

# Bridging The Gap Between Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy on Myanmar Crisis: Voices from Policymakers

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**Abstract.** This research examines the gap between theory and practice in Indonesia's foreign policy toward Myanmar's crisis. Using qualitative methodology through interviews with three informants from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the study analyzes policymakers' perspectives on the Myanmar situation. Findings of this research showed that Indonesia adopted a pragmatic approach prioritizing operational needs over theoretical frameworks, employing quiet diplomacy and inclusive engagement with all conflict parties. The research identifies significant contrasts between practical and theoretical domains regarding ideological orientation, information access, implementation mechanisms, and success metrics for both quiet diplomacy and ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus. Limitations include reliance on policymakers' perspectives without equal representation from theoretical-domain viewpoints and information access restrictions under quiet diplomacy policy. The study illuminates how foreign policy practitioners translate theoretical concepts when navigating complex diplomatic situations, offering insights to strengthen foundations for more effective foreign policy by recognizing constraints and priorities between both theoretical and practical domains.

**Keywords:** Theory-practice gap, Indonesia foreign policy, quiet diplomacy, Five-Point Consensus, Myanmar, ASEAN.

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini membahas kesenjangan antara teori dan praktik dalam kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia terhadap krisis Myanmar. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif melalui wawancara dengan tiga informan dari Kementerian Luar Negeri Indonesia, penelitian ini menganalisis perspektif para pembuat kebijakan atas situasi di Myanmar. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Indonesia mengadopsi pendekatan pragmatis yang memprioritaskan kebutuhan operasional di atas kerangka kerja teoritis, menggunakan diplomasi yang tenang dan keterlibatan inklusif dengan semua pihak yang berkonflik. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi perbedaan yang signifikan antara ranah praktis dan teoretis mengenai orientasi ideologi, akses informasi, mekanisme implementasi, dan ukuran keberhasilan diplomasi damai dan Konsensus Lima Poin ASEAN. Keterbatasan yang ada termasuk ketergantungan pada perspektif pembuat kebijakan tanpa representasi yang setara dari sudut pandang domain teoritis dan pembatasan akses informasi dalam kebijakan diplomasi diam. Studi ini menjelaskan bagaimana praktisi kebijakan luar negeri menerjemahkan konsep-konsep teoretis ketika menghadapi situasi diplomatik yang kompleks, memberikan wawasan untuk memperkuat fondasi kebijakan luar negeri yang lebih efektif dengan mengenali kendala dan prioritas antara ranah teoretis dan praktis.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesenjangan Teori-Praktik, Kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia, quiet diplomacy, Five-Point Consensus, Myanmar, ASEAN.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is actually a complex expression of the interplay between idealized visions and practical realities that are often distant. International relations theorists have long observed the phenomenon of a gap between academia and diplomatic practice in the global arena. George (1993) illustrates that cultural differences between the two communities: academia and policymakers have hindered the development of international relations theory by academics and the use of this knowledge by practitioners (George, 1993).

This gap is not simply a communication problem, but reflects fundamental differences in orientation, values and priorities between those who study theory and those responsible for implementing policy. Nye (2009) also argues that policy practitioners often find theoretical discourse too abstract and detached from the pragmatic demands of decision-making, while academics see policy practice as too reactive and less systematic in utilizing available knowledge.

Policymakers need several types of knowledge to make effective decisions. Walt (2005) identifies that policymakers need 'purely factual knowledge' such as specific information about the political situation in Myanmar (if contextualized), as well as typologies that classify phenomena based on certain characteristics (Walt, 2005).

According to Walt (2005), a good theory must fulfill several applicable criteria, namely: 1) the theory should be logically consistent and empirically valid; 2) the theory should be complete; it should not leave us wondering about the prevailing causal relationships; 3) the theory should have explanatory power that allows the theory to explain phenomena that previously seemed unrelated and confusing; 4) the importance of the phenomena being explained; and 5) the theory should have "prescriptive richness" or the ability to generate useful recommendations.

Theory can inform policymaking in four main ways that are relevant to this research. Walt (2005) explains that theory can help with: 1) diagnosis by expanding the range of possible interpretations that allow policymakers to consider multiple perspectives; 2) theory can

facilitate prediction by identifying the main causal forces at work; 3) theory guides prescription by influencing the choice of objectives and helping policymakers understand what they should do to achieve certain outcomes; and 4) theory is essential for policy evaluation because it can provide benchmarks that will tell them whether a policy is achieving the desired results.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi emphasized that Indonesia deliberately chose non-megaphone diplomacy/quiet diplomacy with the aim of providing space for the parties to build trust and encourage more open communication among stakeholders (France24, 2023). This approach is intended to implement the five points of consensus agreed upon at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in April 2021 in Jakarta.

