

Neoliberal National Security How can MSMEs in Indonesia Survive the Coronavirus Crisis?

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Neoliberal National Security

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Crisis?

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Neoliberal National Security: How can MSMEs in Indonesia Survive the Coronavirus Crisis?

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Abstract: The issues caused by diseases can affect a country's policies. One example is COVID-19, which broke out in December 2019. COVID-19 spread quickly across the globe. The purpose of this study is to analyze disease issues that can threaten the security of a country. A second aim is to identify the neoliberal response of countries, especially Indonesia. Third, we seek to explore the strategies conducted by the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Indonesia's policymakers recognize the adverse effects of the health crisis on the national agenda. Those must be seriously confronted. The threats to health and national security posed by the effects of the virus have forced policymakers to cooperate with each other. The current research finds that not only Indonesia, but countries around the world are threatened due to the consequent vulnerability to all aspects of security—national, economic, and academic. Through the involvement of institutions that are able to build bridges between nations, neoliberalism emphasizes an international political system that is based more on international cooperation and less on powerful interests.

Keywords: COVID-19 Crisis, Enterprises, International Cooperation, Neoliberalism, Threats

Introduction

Disease issues have been one of the main topics of discussion in international security studies since the post-Cold War era. Like the Transnational Social Movement, health issues can threaten the security of a country. They can force a country to fortify itself or take actions to prevent existing threats. One strategy that can be carried out by a country is to include the disease issue within a security policy. Recently, the international community has seen how a health issue can pose a real threat to countries, even the entire world.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 demonstrates how a health issue can threaten national security. The virus that causes the disease is SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 is characterized by flu-like symptoms, including fever, which may eventually lead to more severe complications. This condition relates to the readiness of each country's health system to respond to the pandemic. China is one of the countries with an especially large stake in the coronavirus issue, because it has been identified as originating there specifically in Wuhan City, China (World Health Organization 2020).

Based on Worldometer data of January 20, 2022, there were 340,120,476 confirmed COVID-19 cases throughout the world on that particular date. Of those, 5,586,044 people had died and 273,396,004 had been declared cured. Of the five countries with the most daily new cases, the United States had as many as 69,808,350, India 38,218,773, Brazil 23,420,861, United Kingdom 15,506,750, and France 15,175,464. The countries with the most active cases up to that date were the United States with 25,035,097 cases, with 43,892,277 recovering and 880,976 deaths; India counted 1,924,025 positive cases, with 35,807,029 recovering and 487,719 deaths; Brazil had 950,633 positive cases, with 21,848,301 recovering and 621,927 deaths; UK with 3,615,555 positive cases, 11,738,323 recovering, and 152,872 deaths; and France, 5,434,864 positive cases, 9,612,731 recovering, and 127,869 deaths. Then, Indonesia

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ranked sixteen on January 20, 2022. Indonesia counted 4,277,744 total cases, with 12,328 positive cases, 4,121,117 recovered, and 144,199 deaths (Worldometers 2022).

The World Health Organization (WHO) data also showed the continuing spread of COVID-19 throughout the world, involving more than 220 countries on January 18, 2022 (World Health Organization 2022). This caused panic in every country; the direct threat to the population is the full responsibility of the state. COVID-19 has made health problems a security and foreign policy issue requiring special attention. Leaders of the world's nations quickly made the health sector a security issue.

COVID-19 is a global issue and a threat to human security in any country, including Indonesia, because of its rates of transmission and fatality. COVID-19 is a non-traditional security threat. One strategy that must be carried out in cooperation with various state and non-state actors, both military and civilian, is to prevent adding more victims. Collaboration between countries can be accomplished by exchange of the latest information in various fields, such as health, education, economics, and security.

An economy hit by a severe viral outbreak can pose a security threat and be a trigger for people or groups of people to participate in radical activities (Seniwati, 2020a; Seniwati 2020b). Many micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have experienced problems with their businesses and have been unable to survive the loss of their business incomes. This condition is exacerbated because some MSMEs are constrained by their lack of digital literacy. Therefore, the government has implemented various collaborative strategies to continuously educate MSMEs in Indonesia. The government, especially the Ministry of Communication and Information, has made various efforts to provide all villages in Indonesia with 4G networks. Based on data from June 2020, of 83,280 villages in Indonesia, there are still 14 percent (i.e., around 12,458 villages) that do not yet have 4G networks (Agustiyananti 2020).

