from official speeches, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements, and UN documents. Secondary data were sourced from media coverage and social media analysis (Twitter, Instagram). Techniques included:

- Document analysis of official texts to identify government narratives.
- Content analysis of media to map neutrality framing.
- Social media analysis to gauge public opinion (Appendix 1).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Fairclough’s CDA (1995) with the following stages:

- **Text Analysis:** Identifying keywords, phrases, and narratives (e.g., “peaceful diplomacy,” “UN Charter”).
- **Discursive Practice:** Examining the context of discourse production by government and media actors.
- **Social Practice:** Linking discourse to power structures, such as Western pressure and economic dependency.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (documents, media, social media) and counter-narrative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CDA analysis identified four critical discourse codes supporting Indonesia’s neutrality, summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Findings on Indonesia’s Free and Active Critical Discourse

Code	Narrative	Data Source	Context	Theoretical Relevance
J1-WACANA-DAMAI (Discourse of Peaceful Diplomacy)	“Indonesia promotes parliamentary diplomacy”	ANTARA (2022); Retno Marsudi’s speech (February 2022)	Emphasizing dialogue as an alternative to sanctions	Free and active as global peace (Sukma, 1999); 1945 Constitution Preamble
J4-MEDIATOR-NETRAL (Discourse of Neutral Mediation)	“Promoting peaceful dialogue”	Jokowi (2022a); Kompas.id (2022)	Jokowi’s visits to Kyiv and Moscow (June 2022)	Neutral mediator avoids confrontation (Weinstein, 1976)
K1-LEGITIMASI-HUKUM-INTERNASIONAL (Discourse of International Legal Legitimation)	“Committed to the UN Charter”	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022); United Nations (2022)	Abstention in UN votes (7 April, 14 November 2022)	Counter-hegemony against Western pressure (Gramsci, 1971)
K4-KEPEMIMPINAN-G20 (Discourse of Multilateral Leadership)	“G20 must be inclusive”	Jokowi (2022b); Kompas.id (2022)	Maintaining Russia’s presence at G20 Summit	Multilateralism conceals dependency (Dos Santos, 1970)

Discourse Code Analysis

J1-WACANA-DAMAI: The narrative “Indonesia promotes parliamentary diplomacy” (ANTARA, 2022) emerged in Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi’s February 2022 UN speech. This narrative underscores Indonesia’s role as a peace facilitator, aligning with the 1945 Constitution’s call for global peace contributions. Sukma (1999) emphasizes that the free and active principle prioritizes dialogue over confrontation. This narrative was reinforced in ASEAN forums (ANTARA, 2022), demonstrating consistency across regional and global platforms.

J4-MEDIATOR-NETRAL: President Jokowi’s statement, “promoting peaceful dialogue” (Jokowi, 2022a), during his June 2022 visits to Kyiv and Moscow positioned Indonesia as a neutral mediator. Reported by Kompas.id (2022), these visits garnered global attention as a rare non-Western effort to bridge the conflict. Weinstein (1976) notes that Indonesia’s neutrality often balances external pressures with domestic interests. However, this narrative drew Western criticism for lacking firmness (BBC, 2022).

K1-LEGITIMASI-HUKUM-INTERNASIONAL: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ (2022) statement, “committed to the UN Charter,” supported Indonesia’s abstention in UN votes on 7 April and 14 November 2022 (United Nations, 2022). This narrative leverages international law to legitimize neutrality, reflecting counter-hegemony against Western anti-Russia narratives (Gramsci, 1971). The abstention aligns with Indonesia’s historical rejection of bloc alliances (Hatta, 1948).

K4-KEPEMIMPINAN-G20: The narrative “G20 must be inclusive” (Jokowi, 2022b) affirmed Indonesia’s multilateral role, particularly by maintaining Russia’s G20 participation (Kompas.id, 2022). This reflects a strategy to ensure global stability while concealing economic dependencies, such as wheat (3.4 million tons) and fertilizer (250,000 tons of ammonia) imports (Central Statistics Agency, 2022). Dos Santos (1970) argues that such dependencies limit foreign policy autonomy.

Role of Media and Public Opinion

National media (Kompas.id, ANTARA, 2022) reinforced neutrality discourse through positive framing, such as “Indonesia chooses neutrality, avoids sanctions” (Kompas.id, 2022). This framing reflects the media’s role as “organic intellectuals” supporting government consensus (Gramsci, 1971). Conversely, international media (BBC, 2022; Reuters, 2022) criticized neutrality as passive alignment, with headlines like “Indonesia’s neutral stance draws criticism from the West” (BBC, 2022).

Social media analysis (Appendix 1) revealed public polarization. The hashtag #IndonesiaNetral on Twitter generated 50,000 tweets, with 60% supporting neutrality as an expression of sovereignty and 40% criticizing it as concealing economic dependency. Reddit discussions showed 65% of 1,200 comments supporting neutrality, but concerns about economic impacts, such as rising food prices due to wheat dependency, were prevalent (Appendix 1). This polarization highlights challenges in achieving domestic consensus.

