

## **Chapter IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

The main problem that this research attempted to answer is why Indonesia sidestepped ASEAN haze cooperation in dealing with the 2015 Southeast Asian haze, despite its international commitment to the AATHP. Using and combining concepts within the neoclassical realist framework proposed by Randall Schweller, Ripsman, and others, the writer found that Indonesia's foreign policy elites had a consensus to underreact towards the haze and forest fires issue to protect national political and economic interests. The findings support the neoclassical realist theory wherein, states deviate from the behaviour expected by international pressures due to unit-level factors. The unit-level factors are the elites' perception and domestic politics. Here, the elites translate international pressures of regional cooperation based on their own biases and conduct decision-making based on domestic political risks and costs.

I identified the foreign policy elites as President Joko Widodo, Retno Marsudi (Minister for Foreign Affairs), Siti Nurbaya (Minister for Environment and Forestry), Luhut Pandjaitan (Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs), and Willem Rampangilei (Head of The National Agency for Disaster Management), and all of them aside from Retno Marsudi perceived the haze and forest fires as a domestic rather than a regional threat. Their perception was influenced by their personality as leaders and experiences, as well as bureaucratic and nationalist doctrine factors. The majority aside from Retno

Marsudi also similarly believed that ASEAN haze cooperation would pose high domestic political risks and costs as it can bring international attention to the country's haze and forest fires management practices, decrease autonomy towards resources governance, and hinder the country's economic development aspirations that are supported by the palm oil industry. Meanwhile, Retno Marsudi as the Minister for Foreign Affairs believed it was less risky as it was beneficial for their internationalist agenda and could bring benefit to Indonesia's image and interests in ASEAN and enhance its regional ties.

The findings contribute to mainstream neoclassical realism by showing that states underreact to international pressures and threats not only because of elite dissensus, but also because there is elite consensus to underreact. The foreign policy elites in my case overwhelmingly agreed to sidestep ASEAN haze cooperation. President Joko Widodo, Siti Nurbaya (Minister for Environment and Forestry), Luhut Pandjaitan (Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs), and Willem Rampangilei (Head of The National Agency for Disaster Management) had a consensus to underestimate the haze and forest fires as domestic matters and were pessimistic on the necessity of regional cooperation. They were also unwilling to take the risks of opting for ASEAN haze cooperation.

Retno Marsudi as the Minister for Foreign Affairs who was the minority who supported ASEAN haze cooperation, ended up agreeing with the majority who agreed to sidestep ASEAN haze cooperation because the ministry's influence in the decision-making process was marginal compared to the other foreign policy elites. It turned out that the President, who sits at the highest place in the hierarchy of

foreign policymaking, had an inner circle of foreign policy and political advisors who mostly consisted of individuals outside of the MoFA, and he did not bring an ambitious global and regional agenda into his administration. This diminished the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs' role as merely representational and they adapted the President's inward-looking agenda into their foreign policy activities. In other words, power concentration in the decision-making process at the hands of President Joko Widodo and his close political and foreign affairs advisor, Luhut Pandjaitan, led to the formation of elite consensus to sidestep ASEAN haze cooperation. This meant that their domestic agenda of pursuing palm oil economic development prevailed in the end.

Another point from neoclassical realism that the findings confirmed was that underbalancing which is a form of disproportionate response towards the level of threat and international pressure is a suboptimal foreign policy. Indonesia in this case was dealing with a large-scale and severe regional haze resulting from forest fires whilst having limited capacity and resources, and therefore should have opted for ASEAN haze cooperation in an emergency such as this. Instead, Indonesia's foreign policy elites chose to underreact towards the haze and forest fires issue by regarding it as a domestic issue and overestimating the government's abilities.

The majority of the foreign policy elites insisted that the haze and forest fires were the responsibility of the local governments, were reluctant to categorize it as a national much less a regional threat, and boasted to regional neighbours that the country had sufficient technology, personnel, and financial resources. The government's denial towards its lacking capacity to handle the haze and forest fires

to protect national pride and economic and political interests prolonged the negative health and economic impacts on the country and region. The problem which could have been prevented as early as February 2015 when the government was warned of the potential for forest fires, was set aside until it became too serious to ignore by September 2015 and fires had engulfed six provinces in Indonesia and covered the Southeast Asia region in haze pollution.

The most important implication from the writer's research is that domestic foreign policy elites can collude with each other during the decision-making process and ensure that the chosen policy option serves their shared interests. As apparent in the findings, regional mechanisms for cooperation can be easily sidestepped to prioritize the national interests of governments in ASEAN which also indicates the soft nature of the AATHP can become a disadvantage for the region, especially when it comes to emergency and threatening situations. The 2015 Southeast Asian haze was a serious issue that needed a multilevel and multi-stakeholder intervention but there were little to no repercussions for Indonesia's sidestepping of ASEAN haze cooperation.

Other implications from this research are that the extent of influence that a policymaker has in Indonesia's foreign policymaking does not necessarily come from their formal positions. Instead, it can also be determined by the informal standing of the foreign policy elites with the head of government. As evident in the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs' minimal power to sway the opinions of other foreign policy elites to support ASEAN haze cooperation, despite their formal mandate as the top figure of foreign policymaking second to the president.

Moreover, preventive actions are crucial when dealing with haze and forest fires and should not be taken lightly until it has become a regional problem. The Indonesian government made many blunders and missed an important time window between February to June 2015 when the haze and forest fires could have been tackled early on. When countries underreact to a serious issue, there will be negative consequences like how Indonesia's decision to sidestep ASEAN haze cooperation was detrimental to the health and economic security of its people and the Southeast Asia region.

This study focused on analyzing the perspective of Indonesian foreign policy elites regarding ASEAN haze cooperation which is majorly against said cooperation in addressing the transboundary haze pollution issue in 2015. Hence, there is still room for further research to analyze the views of other actors outside of the inner circle of Indonesian foreign policy elites. The study also touched upon the involvement of political and economic interests in the elites' decision to sidestep ASEAN haze cooperation in 2015. More in-depth studies could be conducted regarding the national interests, who constructed these interests, and how these interests are constructed.

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