

# Indonesia's Position on International Economic Sanctions on Russia: Between Political Neutrality and International Legal Obligations

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**Abstract.** Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a global response in the form of economic sanctions, mostly imposed unilaterally by Western countries outside the United Nations framework. This action has sparked debate about the legality of unilateral sanctions in international law, especially regarding the principle of non-intervention, state sovereignty, and the use of economic pressure as a means of coercion. Indonesia, as a non-aligned country and an active member of various international forums, has taken a stance not to impose sanctions, but has continued to voice concerns about the conflict. This paper aims to analyze Indonesia's legal and diplomatic position in responding to economic sanctions against Russia, using a normative approach through a study of international legal documents and Indonesia's foreign policy. The main focus is on the conformity of Indonesia's stance with the principles of public international law, as well as how Indonesia seeks to maintain a balance between neutrality and global responsibility. The results of the study show that Indonesia consistently rejects unilateral coercive actions that are not based on a UN mandate, but continues to show active intentions through diplomatic channels, including submitting diplomatic protests and calling for an end to Russia's massive attacks on Ukraine. This approach reflects a balanced diplomatic strategy—not taking sides militarily, but still upholding a peaceful resolution in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and international law, between Political Neutrality and International Legal Obligations.

**Keywords:** Economic Sanction, Neutrality, International Law.

## 1 Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked one of the most tumultuous moments in post-Cold War geopolitical dynamics [1]. The military action not only created instability in the Eastern European region, but also triggered a broad global resonance in various aspects—political, economic, security, and humanitarian. A quick reaction came from Western countries, especially members of the European Union, the United States, Canada, and their allies, who imposed large-scale economic sanctions on Russia [2]. These sanctions include asset freezes, restrictions on access to the international

financial system, energy embargoes, and trade cuts in strategic sectors. The main goal of the sanctions is to put economic pressure on the Russian government to stop military aggression and return to diplomacy.

However, the response to the invasion was not uniform across the world. Developing countries, including members of the Non-Aligned Movement and countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, showed diversity in their foreign policy positions. Indonesia, as the largest democracy in Southeast Asia and a leader among developing countries, pursued a cautious policy. Although it openly expressed concern over the use of military force and called for respect for the principle of state sovereignty, Indonesia chose not to join the international sanctions regime against Russia. This stance did not necessarily signal support for Russia's actions, but rather reflected Indonesia's foreign policy orientation, which is rooted in the principle of free and active [3].

The principle of free and active in Indonesia's foreign policy has strong historical roots, especially since the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung [4]. In this context, "free" means not tied to any power bloc, while "active" means that Indonesia continues to actively contribute to maintaining world peace and order. In dealing with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this principle is manifested through a series of diplomatic attitudes that are non-partisan but remain vocal in calling for a peaceful resolution. Indonesia has several times emphasized its commitment to the UN Charter, especially regarding respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, without having to take part in coercive actions that do not have a mandate from the UN Security Council.

This paper aims to analyze Indonesia's position on the imposition of economic sanctions by a number of countries against Russia, in the context of international efforts to stop the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In addition, this study also evaluates various policy options that Indonesia can realistically take to play a more constructive and significant role in supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

## **2 Result and Discussion**

### **2.1 Indonesian Position on Unilateral Economic Sanction to Russia**

Indonesia's decision not to participate in the implementation of economic sanctions against Russia can be seen as a form of consistency with the principle of non-intervention in international law. As stated in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, intervention in the domestic affairs of another country without a clear legal basis, especially without a Security Council mandate, can be considered a violation of sovereignty [5].

According to Brownlie (2003), unilateral sanctions that are not authorized by the UN fall into a legal grey area, and have the potential to be used as political tools rather than legitimate legal mechanisms [6]. In the case of sanctions against Russia, the majority of sanctions were imposed unilaterally by Western countries, without any consensus in the Security Council, given that Russia has veto power. Indonesia, referring to the principle of non-intervention and the supremacy of international law based on multilateralism, chose not to support such a unilateral approach.

This decision is also in line with the view of Hans Kelsen, who stated that modern international law must be distinguished from sovereign power [7]. State action in responding to violations of the law must be based on internationally recognized legal instruments, not by a particular coalition or geopolitical alliance. Rejection of sanctions does not mean that Indonesia is passive or indifferent to the conflict. On the contrary, Indonesia applies the principle of active neutrality, where non-involvement in coercive actions is accompanied by real efforts to encourage a peaceful resolution. This concept reflects the approach initiated by the founders of Indonesian foreign policy, which prioritizes active diplomacy without being tied to a particular power bloc.

President Joko Widodo's move to visit Kyiv and Moscow in mid-2022 is a concrete implementation of this strategy [8]. In his capacity as Chair of the G20 Presidency, Jokowi brought a message of peace and called for the importance of ending wars and normalizing global food supply routes [9]. In the diplomatic approach, this is referred to as track one diplomacy—where state leaders directly become facilitators of communication and balancers of the global political narrative.

According to the theory of constructivism in international relations (Alexander Wendt), the identity and role of a state in the international system can be formed through interaction and discourse [10]. In this case, Indonesia forms itself as a peaceful actor (peace broker) whose role is to balance the position between the great powers without losing credibility in the eyes of the international public.