Meanwhile, through ASEAN, Indonesia played a key role in initiating the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (FPC) for Myanmar, which was agreed at the ASEAN Leaders Meeting (ALM) in April 2021 in Jakarta (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). The consensus includes five main points: 1) violence must stop immediately in Myanmar and all parties must exercise complete restraint; 2) constructive dialogue among all relevant parties must begin immediately to find a peaceful solution for the benefit of the people; 3) a special envoy of the ASEAN Chairperson will facilitate the mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the ASEAN Secretary-General; 4) ASEAN will provide humanitarian assistance through The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre); and 5) the special envoy and delegation will visit Myanmar to meet with all relevant parties (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

Criticism of Indonesia's 'quiet diplomacy' approach centers on the lack of transparency and concrete measurable results. According to M. I. Sari (2023), this approach has not met the expectations of the international community, with insignificant progress in the implementation of the FPC. Some observers have also questioned the effectiveness of quiet diplomacy in the context of Myanmar's political complexities and rising tensions in the region (A. C. Sari, 2023).

On the other side, Indonesia underlined that an overt intervention could exacerbate tensions and jeopardize prospects for a peaceful settlement. While the quiet diplomacy approach faces criticism and challenges, Indonesia's efforts reflect a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and respect for regional sovereignty, while recognizing the complexity of situations that require long-term and sustainable solutions (Lamb & Teresia, 2023).

The contrasity of perspectives between policymakers and what George (1993) called theoretical domain clearly seen in some articles, (see: Alexandra, 2022; Alexandra et al., 2023; Alexandra & Mantong, 2022; Amador, 2021; Arifin, 2022; Asia Justice and Rights, 2024; Caballero-Anthony, 2022; Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2021; Djujandi et al., 2022; Ha, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2022; Ian, 2021; Iannone, 2025; Kausikan, 2022; Mitra, 2023; Muhibat, 2021; Ong, 2022; Phuangketkeow, 2021; Piromya, 2022; Preecharush, 2022; Seah, 2021; Sothirak & Po, 2022; Thuzar & Alexandra, 2023; Wardani, 2022).

Meanwhile, it's not fair if we aren't looking at how the results of research may be interpreted by policymakers, highlighting how the policymakers see the political reality in Myanmar as a limitation of their policies. At the same time, policymakers may have a different decision-making process in their institutions: a challenges like bureaucracy and leader's personal preferences on deciding what kind of knowledges that valuable on policymaking.

Therefore, there is a need for research that advocates for their voices (policymakers) with linear significance in an effort to bridging the gap between theory and practice in Indonesia's foreign policy. As articulated by George (1993), both policymakers and academia were separated on different culture, perspectives, and knowledge utilization. The integration of academic knowledge into policy processes makes it possible to improve the quality of diagnosis of increasingly complex international situations, especially on complexity in Myanmar.

The purpose of this research is to examine the gap between theory and practice in

Indonesia's foreign policy making, particularly in relation to the Myanmar crisis. This study aims to advocate for policymakers' voices as a means to the first step of bridge the differences between theory and practice in foreign policy.

By investigating how theoretical knowledge is utilized in Indonesia's approach to the Myanmar situation, this research intends to demonstrate the significance of integrating academic research into policy processes to improve the quality of foreign policy diagnosis in Myanmar.

Furthermore, this research seeks to address the need for more active interactions between policymakers and academia to facilitate knowledge transfer from research to policy within Indonesia's foreign policy apparatus.

This research seeks to answer a question: how do policymakers see and engage with Myanmar crisis in practical and how policymakers see academic research and its utilization to policy-making process. Additionally, this study examines how Indonesia's policymakers' perspectives on how to engage with Myanmar between theoretical understanding and practical constraints, exploring whether this approach represents an effective implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus or a manifestation of the theory-practice gap in foreign policy. This research uses a type of qualitative research. Qualitative research design is a methodological approach that focuses on exploring and interpreting social phenomena through subjective and contextual perspectives.

## 2. METHOD

This research uses a type of qualitative research. As Creswell & Poth (2018) articulated, qualitative research design is a methodological approach that focuses on exploring and interpreting social phenomena through subjective and contextual perspectives.

This research will take qualitative data sources suggested by Creswell & Creswell (2018). This research will use data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with sources from parties relevant to the research topic as a primary data (Creswell & Creswell,



2018). The data collected will include information on the research topic.

The author used unstructured and open-ended questions to explore participants views and opinions. The author started by sending an interview request letter 1 month before, giving informed consent to the informant, and conducting the interview.

