

Rethinking the Emergence and the Practice of Three Praetorian States in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Study between Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand

Muhammad Indrawan Jatmika

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Institute of International Studies, Indonesia

indrawanjatmika@hotmail.com

Military forces have had many important roles in political life in Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand, where the military has a full power or major role and influence in the domestic politics. These forms of military intervention in domestic politics are called praetorianism, which is characterized by the military being more inclined to take care of domestic political affairs rather than carrying out its professional duties as guardians of sovereignty from external threats. This paper aims to analyze what factors are the background of the widespread practice of praetorianism and how the practice can last for a certain period of time, even still to this day in these three specific countries that located in Southeast Asia. The main argument is the weak political institutions and the low political culture of developing country are the main causes of various intervention efforts made by the armed forces in the domestic political realm of a country.

Keywords: *Praetorianism, military, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand*

Introduction

The modernization process of several countries in Southeast Asia brought the role of the military forces in the development of socio and political life of some countries. In some cases, the military's role has become so great that it tends to get off track and become unprofessional with a lot of military intervention in domestic politics with the tendency to take care of domestic political affairs rather than carrying out its professional duties as guardians of the countries from external threats. In Southeast Asia there are three countries with distinctive military role in its socio political life of the countries, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand, so that the military's role in the three

countries can be categorized as praetorianism. This paper aims to analyze what factors are the background of the widespread practice of praetorianism and how the practice can last for a certain period of time, even still to this day in three specific countries of Southeast Asia. The main argument is the weak political institutions and the low political culture of developing country are the main causes of various intervention efforts made by the armed forces in the domestic political realm of a country (Perlmutter, 1969). This was also experienced by these especially after the Second World War where armed forces felt that it was the only capable group to restore political order and maintain national stability.

In addition, past experiences such as the war of independence and resistance to rebellion in which the armed forces played a major role in mitigating the incident, led to the assumption that the state has a debt of gratitude to the armed forces. This condition led to another assumption that these “heroes” were the most entitled party to hold the political power in a particular country. Therefore, it provides a way to emerge and develop praetorianism practices in these three Southeast Asian countries where military institutions have assumed power over the domestic politics in the country under the pretext of restoring security and order stability.

Defining Praetorianism

Praetorianism which literally means “the special guardian of the King (ruler)”, is explained as the excessive political influence of the Armed Forces in a country marked by militarism actions oriented towards the domestic life of a country. Mc Alister (1961) explains that the practice of praetorianism arises from a combination of the high level of social and political disorganization of a country combined with the low professionalism of the country’s armed forces. Furthermore Perlmutter (1969) after concluding McAlister’s concept of political disorganization as the main cause of the practice, Rapoport’s (1960) idea of government without consensus as a general definition of modern praetorianism, and Huntington (1965) concept of the corrupt society, explains that in the practice of modern praetorianism, military tends to intervene and has great potential to dominate a country’s political system. This arises because the political situation of a country strongly supports the development

of the military to control the core groups of political power that may develop when civilian institutions lack legitimacy or are in a position to be dominated by military. With this power, the military has the ability to appoint military officials, sympathizers, and supporting parties as the holders of positions in all bureaucratic fields in a country.

A more specific definition of praetorianism is proposed by Perlmutter and Nordlinger, which is summarized by Yasser El-Shimy (2016). Perlmutter argued that a praetorian regime can be characterized with the army’s potential to dominate the political system with the political processes favor the development of the army as the core group in countries political development. It was done by interfering in government affairs, including influences and sustains particular constitutional provisions. Furthermore, this definition were expanded Nordlinger with his argument that a regime can be considered as a praetorian regime if it meets these conditions:

1. The military came to power by means of a coup;
2. The highest government officials have served in the army or continue to; and
3. The rulers are primarily dependent on the support of the armed forces for the retention of power. (El Shimy, 2016)

Modern praetorianism mostly emerged in the aftermath of the World War when military instruments no longer had much interest in expanding territories or defending the country against external attacks so that the military’s role as a domestic force was greatly enhanced (Karabelias, 1998). Military institutions were considered as the most modern institution in

a country and had the capability to bring the country to reach a higher level in the ladder of social and political development. In addition, the military was considered as the only group capable of maintaining political stability so that military institutions were often asked to play a multidimensional domestic role, including in non-security fields, such as the economy and even socio-cultural development. The key word for the emergence of praetorianism in a country is modernization. Praetorianism often appears in the early and middle stage of modernization in a particular country. These periods are marked by widespread political and order instability. The military will act and take power when civil groups fail to legitimize their power due to several circumstances under the pretext of restoring security and order stability (Perlmutter, 1969)

In Southeast Asia, there are three countries that can be included in the category of praetorian states as defined by the description of the characteristics above. These countries are Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand. For that reason, this paper aimed to analyze the emergence and the practice of praetorianism of these countries so a prevention method can be found and implemented to achieve a more professional level of military development.

