

Port Visits as Instruments of Defense Diplomacy: The Case of KRI dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991's South Pacific Mission (2024)

Tri Huliyani¹, Rizerius Eko Hadisancoko², Fauzia Gustarina Cempaka Timur³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Pertahanan Republik Indonesia

E-mail: trihuliyani0418@gmail.com¹

Article History:

Received: 05 Agustus 2026

Revised: 20 Agustus 2026

Accepted: 26 Agustus 2026

Keywords: Port Visit, Defense Diplomacy, Soft Power, KRI dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991, South Pacific

Abstract: The South Pacific region holds strategic significance for Indonesia due to its geographical proximity to the east part of Indonesia especially Papua, its Melanesian cultural connections, and the increasing geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. Amid challenges related to perceptions of the Papua issue and the need to strengthen relations with Pacific countries, Indonesia conducted the South Pacific Port Visit Mission 2024 using KRI dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991 to Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. This article aims to analyze how the port visit utilized as an instrument of Indonesia's defense diplomacy and its implications for Indonesia's interests in the South Pacific. This study employs a descriptive qualitative descriptive method through literature review, official documents, activity reports, local media coverage, and interviews with the Commander of the 2024 Port Visit Task Force and the Commander of KRI WSH-991. The findings show that the port visit served as a means of defense diplomacy through courtesy calls, official meetings, open ship activities, and military engagement. In addition, health services, medical aid, cultural promotion, culinary diplomacy, and social service activities strengthened Indonesia's soft power dimension. This mission is important because it demonstrates a peaceful, humanitarian, and relevant defense approach to strengthening Indonesia's image and engagement in the South Pacific.

INTRODUCTION

Perkembangan pendidikan abad ke-21 menuntut peserta didik memiliki kemampuan berpikir kritis, kreatif, kolaboratif, dan komunikatif sebagai bekal menghadapi berbagai persoalan dalam kehidupan. Tuntutan tersebut sejalan dengan Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional Pasal 3 yang menempatkan pengembangan potensi peserta didik sebagai bagian penting dalam pembentukan manusia yang beriman, bertakwa, berakhlak mulia, mandiri, demokratis, dan bertanggung jawab. Pada jenjang sekolah dasar, pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam dan Sosial (IPAS) memiliki posisi strategis karena tidak hanya mengarahkan peserta didik pada penguasaan pengetahuan, tetapi juga pada kemampuan memahami fenomena alam dan sosial melalui pengalaman belajar yang kontekstual. Namun, kondisi pembelajaran di kelas IV B SDN Kartika Sejahtera 02 Kabupaten Bogor menunjukkan bahwa proses tersebut belum berjalan secara optimal. Berdasarkan wawancara dengan wali kelas pada 12

November 2025, pembelajaran materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku masih didominasi penggunaan LKPD cetak yang relatif monoton dan belum didukung aktivitas pembelajaran interaktif. Kondisi tersebut beriringan dengan capaian belajar peserta didik, yaitu sebanyak 50% siswa masih memperoleh nilai di bawah standar ketuntasan yang digunakan sekolah sebesar 75. Hasil angket terhadap 15 peserta didik juga menunjukkan bahwa 60% siswa mengalami kesulitan memahami materi secara mandiri, 80% lebih tertarik pada penyajian visual interaktif, dan 73% merasa jenuh apabila pembelajaran hanya menggunakan buku atau lembar kerja cetak. Seluruh responden juga memberikan respons positif terhadap kebutuhan pengembangan *E-LKPD* berbantuan *Educaplay*. Temuan ini menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara kebutuhan peserta didik terhadap pengalaman belajar digital yang interaktif dan perangkat pembelajaran yang tersedia di kelas.