This research will use purposive sampling technique as explained by Creswell & Creswell (2018) that in this technique, authors intentionally select individuals and locations that can help understand the research problem and the main phenomenon under study. In this case, the author selected 3 informants to interview: 1) a non-consensual informant to be named from the Directorate of ASEAN Political-Security Cooperation, Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2) a non-consensual informant to be named from the Directorate of ASEAN Political-Security Cooperation, Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 3) Cahya Pamengku Aji from the Indonesian Foreign Policy Strategy Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

The author used the concept of data saturation, where data collection is stopped when new data no longer brings new insights or reveals new properties of existing categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on the research interviews conducted, data saturation was achieved, and the information collected was sufficient to address the research questions of this study.

This research employs data analysis techniques proposed by Miles and Huberman (1992), which consist of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is the process of simplifying, sorting, grouping, and organizing raw data in order to make it more focused, structured, and easier to interpret. This process helps eliminate irrelevant data and highlight essential information for further analysis. Data presentation involves organizing the reduced data in a narrative and systematic form, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and preliminary conclusions.

The conclusion drawing involves drawing initial conclusions based on the data that has been reduced and presented. These conclusions

are provisional and may change if additional data collected does not support them.

The data that analyzed is data that authors got from in-depth interview with each informant. The data will be in form of interview transcripts that written based on interview voice recorder.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

George (1993) identifies three types of knowledge (knowledge base) that can help policymakers to decide whether and how to use a particular strategy. Scholarship by academics, research and intelligence specialists in government, and other analysts is the main way to gather these types of knowledge. The three types of knowledge are: 1) an abstract conceptual model (or quasi-deductive theory) of each strategy (the abstract or general conceptual model of a strategy); 2) general (or generic) knowledge of the conditions that favor the success of a strategy and, conversely, the conditions that make its success impossible (the identification of 'favoring conditions'); (3) actor-specific (idiosyncratic) behavior and adversary-specific behavior models (the idiosyncrasy of the country or the adversary) (George, 1993).

An abstract conceptual model of a strategy, such as deterrence, coercive diplomacy, crisis management, cessation of war, détente, appeasement, dispute settlement, or cooperation, identifies the essential variables and overarching rationale for its effective implementation. Deterrence theory emphasizes the potential to retaliate against actions contrary to the state's interests, which requires a credible and formidable threat to convince the opponent that the potential costs and harms outweigh the anticipated benefits (George, 1993).

Abstract models can be used for other tactics, but they are not a strategy. The models provide a foundation for formulating and executing plans, but they do not specify actions to incorporate logic into the opponent's calculations. To adapt the model into a concrete strategy, policymakers must fit each variable component into a specific strategy. In addition, abstract conceptual models are not comprehensive deductive theories, which can

be used to predict the success or failure of tactics in a particular context (George, 1993).

The effectiveness of abstract conceptual models can be partially reduced by recognizing factors that increase the likelihood of strategy success. Generalized knowledge can be obtained through empirical research comparing successful with unsuccessful strategy implementations. Conditional generalizations, or laws, describe factors that facilitate strategy success and factors that correlate with the likelihood of failure (George, 1993).

These generalizations are more advantageous in policymaking than probabilistic relationships without specifying conditions. The effectiveness of foreign policymaking tactics will depend on a variety of factors, and no single causal pattern can explain all successes or failures. Making conditional generalizations is not an easy research endeavor, but through further evaluation of historical experience, it is possible to identify factors that can increase or increase the probability of conflict (George, 1993).

Conditional generalization is a set of assumptions that can be used to predict the outcome of a conflict. It can be used in conflict mediation, negotiation, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy. A crisis will be conducive to mediation when the parties realize the impasse and decide that unilateral action is no longer possible (George, 1993).

Pre-negotiation conditions found that conditions such as impending disaster, the belief that negotiation is preferable, potential obstacles in formal discussions, and the belief that pre-negotiation will lead to favorable outcomes can increase negotiation success. Thus, producing conditional generalizations about trust-building measures, which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of particular strategies in particular contexts (George, 1993).

Policymakers need an accurate perception of the adversary to engage effectively with other states. This involves viewing events and actions from the opponent's point of view, which can lead to misunderstandings and misjudgments. Inaccurate portrayals can result in fatal irrationality, policy errors, preventable disasters, and lost opportunities (George, 1993, (George, 1993)).

The gap between theory and practice in foreign policy is a condition that has long been a concern of international relations scholars and diplomacy practitioners. This phenomenon reflects the complexity of the relationship between two communities that should complement each other but often operate in separate domains. In the global context, George (1993) has early on identified that there is a cultural divide between academia and policymakers that has hampered the development of theories about international relations by academics and the use of this knowledge by practitioners.

This gap is not simply a communication problem, but reflects a fundamental divergence in orientations, values and priorities between those who study theory and those responsible for implementing policy. A similar situation is evident in Indonesia's foreign policy landscape, where interactions between theoretical domain and the practical domain have not been productive. Exploring the perspectives from policymakers in trying to bridge this gap is a crucial one-step towards strengthening the foundations of foreign policy in Indonesia.

