

The Role of The International Community in Establishing Democracy in Myanmar

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received September 14, 2021

Revised September 16, 2021

Accepted October 29, 2021

Available online November 25, 2021

Keywords:

Democracy, International Community, Military Junta



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ABSTRACT

The existence of differences in Myanmar against the ruling regime is a significant obstacle in building opposition against the military junta. After being generalized in the November 2010 elections, it could be argued that Myanmar has moved away from reclusive authoritarianism but is not yet fully democratized. However, until now, the freedom felt by the people of Myanmar is still limited. It falls under the category of hybrid regimes encountered in the literature as 'not clearly democratic or conventionally authoritarian.' This study aims to analyze the role of the International Community towards Myanmar in promoting democratization. This study describes the political dynamics of Myanmar from its independence until the coup that just occurred in 2021. The method used in this paper is qualitative. This research collects and analyzes data from literature studies and interviews. This study found that international actors who play a role are NGOs, including ASEAN and the US, China, and Indonesia. The military coup has dashed hopes for democracy in Myanmar. The state has committed and reported as a result of civil protests to the military leadership. The coup has influenced the country to decline development in the political, social, and economic fields. In playing democracy, these actors try to develop meaning towards Myanmar using, among others, dialogue between the Myanmar civilians and the military and organizing joint talks. These methods hope Myanmar civilians get the ideal meaning of democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its independence on January 4, 1948, Myanmar has never experienced freedom in democracy. This is one of the results of the military junta that still in power as a single authoritarian regime through a military coup. Even though since 1990 the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the general election in Myanmar, the democratization or democratic transition that has been promised by the military has not seen a bright spot in a positive direction (Nare, 2021; Sadan & Dan, 2021). The existence of ethnic divisions in Myanmar against the authoritarian regime is the main obstacle to building an opposition coalition against the military junta (Manosuthikit, 2021; Stokke et al., 2022). After the general election in November 2010, it can be said that Myanmar has moved away from reclusive authoritarianism but is not yet fully democratic (Bünthe, 2021; Jap & Ziegfeld, 2020). But until now the freedom felt by the people of Myanmar is still limited. It falls under the category of hybrid regimes, which are understood in the literature as 'not clearly democratic or conventionally authoritarian'. Myanmar is often referred to as an 'illiberal democracy' or an 'electoral authoritarian regime'. These concepts, however, are misleading and actually cover the prerogative of the military and military action, which systematically pervades civilian institutions. While it is often said that the lack of civilian control hinders the consolidation of democracy or the deepening of democracy, we have no clear idea why democratization actually fails when military officers are placed in key positions of democratically elected regimes (Barany, 2016; Bünthe, 2021).

Myanmar's future is uncertain for democracy and many challenges will remain between the unpopular military and the popularly elected government (Kim et al., 2020; Zune et al., 2020). The optimal way forward would be to not only end military rule but also replace the 2008 constitution with a charter that brings the military under civilian control and enables a democratically inclusive nation-building process. This is a deep structural challenge that, beyond military approval, requires broad social change to achieve. But without this, Myanmar will continue to be plagued by many problems (Mahmood et al., 2020; Stokke et al., 2022). However, the military coup that took place on February 1, 2021 indicated that even

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though the political order of Myanmar's supervision ended, Myanmar still had to face the dynamics of implementing democracy. Currently, Myanmar is considered to be facing a period of transition from military junta rule to democracy. As a result of the actions of the military junta government, it caught the attention of the international community. In fact, various pressures arose over these human rights violations. International pressure and threats against Myanmar indirectly have a bad impact on the situation and conditions in Myanmar itself (Stokke et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021). The impact of economic sanctions from Western countries such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) for more than 20 years has made the economy in Myanmar increasingly underdeveloped and slumped. Burma's exclusion from world relations and international pressure also has a negative impact on the economic, social and political life of society as a whole (Lima & Kmoch, 2022; Sadan & Dan, 2021).