The emergence of praetorianism in Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand

The end of the Second World War and the withdrawal of colonial power in Southeast Asia in the late 40s gave Southeast Asian countries the opportunity to begin their post-independence modernization and development processes. However, this condition did not

merely give the military a leading position in power holders in several countries such as Indonesia and Myanmar. They must compete with various other political groups who also claimed a stake in the country's independence efforts. The struggle of power in the domestic realm of each particular country at that time caused instability in the political situation. It was impossible in this era of instability to build a strong political and democratic culture in each country. This condition was exacerbated by the many cases of insurgency and attempts to take power by groups who were dissatisfied with the post-independence power distribution. As the result, the military became very active to overcome such crises so that its role in maintaining the stability of the country during the modernization period was increasingly in the spotlight. At the same time, the civil government which had assumed power since the early days of independence after the Second World War gradually began to lose its legitimacy.

The socio-political situation in Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand during the modernization process of each countries was marked by the low rate of socio-economic development and under-developed political institutions. Indonesia for example, the high underdeveloped population post-independence become the main burden of the industrialization of the country. For this reason Indonesia's GDP per capita stagnated at US\$70 with an annual growth of real GDP was only 3.2 percent in 16 years span from 1951 to 1967, while population growth was 2.0 percent in the 50s (van der Eng, 2009). In Myanmar, the socialist way that tried to be pursued by the founding fathers with large-

scale state control of the economy hampering the growth potential of Myanmar, including efforts to restore its glory in the colonial period when the economy tends to support free trade. But when the U Nu government tried to restore the free trade policy back in the early 60s, this was precisely opposed by the military and became one of the reasons for them to carry out a coup by assuming that the Nu Nu committed treason against socialism (Mya Maung, 1964). In Thailand, there are at least two factors that caused Thailand's economy to crash in the early 1930s. The first was the rice price crisis in the late 20s that had a major influence on the lives of the majority of the Siamese (Thailand at that time) people who were farmers (Manarungsan, 2001). The second and foremost factor is the "Great Depression", which occurred in 1929 and continued into the early 1930s. The great depression led to the emptiness of the royal treasury which then stabilized the economy and delegitimized the absolute power of monarchy in Thailand.

The disarticulated heterogeneous structures of the society were imbued with ethnic antagonisms and ethnic dominance created vulnerability towards military intervention. Coupled with a central military position in the midst of society, this condition made third world countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand vulnerable to military intervention (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2014). We can see the same pattern by analyzing case studies that took place in Indonesia and Myanmar in the early period of post-independence modernization. In Indonesia, for example, although the Indonesian National Army (TNI) was considered to have a crucial role in ousting Dutch colonial forces,

the early days of Indonesian independence were surprisingly marked by an assertion of civilian control and authority over the military. The existence of Sukarno as a charismatic figure who was a pioneer of independence and a symbol of unifying the nation was the key to the distribution of power in Indonesia. However, a government and political system that were run with a wide range of political parties based on ethnic, religious and geographical lines with unclear policy implementation weaken the legitimacy of civil government. This was proven by 17 cabinet changes between 1947 and 1958 with a span of less than 2 years for each change (Noperi, 2018). Various separatist and insurgency events that occurred across the country such as the Darul Islam Army in West Java, PRRI Permesta in Sumatra, and the Maluku People's Rebellion ultimately led to the need for military force to deal with these events and restore security. This made TNI's position stronger in the struggle for power in Indonesian politics, especially when people compared the success of TNI with the failure of the civilian government in maintaining stability (Kwok, 2010).

However, once again it was proven that Soekarno's position as a charismatic leader and the symbol of national unity was very crucial. Although the TNI began to increase its power in the practical political arena, this had not yet surpassed Sukarno's power. He cleverly succeeded in placing the military as one of the pillars. It was in 1965 when the political tension in Indonesia became chaotic, Soekarno's legitimacy began to be questioned. The political crisis culminated in the occurrence of the G30S / PKI incident in which a coup attempt against the government was marked by the killing of

seven high-ranking military officers which later caused massive political turmoil throughout Indonesia (Crouch, 2007).

