

2021 Myanmar Political Crisis : Opportunity and Challenge for Indonesia Sectoral Leadership in ASEAN

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Abstract – The purpose of this research is to find the opportunity and challenge for Indonesia as sectoral leadership role in political-security in address 2021 Myanmar political crises. This research used qualitative methods which data collection by literature studies. Research found that the opportunity for Indonesia to coping with 2021 Myanmar political crises came from its free-active foreign policy, experience of democracy transition and diplomacy capability in ASEAN. But at the same time Indonesia has faced the obstacle to coping with it from the both external and internal such as ASEAN non-interference doctrine, the resistance from Myanmar people and inconsistency of Indonesia domestic commitment toward Human Right and Introduction

Myanmar's membership in ASEAN has been in the spotlight related to issues of democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, ASEAN still accepts Myanmar as a member in the midst of the fact that issues of democracy and human rights are still taboo issues to be discussed through the ASEAN mechanism. In early 2021, Myanmar back and become spotlight again with a coup carried out by the military against the government of Aung San Suu Ki. The Myanmar coup which triggered domestic political instability and violence against civil society became a threat to regional security and peace as well as the potential for intervention from external parties. Not only that, the protracted conditions in Myanmar will weaken ASEAN regarding the unity among member countries and the relevance and centrality of ASEAN in establishing order and relations between countries within the region (1).

For Indonesia, the problems that occur in Myanmar need immediate attention, especially from ASEAN. This view cannot be separated from how Indonesia places the unity and centrality of ASEAN as the main axis in solving problems that arise in the region (2). Based on this description, the political crisis in Myanmar will test Indonesia's leadership capacity in the political-security sector in ASEAN, especially post-reform, referring to Indonesia's domestic stability (3). However, even so Indonesia still has the opportunity to show its leadership in order to bring stability and peace in the region amid the crisis experienced by Myanmar. This is reflected in how Indonesia uses constructive engagement as an approach in its foreign policy towards Myanmar on the issue of democratization in the country (4). Indonesia through a statement by former Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda emphasized ASEAN to continue the dialogue by placing Myanmar as part of the family (5).

Based on this explanation, this study tries to answer the question what are the hopes and challenges for Indonesia in carrying out the political-security leadership in ASEAN in the political crisis in Myanmar? Thus, the purpose of this study to discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by

Indonesia to demonstrate leadership in the political-security sector in ASEAN on domestic political issues in Indonesia. This research using qualitative method, with data collection came from literature studies.

1. Method

This study was structured using qualitative methods, selecting qualitative methods because the research will analyze and build understanding of the role of the state as part of social phenomena in interactions at the regional level (6). Therefore, this study will look at the role of Indonesian leadership as a social phenomenon that exists around Indonesia as a country. Where through this qualitative research will involve a process to collect and process data from specific themes to general themes in Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN to interpret the meanings contained therein. This research is a descriptive research, data collection is carried out using literature studies on various official government documents, articles in the mass media and the result of previous studies related to Indonesia's behavior in its leadership capacity in ASEAN.

2. Results and Discussion

The Role of Indonesia's Leadership in ASEAN.

Indonesian leadership that emerged in ASEAN in this study will refer to Holsti (7) as foreign policy role performance. Foreign policy role performance will look at various aspects related to Indonesia's attitudes, policies and actions in responding to various problems that arise in the region through the ASEAN mechanism. Indonesia's attitudes, policies and actions show that Indonesia takes on the role of what Holsti calls a regional leader. Regional leader in Holsti's conception (8) refers to the role to assume certain duties and responsibilities in interactions both in the context of countries within the region and with countries outside the region.

Indonesia leadership forms the basis for analyzing Indonesia's roles and policies in ASEAN (9–11). In line with this paper, which places the Indonesia leadership in responding to the coup problem that occurred in Myanmar as one of the ASEAN member countries. However, Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN is not comprehensive and only sectoral in dealing with problems in certain areas within the region (12). Thus, Indonesia has strong characteristics in dealing with problems related to the political-security field in ASEAN. Indonesia's leadership in the political-security field can be referred to from Indonesia's involvement in reducing various conflicts, showing Indonesia's credibility as a "responsible power", which is able to carry out leadership in a positive way (13) and ideas related to democracy. And the enforcement of human rights in ASEAN. Evidence of ideas about democracy and human rights is reflected in Indonesia's initiatives in the spirit of establishing the ASEAN Political-Security Community (14).

