

Economic Diplomacy through the Development of Nickel Smelters and Battery Plants in Indonesia: Obi Island Case Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Date received: 11 January 2023 Revision date: 09 March 2023 Date published: 30 May 2023	There is a high demand for electric batteries worldwide, driven by a growing movement towards environmentally friendly electric cars. As the country with the largest nickel producer, Indonesia can develop the technology of making raw nickel into raw materials for the world's electric batteries that will be supplied until 2040. The large number of these has an impact on the proliferation of foreign investment in Indonesia. This article will discuss the success of the Indonesian government in restoring the post-Covid-19 economy through international forums and bilateral cooperation, especially with China. The analysis of this theme uses qualitative methods to explore the success and impact further. Then, the concepts of economic diplomacy and state economic security become analytical tools to strengthen the author's argument regarding the long-term effect of too much foreign investment in Indonesia, especially cooperation with the Nickel Smelter owned by China.
Keywords <i>electric battery;</i> <i>technology;</i> <i>government of Indonesia;</i> <i>cooperation;</i> <i>bilateral;</i> <i>economic diplomacy;</i> <i>economic security</i>	
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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is a virus that has caused the collapse of several essential sectors in every country in the world. Its rapid spread resulted in deaths in all parts of the world, including Indonesia. However, the economic sector is most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Every nation strives to create a better world by effectively and comprehensively addressing health security through international organizations and meetings. This is crucial for reviving the global economy, including investment, which has suffered due to the pandemic.

Indonesia, rich in natural resources that can be utilized for manufacturing finished goods, promotes the integration of infrastructure development. This integration also involves the manufacturing of electric vehicles. The process consists of production from upstream to downstream. The government maximizes the process due to the lack of smelters that comply with the latest management standards, so the government must seek other things to develop electric vehicles. This is supported by President Jokowi, who stopped nickel exports and only focused on making finished goods from Indonesia. However, what is interesting is that China owns some of the nickel smelters in Indonesia. It becomes an interesting discussion about what Indonesia gets in addition to the economic impact that occurs. Then, I will discuss the long-term financial problems that will arise.

Despite the pandemic slowly declining, world countries continue to make efforts to respond to the current situation. Governments are working together to support each other in recovery, focusing on economic recovery as an essential component. The world countries held a high-level meeting to realize this recovery, namely the G20. The picture can be seen through the meeting of the G20

countries. The G20, or Group of Twenty, is an international forum that brings together world countries with high economic levels with European Union representatives. G20 members consist of South Africa, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Germany, Canada, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Russia, France, China, Turkey, and the European Union. Indonesia hosted the meeting. Indonesia was chosen to host the G20 for one full year. Based on the G20 slogan of Recover Together, Recover Stronger. The Indonesian government is expected to have a high bargaining value for the world economic recovery process, especially Indonesia.

Some islands can produce abundant natural resources and are ranked in the top 4 in the world. In recent years, Indonesia has been looking to improve. Some of the impacts of the pandemic that encourage the world to move together to recover are rising debt and increasingly scarce public needs. However, more than that, Indonesia has good bilateral relations with China. However, there are things that the government needs to focus on so that diplomacy runs according to existing rules.

Diplomacy is a form of representation, communication, and negotiation mechanism by states and other international actors, including business. The definition reflects how diplomacy participation is carried out simultaneously by various state and non-state international actors (Saner and Yiu, 2001). China defines economic diplomacy as a form of economic and financial action, including trade, investment, and all forms of cooperation in the economic field. Thus, economic diplomacy is a negotiation between countries through state representatives to promote economic benefits and gain access to resources, markets, technology, and capital (Chaziza, 2019). Some countries define economic sanctions as coercive economic diplomacy or an alternative to war (Rosyidin and Fitrah, 2016).

Economic diplomacy is closely related to the security sector. Security is generally defined as the result of political interaction between countries that can ultimately threaten the state (Hough, 2023). However, William defines that the issue of security is transformed not only in its focus on security in the military field (Williams, 2013). However, other issues, including the economy, must be given more attention. In the economic security section, China defines its national economy as a situation where countries are free from disturbances and threats that come from both external and internal sources. These disruptions and threats include development and economic interests (Salam, 2022).

Thomas defines the global political and economic challenges as limited since they only focus on reducing poverty through the quantitative targets set out in the MDGs. However, with the global population rising to billions by 2025, poverty reduction is a very ambitious target in many parts of the world (Williams, 2013). Poverty kills in large numbers when people cannot obtain enough food to live on because they do not have the economic means to buy or produce it (Hough, 2023). So, it becomes a concept of human security through economic improvement and resource access.