The incident gave the military a big gap to take over greater power under the pretext of restoring security amid the weakening of Sukarno's power. It was also undermined by other issues such as the weakening of the economy and the issue of its closeness to the communist party which was considered as the mastermind of the great chaos. Finally, through the Supersemar (Order of Eleventh March) in 1966 which was later strengthened by the decision of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) in March 1967, which decided to impeach Soekarno from the presidency, Major General Soeharto who represented the military succeeded in taking full power and began 32 years of the praetorian regime known as the New Order Era (Ricklefs, 1981).

In Myanmar, the independence of the country was marked by the approval of the 1947 constitution that placed civilian control over military spending and appointments under a secretary of defense. Myanmar became a country with a bicameral parliament consist of Chamber of Deputies and Chamber of Nationalities with U Nu as the first prime minister. In 1951- 1952, 1956, and 1960, Myanmar held multi-party elections. In this period, Myanmar managed to overcome various political upheavals such as the insurgency of the communists. However, the political upheaval in this country continued, especially with the breakdown of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), the main political alliance in Myanmar at that time, into two factions, one led by Thakins Nu and Tin, the other by Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein

(Win, 1959). U Nu's role as a central figure in the politics of Myanmar in the early days of independence slowly began to be weakened along with the increasingly strong influence of the military in the politics. Meanwhile the military began to tighten its grip on the implementation of practical politics in Myanmar. They claimed that since its struggle for independence, the military played role to achieve the independent and it was under the Burmese Independent Army that Myanmar got its independence. They also claimed to be the founders of the Union of Burma, and claimed that it had prevented the country from disintegrating (Devi, 2014).

Various kinds of social chaos which reached the level of the national security crisis in 1958 prompted the civilian government of U Nu to request the military to take over the government and form a caretaker government. After security and stability were successfully established, it was expected that the military would return the government to civilians after the holding of the general election. The fact is that after the general election was held the Myanmar public assumed that the elected government was a corrupt government and did not have the ability to maintain the security and social stability of the people of Myanmar at that time. On the other hand, the Military's credibility is even stronger after it was deemed to have played a major role in restoring social order stability and success in supporting the holding of the general election in 1960 (Myoe, 2009).

In 1962, the military led by General Ne Win staged a coup under the pretext of fears of national disintegration if the government remained in the hands of the AFPFL-Government. In addition, the military

also considers that the federal government and the multi-party system are at high risk of causing national disintegration so they want to establish a more centralized government (Myoe, 2009). The coup began the era of Myanmar under praetorian government which will last until 2011. Ne Win, who had been the highest leader in the military since 1949, will be the leader of Myanmar until 1988, before being replaced by another military figure who will continue the military junta's rule until the effort democratization was carried out at the beginning of the 2010s decade.

In Thailand, we find that the beginning of praetorianism had quite a different history from Indonesia and Myanmar. Thailand, which had never had the experience of being under colonial rule, makes the history of the military's role slightly different than that of other countries such as Indonesia and Myanmar. But that did not mean the military does not have a big role in the history of the country's modernization. In fact, precisely because it was never colonized by western powers, the Royal Thai Army were able to maintain one of the longest and steadiest military traditions in Asia since it came into existence in 1852. The military's major role in the modernization of Thailand peaked in 1932 when four western educated high ranking military officials successfully staged a coup that ended the era of absolute monarchy in Thailand.

The declining legitimacy of King Vajiravudh in practical politics due to the mismanagement of government coupled with the development of western thought brought by the Western-educated "commoner" elites of Thailand was considered to be the main cause of the Siamese revolution of 1932 which

became the end of the absolute monarchy. The worsening condition of the world economy in 1920 affected the Thai economy and caused a royal budget deficit. The king was considered to have mismanaged the fiscal policy so that it affected the royal budget. Furthermore, the rise of western idea of democracy, nationalism, and communism gave way to the bloodless coup that occurred in 1932 (Handley, 2006; Stowe, 1991). The end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 provided space for the military to increase its role in practical politics and create an informal network of elites (from the palace, military and bureaucracy), which marginalizes the substance of democracy in Thailand to this day by exploiting the fragility and lack of public participation and representative institution in the country (Bunbongkarn, 2004).