Sejumlah penelitian telah menunjukkan potensi perangkat pembelajaran digital untuk mengatasi persoalan tersebut. NF et al. (2022) menemukan bahwa *E-LKPD* interaktif berbasis *Liveworksheets* efektif meningkatkan hasil belajar pada materi peristiwa sekitar Proklamasi Kemerdekaan. Falah dan Sari (2026) menunjukkan bahwa media berbantuan *Educaplay* memenuhi aspek validitas, kelayakan, dan efektivitas dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar peserta didik kelas IV pada materi perubahan bentuk energi. Sementara itu, Sana et al. (2025) mengembangkan LKPD berbasis kearifan lokal masyarakat Desa Mbengan pada materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku dan menunjukkan pengaruh positif terhadap hasil belajar. Penelitian-penelitian tersebut memperlihatkan bahwa *E-LKPD*, *Educaplay*, maupun konteks kearifan lokal memiliki potensi dalam mendukung pembelajaran sekolah dasar. Meskipun demikian, penelitian terdahulu masih mengembangkan ketiga aspek tersebut secara relatif terpisah. Kajian yang mengintegrasikan *E-LKPD* dengan *Educaplay* secara khusus pada materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku dan menguji efektivitasnya terhadap hasil belajar peserta didik kelas IV masih terbatas. Selain itu, karakter materi tersebut memerlukan penyajian yang mampu menghadirkan keragaman kebiasaan masyarakat secara visual dan kontekstual, sehingga penggunaan lembar kerja konvensional memiliki keterbatasan dalam memberikan pengalaman belajar yang variatif. Ruang tersebut menjadi *research gap* yang mendasari pengembangan produk dalam penelitian ini.

Berangkat dari kesenjangan tersebut, penelitian ini menempatkan *E-LKPD* berbantuan *Educaplay* bukan sekadar sebagai pengalihan LKPD cetak ke format digital, tetapi sebagai perangkat pembelajaran yang mengintegrasikan materi, visual, latihan, evaluasi, dan aktivitas berbasis permainan dalam satu pengalaman belajar interaktif. *Educaplay* memungkinkan aktivitas seperti pencocokan, teka-teki, kuis, dan bentuk permainan edukatif lainnya digunakan untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan peserta didik selama proses pembelajaran. Integrasi tersebut relevan dengan materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku karena peserta didik perlu mengenali, membedakan, dan memahami keragaman kebiasaan masyarakat melalui contoh-contoh yang kontekstual dan mudah divisualisasikan. Atas dasar itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan dan mengetahui spesifikasi *E-LKPD* berbantuan *Educaplay*, menguji kelayakannya, serta menguji efektivitasnya dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar peserta didik kelas IV pada materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku di SDN Kartika Sejahtera 02 Kabupaten Bogor Tahun Pembelajaran 2025/2026. Pengembangan tersebut diarahkan untuk menghasilkan perangkat yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan peserta didik sekaligus memberikan alternatif bagi guru dalam mengelola aktivitas dan evaluasi pembelajaran secara lebih interaktif.

Secara teoretis, penelitian ini diharapkan memperkuat kajian mengenai integrasi teknologi digital dalam pembelajaran IPAS sekolah dasar, khususnya penggunaan *E-LKPD* yang menggabungkan penyajian materi dengan aktivitas *gamification* melalui *Educaplay*. Penelitian ini memberikan perspektif bahwa efektivitas *E-LKPD* tidak hanya ditentukan oleh perubahan format

.....