### **3.1 Policymakers Perspectives on Conceptualizing Strategy on Myanmar**

Indonesian policymakers showed a pragmatic approach to conceptualizing strategy for the Myanmar crisis that prioritizes operational effectiveness over theoretical purity. Their strategic conceptualization integrates elements of abstract models with practical considerations, revealing how George's (1993) first type of knowledge—abstract conceptual models—functions in real-world policymaking environments.

The findings from interviews that authors conducted revealed that policymakers do not explicitly identify with specific theoretical frameworks that used when making their strategy of foreign policy about Myanmar. Instead, they develop what might be termed an inclusive engagement approach that emerges from practical considerations rather than

theoretical prescriptions. This approach, characterized by engagement with all conflict parties including the military junta, National Unity Government (NUG), and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), demonstrates how policymakers adapt abstract models to particular contexts rather than rigidly applying theoretical constructs.

While not explicitly articulated as theoretical adherence, Indonesia's approach bears notable resemblance to Johan Galtung's positive peace concept. This theoretical alignment appears more incidental than intentional, suggesting that policymakers may unconsciously incorporate theoretical frameworks that align with their practical experiences and institutional wisdom. The emphasis on building long-term peace through joint national development rather than merely halting violence illustrates how abstract peace-building models manifest in practical policy formulations, even when not explicitly invoked.

Historical precedent serves as a more direct influence on strategy formulation than abstract theory. The Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) approach used during the Cambodia conflict provides a historical experienced that policymakers adapt to the Myanmar policy. This information showed how historical experiences knowledges often supersedes theoretical frameworks in practical policymaking, with policymakers drawing lessons from previous diplomatic successes rather than theoretical literature. This pattern aligns with George's (1993) observation that policymakers tend to rely on concrete, context-specific knowledge rather than abstract theoretical models.

Indonesia's foreign policy in Myanmar-quiet diplomacy-policy represents a context-specific adaptation that prioritizes pragmatic considerations over theoretical contribution. This approach emerges from policymakers' understanding of the Myanmar military junta's sensitivity to international image and dignity concerns rather than from theoretical prescriptions about diplomatic engagement. The adaptation in Indonesia foreign policy illustrates how George's third knowledge type—actor-specific behavioral models— influences strategic formulation more directly than abstract conceptual models.

The divergence between theoretical prescriptions and practical implementation becomes particularly evident in how policymakers approach the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC). Rather than developing a rigid roadmap and implementation plan as many theoretical domain approaches would suggest, Indonesian policymakers have created a building block policy consisting of three progressive phases of dialogue facilitation. This policy emerges from practical considerations about stakeholder ownership and diplomatic sensitivities in Myanmar rather than theoretical models of conflict resolution. The policymakers' insistence that any roadmap and implementation plan must be Myanmar-owned rather than ASEAN-imposed further showed how practical concerns often override theoretical prescriptions in real-world policymaking.

This finding reinforces George's (1993) observation about the limitations of abstract conceptual models in guiding concrete strategy implementation. While such models provide general frameworks for understanding, they often lack the specificity required for operational effectiveness in complex diplomatic considerations. Indonesia's policymakers have therefore developed what might be termed a pragmatic eclecticism that borrows elements from various theoretical approaches while prioritizing contextual situation adaptation.

The limited role of explicit theoretical frameworks in policy formulation does not necessarily indicate their irrelevance. Rather, it suggests that theories may function more as interpretive lenses through which policymakers make sense of complex situations retrospectively, rather than as prescriptive guides for action. This pattern recalls George's (1993) distinction between theories of action and theories for action, with policymakers more often employing the former than the latter.

The strategic conceptualization process also reveals how institutional constraints shaped theoretical application in foreign policy making. Indonesia's policy showed not only its assessment of the Myanmar situation but also its position within ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making structure. The need to accommodate diverse regional perspectives creates a diplomatic environment where

theoretical purity often gives way to pragmatic compromise. This finding highlights how institutional constraints mediate the relationship between abstract theoretical models and policy making process.

Indonesia's preference for inclusive engagement rather than isolation of the military junta demonstrates how national diplomatic knowledge and historical experiences shape foreign policy application. This approach contrasts with Western powers' more confrontational stance toward authoritarian regimes, suggesting that theoretical frameworks are filtered through distinct national diplomatic knowledge and historical experiences. The pattern illustrates how theoretical models undergo cultural and institutional translation when applied in specific policymaking contexts.