State actions are always based on national interests, including economic stability and domestic security. Indonesia considers that the imposition of sanctions on Russia could have a direct negative impact on the national economy. Russia is an important partner in energy, defense, and food exports and imports. Sanctions on Russia could disrupt the supply of wheat, fertilizer, and other strategic commodities needed by Indonesia [11], and trigger a spike in inflation.

As a concrete example, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that Russia is one of the largest fertilizer exporters to Indonesia [12]. The severance of economic ties with Russia could disrupt the national agricultural sector, threaten food security, and impact millions of small farmers. Therefore, Indonesia is taking a cautious position, especially to protect the Indonesian people from being affected socially and economically.

## **2.2 Diplomatic Protest and the Settlement of Russia and Ukrainian Conflict by Peaceful Means**

Before Although Indonesia has taken a neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict by not imposing economic sanctions, it does not mean that Indonesia must completely refrain from expressing its stance on clear violations of international law. In fact, within the framework of active neutrality, Indonesia has the moral and diplomatic space to convey an official protest (diplomatic protest) to Russia, as a form of condemnation of actions that contradict the principles of the United Nations Charter, especially regarding the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity of another country.

Diplomatic protest, in international law, is a form of legitimate state action to express objections to the actions of another state that are considered to violate international norms, without severing diplomatic relations or taking coercive action. According to Oppenheim (2008), diplomatic protests have strategic value in maintaining the consistency of a state's attitude, emphasizing the principles adopted, and affirming a state's legal position in dealing with violations of international norms [13].

In this case, Indonesia can officially convey its objection to the Russian government

through bilateral diplomatic channels or in multilateral forums, regarding the military invasion that has caused a humanitarian crisis and violation of the principle of non-aggression. This protest does not necessarily make Indonesia take sides in the conflict, but rather confirms that Indonesia remains in a position to uphold public international law, especially the principle of sovereignty and peaceful dispute resolution.

Moreover, Indonesia can also use diplomatic channels to remind Russia of the destructive impact of a prolonged conflict, both economically, socially, and in terms of global reputation. The never-ending military invasion has disrupted the global supply chain, spiked energy and food prices, and reduced the international community's trust in Russia's commitment to global stability. In bilateral relations, Indonesia has an interest in maintaining strategic cooperation with Russia, but such cooperation can only continue if it is built on the basis of stability, trust, and respect for international law.

This warning can be delivered wisely in various multilateral diplomatic forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), as well as in bilateral forums, as a form of Indonesia's moral responsibility as a country that upholds the principles of peace. According to the constructivist view in international relations [10]. States have the capacity to shape the behavior of other actors through normative dialogue and diplomatic interactions consistent with international values.

In addition to conveying protests and warnings, Indonesia also needs to reaffirm the importance of resolving disputes through peaceful mechanisms as stipulated in Article 33 of the UN Charter [5, p. 33]. This article contains various methods of peaceful dispute resolution, including negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and international justice. Indonesia can encourage Russia and Ukraine to return to the negotiating table, either through bilateral, trilateral (involving a third party), or through international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, or other informal mechanisms.

For example, Indonesia could propose the establishment of an ad hoc working group within the G20 or ASEAN+3 to encourage limited dialogue focused on humanitarian issues, civilian assistance, and normalization of food supplies. This is in line with the "conflict transformation" approach, where conflict resolution is not solely through the cessation of violence, but also through changing the structure of relations that underlie the conflict itself [14].

Indonesia can also maximize its role in international forums such as the UN General Assembly, where resolutions are non-binding but can reflect the moral voice of the international community. In previous UN sessions, Indonesia has supported resolutions condemning violations of Ukraine's sovereignty, and this support should be followed up with real action in the form of involvement in global peace initiatives initiated by non-aligned countries.

### **3 Conclusion**

Indonesia's position in responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the wave of international economic sanctions reflects a cautious, balanced diplomatic approach rooted in the principle of an independent and active foreign policy. By not participating

in the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia, Indonesia maintains its commitment to the principle of non-intervention and respect for international legal mechanisms, especially in the context that unilateral sanctions without a mandate from the UN Security Council are often questioned for their legal legitimacy. However, this neutral stance cannot be interpreted as non-involvement or indifference to violations of international law that occur.

As a country that upholds the principles of world peace and the enforcement of international law, Indonesia has the moral space and diplomatic responsibility to take a more proactive position. One step that can be taken is to submit an official diplomatic protest to Russia over military actions that have caused a humanitarian crisis, infrastructure damage, and global instability. In addition, Indonesia can also use a normative approach in submitting a diplomatic protest regarding the long-term impact of this conflict on Russia's international reputation and the balance of the global system.

On the other hand, Indonesia needs to continue to emphasize its support for peaceful resolution mechanisms, whether through bilateral, regional, or multilateral channels, as mandated by Article 33 of the UN Charter. An active role in encouraging negotiation and mediation, as well as participation in international forums that prioritize dialogue, will strengthen Indonesia's position as a constructive actor in global diplomacy. Thus, Indonesia not only maintains national independence and stability but also plays the role of a bridge of peace amidst the increasingly sharp polarization of the world.

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