dari cetak menjadi digital, tetapi juga oleh desain aktivitas yang memungkinkan peserta didik berinteraksi secara aktif dengan materi pembelajaran. Secara empiris, kebaruan penelitian terletak pada pengembangan dan pengujian *E-LKPD* berbantuan *Educaplay* pada materi Keunikan Kebiasaan Masyarakat di Sekitarku untuk peserta didik kelas IV sekolah dasar dengan hasil belajar sebagai capaian yang diuji. Secara praktis, produk yang dikembangkan diharapkan dapat menjadi alternatif perangkat pembelajaran bagi guru untuk menyajikan materi IPAS secara lebih visual, kontekstual, dan interaktif, sekaligus membantu mengurangi kejenuhan peserta didik dan meningkatkan keterlibatan mereka dalam proses belajar. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini tidak hanya menghasilkan produk yang layak digunakan, tetapi juga memberikan bukti empiris mengenai efektivitas pemanfaatan *E-LKPD* berbantuan *Educaplay* dalam mendukung peningkatan hasil belajar peserta didik sekolah dasar.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to examine the implementation of the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit Mission of KRI *dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991* (KRI WSH-991) as an instrument of Indonesia's defense diplomacy in the South Pacific. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand the processes, activities, actors, and strategic context surrounding the mission rather than quantify relationships among predetermined variables. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for examining phenomena within their social and institutional contexts and for interpreting the meanings attached to actions, experiences, and policy practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive approach was used to systematically reconstruct the implementation of the port visit and identify the forms of defense diplomacy conducted through the mission, including diplomatic engagement, military interaction, humanitarian activities, and other forms of engagement with South Pacific countries. The analysis subsequently examined how these activities related to Indonesia's strategic interests and diplomatic engagement in the region.

The study used primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key actors directly involved in the 2024 mission, particularly the Commander of the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit Mission and the Commander of KRI *dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991*. These informants were selected purposively because their positions and direct involvement provided first-hand knowledge of the planning, implementation, objectives, and operational dynamics of the mission. Purposive selection is appropriate in qualitative research when participants are chosen based on their ability to provide information-rich accounts relevant to the research problem (Patton, 2015). Primary data were supplemented by information and researcher field notes obtained during the 2026 Port Visit Coordination Meeting in Surabaya, particularly information relevant to the planning, evaluation, and institutional context of port visit activities. Secondary data were derived from official Indonesian government and Indonesian Navy documents, mission reports, policy documents, books, scholarly journal articles, and other credible publications concerning defense diplomacy, military diplomacy, *soft power*, and Indonesia's engagement with South Pacific countries.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field-note documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the objectives, implementation mechanisms, diplomatic activities, operational experiences, and perceived strategic significance of the 2024 port visit. This interview format was selected because it provides a consistent thematic framework while allowing the researcher to probe emerging issues and obtain detailed accounts from participants (Kallio et al., 2016). Document analysis was conducted by systematically reviewing official mission records, government and Indonesian Navy publications, relevant policy

documents, academic literature, and other documentary materials related to the mission and Indonesia's defense diplomacy. Document analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research for obtaining contextual information, corroborating interview findings, and identifying institutional narratives and policy orientations (Bowen, 2009). Information gathered during the 2026 Port Visit Coordination Meeting was recorded as supplementary field data and used to provide additional institutional context rather than as a substitute for the primary interviews.

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis following the interactive procedures of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). During data condensation, interview transcripts, documentary materials, and field notes were selected, organized, and coded according to themes relevant to the research questions, including mission objectives, forms of defense diplomacy, diplomatic and humanitarian activities, interactions with host countries, and implications for Indonesia's regional interests. The categorized data were subsequently displayed in thematic narratives to identify patterns and relationships across the different sources. The final stage involved interpreting and verifying the findings by comparing evidence obtained from interviews, official documents, academic literature, and supplementary field information. Source triangulation was employed by comparing information from different informants and documentary sources, while method triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings with documentary and field-note evidence. This analytical process enabled the study to develop a contextualized interpretation of how the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit functioned as a practice of Indonesian defense diplomacy and how it contributed to Indonesia's strategic engagement in the South Pacific.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit Mission of KRI dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991 should not be understood merely as a conventional naval visit or as a discrete humanitarian operation. Rather, the mission combined defense diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, and people-to-people interaction within a single maritime platform. This combination is particularly important because KRI WSH-991 remained an Indonesian Navy asset while simultaneously providing medical assistance, facilitating official and informal interactions, displaying Indonesian culture, and creating direct contact with communities in Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. The mission therefore illustrates how a military platform can be employed for non-coercive foreign-policy purposes without losing its identity as an instrument of national defense.

