

All Eyes on Myanmar (3):

Indonesia Proposes High-level ASEAN Meeting, Myanmar Praises Cooperation with Five Neighbouring Countries

Despite the **alarming number of victims, including innocent children, following the on-going protests in Myanmar**, a solution to the crisis continues to appear as an attainable objective. In an atmosphere of an ever more complicated situation in this country and in consonance with the **increasing international pressure** in the aftermath of the *February 1 coup d'état*, **Indonesia's President, Joko Widodo, has proposed an urgent high-level ASEAN meeting** to the Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, the current rotating Chair of the Southeast Asian regional organisation. As the Indonesian President presented his country's condolences to all the families of the protests victims in Myanmar, he **reaffirmed the priority of the safety and well-being of the Burmese population**.

The constant efforts of the Indonesian President represent the **corollary of Indonesia's consistent diplomatic endeavours to provide a mutually acceptable solution to the on-going crisis**. It was in this key that the **Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, met the Foreign Minister of the military regime, Wunna Maung Lwin, on February 24** and has successfully initiated a meeting of ASEAN at the level of the ministers of foreign affairs. Subsequently, during the **18th ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces' Meeting** on *March 18*, the head of the Indonesian delegation expressed his **concerns for the continuation of the crisis**. Also present at the meeting was General Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military junta in power, marking **his first international participation as the de-facto leader of Myanmar**.

Clearly, **Indonesia is not alone in its attempts to provide a solution to the crisis** following the military *coup*. Unlike other countries, such as **Australia and South Korea, which have interrupted their defense cooperation with Myanmar** and mentioned other possible sanctions, the **European Union, which recently sanctioned 11 high-ranking officials of the Myanmar Armed Forces, held responsible for the military coup and subsequent repression, or the United States, United Kingdom or Canada, which condemned the coup and denounced the increasingly violent actions of the junta in power, Indonesia is seeking a consensual solution**, based on persuasion and mutual agreement, rather than "*sticks and carrots*". This is very much in accordance with the way of thinking of the other ASEAN member states. Bilaterally, some other members of the organization, such as Thailand, are trying their very best with concrete actions to restore peace in Myanmar.

Of course, **the prolonged crisis signals the impossibility to have so far reached an understanding of cooperation with the current regime in Myanmar, as well as to stop the constant deterioration of the**

situation. In a comparatively harsher language than previously, the **United Nations Secretary General** Antonio Guterres **has condemned** *“the killing of demonstrators, arbitrary arrests and the reported torture of prisoners”*, urging the international community *“to work collectively and bilaterally”* in order to end the violent crisis. At the same time, he called for the military forces in the country to **allow a visit of his Special Envoy** *“as an important element in calming down the situation and setting the stage for dialogue and return to democracy.”*

The quick decline of the country’s social stability was further stressed by the **increasingly harsher internet restrictions**, which render the country’s communication with the outside media extraordinary challenging. According to multiple media accounts, **private media outlets in the country have been closed.**

The spokesperson of the military forces in power, Zaw Min Tun, declared that Myanmar respects the positions expressed by **five neighboring countries**. The official stopped short of providing the names of the above mentioned countries, with **the sole exception of China**, described as *“friendly”*. Certainly, China is bringing its own contribution to find an urgent solution in accordance with its leading foreign policy principles and national interest, as well as with the good neighborly approach to the matter.

Naturally, shall a **high-level ASEAN meeting** take place, as proposed by President Jokowi, it could serve as the venue of a consensual solution (*“musyawarah”*), having Myanmar present at the event. If not, **a set of firm measures might be implemented** in order to prevent further escalation of the violence in Myanmar. As the topic remains of utmost importance on the regional agenda, **it is expected that third parties would display availability and support for a joint ASEAN decision able to mitigate the crisis.**

Of course, shall Myanmar undermine the **ASEAN Unity** and its **Centrality** in the regional architecture, achieved in over half a century, the Southeast regional organisation **may well choose to prioritise its Core Values and Principles rather than further tolerate the risk of having them damaged.**

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The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy, position or view of IRSEA.