This analysis reveals a complex relationship between abstract conceptual models and strategic formulation in Indonesia's Myanmar policy. While theoretical frameworks offer general orientations and interpretive lenses, they function more as background influences than as explicit guides. Policymakers instead prioritize contextual adaptation, historical precedent, and actor-specific understanding when conceptualizing their Myanmar strategy, demonstrating the limitations of abstract models in guiding concrete diplomatic action in complex regional crises.

### **3.2 Policymakers Perspectives on General Knowledge of Situation in Myanmar**

Indonesia's policymakers showed complex understanding of the contextual conditions that shape the Myanmar crisis, reflecting what George (1993) terms general knowledge of the conditions that favor the success of a strategy. This knowledge type proves crucial in adapting abstract strategic concepts to Myanmar's specific context and identifying viable diplomatic pathways amid complex constraints.

Policymakers exhibit a comprehensive historical perspective that locates the current crisis within Myanmar's longer political evolution. They view the conflict not merely as a caused of the 2020 election dispute and 2021

coup but as an extension of military-civilian and inter-ethnic tensions dating back to General Ne Win's 1962 takeover. This historical contextualization demonstrates how policymakers develop what George (1993) calls conditional generalizations about conflict dynamics based on longer historical trajectories rather than focusing exclusively on immediate triggering events. This longer temporal perspective provides policymakers with deeper contextual understanding than often appears in academic analyses focused on more recent developments.

Through practical engagement, policymakers have identified specific conditions they believe favor successful diplomatic intervention. These include finding common interests among conflicting parties—particularly the shared desire for a peaceful, democratic Myanmar with broader autonomy for ethnic minorities—and leveraging the fact that no ethnic minority group seeks full independence from Myanmar. This identification of favorable conditions showcases how policymakers develop empirical knowledge about conditions conducive to strategy success—aligning with George's second knowledge type. This knowledge emerges not from theoretical prescriptions but from direct engagement with stakeholders and assessment of on-the-ground realities.

Policymakers' comparative analysis between the Myanmar and Cambodia conflicts reveals historical understanding of how regional context affects strategy viability. They recognize that ASEAN's expanded membership and increased fragmentation create more complex conditions for consensus-building than existed during the Cambodia crisis, showed how policymakers develop conditional knowledge about when and how specific strategies might succeed. This comparative analysis enables them to adapt past successful approaches to current regional realities, illustrating the practical application of George's second knowledge type.

Information constraints significantly shape policymakers' understanding and approach. They recognize that limited media coverage of Myanmar in Indonesia creates information gaps that affect both public perception and academic analysis. This



awareness of information constraints helps explain divergences between policymakers and theoretical analyses, as both groups operate with different levels of access to Myanmar's complex realities. This finding highlights how information gaps contribute to the theory-practice gap, with policymakers often facing contextual and reality-based knowledge that is unavailable to academic observers.

The tension between diplomatic necessity and information sharing creates particular challenges. While quiet diplomacy enables trust-building with conflicting parties, it limits transparency about policy processes and progress. This restricted information flow affects theoretical-domains assessment of policy effectiveness and contributes to divergent evaluations between practitioners and theoretical domain. The pattern reveals how practical diplomatic requirements sometimes conflict with the information transparency that would facilitate closer alignment between theoretical and practical domains.

Regional dynamics within ASEAN influence Indonesia's policy to Myanmar. Policymakers identify fragmentation among ASEAN members as a key constraint, with different national interests creating divergent approaches to the Myanmar crisis. This recognition of regional political constraints demonstrates how policymakers develop knowledge based by conditional constraints about when particular strategies might succeed or fail based on regional political constellation. The insight highlights how regional institutional dynamics shape the application of abstract strategic models to specific crises.

Policymakers' knowledge includes realities on-the-ground assessment of the conditions that might enable sustainable conflict resolution. They recognize that economic development and prosperity may prove more effective than purely political reforms in reducing Myanmar's conflict potential, demonstrating pragmatic understanding of the relationship between economic conditions and political stability. This insight reflects conditional knowledge about what factors might enable long-term success beyond immediate crisis management, showing

how policymakers incorporate multiple causal factors into their strategic assessments.

The ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC) features prominently in policymakers' understanding, but they view it as an ultimate goal rather than implementation methods of conflict resolution. This perspective shows how policymakers distinguish between aspirational frameworks and operational strategies, recognizing that abstract consensus points require translation into context-specific action steps. This distinction reflects George's (1993) observation that abstract models provide strategic orientation but require contextual adaptation for implementation.

The knowledge policymakers possess about Myanmar's situation emerges from multiple sources beyond formal academic research. This diverse knowledge acquisition demonstrates how policymakers integrate multiple information sources rather than relying exclusively on academic theoretical frameworks, creating a more practical but sometimes less systematic knowledge base than academic analysts develop.