This interpretation is consistent with the broader concept of defense diplomacy, in which military resources are employed during peacetime to establish communication, strengthen confidence, and support cooperative relations rather than to threaten or compel another state (Cottey & Forster, 2004). The activities conducted during the mission—including *courtesy calls*, official meetings, interactions with defense institutions, *open ship* activities, joint sports, health services, and humanitarian assistance—demonstrate that the diplomatic value of the visit lay not primarily in the physical arrival of the vessel but in the network of interactions generated around it. Thus, the port visit functioned as an institutionalized contact mechanism connecting military, governmental, diplomatic, and societal actors.

From Naval Presence to Hybrid Maritime Diplomacy

A central finding of this study is that the diplomatic role of KRI WSH-991 exceeded the conventional logic of naval presence. Traditional naval diplomacy often emphasizes the symbolic value of a warship as a visible representation of national capability and state presence. In this mission, however, presence was combined with the provision of direct public goods, particularly

healthcare. The distinctive feature was therefore not simply that Indonesia deployed a naval vessel to the South Pacific, but that the vessel's military identity was coupled with capabilities that directly addressed human-security needs.

This distinction matters theoretically. A combat-oriented naval platform normally communicates military capability even when used peacefully. A hospital auxiliary ship creates a different diplomatic signal because its visible military presence is mediated through medical treatment, humanitarian assistance, and social interaction. The result can be described as humanitarianized defense diplomacy, in which defense assets remain instruments of the state but their diplomatic value is produced through non-threatening and socially beneficial activities.

The international literature provides support for this interpretation. Baker et al. (2022) argue that hospital ships can operate simultaneously as military medical assets and instruments of constructive engagement, humanitarian assistance, security cooperation, and foreign policy. They further note that military medical platforms can generate goodwill and positive perceptions while establishing communication with partner countries. Similar patterns can be observed in the use of USNS *Mercy* through Pacific Partnership and China's deployment of hospital ships for medical missions. Hospital ships have consequently become relevant not only to operational medicine but also to naval diplomacy and international partnership building.

The Indonesian case nevertheless differs in an important respect. The use of KRI WSH-991 was embedded in Indonesia's own South Pacific diplomatic context and its Pacific Elevation agenda. Indonesia has sought to strengthen engagement with Pacific states through partnerships emphasizing equality, development cooperation, education, disaster mitigation, renewable energy, and cultural relations. Herindrasti et al. (2025) interpret Pacific Elevation as an attempt to deepen Indonesian engagement through mutually beneficial and increasingly multidimensional partnerships. The KRI WSH-991 mission can therefore be understood as a maritime operationalization of this broader diplomatic orientation: the abstract language of partnership was translated into physical presence, medical assistance, cultural exchange, and direct interaction.

Strategic Congruence between the Platform and Regional Needs

Another important finding concerns the selection of the hospital ship itself. The decision to deploy KRI WSH-991 was linked to the conditions of the destination countries, particularly limitations in healthcare infrastructure. Planning involved coordination among the Indonesian Navy, the Ministry of Defense, diplomatic missions, defense attachés, and the Ministry of Health. This suggests that the vessel was not selected merely because it was available, but because its capabilities had functional relevance to local needs.

This relationship can be described as strategic congruence, referring to the alignment between the diplomatic instrument selected by the sending state and the needs perceived in recipient societies. The effectiveness of humanitarian diplomacy is likely to be greater when assistance is not detached from the practical concerns of local communities. In this case, healthcare provided an especially suitable entry point because it concerned an issue with immediate and visible social value.

The health activities conducted during the mission substantiate this interpretation. Medical services and assistance varied according to country context. In Solomon Islands, activities included medical aid, blood donation, general treatment, and X-ray services. Vanuatu received medical services over multiple days as well as medical supplies, while Papua New Guinea received general medical, dental, medical-check-up, radiological, and CT-scan services. The variation suggests that humanitarian activities were not entirely standardized across destinations.