So, Economic Diplomacy is a form of state and other actors' efforts to benefit from political interaction to create a conducive and safe situation for the interests of the country being brought. Meanwhile, economic security is a situation of freedom from external and internal threats in finance, poverty, and hunger and to meet the country's needs. Economic security can be interpreted as the result of the diplomacy process carried out between states and non-state actors across countries.

In this case, China's approach to world countries, especially developing countries, is an exciting form of economic diplomacy. Interestingly, China can contribute to every nation, including

policies in its country. In comparison, China is reluctant to enter into conflicts in each country. This proves that China's more humanist approach can encourage the acceleration of its country's economic growth and expand its influence in various sectors and countries.

In addition, China is known as a country that permanently protects the interests of people living in conflict areas. However, the government is still given a place in a country in conflict. This is also done by partner countries so that China can provide financial assistance and development in their countries. In negotiations, China always offers the best price for partners and rarely plays military sanctions. Indonesia seeks to garner its partner countries' interest, but numerous areas, such as environmental concerns, require improvement. Despite this, there are still opportunities available.

Environmental pollution will be essential to sustain bilateral relations between Indonesia and China. In their journal, Rompas and Hayati argued that nickel mines create concerns for people in Sulawesi. This is due to the change in the color of the sea to two since nickel companies have been operating. So, although the nickel smelting process will be the initial capital for the Indonesian government in conducting economic diplomacy, there are still impacts that need to be considered. These activities have destroyed the sea and the water environment, so it has become severe. In his journal, he mentions several laws and regulations to strengthen the argument that every development must adjust and comply with existing regulations (Rompas and Hayati, 2022).

Meanwhile, Tsirwiyati argues that Indonesia will become a big market for nickel. Indonesia will also dominate the electric vehicle markets. This is due to the abundant amount of nickel in Indonesia. Even Indonesia agreed to build nickel industry factories (Tsirwiyati, 2023).

The author will focus on the security of Indonesia's economic diplomacy, especially diplomatic relations with China. Then, the process of diplomacy and negotiations carried out by Indonesia, as well as future predictions regarding the success of the construction of the nickel factory and the inauguration of the nickel smelter on the island of Obi, become vital objects of the country that will use a sustainable economy.

RESEARCH METHOD

The author uses a qualitative approach to answer the research questions, where each issue discussed is addressed through a literature review of several journals, books, and previous research articles that observe the patterns of diplomacy between Indonesia and China. The author justifies this by saying that qualitative methods uniquely process data based on problems in responding to text and image data. To examine and understand the problem, qualitative research has many research designs (Creswell and Creswell, 2023).

The author needs to work on collecting information through interviews or observing samples related to the question. Through the author's qualitative analysis, the author uses previous research and literature from other sources to answer questions about smelter development in Indonesia. The researcher as a validated instrument must be considered in terms of the researcher's tendency to understand the subject, the subject's level of understanding, and the willingness to enter the subject's research object. So, we use the above method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Covid-19 has caused several obstacles in all countries, including Indonesia. The impact is in several crucial areas: economic, political, social, and even health. In this case, Indonesia and its ASEAN neighbors have experienced a decline in the country's economic growth rate. This can be a real threat to Indonesia, namely an economic recession. Economic recession in Indonesia is characterized by changes in the prices of inputs used to produce goods and services. Price changes that increase sharply from before can create new threats for Indonesia in the economic field. Fiscal and monetary policies can also lead to recession if done excessively (Darmastuti et al., 2021).

Therefore, Indonesia formed a nickel smelter development cooperation to restore the country's economic condition. Indonesia used it as a momentum to recover from the impact of Covid-19. Cooperation with China is an option chosen by Indonesia in developing nickel smelters because China always maintains a balance between reform, development, and stability (Saripudin and Juned, 2018).

Indonesia has abundant natural resources, including renewable energy. Natural gas is one of Indonesia's natural resources. Policies related to renewable energy implemented by the government have been passed. It has had a good impact on the demand for energy from Indonesia's natural resources increasing. Some of the policies include cuts through subsidies and a ban on the export of raw materials. The procedure is expected to encourage domestic interest in the use or purchasing power of the Indonesian people (Juned, Darmastuti and Satrio, 2022).

However, the government is expanding its reach into the purchasing power of renewable energy. This is done through the construction of nickel smelters. Nickel is the largest natural resource that Indonesia produces to meet world needs. Several surveys conducted by other countries say that Indonesia has the most nickel in the world. Indonesia is considered the largest nickel producer in the world.

