

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Indonesia and Myanmar have established cooperation since long time ago. From historic point of view, these two countries have something in common which is their experience on freeing themselves from the colonialization. Myanmar, which categorized as Indonesia's neighbor, was one of the countries that recognize the proclamation of Indonesia's independence.¹

The starting point of relations referred to the time when Indonesian delegation came to Myanmar, previously known as Burma in 1947. Myanmar provided housing facilities and allowed Indonesia to open a representative office in Yangon, which later became the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia-Myanmar bilateral relations officially formed in 1949. That moment was considered as the fulfillment of true independence, under Sukarno's presidency.

To maintain the cooperation, there was continuity of relations. Suharto was actively persuading Myanmar to join regional organization where countries develop cooperation together. Also, bilateral visit became a prominent action which was accelerated by both countries. Until now, the Indonesian and Myanmar governments continue to visit each other.

Within this background, I would highlight an ethnic who is considered as an illegal immigrant in Myanmar, known as Rohingya. In the beginning, the 1948

¹Aryo Bhawono, "Riwayat Panjang Hubungan RI – Myanmar Tanpa Cela," *Detik News*, September 6, 2017, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3630263/riwayat-panjang-hubungan-ri--myanmar-tanpa-cela>, Accessed September 12, 2021.

Union Citizenship Act was quite flexible, because Rohingya people got conditional identification, even, seats in parliament at that time.² However, the 1962 military coup has brought changes to Myanmar society, including dramatic changes of citizenship members.

To be precise, Rohingya's identification has been transformed into foreign identity card which has a lot of limitations. Even more, a new citizenship law in 1982 officially proclaimed that Rohingya was not included as one of the country's 135 ethnic groups.³ Hence, several restrictions were given to them, including the restrictions on their identity, job opportunities, access to health, and education. In other words, the Rohingya people experienced tremendous series of discrimination because of stateless.

Specifically, this thesis will focus on the Rohingya's humanitarian crisis in 2017. 25th August 2017 was the starting point, when Rohingya militants launched deadly attacks on more than 30 security posts and an army base in Rakhine state.⁴ As a response, the troops who were backed by Buddhist militants attacked back by burning villages and killing civilians.

That major escalation cannot be separated from the involvement of a specific militant group called Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army or known as ARSA. They manifested a militant obligation to defend, salvage, and protect the

²Al Jazeera Staff, "Who are the Rohingya?" *Al Jazeera News*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/4/18/who-are-the-rohingya>, Accessed September 11, 2021

³ Ibid

⁴ BBC Staff, "Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the Crisis," *BBC News*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>, Accessed September 11, 2021

Rohingya community. Uniquely, their capacity was claimed as an act in line with the foundation of self-defense. However, Myanmar government categorized them as terrorist organization.

The outbreak of violence in 2017 brought significant impacts to society. Thus, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees have fled from Myanmar, mostly to Bangladesh. Because of that, the issue has become a global concern and spread across the world. International community put serious attention on this issue, including several countries, figures, and organizations.

In this research, I will elaborate how the United Nations as an official international body reacts to the incident, action towards the Myanmar government, and its resolution. Other than the UN, the ICJ, ICC, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and several countries also respond to the crisis, which will be recapped as worldwide reactions.

From a regional point of view, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has not been able to do much during that time. Because this regional organization stuck to the fundamental principle of non-interference, which condemned any intervention in the internal affairs.⁵ However, several countries which are part of ASEAN have reacted and taken actions.

By taking this into account, the research will highlight populist actions and reactions from Indonesia's governments that were triggered by local pressures. The local pressures reflect the domestic situation inside Indonesia during that time. In

⁵ Anis Muslimin, "ASEAN's Rohingya Response," *Forbes*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anismuslimin/2017/12/17/aseans-rohingya-response-barely-a-peep-outside-of-malaysia/?sh=7a5680e939de>, Accessed September 13, 202

2016 to 2017, Indonesia was facing conflicts of political identity. Due to the identity-based conflict, the issue of Rohingya tragedy easily triggers the civil society protests.