From analyzing the origin of the development of the military's role in the practical implementation of politics in these three countries in Southeast Asia which then developed into praetorianism, we can find the same pattern showing the initial power held by non-military groups began to lose its legitimacy in the early days of the country's modernization efforts which filled with social and political and economic turmoil. Various economic policies taken by the previous leaders caused a lot of uncertainty so that they were considered unable to create stability in society. As stated previously, the economic crisis in the early 60s in Indonesia, the controversial pro-free trade policy taken by civilian government in Myanmar, and the great depression and the royal treasury crisis in Thailand become the factors of a factor in the decline in the legitimacy of civil administration in these countries. This gap

provided an opportunity for military groups to emerge as they were able to offer stability and security that cannot be provided by the civilian government. The military, which no longer had a flurry of activity to expel invaders, expanded territories, and faced external threats after the end of the Second World War era, began to divert its preoccupations to further expand its influence into domestic politics. The military's position was strengthened by their image and prestige in the eyes of the people after heroic actions they delivered in expelling colonial power or external threats in the past. The role of the military in the efforts of the nation's independence from the Western occupation was still so profound in Southeast Asian society at the time that the stories of heroism gave military groups more legitimacy to take power.

In Indonesia, various incidents of domestic uprising and turmoil that culminated in the G30 / S-PKI incident caused the loss of legitimacy of the civilian government, which provided a space for military groups to take power on the pretext of restoring national stability. The same thing happened in Myanmar when the military junta took power in 1962 after a series of political upheavals motivated by conflicts on the elite level and separatist acts became the background of the takeover of power because the military was considered as the only group that can restore national stability. In Thailand, the weakening of the condition of the monarchy as the absolute power-holders pre-1932 provided an opportunity for the military to cooperate with a number of elite commoners to carry out a coup that ended the absolute monarchy that had been practiced for hundreds of years in the Thai kingdom and replaced it

with a constitutional monarchy.

The practice of praetorianism in Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand

Efforts to restore national stability which became the basis for the takeover of political power by the military then developed into praetorianism practices that persisted for the next few decades and some even still survive today throughout Southeast Asia. As explained by Perlmutter (1969), in a modern praetorian state the military plays a dominant role in political structures and institutions. It is specifically marked by military interference and its potential to dominate a country's political power. The political development in the country favor the development of the military as the core group and the growth of its existence as a ruling class. Political leaders in the country are specifically appointed from the military or from sympathetic groups, or at least not antagonistic, to the military. The role of the military in domestic politics was then strengthened by constitutional changes that favor military interests, sustained by the military and frequent interventions from the military towards government.

The characteristics described by Perlmutter were found during the reign of the praetorian regime in these three particular Southeast Asian countries after taking power from the civilian group. Systematically military groups utilize social cohesion that occurs in nation's community during the praetorian era that tend to prioritize the interests of their respective groups and then emerge as a symbol of unity to rule and introduce some coherence by force. In various social conditions encountered,

the weak middle class that functions as a link between power and the bottom poor, as well as a major source of political awareness and cohesion of a country also perpetuate the practice of praetorianism in decades. Praetorianism which is driven by the elite class easily perpetuates their power because of the lack of social and political control of other class groups.

A praetorian regime will appoint military officials, ex-military officers, sympathizers, and people who support military interests in the struggle of power to occupy strategic positions in government that are not only limited to political but also economic and socio-cultural affairs. Centrality is also one of the important points in running the praetorian regime. The government will tend to encourage the community to support a central development value so that differences of opinion from the community can be minimized. National development will be carried out through a top-bottom system where the central government controls all the interests of the people.

Dual Function: a blurred line between military and civilian regime in Indonesia

Indonesia is considered as a concrete example of the practice of praetorianism which deeply entrenched in people's daily lives in the mid-1960s to the 1990s which was marked by a society that was prone to military rule (Mietzner, 2012). The growing influence of the military in Indonesia's socio-political and economic life at that time, which was also famously known as the "New Order" era, was marked by the implementation of *dwifungsi* (dual function)

where the military was not only responsible for protecting the country from internal and external threats, but they would also involve themselves in the economic and social development of the state. The military were deeply involved in various activities outside the interests of defense and security such as business activities where the military and its cronies tried to find a way in order to maximize their profits to meet the interests of their own groups (Elson, 2001). The military position was strengthened by the success of their efforts in political consolidation by developing a particular ideology (whose ideas specifically originated / benefited their group), patrimonial concessions by giving power to those who supported their groups, the success of economic development which became a strong claim in the takeover of power in the community welfare development sector, as well as systematic repression of individuals or groups who threaten their position in power (Mietzner, 2012).