This analysis reveals how Indonesian policymakers develop and apply general knowledge about conditions affecting strategy success in Myanmar. Their approach aligns with George's (1993) second knowledge type but demonstrates a more pragmatic, multisource orientation than purely theoretical approaches. While sometimes less rigid than academic frameworks, this practical knowledge enables contextual adaptation that abstract models alone might not facilitate a success foreign policy impact.

### **3.3 Policymakers' Perspectives on Idiosyncratic Factors in Myanmar's Military Junta**

Indonesian policymakers showed complex understanding of actor-specific behaviors and motivations in Myanmar, particularly regarding the military junta. This understanding reflects what George (1993) terms actor-specific behavioral models—the third type of knowledge essential for effective strategy implementation. Policymakers' nuanced grasp of Myanmar's military dynamics significantly shapes their diplomatic approach and explains key divergences from theoretical prescriptions.



Policymakers exhibit keen awareness of the Myanmar military's psychological and reputational concerns, particularly regarding international image and dignity. They recognize that the junta places high value on appearing autonomous rather than influenced by external actors, a motivation that significantly shapes Indonesia's preference for quiet diplomacy over more public approaches. This understanding of actor-specific psychological factors demonstrates how policymakers develop behavioral models that go beyond institutional analysis to incorporate reputation and face-saving concerns that academic analyses might overlook or underemphasize.

The policymakers' assessment of Myanmar's military incorporates realistic power analysis that sometimes diverges from theoretical domain ideals. They recognize the military's entrenched position in Myanmar's political structure and the improbability of rapid transition to civilian rule, noting that even Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government operated under military constraints. This power-oriented assessment leads policymakers to pursue pragmatic engagement rather than isolation strategies, showed how actor-specific power analysis shapes strategic choices in ways that may diverge from normative theoretical prescriptions favoring democratic transitions.

Ethnic dynamics feature prominently in policymakers' actor-specific understanding. They recognize that Myanmar lacks the cohesive national identity that might facilitate lasting conflict resolution, with tensions between the majority Bamar population (75%) and ethnic minorities (25%) creating persistent fault lines. This sociological understanding informs policymakers' assessment of solution sustainability, suggesting that economic development might prove more effective than purely political reforms in reducing conflict potential. This multidimensional analysis demonstrates how policymakers incorporate social and economic factors into their actor-specific behavioral models.

Policymakers' approach to stakeholder engagement reflects Indonesia's policymakers' understanding of different actors' communication preferences and trust requirements. They leverage think tanks and NGOs as intermediaries to connect with

resistance groups such as the NUG and EAOs, recognizing that these groups often feel more comfortable engaging with civil society organizations than directly with foreign governments. This strategic use of intermediaries demonstrates how policymakers creatively adapt to actor-specific behavioral characteristics and translate psychological insights into practical foreign policy engagement strategies.

The creation of informal settings for initial contact between conflicting parties further illustrates how actor-specific understanding shapes tactical implementation. Policymakers facilitate initial meetings through low-pressure environments like diplomatic formal events, recognizing that direct confrontation might prevent dialogue initiation. This policy shows how behavioral understanding informs micro-level tactical choices that facilitate broader strategic objectives, revealing how actor-specific knowledge shapes not just overall strategy but also implementation details on Indonesia foreign policy.

Policymakers maintain realistic expectations about Myanmar's political trajectory based on actor-specific analysis. Their assessment suggests that political transformation will likely be gradual rather than sudden, given the military's entrenched position and determination to maintain control. This realities-based outlook informs a long-term engagement strategy rather than expectation of rapid democratic transition, demonstrating how actor-specific assessment shapes time horizons and success metrics in ways that may diverge from more idealistic theoretical approaches.

The building block approach Indonesia employs with Myanmar stakeholders demonstrates policymakers' understanding of the relationships among different actors and the communication barriers between them. By first facilitating dialogue among groups with similar positions before attempting cross-faction engagement, policymakers demonstrate how actor-specific relationship mapping informs sequenced diplomatic approaches. This graduated engagement strategy shows how behavioral understanding shapes process design in complex multi-actor conflicts.

Policymakers' actor-specific understanding extends beyond Myanmar's domestic stakeholders to encompass regional dynamics. They recognize how ASEAN member states' relationships with Myanmar's military shape varying patterns of regional response coordination, with some countries prioritizing non-interference while others advocate stronger collective action. This mapping of regional member states shows how policymakers develop behavioral models not only for primary conflict parties but also for regional stakeholders whose positions significantly influence strategy implementation.

The emphasis on Myanmar-owned solutions rather than externally imposed roadmaps reflects understanding of how various Myanmar actors would perceive and respond to different intervention approaches. Policymakers recognize that externally designed implementation plans would likely trigger resistance based on sovereignty concerns, particularly from the military. This assessment demonstrates how anticipated actor reactions shape diplomatic approach design, illustrating the practical application of behavioral prediction in strategy formulation.