This is analytically important because effective defense diplomacy does not necessarily

require identical engagement in every country. Adaptation to institutional and social contexts can instead improve diplomatic relevance. A similar flexibility was visible in joint sports activities: engagement in Fiji and Papua New Guinea involved defense institutions, whereas in Vanuatu, which does not possess a regular armed force, interaction took place with the Ministry of Health. Thus, the mission demonstrates a form of context-adaptive defense diplomacy, in which the objective of engagement remained consistent while the institutional counterpart and activity varied according to local circumstances.

Hospital Ships as Mobile Diplomatic Spaces

The findings also support the conceptualization of KRI WSH-991 as a mobile diplomatic space. Unlike conventional diplomacy, which is usually conducted within embassies, government buildings, or international forums, the hospital ship created a temporary diplomatic environment that could physically move among several states.

This function operated at multiple levels. At the intergovernmental level, the vessel facilitated official meetings, *courtesy calls*, and engagement with defense and government officials. At the military level, it provided opportunities for professional interaction and confidence building. At the societal level, local residents could enter the ship for healthcare or *open ship* activities. At the cultural level, receptions and performances transformed the ship into a venue where Indonesian identity was displayed and experienced.

The diplomatic value of this arrangement lies in the simultaneous presence of actors who would otherwise interact through separate channels. The ship therefore became more than a transportation or medical asset; it became a temporary diplomatic infrastructure connecting state-to-state, military-to-military, and people-to-people relations.

This finding extends conventional discussions of naval diplomacy. A naval platform usually symbolizes state presence, but the KRI WSH-991 case demonstrates that the platform can also organize diplomatic encounters. Its diplomatic significance was thus both symbolic and relational. The vessel represented Indonesia, while at the same time creating the physical and social conditions under which relationships could develop.

Embedded Soft Power rather than Separate Soft Power

The cultural and humanitarian activities identified in the mission further demonstrate that soft power did not operate independently of defense diplomacy. Cultural performances included the Saman Dance, Reog Ponorogo, Pencak Silat, and Papuan dances, while Indonesian cuisine was introduced through diplomatic receptions. These activities represented Indonesia through cultural attraction rather than coercive capability.

Following Nye's (2004) formulation, soft power concerns the capacity to generate attraction through culture, values, and policies that appear legitimate. However, the findings of this research suggest that the relevant analytical unit is not simply the cultural performance itself. What is distinctive is that these soft-power resources were delivered through a military platform. Accordingly, the relationship can be represented as follows:

Military platform → peaceful engagement → humanitarian/cultural experience → interpersonal contact → potential attraction and trust.

The sequence matters because the hospital ship transformed the meaning normally associated with a naval presence. Rather than displaying only the state's capacity to project military power, it communicated an ability to provide medical care, assistance, and social engagement.

The inclusion of Papuan cultural elements deserves particular attention. The mission presented cultural representations from different parts of Indonesia, including Papua, in a region where Melanesian identity has direct political significance. In this sense, cultural diplomacy was not merely promotional. It functioned as part of Indonesia's attempt to communicate a plural national identity to South Pacific audiences.

This does not mean that cultural performance can resolve political disagreement surrounding Papua. Rather, it provides a channel through which Pacific communities encounter representations of Indonesia that differ from those communicated through formal political statements alone.

Humanitarian Engagement and the Production of Diplomatic Legitimacy

One of the strongest empirical findings concerns the responses to humanitarian activities. Government and media responses in Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands indicate that the visit generated visible acceptance and positive engagement. The uploaded data show appreciation for health assistance, participation by officials, community attendance, and favorable media attention.

The significance of these responses lies in what may be termed experiential diplomacy. Conventional public diplomacy primarily communicates through speeches, media narratives, cultural messaging, or information campaigns. Humanitarian engagement introduces an additional dimension: local communities directly experience services associated with the sending state.