Efforts to preserve the practice of praetorianism in Indonesia began with political design and consolidation. After gaining power in the late 60s, the military which initially portrayed itself as a caretaker government that would return the government position to civil society groups after security stability could be controlled, began a systematic political consolidation by establishing and developing the pro-military grouping of Golkar into the regime's electoral machine which resulted in a landslide victory in the 1971 (staged) general election (Suryadinata & Emmerson, 1989). This political design effort continued

in 1973 with the attempt to merge nationalist political parties which were represented by many parties to unite as Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or the Indonesian Democratic Party, and Islamic parties into one party, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan or the United Development Party. Under the pretext of preventing ideological threats, the New Order regime routinely intervened in the internal affairs of the party thereby minimizing their potential to develop to challenge the regime's power. As a result, Suharto was re-elected six times in a series of elections in the New Order era, circa 1973-1998 (Mietzner, 2012). In economic affairs, the key to the survival of the praetorian regime of the New Order was the success in economic development. It was built by a distribution of patronage rewards pyramid system in which Suharto was the supreme leader and the military group held the upper echelon positions. This system consists of reward for subordinating followers of the officials with lucrative posts in government and state enterprises, concession and business opportunities in order to skim money from the state budget, and favored access to business contracts and credit (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2008). Most of cabinet positions were held by military officers, so did 80 percent of the governorships and various strategic positions in state-owned enterprises. Even though it looks corrupt, the New Order government always defends himself by highlighting the fact that there had been an increase in the welfare of the community in general despite the fact that external influences such as the oil boom in the late 70s, and the large amount of foreign aid entering Indonesia due to its

close relation with the western bloc also had major influences on economic development. This made the Indonesian people more tolerant towards the praetorian regime as the government even though repression and human rights violations routinely occurred, because according to them these things were not important as long as the people can still feel the improvement of welfare quantity (Mietzner, 2012).

Heavy reliant of the claim of the success of economic development was what will later bring the fall of the praetorian regime which ruled for 32 years. As argued by Mietzner (2012) although there are several other factors, but the 1998 Asian economic crisis which had a profound impact on the Indonesian economy became a major factor in the fall of the praetorian regime which has survived for the past three decades. As a result of the economic crisis, Indonesia's economy, which has steadily experienced growth of 5-10 percent annually, has suddenly dropped and even experienced a drastic decline of 14 percent. Millions of economically vulnerable citizens felt into poverty, while at the exact moment, the middle classes faced raising debts as the value of rupiah decreased from around 2500 to the US dollar in mid-1997 to more than 17,000 in one particular point in early 1998. Therefore, by March 1998, the poor, middle-class and rich Indonesians, which was quite rarely allied, had turned against the regime, demanding Suharto's resignation in mass demonstrations across the archipelago. This was then compounded by a number of other factors such as Suharto's aging and the decline in military institution support for him.

After the fall of Soeharto in 1998, there were actually many fears of a return of military intervention in domestic politics, given the country's fragile socio-political condition after chaos in 1998, and the strong strength and influence of the military that was built massively during the 32 years of the Praetorian regime. However, the unity of the civilian and government effectiveness played key roles in both the establishment of a democratic regime afterward and the removal of praetorian rule in Indonesia. This was done through a reform effort led by civilian elites with several constitutional amendments that allowed the president to be directly elected by the people thereby increasing political participation of all walks of life and starting from 2004 a directly elected president enjoyed strong legitimacy with the Constitutional Court was respected as the highest authority in settling political disputes (Mietzner, 2012).

Total praetorianism in Myanmar

Just like in Indonesia, praetorianism in Myanmar began in the 60s after the military took power through a coup under the pretext of restoring state stability and security. The political coup conducted by the Myanmar Military in 1962 saw this country enter the praetorian regime at least until 2011. Praetorianism in Myanmar was marked by the increasing role of the military (or even total control) in all aspects, politically, socially and economically. Although in general it had the same pattern as the implementation of praetorian regimes in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia, in particular what distinguishes praetorianism in Myanmar was the much higher level of totalitarian control

imposed by the military compared to praetorian regimes in the region. In the Southeast Asia, Myanmar was the only country with a purely praetorian regime held the absolute control of the political realm of the country. In this case, the military took over all government affairs while civilian political expression was considered as an opposition act rather than any involvement in the governmental process (Kwok, 2010).