This paper is one of the results of the seminar KKLN (Kuliah Kerja Luar Negeri) done by Peace and Conflict Resolution Study Program, Republic of Indonesia Defence University, focused on studying how to resolve conflict in Myanmar after the Coup happened in February 2021. The topic chosen in this paper is to enlighten the international society about what happened in Myanmar and how do international community deal with it (Jap & Ziegfeld, 2020; Sanchez, 2020; Stokke et al., 2022). We seek that this topic has its urgency due to the mass protests in Myanmar that caught international attention and how once again the country is ruled under the Military Junta system. Rather than using a smaller scope to focus on, like most of the researches on Myanmar Coup issue, this research focuses on bigger scope of the role of international community in establishing the democracy in Myanmar. The international communities, as the research object, chosen in this paper are based on the interests the communities have in Myanmar coup. The actors of the international communities in this paper come from the state and International NGO, which are USA, China, Indonesia and ASEAN.

In analysing the topic, we also consider using several targets and indicators that can be used in assessing matters relating to the role of the international community in the functioning of democracy in Myanmar, of which the targets and indicators used are adapted to the SDGs. Goal 16: Supporting a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The targets used in this study were Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; Support legal instruments at national and international levels and equal access to justice for all; Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms; Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in global governance and institutions; Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements; Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for capacity building at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime; and Support and promote non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

2. METHODS

Research method is a method or technique that is arranged regularly used by researchers to collect data or information in conducting research that is tailored to the subject or object under study. The method used in this research is qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with informants and literature reviews from journals, articles, and books related to the issue. The research subject in this study were Khin Ohmar from Myanmar Democracy Activists, Min Zaw Oo from the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security and Rosalia from Mahidol University. In this study, the research objects are Myanmar's Democracy after the 2021 Military Junta; and the role of the international world (state and non-state actors) in Myanmar's democracy.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Myanmar or formerly known as Burma is a country that became independent from the British colony on January 4, 1948. After independence, the Government of Burma formed a bicameral parliament consisting of the Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities. Multi-party elections were also held in 1951-1952, 1956, and 1960. The military leadership carried out a coup on March 2, 1962. Although the 1947 constitution already included the term federalism, the military government interpreted the term as anti-national, anti-union and pro-disintegration. Between 1962 and 1974, Burma was governed by a revolutionary Council headed by a general. The government manoeuvres carried out during this period were often referred to as The Burmese Way to Socialism which combined Soviet-style nationalization with centralized economic planning.

New constitution of The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted by the government from 1974 to 1988 in which the country used a one-party system of government. This allowed generals and other military officers to resign from their military posts and enter the government through the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Myanmar government held free multi-party elections in May 1990, these were the first free elections in 30 years. This election was won by the NLD. However, the military junta government refused to cede power and continued to govern Myanmar using SLORC until 1997, followed by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) until the organization's disbandment in 2011. On 10 May 2008, The Burmese Constitutional Referendum was conducted by the government with the aim of creating a thriving and disciplined democracy. The referendum allowing Myanmar to conduct general elections in 2010 using the new constitution. However, the election was widely accused of voting irregularities. The United Nations and a number of western countries also declared the election a fraud. From 2011 to 2015, Myanmar underwent major political reforms during which there were a series of changes in the political, economic, and administrative fields supported by the government and the military.

November 8, 2015 general elections were held in Myanmar. The results of the vote count stated that the NLD received the most support and obtained a majority of seats in the upper and lower chambers in the national parliament. However, Aung San Suu Kyi as the leader of the NLD is constitutionally barred from serving as president (Fisher, 2015). On 15 March 2016, Htin Kyaw was elected as the first non-military president since the 1962 military coup. Meanwhile, on 6 April 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed as state adviser which is a position similar to that of prime minister. In the 2020 Myanmar parliamentary elections, the NLD competed with the USDP and other parties for parliamentary seats, the results of this general election stated that the NLD received the most votes and regained the most seats in the upper and lower chambers of the national parliament (Kipgen, 2021; McCarthy, 2019). The result however, was rejected by the USDP and urged the military to oversee the election. Finding more than 8 million irregularities in voter lists in 300 cities, the military asked Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC) to review the election results, but the UEC rejected the claim due to lack of evidence (Hteik & Lwin, 2013). On February 1, 2021, the Tatmadaw arrested State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint and held them under house arrest. In addition, the Tatmadaw also expelled NLD Members who served in parliament and arrested other NLD members. The Tatmadaw handed over government power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing and declared a year-long state of emergency and began to tighten borders, domestic and international travel, and restrict electronic communications nationwide. The Tatmadaw announced that it would replace the UEC with a new institution and unofficially stated that elections would be held within a year (Hteik & Lwin, 2013).