In Vanuatu, for example, members of the public continued to use the medical services despite earlier skepticism toward the visit. In Papua New Guinea, community participation in free healthcare services also demonstrated direct interaction between Indonesian military medical personnel and local residents. These cases suggest that perceptions were shaped not only through diplomatic messaging but through encounters with a practical benefit.

The broader literature on military medical diplomacy supports this interpretation. Baker et al. (2022) emphasize that humanitarian medical missions can contribute to goodwill, constructive engagement, and longer-term security relationships. More recently, analysis of Indonesia's hospital-ship diplomacy has similarly identified the 2024 South Pacific mission as an example of how Indonesia can combine humanitarian outreach and maritime presence to strengthen relationships in the Indo-Pacific.

However, the evidence available in this study mainly demonstrates immediate acceptance and positive reception, rather than durable changes in public attitudes. Positive media reports, attendance at medical services, official appreciation, and interpersonal interaction are meaningful diplomatic outputs, but they are not equivalent to longitudinal evidence of changed public opinion. This distinction should be retained to avoid overstating the impact of the mission.

The Papua Issue: Strategic Communication without Causal Overstatement

The Papua issue constitutes one of the most politically sensitive dimensions of Indonesia's South Pacific diplomacy. Several destination countries possess strong Melanesian identities, while debates concerning Papua have remained present within regional institutions. The decision to visit Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands therefore had significance beyond logistical considerations. The mission was situated within a regional environment in which Indonesia must simultaneously pursue bilateral cooperation, communicate its own narrative, and respond to continuing concerns regarding Papua.

Recent scholarship confirms that the Papua issue remains a persistent challenge for Indonesia's engagement with the Melanesian Spearhead Group. Dugis and Wardhani (2025)

conclude that Indonesian diplomacy in the MSG continues to face significant challenges despite Indonesia's institutional engagement with the organization. Developments in 2025 also demonstrate the continuing complexity of regional positions. Papua New Guinea publicly reaffirmed respect for Indonesian sovereignty while simultaneously maintaining that Melanesian regional institutions can discuss human rights and the welfare of Melanesian communities. This illustrates why the regional political environment should not be reduced to a binary distinction between “supporting” or “opposing” Indonesia.

The findings of this research are therefore strongest when the port visit is interpreted as an instrument of strategic communication and perception management, rather than as a direct mechanism for changing state policy.

The mission provided opportunities to present Indonesia through direct interaction, Papuan cultural participation, humanitarian activities, and dialogue. The commander interviews contained in the study similarly indicate an intention to reduce misperceptions by allowing Pacific audiences to encounter a more tangible representation of Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the evidence does not establish a causal relationship between the 2024 mission and subsequent diplomatic positions regarding Papua. The manuscript itself appropriately notes that continuing discussion of Papua within MSG and Pacific regional forums means that the port visit cannot be treated as a single factor that transformed regional attitudes.

This formulation retains the strategic significance of the mission without attributing subsequent political developments to one diplomatic intervention.

Defense-Industrial Signaling as a Secondary Diplomatic Effect

An additional finding concerns the visibility of Indonesia's domestic defense-industrial capacity. KRI WSH-991 was built by PT PAL Indonesia, meaning that the port visit simultaneously showcased a domestically produced military platform.

This introduces a secondary dimension of defense diplomacy: capability signaling without coercive signaling. Indonesia demonstrated that its defense industry is capable of producing a large maritime platform with medical and humanitarian functions, yet the demonstration occurred through health services and diplomatic engagement rather than military exercises or weapons displays.

The distinction is significant. Military capability was visible, but its immediate manifestation was peaceful. This allowed Indonesia to communicate technological and naval capacity without generating the same level of threat perception that might accompany the deployment of a combat-oriented platform.

