

Indonesia's Roles in Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis: Through the Lens of Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar's Rohingya crisis is one of the intractable conflicts in South East Asia that has been unsolved until now. The Rohingya, as a minority group in Myanmar, suffer from human rights violations by the majority Buddhist Rakhine population with central government support. In effect, many of them fled to neighboring countries, such as Thailand, India, Indonesia and Nepal, and other countries across the region (UN Refugees, 2022). Indonesia, as one of the founding members of ASEAN, thinks that ASEAN must solve this conflict, but the obstacle faced by ASEAN is the non-intervention principle. With the differences in ideology and national interest of ASEAN member states, this conflict is not to be the utmost priority by the ASEAN Members. Indonesia gave attention to Myanmar's Rohingya crisis since the crisis emerged in 1948 at the same time Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain. As an ASEAN host this year, Indonesia intensified its role to be a peace broker through shuttle diplomacy and engaging key players in Myanmar. Indonesia realized that this conflict must be solved by bringing to the table the key players in Myanmar's Rohingya conflict. This conflict matters for Indonesia, because of a chance for Indonesia to be portrayed as one of the countries that enhance its reputation and want to revive its glory moment in the Soeharto era that can solve regional conflict. Public diplomacy will be used in this paper by seeing the efforts of the Indonesian government, especially during President Jokowi's second term. As Joseph S. Nye said <<soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment>>, we can see the Indonesia effort through shuttle diplomacy, implementation of the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar, and humanitarian aid to solve this conflict. The capacity of Indonesia to be an honest peace broker is natural because of the resources that Indonesia had in several areas, particularly in political and economic areas.

Keywords: *Public Diplomacy, ASEAN, Indonesia, Rohingya's Crisis, Shuttle Diplomacy*

INTRODUCTION

As on January 1st 2023 (until December 31st 2023), Indonesia will serve as ASEAN's chairman, but several challenges occurs particularly after the pandemic of COVID 19, not only in the aspect of economic, where recession happened in ASEAN member countries, but also in geopolitical context, where unsolved conflict of South China Sea between China, Malaysia, The Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei Darussalam, also the Rohingya's Myanmar Conflict are still occurred. In fact, strengthening ASEAN's institutional capacity and effectiveness is one of the priorities that must be addressed by Indonesia. As stated by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Teuku Faizasyah:

"Some of the issues that will be discussed at the 42nd ASEAN Summit revolve around the themes of strengthening ASEAN institutions, drafting the ASEAN Post 2025 Vision, post-pandemic economic recovery, strengthening health architecture in the region, as well as other important issues in the region, such as the progress of 5PC implementation in Myanmar and other developments outside the region."(kemenparekraf.go.id)

Indonesia's effort to solve the Rohingya's Myanmar conflict is important to be studied, because the role of Indonesia to solve the regional conflict in ASEAN is not a new thing. Indonesia as the founding father of ASEAN feels a responsibility to keep peace and security in ASEAN. It is aligned with its "free and active" foreign policy principle, where Indonesia has commitment to maintaining world peace and order through its impartiality. Not only in regional conflict, such involvement of Indonesia as peace broker in ceasing Cambodian armed conflict and ending Vietnam's occupation in Cambodia, between the Philippines and the separatist group Moro National Liberation Front, and between Cambodia and Thailand over the conflict of the area around Temple of Preah Vihear, the effort of Indonesia as peace broker in wider arena also occurred last year when Indonesia tried to facilitate the meetings between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy in G20 summit.

However, both of president did not attended the summit, but at least there is an effort from Indonesia government to priorities this issue, again, Indonesia realised the nature of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is pure territorial conflict that actually did not have a place in G20 summit, which is economic forum, but the effects of this conflict undoubtedly impacted the global food security.

The Rohingya's Myanmar conflict that occured in decades has been drawing the attention of the international community. In Myanmar, the Rohingya have endured decades of violence, prejudice, and persecution. Media gave a place to this conflict, particularly in 2017, whereas UNHCR stated their largest exodus began in August 2017 (unrefugees.org). This article will discuss The Indonesia's Roles in Myanmar's

Rohingya Crisis: Through the Lens of Public Diplomacy with the division of four sections of discussion. The first discusses the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar: The Origin and Significance - as this conflict happened decades ago, the significance of this conflict is added by assessing the changing of Myanmar's rule and the effect on Rohingya-. The second discusses Indonesia's Resources as mediator in regional conflict - as mentioned before, Indonesia's role as peace broker in Rohingya's Myanmar conflict is not the first time, therefore the success of Indonesia's effort in mediating regional conflict will also be discussed here. The third, conceptual framework and research method: Public Diplomacy - one of the outputs of Public Diplomacy is conflict resolution, beside branding and advocacy, for this reason there will be a link of the success of being peace broker to the image of the country-. The fourth will discuss the method of Indonesia to solve the Rohingya's Myanmar conflict: Shuttle diplomacy of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and The Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar.

