

# Strategic Role of Indonesia in Helping Afghanistan from Humanitarian Crisis

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**Abstract:** *As a country that plays an active role in maintaining world peace, Indonesia has an important role in helping to overcome the humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan after the Taliban occupation. Indonesia's strategic roles include providing financial assistance for the recovery and rebuilding program and Afghanistan in the next three years. In addition, Indonesia also stated its attitude to immediately reopen bilateral relations with Afghanistan is if the Taliban can maintain their commitment to ensure domestic security.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Role, Afghanistan, Taliban, Humanitarian Crisis

## I. Introduction

The Afghan conflict returns after 20 years. The Afghan government was retaken by the Taliban forces, in no time, on August 15, 2021. Armed groups spread throughout the capital and entered the presidential palace. The incident also made the Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani flee abroad (Aljazeera, 2021). This incident was even beyond the predictions of the United States (US) intelligence, which caused US diplomats and military personnel to flee from the country they had conquered nearly two decades ago. The chaos was out of control, not only US citizens fled, but also civilians chose to go to other countries to seek protection.

As chaos unfolds in Kabul after the group seized control of the Afghan capital, the Taliban claim they want peace, will not seek revenge against old enemies and will respect women's rights within the framework of Islamic law (Reuters, 2021). In addition, the Taliban said they had assured the United Nations that they could carry out humanitarian work in Afghanistan, which is suffering from a severe drought. The European Union says that they will only cooperate with Taliban authorities if they respect basic rights, including women's rights, and prevent the use of Afghanistan's territory by terrorists (Chee, Chalmers, & Siebold, 2021). However, many Afghans are skeptical of the Taliban's promises. Fear still haunts civil society as they looked back on the history of 20 years ago; the Taliban committed various violations of human rights and culture

The Taliban have now gained complete control over the country, but face dealing with mass internal and external displacement of Afghan civilians, monetary invasion and humanitarian concerns. The Taliban restricted access to and from abroad, as a result, foreign countries that had been helping Afghanistan politically and economically decided to stop their aids. However, this condition has made the United Nations feel concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The UN special representative for Afghanistan warned that Afghanistan was "on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe (Detik, 2021). It is noted that 22% of

the country of 38 million are at risk of starvation and another 36% are facing acute food insecurity and hunger every day because people cannot afford buying food. Therefore, Humanitarian aid for Afghans must be maintained and even increased, but assistance will only go to the Afghan government if conditions are met. Starting a dialogue soon is needed to avert a potential migratory disaster and a humanitarian crisis.

Indonesia is proven to have a strong regional commitment to maintain peace in the territory of the country which is inhabited by various ethnic groups with different beliefs. Indonesia, which is also involved in the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which is part of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), also supports the Afghan government's efforts to empower women to support the peace process in Afghanistan. Indonesia has a special affinity with Afghanistan. The two countries have also established good relations for 62 years. For example, in 2017, Indonesia and Afghanistan strengthened their bilateral relationship through a meeting of the President of Indonesia, Ir. Joko Widodo, with the president of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani (Kemenkeu, 2017). The two heads of state discussed a number of bilateral issues, such as peace building cooperation, capacity building, and also increasing cooperation in the trade sector. The Indonesian government itself realizes that Indonesia's involvement in efforts to maintain world peace is very important for the implementation of international commitments and Indonesia's foreign policy. Including the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban came to power, Indonesia has an important role in the peace process.

Referring to Indonesia's position in the eyes of the international community, this author describes how Indonesia's strategic role in developing Afghanistan in alleviating the humanitarian crisis after the Taliban came to power. Indonesia, of course, does not want the long-established bilateral relationship with Afghanistan to be destroyed. On the one hand, Indonesia must also consider their attitude towards the Taliban which has caused chaos in the eyes of the world.