This analysis reveals how Indonesian policymakers develop and apply actor-specific behavioral models regarding Myanmar's complex stakeholder landscape. Their policy aligns with George's (1993) third knowledge type. By incorporating power dynamics, historical patterns, cultural factors, and relationship networks into their behavioral understanding, policymakers develop complex actor assessments that significantly shape their strategic and tactical choices in ways that sometimes diverge from theoretical prescriptions.

### **3.4 Contrasts of Perspectives Between Policymakers and Theoretical Domains**

The research findings reveal significant contrasts between policymakers and theoretical domains (academia and epistemic communities) regarding the Myanmar crisis. These differences manifest across multiple dimensions, creating a theory-practice gap that influences both policy formulation and academic discourse. George (1993) framework

of knowledge types helps explain these divergences and their implications for bridging theoretical understanding and practical application.

Ideological orientation emerges as a fundamental point of contrast. Policymakers observe that academic discourse tends toward Western liberal-democratic frameworks that prioritize normative democratic outcomes, while their own approach necessitates pragmatic engagement with authoritarian realities in Myanmar. This divergence reflects different applications of George's first knowledge type—abstract conceptual models—with academia prioritizing normative theoretical consistency while policymakers emphasize pragmatic adaptation. The policymakers characterize academic discourse as predominantly Western-oriented, making it difficult to find scholarly support for engagement strategies with authoritarian regimes despite their practical necessity in Myanmar's situation.

Information access and utilization create another divergence. Policymakers operating under quiet diplomacy necessarily restrict information sharing to maintain stakeholder trust, thereby creating information gaps between policymakers and academia, which relies on transparent discourse. This divergence exemplifies how different on-the-ground realities shape knowledge development, with policymakers accumulating direct stakeholder knowledge that remains unavailable to academic analysts. The resulting information gap contributes to different assessments and recommendations, as theoretical domain analysis proceeds without access to the full picture of the complexity faced by policymakers.

The time horizon for analysis and solution development differs between the two domains. Policymakers note that academic perspectives often appear more idealistic or normative because scholars lack direct involvement in rapidly changing field conditions. This contrast showed different applications of George's second knowledge type—conditional generalizations about strategy success factors—with academic analysis developing more systematic but sometimes less contextually grounded generalizations than policymakers'

practical constraints. The divergence highlights how operational distance affects the development of conditional knowledge about when and how particular strategies might succeed.

Stakeholder engagement approaches reveal actually the same perception between practical-domain and theoretical-domain. While many academia analyses advocate to keep the engagement with the military junta and all of conflicting parties. On the other side, Indonesian policymakers pursue inclusive engagement with all parties based on their assessment of Myanmar's power realities. The divergences that we can see is theoretical-domain want to put a harder pressure to make Myanmar's military junta obey the Five-Point Consensus while the policymakers realized that the solution for the situation in Myanmar must be 'myanmar-owned solution', not a solution that ASEAN made. This contrast reflects different applications of George's third knowledge type—actor-specific behavioral models—with policymakers developing more considerations of Myanmar's junta military point-of-view.

Implementation mechanisms for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC) constitute another area of contrast. Academic critiques often call for a rigid roadmaps and implementation plans, while policymakers emphasize that such externally imposed frameworks would undermine local ownership and trigger sovereignty concerns. This divergence reflects different understandings of how abstract frameworks should translate into operational strategies, with academia favoring more rigid policy while policymakers emphasize on-the-field realities adaptation and stakeholder ownership.

Institutional constraints contribute to these divergences. Policymakers operate within diplomatic structures that require consensus-building among diverse stakeholders, including other ASEAN members with varying interests regarding Myanmar. Academic analysis typically proceeds with greater autonomy from such institutional constraints, enabling more hard-pressure recommendations that may prove difficult to implement within regional diplomatic frameworks. This contrast highlights how institutional constraints shape the

application of abstract models to diplomatic challenges.

Success metrics and time horizons is also different between the two domains. Policymakers showed their preference to make a building block as a progress metrics, recognizing that complete resolution remains unlikely in Myanmar's complex situation. While theoretical-domain often measure outcomes against more pressure to make Myanmar's military junta obey the Five-Point Consensus, support democratic transition and make the timeline to the conflict resolution more systematic—a building block isn't enough.

This analysis revealed the multidimensional nature of the theory–practice gap in Indonesia's Myanmar policy. While significant contrasts exist across ideological orientation, information access, time horizons, stakeholder engagement approaches, and implementation mechanisms, these differences do not necessarily indicate that either domain is fundamentally flawed. Rather, they reflect the different realities, constraints, and objectives that shape knowledge development within each domain.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In an effort to examine the gap between theory and practice in Indonesia's foreign policy-making, with specific focus on the Myanmar crisis, this study explores policymakers' perspectives on how they perceive and engage with the crisis in practical terms, how they utilize academic research in policy formulation, and how they navigate between theoretical understanding and on-the-ground constraints in shaping Indonesia's policy toward Myanmar.