Rohingya Crisis In Myanmar: The Origin And Significance

The nation of Myanmar, often known as Burma, is situated in the western part of mainland Southeast Asia. With a total population of 56.424.000 (2023), this country consists of various ethnicities. There are *taingyintha* or "sons of the soil", Chinese and South Asians (Alam, J., 2019). The Rohingya population is not recognized as an official ethnic group by the predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, as a result, they have been denied citizenship since 1982 (unrefugees.org).

The Rohingya population has resided in Rakhine State or Arakan, located in western Myanmar, since a long time ago. Shahabuddin argued that The Rohingya are specifically referred to be Muslims in recent times. Arakan, which is geographically isolated from the rest of Myanmar by a range of mountains, has always maintained a distinct political identity (Shahabuddin, M., 2019). Arakan had its kingdom in the 13th century with its capital Mrauk U. At that time, this kingdom was prosperous and had strong relations, such in economic and trade with the Bengal Sultanate. But, it did not last long, when Meng Khari (known as Ali Khan) annexed the territory of Bengal (e.g. Ramu in present-day Cox Bazar) (Shahabuddin, M., 2019).

As the British conquered Myanmar in 1824 and included Arakan as part of it, the Rohingya still resided there and after gaining independence they have been subjected to discrimination by the Myanmar government. Rohingya families are denied basic rights and protection due to their statelessness, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and other forms of abuse. Based on UNHCR, it makes them the world's largest stateless population (unrefugees.org).

After a significant wave of violence erupted in Myanmar's Rakhine State in August 2017, more than 700,000 people—half of them children—were forced to flee, arriving in Bangladesh. This was their greatest exodus (unrefugees.org). Not

only Bangladesh, but several neighboring countries such Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Australia, and other countries across the region (unrefugees.org).