Table 1. Synthesizing the Diplomatic Functions of KRI WSH-991

Dimension	Empirical Manifestation	Immediate Diplomatic Function	Broader Implication
Defense diplomacy	Courtesy calls, official meetings, military engagement, joint sports	Communication and confidence building	Strengthening bilateral defense and institutional relations
Humanitarian diplomacy	Medical treatment, blood donation, medical aid	Provision of direct public benefit	Association of Indonesia with human security and welfare
Soft power	Culture, cuisine, social interaction	Attraction and familiarity	Strengthening Indonesia's societal image
People-to-people diplomacy	Health services, open ship, community activities	Direct contact with local populations	Expanding diplomacy beyond governmental elites
Strategic	Papuan participation and	Providing alternative	Potential reduction of

communication	cultural representation	experiences and narratives	misperceptions
Defense-industrial diplomacy	Deployment of a PT PAL-built hospital ship	Demonstration of indigenous maritime capability	Visibility of Indonesia's defense-industrial capacity
Maritime presence	48-day deployment across four Pacific states	Visible Indonesian presence	Reinforcement of Indonesia's engagement with the Pacific

The table demonstrates that the mission cannot be analytically reduced to any single diplomatic category. The same platform produced several diplomatic functions simultaneously, and these functions often reinforced each other. Humanitarian services reduced the threatening image potentially associated with a military ship; cultural activities strengthened people-to-people engagement; official interactions converted physical presence into institutional communication; and the domestic origin of the vessel simultaneously displayed national industrial capability.

Toward the Concept of Hybrid Maritime Diplomacy

Based on these findings, this study proposes that the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit can be conceptualized as a form of hybrid maritime diplomacy. The term refers here not to hybrid warfare, but to the deliberate combination of multiple peaceful diplomatic functions through a state maritime asset. The mechanism can be summarized as:

Naval presence → institutional engagement → humanitarian service → cultural interaction → societal contact → diplomatic visibility and trust-building.

This conceptualization provides a more precise interpretation than describing the mission solely as defense diplomacy or soft power. Defense diplomacy explains why the Indonesian Navy and its assets could serve foreign-policy objectives. Soft power explains how culture, humanitarian values, and positive experiences can generate attraction. Humanitarian diplomacy explains the provision of socially valuable services. Public and people-to-people diplomacy explain interaction with communities. However, none of these individually captures the simultaneous operation of all these functions aboard one mobile military platform.

The concept of hybrid maritime diplomacy therefore highlights three characteristics of the mission. First, it was multi-instrumental, because military, humanitarian, cultural, and communicative instruments operated together. Second, it was multi-level, connecting state, military, institutional, and community actors. Third, it was context-adaptive, because diplomatic activities varied according to the institutional and societal conditions of each destination country.

The concept also helps distinguish KRI WSH-991 from a conventional warship port visit. The mission's diplomatic effect was not produced merely by showing the flag. It was generated by what can be termed presence-through-service: Indonesia demonstrated its presence by providing a tangible contribution to communities while simultaneously conducting formal diplomatic engagement.

Implications and Limitations

The findings suggest several implications for Indonesia's future South Pacific engagement. Hospital ships can provide a comparatively non-threatening form of military presence in a region where human security, healthcare, disaster resilience, climate vulnerability, and development remain important concerns. This alignment is consistent with the priorities identified by Pacific states in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, where human security, climate change,

disaster resilience, sustainable development, and ocean governance receive central attention.

However, humanitarian diplomacy will produce more sustainable diplomatic value if it is embedded in long-term engagement rather than isolated visits. Medical missions can create positive encounters, but enduring trust requires follow-up cooperation, institutional partnerships, professional exchanges, and continuity between maritime missions and broader development diplomacy.

The available evidence also imposes limitations on claims regarding impact. The study documents mission activities, official responses, media coverage, community participation, and interview-based perceptions. These sources are sufficient to demonstrate diplomatic engagement and immediate reception. They are less suited to establishing long-term shifts in public opinion or demonstrating that subsequent changes in the foreign policy of Pacific states were caused by the port visit. Future research could therefore combine diplomatic-document analysis with longitudinal media analysis, surveys of local perception, interviews with officials in destination states, and comparative analysis across successive port visits.