What also distinguishes the praetorian regime in Myanmar was rather than a continuous ruling regime with a single leader throughout the era of praetorianism as found in Indonesia, what we can find in Myanmar were several phases with different leadership styles depending on the socio-political conditions at a particular time and the leader who hold the highest authority. In the first phase after the coup in 1962 until 1972, Myanmar was in the era of direct military rule. Under General Ne Win, the country was shaped into a socialist state under the military- led party called Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Moreover, Ne Win quickly rescinded the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion. The democratic institutions were dismantled and concentrated in the hands of Revolutionary Council under General Ne Win, which comprised of the group of senior officers. In theory Myanmar remained a federal state, but in practice the military junta treated the country as a unitary state (Devi, 2014).

In the phase of direct dictatorship, Ne Win and the military were declared as the supreme authority. The constitution was suspended, all political parties and efforts to form political parties were banned, freedom of association and organization were exterminated,

and even protests were brutally suppressed. The government withdrew all involvement in international affairs and isolated Myanmar from the outside world (Myint-U, 2007). This first phase ended in the early 1970s when there was an economic crisis and with widespread shortage of rice, cooking oil and other basic commodities leading to rise of the black marketing and corruption.

With the high pressure from the economic and socio political condition, in early 1970s the government issued intentions to draft a new constitution and that the election would be held according to the new constitution and authority would be transferred to the elected civilian government after the election and marked the beginning of the second phase of the praetorian regime in Myanmar although in the end Ne Win and his cronies who had retired from the military were the ones who then occupied the “civil position”. During the year from 1962-1988, three national elections were held in 1974, 1978 and in 1981. But even though there was a civilian rule in Myanmar, it was just for the cover and in fact the military still continued to rule.

The chaos in the second phase of the praetorian regime in Myanmar peaked in 1988 when the pro-democracy mass carried out a large-scale demonstration known as “8888 uprising” to denounce government policy especially in the economic sector and human rights abuses. This moment also marked the emergence of civilian forces led by Aung San Suu Kyi who would later be able to stand up as opposition and challenge the powerful military junta. As the youngest daughter of Myanmar’s founding father Aung San, a national icon

and civil rights fighter, she and several retired army officials who criticized the military junta founded the National League of Democracy (NLD) inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent philosophy and Buddhist concepts to confront the political force controlled by the ruling regime (Houtman, 1999).

Although it had an important role in the emergence of civilian forces that can challenge the power of the military junta in the future, the short-term effect of such large-scale demonstrations actually benefits the military. The turmoil across the country was exploited by General Saw Maung to stage a coup followed by the establishment of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) which then applied the martial law to reinforce the direct control of the military to the political unrest. The government through SLOCR then changed the country’s official name from the “Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma” to the “Union of Myanmar” in 1989 and prepared the country to hold the People’s Assembly elections. The SLORC government which should only be a transitional government and must return the government to a democratic process after conditions began to stabilize in fact continued to hold the reins of power until at least 1997. In the period 1989 to 1997 the SLORC took a number of actions that drew international criticism, including by not recognizing the NLD victory in the 1990 elections and put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest (Hlaing, 2007).

Major changes took place in 1997 when the SLORC was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). This was followed by a series of bright spots with the release of 300 NLD members from prison in

1998. But this did not last long. In the 2000s the military re-launched a series of violations that injured human rights (Steinberg, 2001). Opposition politicians have been arrested again and the military junta has again been pressured on both opposition and ethnic minorities, at least until 2011.

The civilians received fresh air after the election and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in 2010. In November 2010, the main military-backed party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), claims resounding victory in first election for 20 years. As a form of commitment from the military Junta, the government launched the so-called 2011-2015 Myanmar political reforms. After being appointed president in early 2011, President U Thein Sein announced far-reaching political, administrative, and economic reforms. He cited his experience visiting the Irrawaddy Delta after a devastating Cyclone Nargis hit the area in May 2008 which led to a conclusion that a change must be made immediately. Furthermore, there were other factors such as the need to re-engage with the West to prevent dependence on China and the need to open up the country so that the sanctions imposed by the isolationist policies did not obstruct foreign investment and able to encourage the business sectors that would help the economic growth of the citizens (Bünthe & Dosch, 2015). This bureaucratic reform then reached a high point in 2015 with the start of the transition from military rule to democratic government. This transition was the result of a landslide victory in the 2015 elections which later put Aung San Suu Kyi as the State Counselor of Myanmar and started Myanmar's civilian government for

the first time since the military coup in 1962. Public predicted that the NLD as the winner of the election would implement political and economic reforms, including amending and / or repealing laws that restricted human rights or civil liberties (Martin, 2016).