Demonstrations happened in several regions, including Jakarta, West Java, East Java, Central Java, and many other locations as expressions of frustration towards the situation in Rakhine state. The protestors came from several backgrounds, such as professional community, student associations, Islamic community, Muslim defenders, and organizations. They claim the protest as a form of solidarity, which concerned the people who have the same faith in Myanmar, which is the people of Rohingya.

Furthermore, this writing will focus on bilateral relations as the method for the fulfillment of populist agenda on the 2017 crisis. As the oldest form of diplomacy, the bilateral concept focuses on mutual relations, collaboration, and cooperative agenda.⁶ This research will highlight the bilateral efforts under President Widodo administration that really shows populist orientation, because they clearly stated to take concrete action, which bilateral relations can provide.

This topic is interesting to be discussed to study how populism manifested into the bilateral relations between Indonesia and Myanmar within the case of the Rohingya's humanitarian crisis that happened in 2017. I will use foreign policy analysis, followed by populism, humanitarian diplomacy and the concept of bilateral relations as conceptual frameworks.

⁶ Kishan Rana, "Bilateral Diplomacy: A Practitioner Perspective," *Diplo Policy Papers and Briefs*, 15, 2020. Accessed September 5, 2021. https://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/Policy_papers_briefs_15_KSR.pdf

1.2 Research Question

Recognizing the significant relations of populism and bilateral relations, I choose to write the manifestation of government populist orientation and its implications in the way of achieving interest through bilateral actions, as a response to the Rohingya incident in 2017. As the issue becomes crucial enough to be discussed, this research will focus writing the thesis around the research questions as follow:

1. In what way the idea of populism influenced Indonesia's foreign policy to Myanmar during the 2017 Rohingya's humanitarian crisis?
2. What are the consequences of Indonesia's population-based foreign policy to the bilateral relations for both countries during the handling of 2017 Rohingya's humanitarian crisis?

1.3 Research Objective

In accordance with the research question and making of this thesis, the objectives of this research are:

1. To explain the manifestation of populism to Indonesia's foreign policy in responding the 2017 Rohingya's humanitarian crisis
2. To elaborate the implementation of humanitarian diplomacy accelerated by Indonesia's government through bilateral relations with Myanmar

After doing so, this research aims to achieve its outcome which highlights government orientation towards populist agenda to respond to the crisis that derives from domestic protests.

1.4 Research Significance

This thesis points out the process of populist manifestation to Indonesia's foreign policy, the method of bilateral relations and the significant interpretation of the 2017 Rohingya incident. Moreover, it leads to the fulfillment and implementation of both frameworks, which are internal and external as the core concept of foreign policy analysis.

The outcome of this research will provide a better understanding of how populism can trigger government's action in fulfilling people's demands. Due to time constraints, this research has its limitations regarding the bilateral context of the issue. However, due to the comprehensiveness of the topic, I acknowledge that the thesis could be broadened to include international reaction, regional entity, and domestic politics.

Hopefully, by understanding the significant interpretation of the case study, which is 2017 Rohingya's humanitarian crisis, scholars will gain insight on how Indonesia's government maneuver a populist agenda into the strategy of humanitarian diplomacy towards Rohingya and bilateral relations with Myanmar.

1.5 Research Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters along with several sub-chapters. The first chapter is the introduction part. It consists of background, research questions, research objectives, research significance, and structure of writing. The background part basically explains 5W1H of the topic, including the urgency, relevance, and narration of the research.

The second chapter, theoretical framework is divided into two parts, which are literature review and theories or concepts. The literature review mentions several sources, data, information, and literatures that support the topic. It is then further strengthened by the theories or concepts in the essence of international relations.

The third chapter, methodology, consists of research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data analysis technique. These parts are the basic things of research. All of these will be used as the method of writing the topic or specific issue.

The fourth chapter is the analysis part. It is divided into some sub-chapters that will explain significant issues of the topic. The coverage of this chapter will answer this thesis' research questions. It leads to in-depth findings and elaboration of the topic.

Finally, the fifth chapter refers to the summary, conclusion, and recommendation. This chapter will emphasize the significance findings and result of writing.

After realizing the introduction part in Chapter I, the next chapter will be discussing the theoretical framework. The background which mentioned above will be further supported by a lot of sources. The elaboration will emphasize several literatures that have significant relations with this topic and theories or concepts that give significant interpretation on the issue.