Opportunities for Indonesian Leadership in ASEAN in the Political Crisis in Myanmar.

The political crisis that occurred in Myanmar became a warning against the development of democracy in ASEAN. This condition in realizing hopes for a peaceful and stable Southeast Asia. Facing these challenges, ASEAN and its member countries will certainly need a leader to find solutions to the challenges currently being faced related to the political crisis in Myanmar. Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN, which has been known for a long time in the political-security field, raises a new hope as an opportunity for Indonesia to propose various initiatives and efforts to overcome the problems of the political crisis that occurred in Myanmar after the coup in early 2021.

The principle of a free and active foreign policy will be the basis for the actions taken by Indonesia in carrying out diplomacy groups and the Military Junta government. Indonesia as a "responsible power" always strives to put forward various proactive initiatives in order to prevent the escalation of the crisis that occurred in Myanmar both bilaterally and through the ASEAN mechanism by prioritizing ways of dialogue in solving problem as a civilized nation. Furthermore, Indonesia's involvement in efforts to defuse the situation in Myanmar is part of efforts to create regional stability

and part of Indonesia's identity to promote democratization and respect for human rights among ASEAN countries, including the Myanmar government which is currently facing a political crisis in Southeast Asia, which its country. Through a free and active foreign policy, Indonesia is able to encourage a more civilized approach as a characteristic of the Indonesian nation (15). In addition, Indonesia's active role is a manifestation of concern for the existing political conditions in Myanmar without carrying interests from parties outside ASEAN.

The experience that is also important is how during the 32 years of the new order the military in Indonesia controlled the political stage from the national to the regional level through the concept of the *Dwi Fungsi* (Double Functions) of the *ABRI* (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*). The emerging democratization also required the military's withdrawal from politics and government, although this was not an easy thing to achieve. However, through Law Number 34 of 2004 concerning the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian Armed Forces), it became a milestone for realizing a professional military that is no longer in the political sphere. Based on Indonesia's experience where the military is no longer involved and withdraws from political affairs which will have implications of civil society for the military to carry out its professional role to protect the people and the (16). Indonesia can share its experience of returning the military to its functions as part of the democratic process without any upheavals that have an impact on domestic politics. For leaders in Myanmar, Indonesia as a leader in democracy in ASEAN has been used as a reference to form a new model of democracy in the country (17).

Based on experience in the implementation of diplomacy carried out by Indonesia, both on issues between countries and those related to domestic problems, especially in Myanmar, Indonesia has strengthened its leadership role in ASEAN in the field of security politics. Regarding the issue of the political crisis in Myanmar due to the military coup against the government of Aung San Suu Kyi, Indonesia can propose various initiatives either directly against the opposing parties in Myanmar or through multilateral dialogue within the ASEAN framework. Indonesia, through its capacity to carry out its leadership role, conducts shuttle diplomacy to ASEAN member countries in order to develop plans to defuse the political crisis in Myanmar (18). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has experience in approaching various parties in Myanmar and finding a comfort zone through non-megaphone diplomacy. At the multilateral level, Indonesia can remain open to hope regarding the changing conditions in Myanmar at the ASEAN meeting in April 2021 in Jakarta, amid the pessimism that surfaced along with the principle of non-intervention adopted by ASEAN which will prevent the meeting from producing significant results.

Challenges for Indonesia's Leadership in ASEAN in the Political Crisis in Myanmar.

For Indonesia, the political crisis that occurred in Myanmar after the military coup in early 2021 has not only presented hope from ASEAN and other member countries, but also challenges efforts to overcome them. This challenge comes from the efforts and initiatives that will be initiated by Indonesia in overcoming the political crisis in Myanmar in a leadership role in the political-security field. These challenges are present both in the normative context of ASEAN itself related to the principle of non-intervention as part of the ASEAN Way, the emerging resistance from the people of Myanmar and Indonesia's domestic conditions.