Aim of Research

How can disease issues be a threat to the security of a country? How does a neoliberal perspective respond to the handling of such threats by the countries in the world, particularly in Indonesia? How can MSMEs survive the COVID-19 crisis? National policymakers recognize the importance of resolving the adverse effects of health crises on national agendas. COVID-19 has forced them to cooperate with each other because the effects of the virus have become a threat to national security.

Research Methodology

The research uses a qualitative approach. It was conducted through a research library and unstructured interviews with fifteen MSMEs which had continued production activities during the pandemic. The businesses were engaged in accommodation and food service activities, manufacturing and other service activities, as well as agriculture, forestry and fishing, financial and insurance activities, human health and social work activities, transportation and storage, and real estate. The interviews allowed the interviewer to respond spontaneously to explanations given by the interviewees (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Neergaard and UlhØi, 2007). The captured data is related to security, economics, and health. However, not all health problems become security or foreign policy matters. Documents related to COVID-19 that has become a global issue due to its crossing into other countries, are important for the author. COVID-19 is not only a potential domestic threat but also a regional and international threat. This research was conducted from March to September 2020.

Analysis and Discussion

Disease Issues are Potential Threats to the National Security

Related to the explanation above and its connection to international security, countries have increased their security by focusing on strengthening their military power to solve security problems that pose threats. With changing times, however, the world has been formed with ideas of a contemporary nature such as economic, cultural, environmental, transnational crime, and health issues. Based on that, the current state perspective is no longer centered to gain power through anarchy but rather how to take into account aspects such as human security. Therefore, coronavirus has become a disease issue on international security.

Many other countries are also threatened by the virus, not only Indonesia. They have become vulnerable in all aspects of security—national, economic, and social. The meaning of security in the case of the coronavirus must be made clear, as protection or security for the people of Indonesia and other countries is a key step for progress. Because when the scale of a virus spread increases, there will be a significant population decline due to the death rate, which will impact the stability of the country. Thus, it is essential for the government to evaluate the meaning of security.

Neoliberal Response to the Handling of the Pandemic in Indonesia

How, then, can security be achieved? Of course, it is the role of the state to provide what is called security. Several strategies carried out by the Indonesian government, such as conducting policy evaluations in the health sector, the security sector, the economic sector, and the education sector which will then be explained below. This evaluation is closely related to the emergency situation caused by COVID-19 at the national, regional, and international levels. Evaluating the domestic and international situations will greatly influence Indonesia's foreign policy.

Health Sector

The spread of COVID-19 cases can be prevented by starting with a domestic evaluation of development programs such as hospital services and the responsiveness of prevention policies. Professor Budu Mannyu, the chairman of the Hasanuddin University COVID-19 Task Force Team and the dean of the Hasanuddin University Faculty of Medicine, points to the Hasanuddin University Hospital as an example of hospitals in Indonesia that have repaired and rebuilt their facilities to help and treat confirmed COVID-19 cases. It has also enacted precautionary measures to prevent the further spread of the outbreak, such as equipping hospital laboratories with tools for swab testing and making sure medical personnel are equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) and are always available to treat patients exposed to COVID-19. Also needed are surveillance teams with regional zones that provide red alert signals equipped with more modern information technology, and socioeconomic teams that conduct various studies in the form of independent research. The red zone signals are referring to areas with rising numbers of COVID cases. Most receive funding from the Hasanuddin University campus and the Ministry of Research and Indonesian technology related to medical effects of COVID-19 (Author's interview with Budu Mannyu, Makassar, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, Mei 2020). Almost all hospitals in Indonesia take action as described by Professor Budu. This action aims to reduce the number of SARS-CoV-2 virus infections which continue to increase, overwhelming many hospitals.

International cooperation that has been carried out by the Indonesian government, has received assistance in the form of medicines, test kits, and medical equipment from several

countries. Non-government sources in China provided assistance in the form of PPE, goggles, gloves, and masks of five tons which were brought from Shanghai Pudong airport by a Hercules C-130 aircraft belonging to the Indonesian Air Force on March 22, 2020. The Indonesian government also received assistance from the US government. China departed from Guangzhou in the form of medicines, medical gloves, chloroquine phosphate tablets, and test kits on March 22, 2020. UNICEF also provided assistance to the Indonesian Red Cross in March 2020 (Republic of Indonesia 2020).