## II. Discussion

### 1. An Overview of Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan Post-Taliban Occupation

Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August after the United States withdrew its last troop and the militants soon took over the country. The takeover exacerbated an already fragile economic situation and was heavily dependent on foreign aid. Western countries stopped aid, while the World Bank and International Monetary Fund also stopped disbursing funds (BBC, 2021). A country is considered dependent on foreign aid when 10% or more of its gross domestic product comes from foreign aid. In the case of Afghanistan, about 40% of GDP is international aid. Tragically, the Taliban banned the use of foreign currency in Afghanistan, a move that was seen as disrupting an economy that was already on the verge of collapse (Bowen, 2021). However, the World Bank noted that this ban actually slowed economic growth in August 2021, reflecting weak confidence amid the rapidly deteriorating security situation and severe drought conditions that impacted agricultural production (The World Bank, 2021).

The economic downturn in the last four months since the Taliban occupation has led to a severe humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The United Nations claimed that Afghanistan is facing the worst humanitarian crisis the world has ever seen. As many as 23 million people are in dire need of food, and 97% of the 38 million populations were at risk of being trapped in poverty (Choudhury, 2021). The food crisis in Afghanistan has been exacerbated by water shortages and a severe dry season - already the second time in four years. In addition, Afghanistan experienced the third wave of COVID-19 starting April. Infection rates have reached record highs, with less than five percent of the population fully vaccinated (The World Bank, 2021). The political and military advance of the Taliban, reduced healthcare capacity, and imminent humanitarian crisis risk exacerbating an already very serious threat posed by COVID-19 in Afghanistan (Essar, Hasan, Islam, & Riaz, 2021). The continued rise of COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan appears inevitable, but poor diagnostic capacity prevents accurate case measurement, while vaccine provision is extremely limited.

On the one hand, the Taliban has stated that the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is also part of the responsibility of the United States (Medcom, 2021). The reason is, this crisis is the result of the withdrawal of

all US people who have an interest in Afghanistan both from a political and economic perspective. At present, the Taliban are too busy watching over women to prevent the humanitarian catastrophe that could starve half of Afghanistan this winter ini(Business Insider, 2021). Three months into Taliban rule, 22.8 million Afghans could face acute hunger this winter, the United Nations says. The Taliban have been cut off from \$9.5 billion in assets and loans.

Trying to survive without the help of foreign countries, the Taliban then launched a program to tackle the hunger crisis in Afghanistan, providing thousands of people with grain in exchange for labor (Euro News, 2021). The group's food-for-work program was launched around the country's major cities and employs 40,000 men in the capital alone. The scheme did not pay workers, targeting those currently unemployed and most at risk of starvation during the coming harsh winter. However, this program clearly would not be able to relieve Afghans from the hunger crisis which is already quite severe due to the limited state budget they currently have. Despite militarily ruling, the Taliban did not have access to nearly all of Afghanistan's \$9 billion central bank reserves, most of which were held by the New York Federal Reserve as of August 2021 (Boak, 2021).

## **2. Indonesia's Stance on Afghanistan Post-Taliban Occupation**

The goals and international commitments of the Indonesian state have been stated in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in the fourth paragraph of the second paragraph, namely: "... to promote public welfare, educate the nation's life, and participate in carrying out world order based on independence, eternal peace and social justice..." (*The text of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*)

Based on these objectives, Indonesia's commitment to participate in maintaining world peace is carried out through active participation in realizing peace in Afghanistan. In a speech by Indonesian President Joko Widodo in Afghanistan stated that:

"Without peace there can be no prosperity. Without prosperity, peace will not last long. Therefore, when we work together to build peace, economic cooperation must be enhanced in parallel."

Therefore, in realizing peace and development efforts in Afghanistan, it is necessary for Indonesia to harmonize social, political and economic relations.