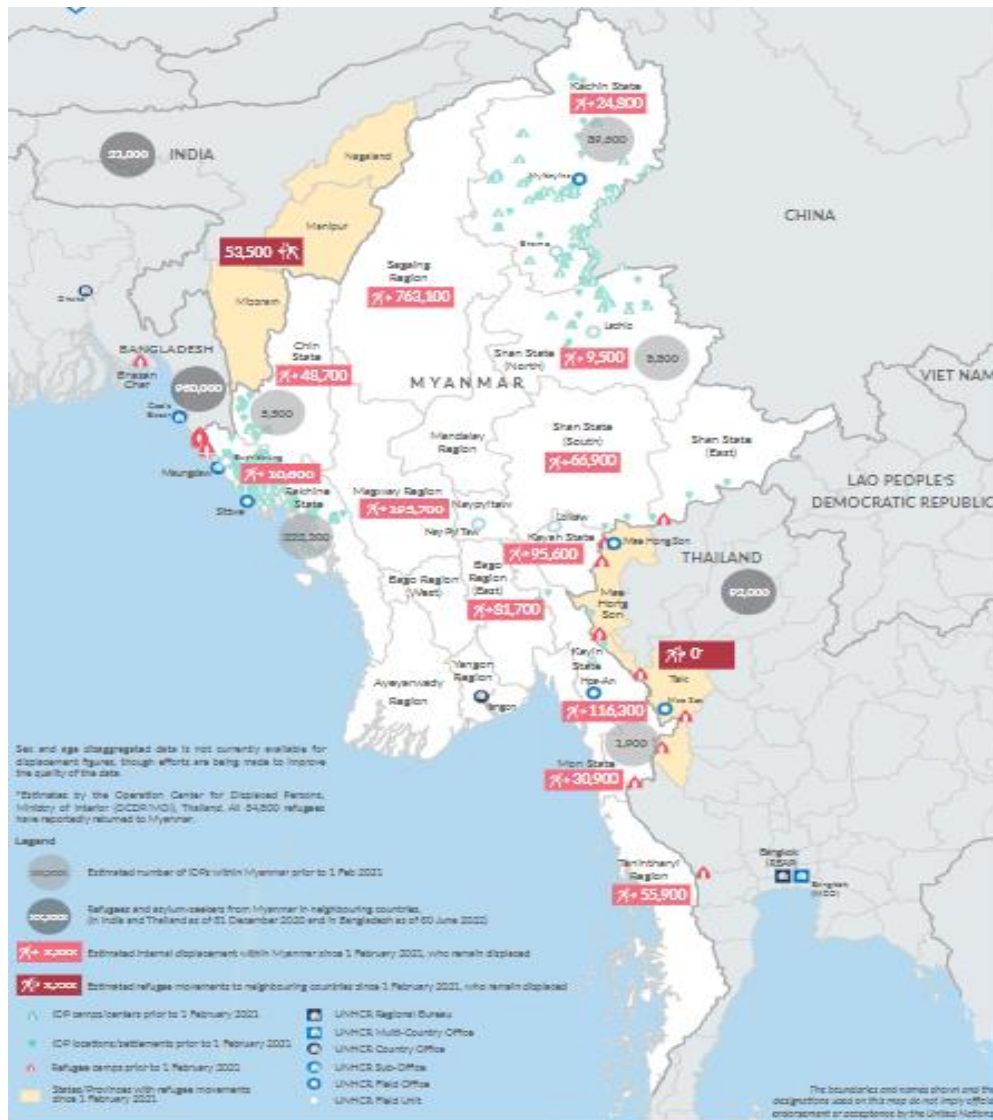


Figure I: Myanmar Emergency - Regional Overview Map
(as of 1 May 2023)

Despite Indonesia not being the top destination of the Rohingya population, but Foreign Minister of Indonesia, H.E Retno Marsudi thinks that Indonesia must take action to solve this conflict. The absence of ASEAN in solving this conflict due to its principle of non-intervention, made Indonesia separate itself to solve this conflict. In the next section, the discussion of Indonesia's resources as a mediator in regional conflict will be presented, and what kind of effort that Indonesia could give to solve this conflict.

Indonesia's Resources As Mediator In Regional Conflict

Every country in this world has resources to advance its foreign policy either by its hard power or soft power. When talking about hard power, many argue that military and economic capacity are the instruments to influence the behavior or interests of other political bodies. Whereas, when we talk about soft power, Nye stated it relies on:

"Its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye, Joseph S., 2011).

Indonesia as one of the largest democratic and Muslim countries in the world presented to the world that it is possible when democracy, Islam, and modernity go hand in hand (Sukma, R. (2011). Moreover, as Foreign Minister Hasan Wirajuda stated that:

"Indonesia today stands proud as the third largest democracy in the world. As a nation with an overwhelmingly Muslim population, Indonesia is a living refutation of the erroneous notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible" (Sukma, R. (2011).

From that statement above, Indonesia would like to project to the world that democracy and moderate Islam are the soft power instruments of Indonesia. Managing a multicultural and multi-religious country is not an easy task. Indonesia indeed experienced intra-state conflict because of ethnicity and religious reasons, but those things were resolved properly by the Indonesian government and it shows the capacity of the government to tackle the conflict within itself.

Sukma said that several reasons have contributed to the increased use of soft power elements as foreign policy assets. There are (Sukma, R. (2011) :

a. The 2004 elections

The 2004 general election was an experiment of Indonesia's new democracy. It was the second election following President Suharto's resignation. However, this second election was substantially different from the previous one in many ways. This was because the 2004 election was the first held following the adoption of the fourth amendment to the 1945 Constitution. The amendment altered Indonesia's political system in a way that influenced the recruitment of the political elite.

b. The confidence in crafting democracy and Islam as foreign policy assets

This stemmed from the relative success in moderating Muslim constituent reactions to US reprisal in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. Despite sporadic violent street demonstrations by extreme organizations, public protests against the United States were mostly calm. The Indonesian administration was able to gather backing from major Muslim organizations to warn the public that protests against the US should not be violent and that Indonesians should prioritize national interests over outsiders. Leaders of both Muhammadiyah and NU urged Indonesian Muslims to focus more on Indonesia's domestic issues and less on Afghanistan.

- c. The ability to resolve protracted secessionist conflict in the province of Aceh through peaceful means

Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or The Free Aceh Movement was a separatist group seeking independence for the Aceh region of Sumatra, Indonesia. This group is undoubtedly challenging for the Indonesian government because many analysts worried about Indonesia's disintegration, or "Balkanization." However, it turned out the democratization process was encouraged to solve this conflict by peaceful means, with the output of the Aceh Peace Accords. This case always became a reference of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's that dialogue is the most important tool in soft power to end intra-state conflict.

- d. Reluctant participant in the war on terror

The combining of moderate Islam and democracy has finally succeeded in its efforts to prevent and combat the growing domestic menace of terrorism. Moreover, Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, said that there is a collaboration between police and ulamas, in which, on the physical front, the police fight the terrorists, while the ulamas [Muslim religious leaders] fight the ideological battle.