Thailand: the land of interventions

In contrast to the two praetorianism practices found in Indonesia and Myanmar where the military holds power continuously for a period of time, in Thailand we find intense competition between the military and civilians in the struggle for power and alternately hold the highest power in the Thai government. Specifically, that the struggle of power is marked by numerous interventions by the military against the existing government, which led to a series of coups by military groups under the pretext of restoring stability and security. Throughout history there have been 19 military coups in Thailand where 11 of them succeeded. Besides that, the military also interferes in various domestic political matters. In Thailand the military positioned itself as the agent of democracy in which they claimed to restore the democratic order in the midst of a corrupt civilian government with a coup as one of the main avenues. (Ockey, 2007). Since 1932 the military have attempted many coups against the head of government, in 1933, 1947, 1948, 1957, 1958, 1971, 1977, 1991, 2006, and 2014.

The practice of modern praetorianism in Thailand can be seen from two military coups that took place in the 21st century. After the 2006 coup the military held 67 out of 242 seats. The number increased after the coup in

2014, where now the military controls 143 out of 250 parliamentary seats. Likewise, in the cabinet now 12 people out of a total of 36 cabinet members have a military background. This is reinforced by the growing influence of the military in the monarchy as the highest holder of legitimacy in all forms of social and political life of Thai society. From 13 members of the Privy Council, the body that advises new King Maha Vajiralongkorn, more than half of them are military men. The King himself was a former soldier that served in Royal Thai Army (Thepgumpanat & Tanakasempipat, 2017).

As of 2019, Thailand became the only country in Southeast Asia that was still under a de facto praetorian regime with the military as the highest authority in government. Although since 1932 there have been several changes of government leaders from the military and civilian groups, de facto the military has had a large influence on Thailand's internal government to the present. The practice of praetorianism in Thailand is systematically perpetuated by military efforts to limit public participation in the political process in a country that historically only provided a place for bureaucratic, monarchic, and military elites in government. Although several strategic positions in the government have been held by many elite civilian bureaucrats, systematically the military group will place its personnel as the top position in the civil administration of the country which gives power to the military to supervise the performance of the civilian apparatus (Kongkirati, 2018). The low awareness of Thai people in general after the 1932 coup made the military seem to have no significant competition other than

elite bureaucrats that were limited in quality and quantity of resistance. The general public considers that politics is the domain of the elite so they do not feel the need to contribute much towards Thai politics (Bunbongkarn, 1988).

Apart from placing personnel in strategic positions of civil administration, the practice of praetorianism in Thailand is also characterized by abusing the law that applies to military interests in the struggle of power. Specifically, the law in question is Martial Law 1914 which gives power to the military to censor the media, ban assembly, and even dissolve the sitting government (Amnesty International, 2017). In addition, a very important factor is how the military maintains relations with the monarchy as the main source of legitimacy in Thailand. Chambers and Waitoolkiat (2016) describe this practice as monarchised military where asymmetrical nexus between monarchy, elite group and a military leadership is formed. Cooperation between them is intended to create and maintain a palace-centered political order from which the military obtains its legitimacy. This order has protected and extended the broad interests of the Monarch, the Privy Council of Thailand and military leaders. To assert their power and legitimacy, the military depends on their royalism by positioning themselves as the King's protector and as a means to secure the interests of the kingdom in all its actions. This example can be seen in General Prayut's statement as the dreamer of the coup stating that in this coup the national peacekeeping committee [NCPO] will worship and safeguard the monarchy. The processes of monarchised military have successfully reproduced the royalist discourse over time, continuously

bestowing monarchical legitimacy upon the military while guaranteeing military guardianship for the monarch.

Conclusion

Praetorianism arises from the weakness of political institutions and the low political culture of the people in these three specific countries in Southeast Asia. As illustrated by the initial phase of the modernization process of their respective countries. The military, which no longer has a flurry of activity against external threats, has begun to shift its focus to managing domestic political affairs.