Social Practice Analysis

The free and active discourse fostered domestic hegemonic consensus, supported by national media amplifying government narratives. However, it also concealed structural dependencies on Russia, such as wheat and fertilizer imports (Central Statistics Agency, 2022). Dos Santos (1970) argues that such dependencies constrain foreign policy autonomy. The multilateralism narrative (K4) successfully positioned Indonesia as a global actor but remained vulnerable to international criticism (BBC, 2022).

Moreover, the neutrality discourse reflects Indonesia’s historical dilemma between sovereignty and external needs (Weinstein, 1976). Jokowi’s visits and UN abstentions demonstrate efforts to maintain autonomy while avoiding alienation from the West or Russia. However, domestic polarization, evident on social media, indicates incomplete public consensus (Appendix 1). Fairclough’s CDA (1995) reveals that neutrality discourse is a sophisticated political communication strategy but also a “veil” for structural dependencies, underscoring the relevance of discourse analysis in understanding power relations.

Theoretical Implications

This study extends CDA’s application in political communication by demonstrating how neutrality discourse shapes domestic and international consensus. Gramsci’s hegemony theory (1971) elucidates the role of national media in supporting government discourse, while Dos Santos’ dependency theory (1970) explains Indonesia’s constrained autonomy. The free and active principle (Sukma, 1999) proves a flexible communication tool, enabling Indonesia to navigate geopolitical conflicts without losing legitimacy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Indonesian government constructed a critical discourse of its free and active policy through narratives of peaceful diplomacy (J1, J4) and multilateralism (K1, K4) to sustain neutrality post-Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This discourse positioned Indonesia as a global mediator but concealed economic dependencies on Russia. National media reinforced hegemonic consensus, but public polarization highlights domestic challenges. This study contributes to political communication by elucidating discourse strategies in foreign policy. Recommendations include:

- Strengthening multilateral diplomacy through platforms like the UN and G20.
- Diversifying economic sources to reduce reliance on Russia.
- Managing domestic polarization through transparent public communication.
- Further research on critical discourse in other geopolitical conflicts.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Supporting Data for Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Social Media Data

a. Twitter (#IndonesiaNetral)

- **Tweet Volume:** 50,000 (February–December 2022).
- **Sentiment:**
 - 60% (30,000 tweets) supported neutrality, with narratives like “Indonesia upholds sovereignty” and “Free and active is the best path.”
 - 40% (20,000 tweets) criticized neutrality, with narratives like “Neutrality hides wheat dependency” and “Indonesia lacks firmness.”
- **Sample Tweets (anonymized):**
 - Support: “#IndonesiaNetral shows we won’t be a Western puppet!” (Twitter user, 15 March 2022).
 - Criticism: “Neutrality is just an excuse; we’re too dependent on Russia” (Twitter user, 20 March 2022).
- **Engagement:** Average 200 retweets per pro-neutrality post, 150 for critical posts (Appendix 1).

b. Reddit

- **Comment Volume:** 1,200 comments in relevant subreddits (February–December 2022).
- **Sentiment:**
 - 65% supported neutrality as a diplomatic strategy.
 - 35% criticized economic impacts, such as rising food prices due to wheat dependency.
- **Sample Comments (anonymized):**
 - Support: “Indonesia’s neutrality shows independence” (Reddit user, 10 April 2022).
 - Criticism: “Neutrality is a mask; we’re trapped by Russian imports” (Reddit user, 15 April 2022).

2. Media Analysis

a. National Media

- Kompas.id (4 March 2022): “Indonesia chooses neutrality, avoids sanctions against Russia.” Positive framing, emphasizing sovereignty and free and active principles.
- ANTARA (10 March 2022): “Indonesia promotes parliamentary diplomacy to resolve Russia-Ukraine conflict.” Supports peaceful diplomacy narrative (J1).

b. International Media

- BBC (15 March 2022): “Indonesia’s neutral stance draws criticism from the West.” Critical framing, accusing neutrality of passive alignment.
- Reuters (28 February 2022): “West imposes sweeping sanctions on Russia.” Highlights Western pressure on Indonesia to join sanctions.

3. Economic Data

- **Imports from Russia** (Central Statistics Agency, 2022):
 - Wheat: 3.4 million tons (USD 1.2 billion, 30% of national needs).
 - Fertilizer (ammonia): 250,000 tons (USD 150 million, 15% of national needs).
- **Impact:** 5% domestic food price increase in Q2 2022, linked to import dependency (Central Statistics Agency, 2022).

4. Data Visualization

- **Public Sentiment Distribution:** See pie chart for Twitter sentiment distribution (60% support, 40% criticism).

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