In addition, several hospitals that are not part of referral hospitals in Indonesia have conducted rigorous screening for potential COVID-19 infections. Some actions have been made by hospitals such as controlling air circulation regularly so that the pressure and change of air needed are reached. Other actions taken are to maintain the infection isolation room remains at negative pressure. This action is conducted to ensure that patients who do not have the COVID-19 virus remain safe while in the same hospital with COVID patients. Some hospitals and universities have made a priority of early detection of coronavirus infection in people who are likely to be exposed. Early detection is needed because many people are asymptomatic.

Security Sector

In addition to evaluating internal conditions, conducting appropriate policies by interacting with countries that are insecure against the disease issue are necessary, because they determine the actions of other countries and the existing cooperative relationships. When panic arises in other countries, they automatically will improve their security capabilities. For example, the Indonesian state closed an export-import shipping expedition directly from China and issued a travel warning to China. This shows that there are actions taken from the Indonesian government. The opposite as well, China delayed taking parallel actions.

Arguing that the Chinese government holds the key role in this case, we see that the neoliberal perspective is applied to dealing with China's international security threats. Neoliberalism itself is a renewal from the standpoint of liberalism, which sees that the international order is able to create peace without resorting to anarchic systems. Through the concept of cooperation, involving institutions capable of bridging relations between nations, neoliberalism emphasizes an international political system that has less interest in power struggles to resolve conflicts. Neoliberals themselves do not deny the existence of extreme cases of conflict, but they do not see it as a whole or even a representative picture of world politics. In many cases and in many fields, countries can work together to reduce the impact of anarchy, produce mutual benefits, and avoid joint losses (Jervis, 1999). Therefore, to suppress the infection rate of the COVID-19 virus, a collaboration between state and domestic actors is needed because the people who are the object of the virus attack are citizens. Health threats can be felt by people who often conduct activities outside their countries, for example, the spread of the coronavirus that occurs because of direct human contact. As a preventative measure, a country needs to immediately issue cooperation policies that support the security sector by sharing information with countries from other regions.

Neoliberalism is a theory in international relations that illustrates the concepts of rationality and focuses on the role of institutions and organizations in international politics (Dunne, Kurki, and Smith 2007). The main concern of neoliberalism involves how to achieve cooperation between countries and other actors in the international system. International cooperation occurs when countries adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others so that a policy is actually followed by a government that will be considered by its partners to facilitate the realization of their own goals. In addition, the international regime is not a weak substitute for world governments but rather is a tool to facilitate decentralized cooperation (Keohane 1984), as in overcoming COVID-19 problems through a foreign policy that focuses on security.

This condition means there must be an ongoing commitment, especially in financial matters. This commitment is one of the coordinated international efforts.

Regarding Indonesia's foreign policy in handling COVID-19, the Indonesian government formed a Rapid Motion Team (TGC) that was activated by the country's entrance authority at airports, seaports, and state cross-border posts. The team consisted of Customs, Immigration and Port Health Office officers, and animal quarantine officers who served as the vanguard in preventing the importation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In addition, the task of TGC is to conduct surveillance of people, goods, conveyances, and environments upon entry to the Indonesian state. The Indonesian government also provides an observation room, interview room, and quarantine room for passengers who are considered exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

In February, 2020, the Indonesian government issued a policy regarding the SARS-CoV-2 virus, authorizing the government to conduct health checks at approximately 135 checkpoints at airports, seaports, and on land, using body temperature scanners for anyone entering Indonesian territory. The action was carried out based on health regulations from WHO. The government appointed around 100 referral hospitals complete with equipment for nurses so that they were not easily exposed to the novel corona 2019 (n-COV) virus. The government also deployed military or police personnel at the airports in big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Makassar, Denpasar, Yogyakarta, Semarang, Samarinda, Pontianak, and Jayapura.

The Government of Indonesia, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also undertook several strategies to prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, such as: (1) sharing COVID-19 experience with other countries, specifically discussing the impact of the pandemic; (2) Increasing cooperation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as strengthening digital infrastructure and managing sanitation and water; and (3) Increasing cooperation with South Korea in the face of COVID-19. Through this collaboration, the South Korean government provided assistance in the form of 625,000 KF94 masks worth approximately \$500,000 for doctors and nurses who directly handled COVID-19 in July 2020. In April 2020, South Korea handed over aid in the form of 50,000 reagents PCD test and 300 disinfectant sprayers valued at approximately \$500,000 (Foreign Ministry 2020).