The situation in Afghanistan has become even more chaotic after the Taliban group took control of the country in August. In addition to the Afghans who fled abroad, a number of countries also moved quickly to save their citizens in Afghanistan. Call it the United States, Italy, Czech Republic, Pakistan, New Zealand to South Korea. At that time, the Indonesian government noted that 15 Indonesian citizens were in Afghanistan and had been secured at the Indonesian Embassy in Kabul (Tirto, 2021). However, unlike other countries, Indonesia did not immediately state its position regarding the occupation of the Taliban. Only a week later, Indonesia succeeded in evacuating 26 Indonesian citizens from the turbulent country (VOA Indonesia, 2021). Foreign Minister RetnoMarsudi explained that the evacuation process was deliberately carried out with careful preparation for several days.

"This caution and secrecy is needed given the very high dynamics of the field and the very fluid situation. We must take all these precautions for the safety of Indonesian citizens and those who were evacuated, as well as for the smooth implementation of the evacuation mission as a whole,"RetnoMarsudi said (VOA Indonesia, 2021).

Based on these facts, it can be concluded that Indonesia does not want to be careless in responding to the conflict in Afghanistan even though there are citizens who are trapped in the chaos.

On the one hand, Indonesia cannot help but consider the perpetuation of bilateral relations with Afghanistan if the Taliban remain in power in the future. According to Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) researcher WasistoRahardjoJati, Indonesia's position with the Taliban is also waiting for the steps of an Islamic state in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Tirto, 2021).The Taliban is still considered a sporadic group that is enough to threaten the stability of the world. In addition, there are concerns that the Taliban will

not be able to fulfill its commitment to maintaining peace by imposing authoritarian rules and laws in Afghanistan. Thus, one aspect that can encourage Indonesia to immediately reopen bilateral relations with Afghanistan is if the Taliban can maintain their commitment to ensuring domestic security.

However, Indonesia cannot turn a blind eye to the humanitarian crisis that occurred in Afghanistan as a result of the Taliban occupation. This is because Indonesia is committed to its role in maintaining world peace. In addition, there is a direct call from the United Nations asking the world's citizens to help Afghanistan to solve the humanitarian crisis (United Nation, 2021). In its appeal, the UN Security Council has adopted a resolution on the need for increased humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. To do so will require urgent increase in funding donations, easing of sanctions, regional cooperation by air for aid deliveries and continued attention from Western governments that may prefer to bounce back from defeat in Afghanistan. In order to prevent a human catastrophe that reverberates across South and Central Asia, donor countries need to put aside their concerns about the Taliban, at least for the narrow purpose of ensuring that aid reaches the Afghan population and refugees living nearby.

This UN call has even been partially implemented by the US, European Union, and NATO even though they are still struggling to distinguish between expanding cooperation or re-recognizing the Afghan government which is now led by the Taliban (Shaikh, 2021). However, at the third meeting of Moscow-format talks on Afghanistan held under Russian patronage on October 20, 2021, they realized that Afghanistan's new rulers must be given access to \$9.5 billion in funds blocked in American banks in order to overcome the economic crisis and humanity in Afghanistan. Not only that, Russia has also expressed deep concern over the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and expressed the need to mobilize the international community to provide urgent humanitarian and financial assistance (Shaikh, 2021).

Therefore, Indonesia as a country that upholds peace and is neutral requires a strategic role so that their efforts to build Afghanistan free from the shackles of the humanitarian crisis can be achieved. Of course, this strategic role is a form of Indonesia's response to the UN's call and at the same time reinforces Indonesia's position towards Afghanistan, which is undergoing a new government transition under the Taliban era.

### **3. Strategic Role of Indonesia in Helping Afghanistan**

In the General Indonesian Dictionary, a role is something that is part of or who holds the main leadership (Poerwadarminto, 1984). According to Suhardono, that the role according to social science means a function that a person carries when occupying a position in a certain social structure (Suhardono, 1995). A person is also said to play a role if he has carried out his rights and obligations according to his social status in society (Walgito, 2003).

Strategy in a general sense is the process of determining the plan of top leaders that focuses on the long-term goals of the organization, accompanied by the preparation of a method or effort on how to achieve these goals (Marrus, 2001). The definition of strategy in particular is an action that is incremental (always increasing) and continuous, and is carried out based on the point of view of what customers expect in the future.