Overall, the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit demonstrates how Indonesia can use a military hospital ship as more than a logistical or medical platform. KRI WSH-991 operated simultaneously as a defense asset, humanitarian provider, cultural venue, strategic communication platform, and mobile diplomatic space. Its significance consequently lies not simply in the number of countries visited or patients treated, but in its capacity to integrate military presence with socially beneficial engagement.

The main theoretical contribution of the case is therefore the concept of hybrid maritime diplomacy, in which defense diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, soft power, and people-to-people engagement are combined through a single naval platform. Empirically, the mission shows that the diplomatic meaning of military presence can be altered by the type of capability deployed and the activities conducted around it. In the South Pacific context, KRI WSH-991 projected Indonesia not primarily through coercive naval power, but through presence, service, interaction, and partnership.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the 2024 South Pacific Port Visit Mission of KRI dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991 functioned as a practical instrument of Indonesia's defense diplomacy by combining military presence with non-coercive engagement, humanitarian outreach, and public diplomacy. The mission demonstrated that a naval port visit can operate beyond its conventional military function by creating a mobile diplomatic platform through which defense institutions, government representatives, local authorities, and civil society can interact directly. Courtesy calls, official meetings, open ship activities, military exchanges, joint sports activities, and community engagement contributed to confidence building and the strengthening of bilateral communication. The hospital ship's medical services, blood donation activities, distribution of medical assistance, cultural promotion, Indonesian cuisine, and social services further reinforced Indonesia's soft-power projection by providing tangible benefits to local communities. Positive public participation and local media coverage in Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands also indicate the mission's contribution to presenting Indonesia as a peaceful, humanitarian, and cooperative regional partner. Nevertheless, the mission should not be interpreted as an independent determinant of changes in interstate relations or of South Pacific countries' positions on the Papua issue. Rather, it should be understood as one component of Indonesia's broader regional engagement aimed at reducing misperceptions, strengthening bilateral relations, improving national image, and demonstrating the capabilities of Indonesia's defense sector.

REFERENCES

- Baker, M. S., Baker, J. B., & Burkle, F. M. (2022). The hospital ship as a strategic asset in 21st century foreign policy and global health crises. *Military Medicine*, 187(9–10), e1176–e1181. <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usac061>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Chaer, M. I., Sumarlan, S., & Widodo, P. (2021). Indonesian defense diplomacy strategy in trilateral cooperative arrangement (Port visit Indomalphi 2017–2019). *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 26(1), 697–704. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v26i1.5142>
- Cottey, A., & Forster, A. (2004). *Reshaping defence diplomacy: New roles for military cooperation and assistance* (Adelphi Paper No. 365). Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dugis, V., & Wardhani, B. (2025). Indonesia's diplomacy for Papua issue in the Melanesian Spearhead Group: Challenges remain. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, 13(2), 38–49. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jhi.v13i2.23042>
- Herindrasti, S., Fernando, J., & Tran, M. H. (2025). Pacific Elevation: Indonesia's vision for strategic engagement and regional diplomacy. *Jurnal Asia Pacific Studies*, 9(1), 98–131. <https://doi.org/10.33541/japs.v9i1.7146>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Mahroza, J., Widjayanto, J., Yulivan, I., Prakoso, L. Y., & Setiadi, M. I. (2023). Implementation of Indonesian defense diplomacy in the South Pacific region. *Journal of Legal and Cultural Analytics*, 2(4), 279–290. <https://doi.org/10.55927/jlca.v2i4.7512>
- Mawangi, G. T. (2024, November 26). KRI WSH-991 berhasil tuntaskan misi kemanusiaan di 4 negara Pasifik. *ANTARA News*. [Sumber ANTARA](https://www.antara.com)
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. (2019, November). Pacific Elevation:

- Meningkatkan presensi Indonesia di Pasifik. *AKSES*, 36.
- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2022). *2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Wardhani, B. (2023). From Jakarta to Oceania: Indonesia's cultural diplomacy with the South Pacific. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 10(1), 47–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970231152011>
-