Figure. 1
Source: The U.S. Geological Survey (2021)

World mine production of nickel, by country, 2021 (p)

Ranking	Country	Thousand tonnes	Percentage of total
1	Indonesia	1,000	37.0%
2	Philippines	370	13.7%
3	Russia	250	9.3%
4	New Caledonia	190	7.0%
5	Australia	160	5.9%
6	Canada	134	4.8%
7	China	120	4.4%
8	Brazil	100	3.7%
9	United States	18	0.7%
-	Other countries	410	15.2%
Total (rounded)		2,750	100.0%

According to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the U.S Geological Survey (USGS), Indonesia's nickel production will reach 1 million tons in 2021, and 37.04% of the world's nickel is said to be in Indonesia (canada.ca, 2023). Up to 90% of Indonesia's nickel reserves

are spread across several regions, such as Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, and North Maluku. PT Aneka Tambang is working on one through its subsidiary PT Gag Nickel. So far, Indonesia has become a benchmark for other countries that want to develop this nickel mining product. The nickel commodity adds to the list of hidden mining in Indonesia (Darmawan, 2022).

The Indonesian government supports the construction of a smelter or electric car battery raw material factory as an effort to turn industrial development. The government is pushing the commodity-based economy into technological development to support Indonesia's transformation into an industrialized country. In addition, Indonesia is also encouraged to become a country that will become a significant producer of nickel-based finished goods. This development will increase the attractiveness of foreign investors in the development of the electric car and motorcycle industry.

Indonesia will support the construction of the largest car battery factory in Southeast Asia with an investment value of around USD 1.1 billion. This has had a good impact on industrial development in Indonesia. The Indonesian government built the factory in collaboration with the Korean company LG. The plant is an investment project between a Korean consortium, namely LG Energy Solution, Hyundai Motor Group, and PT Industri Baretai Indonesia or Indonesia Battery Corporation (IBC). Then, Investment Minister Bahlil Lahadalia said that constructing this battery and electric vehicle factory is part of Korea's investment plan of US\$9.8 billion in Indonesia. A large number of investments in Indonesia. Smelter development in Indonesia will be the object of discussion of the success of Indonesia's economic diplomacy in cooperating with China for economic recovery (Lestari, 2021).

Another focus of this article is the long-term economic impact of constructing a nickel smelter in the Obi region of Indonesia. The problems that occur in the area affect Indonesia's financial security in the future.

Indonesia's economic diplomacy

Indonesia has been closely associated with diplomacy since the old days. Diplomacy is considered a practical step to recover the country from conditions at the lowest point, especially in the economic field; this is because Indonesia has successfully organized the G20 well with countries and parties that will restore economic growth together. This is an interaction process between governments to advocate, negotiate, and determine problem-based policies. In this article, the author uses economic diplomacy to analyze the problem of nickel smelter plant construction in Indonesia, especially on Obi Island. Economic diplomacy is an effort or state dealing with other countries to maximize its national benefits to meet its national needs and interests. These benefits are achieved through trade, investment, and other economic-based transactions. Economic diplomacy also plays an essential role in intergovernmental interactions that are carried out on several levels, namely bilateral, regional, and multilateral (Jemadu *et al.*, 2015).

Strengthen the concept of economic diplomacy. Negotiation is essential to the success of diplomacy. Kickbush defines diplomacy as a process of exchange between two countries that want to agree on a mutual agreement in solving a problem (Kickbusch *et al.*, 2013). In this case, Indonesia provides a place to build a nickel smelter with a significant profit investment for development in Indonesia.

The exchange process is by the development in Indonesia. Zartman and Berman propose three stages to reach a consensus agreement. The first is the problem diagnosis stage, which is the

main focus. The government, other institutions, and community representatives are involved in the smelter construction process and its impact on the surrounding community. Second, exchanges are made in detail regarding the benefits obtained by both parties. Third, implement international agreements based on sustainable development and monitor cases with international bodies to resolve problems. For Kickbusch, the alignment of interests is a form of exploring the perspectives, agreements, and otherwise of all parties involved in a contract. All parties involved must come together to build a good relationship and understanding with each other.

Based on this, Indonesia can be called a country recovering its economy after the Covid-19 pandemic by cooperating with China. The decision to cooperate with the PT Harita Group smelter owned by China is due to one of the nickel needs in the world, which depends on Nickel in Indonesia. So, to fulfill this, Indonesia chose the company because it is a large country with management by world demand. In addition, the post-pandemic situation paralyzed several fields, especially the economy. Indonesia is a country that has been severely affected by economic conditions. The increasing debt due to infrastructure development and the inequality of assistance the community receives are significant challenges for Indonesia's economic progress. It should be noted that the situation becomes risky if Indonesia is not assertive in several policies that lead to the financial sector.