The findings reveal that Indonesian policymakers using a pragmatic lens to make a policy approach to the Myanmar crisis that prioritizes operational need based on-the-field realities over theoretical purity. Rather than explicitly identifying with specific theoretical frameworks, they have developed an inclusive engagement strategy that emerges organically from policy considerations and historical precedents like the Jakarta Informal Meeting approach used during the Cambodia conflict. This showed how policymakers adapted a more



contextual and on-the-field reality requirements than rigidly applying theoretical constructs.

Indonesian policymakers show a complex understanding of Myanmar's crisis, contextualizing current events within the country's longer political evolution dating back to 1962. This perspective enables them to view the present conflict not merely as a result of the 2021 coup but as an extension of deeper military-civilian tensions and ethnic divisions that have characterized Myanmar's political landscape for decades. Their grasp of these historical dimensions allows for more contextually grounded policy formulation than might be possible through purely theoretical analysis.

The research highlights policymakers' perspectives on actor-specific behaviors in Myanmar, particularly regarding the military junta's psychological and reputational concerns related to international image and dignity. This awareness shaped Indonesia's preference for quiet diplomacy over more public approaches, showing how policymakers develop strategies that incorporate reputation and face-saving considerations that academic analyses may underemphasize. Their realistic power analysis recognizes the military's entrenched position and the improbability of a rapid transition to civilian rule, leading to pragmatic engagement strategies rather than a high-pressure policy toward Myanmar's military junta.

Significant contrasts emerged between policymakers and academic perspectives across multiple dimensions. Academic discourse tends toward Western liberal-democratic frameworks that prioritize normative democratic outcomes, whereas policymakers emphasize pragmatic engagement with authoritarian realities currently present in Myanmar. An information access gap contributes to another divergence, as quiet diplomacy necessarily restricts information sharing, creating gaps between what policymakers know and what academics can access. Implementation mechanisms for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus represent another area of contrast, with academic critiques calling for rigid roadmaps and detailed implementation plans, while policymakers emphasize Myanmar-owned solutions to avoid triggering sovereignty concerns.

The research confirms Alexander George's framework of three knowledge types in foreign policymaking: abstract conceptual models, general knowledge of conditions favoring success, and actor-specific behavioral models. However, it showed that in practical constraints, these knowledge types function differently than in theoretical applications. Policymakers develop more pragmatic, contextually adapted applications of these knowledge types based on the situation in Myanmar, often prioritizing the third type—actor-specific understanding—over more abstract conceptual frameworks.

The theory-practice gap in Indonesia's Myanmar policy stems not from deficiencies in either domain but from fundamentally different operational realities and constraints. The quiet diplomacy approach adopted by Indonesia reflects a complex understanding of Myanmar's situation, particularly the stakeholder landscape that enables trust-building among conflicting parties, even as it limits the transparency that would facilitate academic analysis. How policymakers translate psychological insights into policy engagement strategies may diverge from theoretical prescriptions, yet still achieve progress through context-sensitive and practice-oriented approaches.

This research carries implications for both the practical and theoretical domains. In terms of policymaking, it highlights the importance of research-based knowledge in formulating effective foreign policy; policies must be supported by rigorous research while also remaining attentive to on-the-ground realities. From a theoretical perspective, the findings suggest that theoretical frameworks may function more effectively as interpretive lenses for understanding complex situations retrospectively rather than as prescriptive guides for policy action. Furthermore, research must be as realistic as possible in order to be applicable to policy contexts. Bridging the theory-practice gap therefore requires recognition of the legitimate constraints and priorities of both domains, rather than assuming that one should simply adopt the approach of the other.

The study acknowledges limitations arising from its reliance solely on policymakers'

perspectives and the constraints on capturing the full spectrum of views within Indonesia's foreign policy and theoretical domains. Restrictions on information access under quiet diplomacy created inevitable gaps in understanding the full scope of Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives in Myanmar. These limitations suggest directions for future research, including investigating knowledge transfer mechanisms between academia and policy, comparing approaches across ASEAN member states, evaluating the effectiveness of Indonesia's building block approach, and designing better mechanisms for policymaker-academic dialogue.

By advocating for policymakers' voices, this research represents a first step toward bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical constraints in Indonesia's foreign policy toward Myanmar. It contributes to both academic discourse and policy practice by illuminating how theoretical concepts undergo translation and adaptation when applied in complex diplomatic situation and constraints, offering insights that may strengthen foundations for more effective foreign policy.

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