However, in a number of cases, such as in Indonesia and Myanmar, the military did not immediately gain the power after the end of the Second World War and the independence of these countries. They must compete with charismatic civil forces who also share an important role in independence through non-military political channels. During the civil administration the military maneuvered by building strength and strengthening its legitimacy before the people to prepare to take power. The military has the opportunity to take over the peak of power when the civilian government experiences a crisis of legitimacy due to social, political and economic crises that occur in their respective countries. Through certain maneuvers as well as coups, the military group established itself as the highest authority in the country. In Indonesia and Myanmar, this happened in the 1960s when a political and security crisis culminated in acts of separatism and insurgency as well as an economic crisis that hit the wider community. In Thailand the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the absolute

monarchy in 1932 allowed the military to take power through a coup that ended the absolute monarchy of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Political turmoil that occurred at the beginning of the modernization era of each country was then compounded by economic factors that delegitimized the civilian government as a policy maker so as to provide a gap for the military rule to take power. The economic crisis in the early 60s in Indonesia, the controversial policies carried out by Burmese leaders in the early 60s, and the royal treasury emptiness experienced by Thailand were evidence that economic factors could also be a factor that delegitimized the civilian government in these countries.

The power of the praetorian regime in Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand were characterized by interference towards government and domestic political affairs, for example by limiting access to important positions in government specifically for military personnel, or from sympathetic groups, or at least not antagonistic, to the military. To further strengthen its position, the Military systematically influences constitutional changes and utilizes legal loopholes provided by the constitution such as the use of martial law to launch emergency situations that provide opportunities to take power according to their wishes. In Indonesia, for example, dual policy puts the military not only as a guardian of national security from domestic and international threats, but also as a pillar of economic and socio-cultural development so that with this policy active military personnel are often established in important government positions. In Myanmar important positions in

the government were also occupied by senior military and military retirees. Not only that, the ruling military junta totally changed the constitution in such a way that it benefited them, supported certain political parties to gain control of parliament and repeatedly engineered elections. In Thailand the praetorian regime systematically limited political access from the wider community and often intervened in the running of government by repeatedly staging a coup. They also use their position as the guardian of the monarchy as the main source of legitimacy in the socio-political life of the Thai people to perpetuate their power.

Although it was indicated to be corrupt and proven to have the potential to violate the human rights of the people, eliminating praetorianism in Southeast Asia and replacing it with democratic governance is not easy. And that did not rule out the possibility of re-emergence of praetorianism or praetorian regimes in the future. The consolidation of political power that has been carried out for years by the praetorian regime made their grip on the domestic politics of the countries in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, for example, if there was no economic crisis in 1997- 1998 that destroyed the national economy which had been the main claim for the success of the praetorian regime. In Myanmar, the economic downturn and international pressure are the main backgrounds of democratization and the end of the practice of praetorianism which lasted for almost 50 years. Even that might not have happened if Cyclone Nargis did not occur in 2008, which played a role as a catalyst for the process of democratization in the country. In Thailand, even the practice of praetorianism

is still carried out to this day after in 2014 the military junta staged a coup under the pretext of restoring national stability.

Eradicating the practice of praetorianism requires stronger effort and comprehensive participation from all elements of society in the democratization process. This must be accompanied by a commitment from the elite to submit to the democratic process in the interests of the nation rather than its own interests. Indonesia can be used as an example of how the process of democratization is considered successful after the end of the praetorian regime. Overall community participation as outlined in democratic elections can be the main capital in supporting the democratization process.

At present, each country is undergoing a process of modernization and democratization respectively. In this case, Indonesia can be said to be the most advanced in this process where democracy and elections can be carried out properly through elections every five years. However, each country has its own difficulties in the process, which makes it difficult for a country to escape the praetorian realm. Myanmar for example even though the government is officially held by civilians, but in parliament for example 25 percent of the total seats are still allocated to the military and their representatives are chosen by the Defense Services' Commander-in-Chief (Seekins, 2017). While in Thailand, after the signing of the 2017 constitution, 250 seats in the upper house of Thailand parliament were elected by the military, thereby strengthening the military's position in Thai politics (Bemma, 2019). It is feared that this condition will continue for a long time. As long as the government and

the public are neither committed nor have the power to oppose the practice of praetorianism in their country (for example as Indonesia did in the 1998 reforms) the military will continue to try to maintain its power in the country's domestic politics.

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