After the lousy situation of Covid-19 started to recover, the government became more focused on economic recovery by investing on a large scale in Indonesia, including making nickel smelters. Interestingly, smelters in Indonesia are owned mainly by China, so the country influences policies in Indonesia. This is a result of the many Chinese influences in Indonesia. Some things that must be encouraged in the era after the pandemic decreases: the state must focus on maintaining and increasing the country's competitiveness abroad. This means the government must generate revenue from its natural resources, including nickel. Nickel is the fourth largest natural resource produced by Indonesia in the world.

I want to make the argument that the government of Indonesia needs to take into account the long-term effects of granting the nickel smelter plant operation license. Considering this decision's economic, political, and environmental ramifications is essential. The government should support technological advancement by attracting foreign investors according to the country's capacity and considering the long-term impact of other countries' influence on Indonesia. It is argued that all stakeholders and local entities jointly promote the country to synchronize and coordinate attracting investors. Furthermore, internal cooperation between all government departments and consistency of delivery is crucial to success.

Indonesia faces its most formidable challenge yet with the post-Covid-19 condition. However, the opening of a smelter to meet global demand could have a positive impact on the country. China predicts that Indonesia's nickel supply can satisfy the need for electric car batteries by 2040. Furthermore, Indonesia believes that by 2030, the world will gradually transition to electric car technology, with a target of 31 million electric cars. In Indonesia, the market for electric vehicles has already reached 600,000 (Rosana, 2021). There is a \$1 billion investment from a Chinese smelter company to build a joint industry around Obi Island, which could help Indonesia recover from the downturn caused by Covid-19. Civil society groups and other stakeholders can work together to strengthen advocacy efforts for economic issues (Kickbusch *et al.*, 2013).

Construction of a nickel smelter with *High-Pressure Acid Leaching (HPAL)* quality. The smelter has a capacity of up to 365 thousand tons of Mixed Hydroxide Precipitate (MHP) for a year

for electric car batteries. The product is MHP, a mixture of nickel and cobalt hydroxide solids. MHP is an intermediate product in the processing and refining low-grade nickel before further processing into nickel sulfate and cobalt sulfate. The company is also developing advanced production facilities to produce nickel sulfate and cobalt sulfate as the main ingredients for electric vehicle batteries (Asmarini, 2021). Thus, Indonesia can show the world that it can compete in the global market by producing finished goods from mining products.

The construction of smelters is the government's innovation to engage in the *Global Value Chain* process. Previously, Indonesia has yet to be able to compete to manage finished goods. However, now Indonesia can build the largest nickel smelter with the largest supply of nickel as the primary raw material for electric cars at the center of international electric car needs. The construction of smelters in Indonesia is of positive value for the government and society of economic diplomacy's objectives, namely increasing exports and foreign investment. The difference is that the export commodities carried out by Indonesia are different from finished goods. Thus, the selling price of these goods increases. Another implication of smelter development is the increase in Indonesia's economic figures worldwide.

The G20 is a form of cooperation between world countries in restoring the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic internationally. Indonesia was chosen as the host of the forum. The G20 consists of countries with the world's highest economic levels. This means that the policies carried out by the government have shown excellent results for economic progress through the use of technology. The technology creates finished goods from mining products and other sectors. Strengthened by the Ministry of Home Affairs, they said that mining and extraction of mining products and steel and electricity raw materials are factors of competitiveness that Indonesia has. The process of processing nickel into battery raw materials is a success for Indonesia in improving the quality of production and selling prices. This is related to the *Global Value Chain*. Global Value Chain (GVC) is the process of a country producing finished goods that involve other countries, from the production process to the marketing process (BKPerdag, 2021). Thus, Indonesia has high bargaining power in world economic diplomacy. Thus, several policies can develop in Indonesia in the future, although there is still a need for much research on the long-term implications of opening the investment tap after Covid-19.

The effects of the smelter's opening on Obi Island

More about smelter development in Indonesia. There will be other factors that will affect the Indonesian economy in the future. Economic security must be considered so that every government policy runs long. The smelter development should provide comfort for the people around Obi and the entire region of Indonesia without any pollution from the industry.

The government must maintain the state's integrity, society's protection, and economic security. Economic security is an attempt by a country to influence other countries by playing its instruments in intervening in a country's policies. Economic security is also seen in how countries depend on other countries (Chotimah, 2017). The country's condition can be considered safe, depending on its income.