From the explanation above, many see that Indonesia is a newly democratic country that began its journey in 2004. However, the success of Indonesia in resolving the conflict at its home and outside proves that Indonesia had the resources to be a mediator in a regional conflict. The principle of "free and active" is often misinterpreted as Indonesia not wanting to be involved in creating a secure and peaceful world to live in, but on the contrary, free means that Indonesia will not take a side with any party when there is a conflict and active means that Indonesia will contribute to creating a secure and peaceful world to live through its involvement in various regional or international organization, and definitely by being a mediator between conflicting parties.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHOD: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The tool of public diplomacy is separated into five components: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, and exchange diplomacy, which is widely utilized by states. Exchange diplomacy is used to regulate the international environment by sending individuals overseas and allowing citizens from other nations to study and acculturate for a period of time (Cull, N. J. (2008). As a result, public diplomacy refers to an intentional communication strategy that clearly associates promotion within a country with its international public.

When it comes to the main functions of diplomacy, there are at least three important forms of diplomacy: economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and public diplomacy. Public diplomacy, often known as people's diplomacy, is one of the several government operations aimed at directly communicating with various foreign publics. Public diplomacy also encompasses all official efforts to persuade the target segments of opinion to accept or tolerate the government's policy objectives.

In the case of the Rohingya's Myanmar conflict, Indonesia uses track one diplomacy or official diplomacy. De Magalhaes describes Official Diplomacy as (Magalhaes, C. J. 1988):

“[a]n instrument of foreign policy for the establishment and development of contacts between the governments of different states through the use of intermediaries mutually recognized by the respective parties”.

Track One diplomacy is distinguished from all other forms of diplomacy by its formal application at the state-to-state level. Track One Diplomacy is commonly regarded as a state's principal peacemaking tool in foreign affairs. It is carried out by diplomats, high-ranking government officials, and heads of state to influence political power structures.

The effort of Foreign Minister of Indonesia, H.E Retno Marsudi in September 2017, used shuttle diplomacy to try to resolve the Rohingya humanitarian issue in Rakhine State. She took a flight from Jakarta to Singapore, then to Myanmar, Thailand, and Bangladesh before returning to Jakarta. She argued that the safety of The Rohingya population is the utmost priority, and she also asked Junta Militer to refrain from using violence towards The Rohingyas.

I. Indonesia's Public Diplomacy to Solve Myanmar Conflict: Shuttle Diplomacy of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and The Five-Point Consensus

At the UNGA High-Level Side Event on “Rohingya Crisis” in New York, 22 September 2022, FM Retno Marsudi appealed to the countries to resolve The Rohingya's conflict. There are three points that she addressed (kemlu.go.id): First,

their (The Rohingya) voluntary return requires security assurances and hope for livelihoods, second, the need to protect The Rohingya refugee's safety and security in Cox's Bazaar, and third, the urge for peace and national reconciliation.

In the third point, FM Retno Marsudi has been doing shuttle diplomacy to urge international communities to be involved in the realization of peace and national reconciliation. Following the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the term "shuttle diplomacy" was used to describe Henry Kissinger's efforts to mediate peace in the Middle East by "shuttling" back and forth between countries and leaders to establish cease-fires and peace deals (Hoffman, D. A., 2011). The model of shuttle diplomacy is not suitable for every conflict, whereas when it is difficult for conflicting parties to meet directly or meet at one table, shuttle diplomacy at least can be an alternative, to find a solution. Here, the mediator will "shuttling" back and forth between countries and leaders to bring a caucus or a room to reflect what kind of proposition each party is willing to offer.

In the case of The Rohingya's Myanmar conflict, the negotiation is not between the Myanmar Government and the Rohingya's representatives. It is merely, between the Myanmar Government and the international communities. The reason is, that the Myanmar Government (now ruled by Junta Militer) does not recognize the Rohingya as its citizens, so for the Junta Militer, there is no room for The Rohingyas to negotiate with them. Therefore, the only way to resolve the conflict is through the effort from international communities to ask the Junta Militer to stop the persecution of The Rohingya; which is in international law, is called R2P or Responsibility to protect. In the end, FM Retno Marsudi succeeded in drafting a five-point consensus on Myanmar that was endorsed by the ASEAN countries.

Five-Point Consensus On the situation in Myanmar, the Leaders reached consensus on the following (asean.org):

- First, there shall be an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.
- Second, constructive dialogue among all parties concerned shall commence to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people.
- Third, a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair shall facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the Secretary General of ASEAN.
- Fourth, ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre.
- Fifth, the special envoy and delegation shall visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned.

So far, there has been no response from the Junta Militer to implement this consensus, but as the chairmanship of Indonesia in ASEAN is not ending yet, there is still a chance to push Junta Militer to implement this consensus.

BIODATA

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