73 years of independence, the coup situation that occurred in 2020 was not a good thing for the future growth of the Myanmar people's democracy. The consequences of the 2020 coup, of course, created internal divisions in society. Arrest of those who do not approve of the military junta's steps, this will only lead to resentment and hostility among the people of Myanmar. Moreover, the loss of confidence in the military, which was supposed to protect the people, was actually forced to clash with the people of Myanmar. Returning to the military dictatorship of course only made Myanmar move backwards. And making the beautiful dream of a democratic state for the people of Myanmar never materialized in a long time. The emergence of civil society resistance to the actions of the military junta shows what the majority of the people of Myanmar want, a Myanmar democracy. A country whose sovereignty is in the hands of the people, while the military plays a role outside of civil politics. Thus, providing security and comfort for its citizens. This country is always covered by a black cloud if it has entered a leadership transition phase. Security and welfare under the auspices of a democratic state are actually the outward demands or conscience of a human being in his life. This means that the aspirations of the citizens of Myanmar are no different from the citizens of other parts of the world who want democracy as the basis of their country.

Getting a leadership that can unite various stakeholders and find common solutions is the hope of the Myanmar people as well as the expectations of the international community about additional norms to democracy where in the end all agreed that the military must leave democratization. And the basic principles of democracy are non-violence and recognition of popular sovereignty. If these two things can be fulfilled by the junta, then this is actually the democracy that the Myanmar people want. Therefore, the hopes of the Myanmar people today are actually the same as the expectations of the people in any country regarding the importance of democracy in the survival of their country. In an international context, ASEAN has a greater influence than western countries because the approach taken by ASEAN is more easily accepted by the people of Myanmar.

The Myanmar junta has used all possible means to quell the protests and civil disobedience movement. From the coup on 1 Feb 2021 up to June 4, at least 845 people have been killed so far Myanmar's military continues to use brutal methods to quell anti-coup protests, nearly 6000 people have been unfairly arrested and 4565 were currently detained. A strategy to bear down on the junta must be developed

urgently, with top priority given to securing a ceasefire. Channels of communication between the military leaders and key ASEAN members remain open at this juncture. An initiative needs to be propelled by ASEAN and in cooperation with key strategic international players (Suzuki, 2019). It is not possible at this point for the conflicting parties within Myanmar to sit down and negotiate. This reality ASEAN accepts. Some ASEAN members have suggested informal meetings that bring together official and non-official representatives of the main stakeholders, from both inside and outside the country. This would include the Tatmadaw (the military), the National League for Democracy, ethnic groups, civil society and the private sector. The United Nations, ASEAN and key international dialogue partners could be brought in to provide support and mediate

Prior to the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, the United States helped uphold human rights in the country through advocacy with key decision makers. In addition, the United States also assists civil society in conflict reduction, supports formal and informal peace processes, supports judicial initiatives and documentation of human rights violations, and enhances local governance capabilities. USAID provides support to UEC to conduct national and local elections in 2020 as well as technical assistance to political parties and civil society. After the military coup, the United States continued support for civil society in Myanmar which included humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups. This was done by forming an inter-agency committee to review US assistance and involvement in Myanmar and to ensure that there were no US government funds supporting the military regime. With this statement clears that US involvement in realizing the importance of democracy in Myanmar is to supervise the aid for Myanmar but not to the military. In international community, US also acted as the state actor that efforted international community to oppose the Burmese Government's Human Rights Abuse (Khan & Ahmed, 2020).