Therefore, China has a stronger dominance than Indonesia based on economic security. The inauguration on the island of Obi is one form of threat to Indonesia's future economic security. The special treatment for PT Harita Group proves that policy control is in a country with a stable economy and sizeable financial income conditions. The company was made a vital state object and attended by

several state officials. The policy was taken even though the community complained about the pollution conditions in the Obi area.

Buzan's perspective on the need for awareness of economic dependence in the global market will impact the exploitation of political goals. Indonesia must understand that it relies on other countries for the number of smelters and the control of most of them. Evidence of dependence and policy intervention lies in the preferential treatment of these companies to dump waste into the sea. This is allowed by the evidence of pollution in the area around the factory despite administrative problems (Bhawono, 2022).

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources' negative impact is limited to the adverse effects of smelter construction. It does not discuss the Environmental Impact Assessment. The journal entitled "The Impact of Smelter Development in the Special Economic Zone of Southeast Sulawesi Province" only provides negative impacts such as disruption of world markets and social unrest due to the cessation of mine management due to development. However, seawater pollution in the Sulawesi region, especially in Obi, needs to be discussed (Samad, 2022). Indonesia's concern in the future is that when the world's supply is fulfilled, there will be a battery power source. However, Indonesia will focus on environmental issues resulting from industrial waste that pollutes the waters in Indonesia. The costs incurred will be huge because the pollution is not easy to eliminate. The high price of environmental solutions will affect the country's economic security due to the significant expenses incurred and the extended period. Predicting the future situation, Indonesia will focus on environmental issues.

On the contrary, China and other countries will benefit in the long run from the effects of using environmentally friendly electric cars and various economic interests through buying and selling electric vehicles. However, to raise awareness, Indonesia has regulated the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation 11 of 2019 concerning the Second Amendment to the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation Number 25 of 2018 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining Business (Minerba). The regulation was enacted to maintain the sustainability of raw material supplies and smelters in Indonesia. The ban applies not only to nickel but also to other types of energy. This is done to maintain sustainability and increase value due to the processing of raw or semi-finished goods into finished goods at high prices (Tsirwiyati, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The government's construction of battery factories and nickel smelters in Indonesia is an excellent step toward restoring the economy that fell during the Covid-19 pandemic. The involvement of foreign parties to jointly produce finished goods is an exciting thing to discuss because it is an effort by the government to encourage GVC in Indonesia. The ban on the export of raw goods and the production of finished goods from mining products through the regulation of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Number 11 of 2019 concerning the Second Amendment to the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation Number 25 of 2018 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining Business (Minerba) is also Indonesia's effort to recover from the downturn by adding value to the selling price of the products created and encouraging their sustainability. The product is nickel, Indonesia's primary raw material for car batteries.

The construction of a nickel smelter on the island of Obi resulted from economic diplomacy between Indonesia and the owner of a Chinese company with a license to operate since 2018. The

investment value provided is tremendous so that the smelter can be built. The smelter has a large capacity to supply the world's electric car needs until 2040. So, it will be an excellent opportunity for the Indonesian economy. However, several things need to be considered considering the condition of Indonesia, which is recovering from the Covid-19 disorder. Indonesia only focuses on short-term economic needs, meaning it only considers financial aspects without realizing other factors such as politics, the environment, and the military. These aspects will have a long-term impact if not adequately considered.

Indonesia must consider opening the investment tap after the Covid-19 pandemic. Referring to the foreign policy model, Foreign Policy results from a large state's will minus the state's ability. So, Indonesia will currently need help to survive in the current situation. High willingness without considering Indonesia's capacity will lead to an economic crisis. I want the argument to be based on the Global Value Chain concept, which suggests that other countries will prioritize their interests and recuperate from the pandemic. The Indonesian government has decided to construct an electric car battery plant after the decline in Covid-19 cases. I want to state that the policy is explicitly wrong; the government has provided data indicating a gradual improvement in Indonesia's economy and investment levels by around 5.4%. However, fuel and staple food price increases contradict the government's figures. I suggest that Indonesia's policies should be long-term and consider the country's will.

In addition, the Indonesian government must prioritize a sustainable economy to encourage reducing the use of excessive carbon emission gases. This will be an added value for Indonesia if done simultaneously, considering the many impacts on the environment that the community has felt. So, constructing smelters to rebuild the economy that collapsed due to Covid-19 is a reasonable effort for the government. However, referring to the rules for a sustainable economy will be essential to promote Indonesia fully supporting clean energy that can reduce excessive carbon emission gases in the future.

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