The re-election of Indonesia to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (after serving in 1973-1974, 1995-1996, and 2007-2008) is a belief of the international community. Although as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and only serves for two years, Indonesia can still carry out its strategic role. Indonesia's strategic role is not solely because Indonesia is a big contributor in sending UN peacekeepers, but also because of the responsibility as a member of the UN who should care about world peace.

Indonesia has played a strategic role in humanitarian crises when helping its Rohingya ethnic groups. In the era of Joko Widodo's government for the first period (2014-2018), Indonesia became a Regional Leader in ASEAN by raising the Rohingya issue in various forms of ASEAN meetings to successfully lead the humanitarian case in Rohingya so that ASEAN took part in its resolution (Akmaludin, 2019). In addition, Indonesia has become a Faithful Ally for Myanmar by sending aid to become a door in opening dialogue in supporting the resolution of the Rohingya conflict by Myanmar itself, and becoming a Mediator-Integrator by continuing to communicate with the Myanmar government and continuing to open communication with various

international actors. In addition, Indonesia through the Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance (IHA), an alliance consisting of NGOs and zakat institutions in Indonesia, has responded to the Rohingya humanitarian crisis (Ramadhanti, 2019). IHA as an alliance in collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has succeeded in providing humanitarian assistance to victims and refugees in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Apart from the Rohingya, Indonesia has shown its strategic role in dealing with the humanitarian crisis during the Palestinian conflict. Indonesia through the non-profit organization AksiCepatTanggap (ACT) Indonesia played a role in helping victims of the conflict in Gaza, Palestine in the 2014-2018 periods (Shabita, 2019). The presence of ACT Indonesia in Gaza is quite influential for Gaza residents from a psychological, economic and socio-cultural perspective. However, with its status as an NGO, ACT Indonesia can only provide assistance, gather support and advocate for the issue of the humanitarian crisis currently occurring in Gaza.

Indonesia has played a diplomatic role in various peace and conflict resolution efforts. One of them is being a mediator between the Afghan government and the Taliban group since the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014). Indonesia's strategic roles in the past are now the capital to play a more active role in peace reconciliation efforts, rebuilding Afghanistan. However, with negotiations stalled and the fall of the US-backed Afghan government into the hands of the Taliban, now is the time for Indonesia, as the world's most populous Muslim nation, to tackle a more pressing crisis. As a concrete step, Indonesia provided aid funds worth US\$3 million (Rp42.77 billion) for Afghanistan (CNN, 2021). This assistance reflects Indonesia's commitment to help Afghanistan, which is now controlled by the Taliban regime. The tens of billions of aid, amounting to US\$ 150 thousand (Rp 2.1 billion) is intended for humanitarian assistance in emergency situations. Meanwhile, around US\$2.85 million (Rp40.6 billion) will be aimed at supporting development in Afghanistan over the next three years. This development assistance will focus specifically on health, education, women's empowerment, and mining. In addition, Indonesia must also be responsive to Afghan refugees who have difficulty seeking asylum in neighboring countries.

Finally, President Joko Widodo on the occasion of the G20 Extraordinary Summit on Afghanistan which was held virtually on October 12, 2021, emphasized the importance of the international community's efforts, with the G20 at the forefront, to do three things. First, maintaining stability and security, including by forming an inclusive Afghan government. Second, ending the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, including supporting the United Nations' efforts to raise humanitarian aid for the Afghan people. And third, restore economic activity and development.

### III. Conclusion

The Afghan government was fractured by the Taliban forces, in no time, on August 15, 2021. The chaos caused the worst humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. As a country that has consistently supported the peace process in Afghanistan, Indonesia certainly has an important role in helping to create stability in Afghanistan, overcoming the humanitarian crisis and supporting inclusive and sustainable recovery and development in Afghanistan. Regarding the recognition of the Taliban as the official leader in Afghanistan, the Indonesian government must immediately determine its position by taking into account the situation and communication with the Taliban.

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