Economics Sector

Both neoliberalism and neorealism recognize the existence of an anarchic international system, yet, both have different views. Neo-liberalism in the anarchy system is more focused on the economic field and the global market for the welfare of its people. Neoliberalism believes that the economy and the regimes that govern the world economy are the main pathways to creating interdependence with other actors because the economy basically answers most of the country's interests so that conflict can be suppressed. According to neoliberals, the existence of the anarchic system, or world structure, will encourage and become a great opportunity for cooperation in the form of trade and interdependence in the economic field (Baldwin 1993). Indonesia and other ASEAN member countries continue to strive to increase cooperation over COVID-19, such as test practices, research on the economic impact of the spread of COVID-19, sharing information on how to strengthen public communication by combating stigmatization and discrimination for people infected with the coronavirus, clinical treatment, and epidemiological development. Then, the Indonesian government also issued a policy to mitigate social and economic impacts arising from the pandemic. One way to support this policy is to increase the role of MSMEs so that trade supply chain connectivity can continue. This research concerns the role of MSMEs in dealing with COVID-19.

This perspective is often referred to as the leading approach for the study of international organizations and international cooperation patterns. The actors involved in neoliberalism are not only the state but non-state ones as well, through influential international organizations, NGOs, IGOs (international governmental organizations), and MNCs (multinational

corporations). The state remains influential, but its influence is not significant. Neoliberalism believes that with an anarchic international system, cooperation is needed to overcome future obstacles, leading to interdependence. The state will provide resources and loyalty to institutions if the institutions provide mutual benefits and more opportunities to practice its international interests. Neoliberalism focuses more on non-state actors, human rights, dominant states, and economy. Neoliberalists are enthusiastic about cooperation involving countries to achieve mutual benefits (Lamy 2005).

Cooperation that will affect a country's foreign policy is needed to overcome COVID-19 issues because those require substantial financial assistance. In addition, the impact on the economic sector will also be seen to expedite progress without long waiting times. Cooperation between various parties is needed because it can prevent political instability. It is not wrong to say that coronavirus directly impacts the security of a country because it causes serious setbacks to the economic sector, civil unrest, political unrest, and destabilization. To maintain a stable economic sector, the government continues to pay attention to MSMEs. SMEs are seen as the foundation of the country's economy, no longer as an alternative. Therefore, the government continues to strengthen MSMEs, especially those related to finance, increased human resources, and marketing model innovations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted MSMEs in Indonesia, especially in South Sulawesi Province, where several MSMEs have had to close due to high production costs and low demand. This condition is caused by a slowdown in economic activity (supply and demand) due to government policies implementing social distancing and lockdowns. Workers from MSMEs contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus have resulted in disruption on the supply side. Many workers cannot go to work because they must focus on their children whose schools are closed, and so must study at home. Social distancing implemented by the government slows production and distribution of SMEs. The shipping of goods has also slowed due to lockdowns in some areas. Therefore, the government is mapping the potential sub-sectors affected by COVID-19. MSMEs in South Sulawesi Province are generally associated with drinks, food, clothing, and rattan and wood handicraft businesses.

The Indonesian government has also provided large-scale credit assistance to MSMEs that have been directly and indirectly affected by COVID-19. Provision of credit assistance is provided through conventional banking institutions and fintech (financial technology). Some conventional banks also provide relaxation of installment payments, the addition of credit or financing facilities, extension of the loan periods, postponement of principal and/or interest payments, and adjustment of rates for MSMEs. Some MSMEs in South Sulawesi utilize fintech for its technological advantages, such as fintech services that do not recognize geographical boundaries, so that they are able to reach MSMEs in rural areas, debtors can monitor in real-time by means of blockchain finance and big data, and technology systems which can be used online so as to reduce the risk of contracting the coronavirus for users.

Digital transformation is useful for generating MSMEs to boost sluggish economies due to the ever-widening spread of the coronavirus. Some MSMEs experienced a decline in sales, difficulty in obtaining raw materials, hampered distribution, and difficulty in obtaining capital. Therefore, local governments provide online training to MSME entrepreneurs on an ongoing basis and prepare access to marketing SME and MSME products through social media.

Some convection MSMEs that usually produce clothing have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to a significant decrease in turnover, such that they also change product lines by offering personal protective equipment for health workers, face shields, washbasins, herbal oils, and anti-coronavirus face masks. The local government, especially the health department, has taken a number of alternative steps by making partnerships with several MSMEs that produce PPEs and masks. From the interviews, some of these MSMEs said that they were greatly helped by their collaboration with the government because the materials, designs, and safety standards had been determined by the government or the health department as buyers, the

merchants greatly benefited by producing PPE with standards and quality in accordance with WHO recommendations.