Chen Hai, who serves as China's ambassador to Myanmar, stated that Myanmar's current political situation is "absolutely not what China wants to see". This was also demonstrated by the Chinese delegation at the United Nations by approving the Security Council statement demanding the immediate release of Myanmar's political leaders and activists detained by the military government. While many observers think China favours authoritarian regimes, they have little reason to favor Myanmar's ambitious and unpredictable military dictatorship and expansionist tendencies. For the Chinese government, Aung San Suu Kyi has so far been a more profitable economic and political partner than the Tatmadaw. In addition, the Tatmadaw's refusal to progress in Myanmar-China economic relations proves that the Tatmadaw is not a promising partner for the Chinese government. Tatmadaw also demonstrates its territorial integrity by maintaining power against pressure from ethnic minorities. One example is the 2009 Kokang Incident which caused 30,000 refugees to flee to Yunnan province, China. Such military territorial ambitions pose a far greater threat to China's border integrity and national security than the NLD. This is based on the Tatmadaw's suspicions of China's involvement in the internal conflict in Myanmar. This is a major concern for Min Aung Hlaing who is the leader of the Military Junta and Commander in Chief of the Myanmar Tatmadaw, even though China is the largest supplier of weapons to his army. In contrast with US, China along with its ally, Russia vetoed the UN Resolution to block US effort in opposing the Military Junta regime. This shows that China has its own interest along with its ally to raise the power of military regime instead of supporting the voices of civil community to gain democracy (Khan & Ahmed, 2020).

Discussion

Due to the historical similarities between Myanmar and Indonesia. The democratization process in Indonesia provides Myanmar with a real example to implement democratization in its own country (Hornat, 2019; Kriyantono et al., 2022). Myanmar's leaders use the example of Indonesia as evidence that Myanmar has the potential for successful reforms and convince others that the government's goals of development and democratization can be achieved. The 2008 Myanmar Constitution was drafted in a similar way to the 1945 Indonesian Constitution. However, the source of Myanmar's democratic transition is purely the will of its own people. However, it is not an exaggeration to state that the process of consolidation and development of democracy in Myanmar imitates the process of its neighbors in Southeast Asia (Mirajiah, 2013; Renshaw, 2013). An example of a good relations between Myanmar and Indonesia occurred in 1997, the Indonesian Ambassador to Myanmar stated that SLORC wanted to emulate the New Order Government in three main areas, which are, Pancasila as the ideology of the Indonesian state; the 1945 Constitution; and military dual function (Mirajiah, 2013; Renshaw, 2013).

Indonesia's approach to strengthening democracy in Myanmar is a persuasive approach that is in line with the principles of coexistence and non-intervention promoted by ASEAN. Ali Alatas who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia between 1988 and 1999 emphasized that the best approach to help strengthen democracy in Myanmar was through Constructive-Engagement, namely by supporting Myanmar

to change its policies through sustainable relations and calm diplomacy and not isolating or imposing sanctions. economy to them. Guided by the above principles, Indonesia is expected to be able to strengthen democracy in Myanmar through dialogue and capacity building (Cantarero, 2020; Jansen et al., 2021; Purnama et al., 2019). Indonesia does not want to damage relations with ASEAN member countries, especially Myanmar, which is the object of discussion in the draft resolution. From a security perspective, intervention by western countries in draft resolutions on the human rights situation in Myanmar can jeopardize the stability of the Southeast Asian Region. The principle of non-interference that is guided by ASEAN will be violated by the intervention carried out by the United States and the United Nations. Indonesia certainly supports international involvement in the Myanmar issue, but the involvement must be constructive. If not, then Indonesia will continue to reject every resolution issued by the UN Security Council in which the resolution in the form of sanctions will only have a negative impact on the development of democracy in Myanmar.

4. CONCLUSION

The military coup had made the hopes of democracy in Myanmar gone. The country had gone through riots and chaos due to civilian protests to the military leadership. The coup has affected the country to gain a slump of development in politics, social, and economy. Therefore, as the SDG Goal point 16: Supporting a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, the point could be used in assessing matters relating to the role of the international community in the functioning of democracy in Myanmar, of which the targets and indicators used are adapted to the SDGs. In accordance to the SDG Goal point 16, the role of international community is needed. The roles are needed to deter the riots and chaos happen in Myanmar and to bring peace towards the country. The NGO actors who played role in implementing the democracy in Myanmar such as ASEAN. The state actors who played role in implementing the democracy in Myanmar include US, China, and Indonesia. In playing the role, these actors try to develop the meaning of democracy towards Myanmar with means like doing sanctions for the military leadership, facilitating dialogues for Myanmar's civilian and military, arranging mutual talks. These means become hopes for Myanmar civilian to gain their ideal meaning of democracy.

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