The challenge for Indonesia in addressing issues related to the democratic crisis due to the military coup in Myanmar emerged from the agreement on the principle on non-intervention as the spirit of the ASEAN Way. The existence of this non-intervention principle makes Indonesia have limited options to prioritize and encourage the resolutions of the crisis that occurred in Myanmar. On the other hand, Indonesia in its leadership role in ASEAN demands to put forward the *ASEAN Way* and *ASEAN Centrality*, but on the other hand, the demand for solving the crisis in Myanmar are getting stronger, especially from the international community. Moreover, it is undeniable that ASEAN countries are not in one voice in addressing the issue of the political crisis in Myanmar. Thus, the challenge for Indonesia in addition to its attitude towards Myanmar is also related to gathering unanimous votes from ASEAN member countries to find solutions to the problems they are currently

facing. Although no an easy job, this challenge will test the role of Indonesia's leadership in the political-security sector in ASEAN in resolving the political crisis in Myanmar.

Indonesia is in a dilemmatic position considering that the pro-democracy party represented by the activists asked the Indonesian government and ASEAN not to open communication with the ruling military junta (19). This demand appears as part of not giving legitimacy to the military given by Indonesia and other ASEAN countries. This condition complicates Indonesia's efforts to help find a middle ground for both parties, especially Indonesia needs to place itself between the two sides to listen to aspirations as input in formulating solutions to the current crisis. Especially in organizing the ASEAN Summit in April 2021 which will be held in Jakarta, General Min Aung Hlaing the coup leader is present to represent the Myanmar government. The presence of this coup leader will certainly get criticism from the people of Myanmar because it is considered a form of recognition and gives legitimacy to the government resulting from the coup. On the other hand, the people of Myanmar particularly criticized the efforts being made by Indonesia to help ease the crisis that occurred in their country. This criticism was manifested through demonstrations by community groups at the Indonesian Embassy in Yangon Myanmar demanding that the Indonesian government not communicate with representatives who represent the Myanmar military government.

For Indonesia, as a country that becomes the lead in promoting human rights and democracy in ASEAN, the potential for human rights violations that occur in the political crisis in Myanmar must get immediate attention, especially through the ASEAN mechanism. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that human rights issues in Indonesia's domestic sphere are still homework that must be resolved. The problem of human rights violations that occurred during the democratic transition in 1998, Aceh, East Timor (the current state of Timor Leste) as well as various cases that until now have not met a clear result (20). On the other hand, Indonesia still shows doubts about implementing the International Civil Rights Convention instrument which is a key instrument in guaranteeing Universal Human Rights owned by the United Nations (21).

The conditions described previously will certainly have an impact on how Indonesia carries out foreign policy related to human rights (22). Which is then shown by Indonesia is the inconsistency of the attitude shown by Indonesia toward human rights violations. This inconsistency can be seen from how Indonesia's attitude in Myanmar that occurred in the previous year. Indonesia does not expressly show an attitude towards Myanmar for the violations of human rights that have occurred, this condition is in contrast to the attitude of the Philippines which will not ratify the ASEAN Charter if the Myanmar government does not make improvements to the protection of human rights (23).

Meanwhile, on the other hand, the reality that Indonesia faces in its leadership role in responding to the political crisis in Myanmar is the foreign policy orientation is based on the domestic conditions faced by Indonesia, which no longer has full energy to carry out leadership in ASEAN. The same conditions as experienced at the beginning of the reform era where Indonesia had to face an economic crisis as well as a domestic political crisis (9,24). Thus, President Joko Widodo brought Indonesia to focus on efforts to consolidate domestic politics. This condition makes the Indonesian government more inward-looking by displaying a low profile foreign policy by not carrying out too much of its international role so that it focuses on domestic affairs which aims to fix and strengthen domestic conditions and stability (25).

3. Conclusion

Based on the explanations that have been described, this study presents a conclusion that Indonesia has both opportunities and challenges in responding to the political crisis in Myanmar after the 2021 coup in the political-security leadership role in ASEAN. Thus, Indonesia is expected to be able to formulate appropriate policies in helping Myanmar left out of the political crisis in its country in the capacity of

its leadership role in ASEAN. The policy must be based on efforts to maximize the opportunities that are owned through a free and active foreign policy, the experience of democratic transition and Indonesia's diplomatic capabilities that are used to overcome challenges stemming from ASEAN norms as well as domestic conditions currently faced by Indonesia.

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