Education Sector

Neoliberals emphasize the role of institutions, which are broadly defined by their shared patterns of behavior that have received some level of formal approval. In neoliberalism, it is important to understand disputes with realists, in which neoliberalism is not only about the existence of institutions or the fact that there is high levels of cooperation, but also that they are more than state instruments, and have a measure ⁶ independent impact. In contrast to realists, the neoliberal sees how conflicts can be avoided. The contrast is greater with offensive realists, who believe that the attractive nature of the international environment and the clash of state preferences over outcomes places a limit on the extent to which conflict can be reduced by a viable alternative policy of cooperation. Realists believe that many countries depend on security dilemmas and national interests of actors, which enhances neoliberal views that the interests of a country can be achieved through an approach that promotes peace through cooperation.

The American political scientist, Joseph Nye, argues that a country's power can no longer hold fast to anarchy and rely on hard power, but as a country needs soft power to be able to minimize existing threats. Nye distinguishes between the two types of power—hard power that makes others act in ways contrary to their initial preferences and strategies, and soft power, which encourages others to want the desired results (Gomichon 2013). More specifically, soft power is the ability to achieve goals through attractiveness rather than use of force. With this division of power, Nye reflects that the realist perspective no longer lies in accord with the state of the international system, and that the international system can realize shared goals through cooperation. Therefore, the concept of soft power can be said to be closer to the liberal tradition. In opposing hard power, soft power emphasizes not the possibility of military force and war, but the potential for cooperation and the power of ideas. In a democracy, people have a voice in their country and can strive for peaceful goals. Therefore, democracy is more likely to use soft power rather than hard power. Nye stresses that despite difficulties, a democratic state would not lose its soft power (Gomichon 2013). Therefore, countries need collaboration as one of the forms of soft power to make cooperative policies that place more emphasis on health issues because COVID-19 poses a threat to national, regional, and international security. This threat is an important reason why coronavirus has a negative impact on the economic sector.

The education sector in Indonesia has undertaken several reforms in the face of COVID-19, such as distance learning where students learn at home under the supervision of parents. This system aims to anticipate the large crowd at school that causes the spread of COVID-19. Home study students are expected to break the distribution and accelerate the handling of COVID-19. Distance learning starts from the level of kindergarten and continues through elementary school, high school, and college. The processes of teaching and learning activities online are based on a circular of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 3 of 2020 concerning prevention of COVID-19 and Number 36962 / MPK.A / HK / 2020. All lecture activities on campus are now conducted online from the midterms, final semester exams, final project guidance, thesis, dissertation, and practicum.

The government, especially the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, issued this decision because the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Indonesia has been deteriorating. Students and lecturers learn from a variety of applications such as e-mail, WhatsApp, video conferencing, Google meetings, and other online social media. These apply for elementary school through secondary school levels. Beyond that, President Jokowi and the Ministry of Education and Culture have replaced the online National Standard School Examination online or the graduation method by considering the cumulative value of students while studying at

school. This system is used by the government to support policies issued by the Minister of Health to implement physical distancing behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion above, it can be seen that health problems can pose a security issue in a country. To overcome these problems, the neoliberal perspective emphasizes cooperation, especially by decision-makers as policymakers. Countries need to give top priority to COVID-19 because those cases impact other sectors, including the economic and security sectors. Cooperation is critical for controlling the COVID-19 threat. Making health a security issue has encouraged countries in the world to make health programs one of their foreign policy agendas. From a neoliberal perspective, building and expanding partnerships are principal elements in a country's foreign policy. Through cooperation, countries will be able to overcome global health challenges in the form of potential threats to regional and international security. Prioritizing cooperation can reduce risks to public health, both local and cross-country epidemics.

If we look at how coronavirus has spread, and the level of response in Indonesia and other countries, neoliberalism's perspective reflects the local conditions. This is encouraged by the fact that the current Indonesian government does not limit the scope of cooperation to overcome cases of the virus. The government is opening its doors to the involvement of other countries and international organizations that can help Indonesia. It can be seen in the cooperation between Indonesia and other countries, between Indonesia and the WHO, and by the amount of significant data they are sending regarding the scale of the virus spread. All of these show that the essence of neoliberalism is reflected in the handling of disease issues that pose a threat to international security today.

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