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Coalition Collision: Jokowi vs the Opposition in Parliament

By Tiola Javadi and Adhi Priamarizki

Synopsis

Current development suggests that the opposition-dominated parliament would be President Jokowi's biggest challenge in delivering reform. What are the possible scenarios for Jokowi's relationship with parliament in the next five years?

Commentary

ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT Joko Widodo's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) won the 2014 legislative elections, his Great Indonesia Coalition (*Koalisi Indonesia Hebat*, KIH) did not secure the majority of seats in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR). On the other hand, the Red-White Coalition (*Koalisi Merah Putih*, KMP), which supported Prabowo Subianto in the 2014 presidential election, significantly outnumbers the ruling coalition in the DPR.

Nevertheless, the saga has moved far beyond the Jokowi versus Prabowo relationship to a more complex competition for political power. Prabowo's Gerindra Party is no longer the sole director of the KMP with Golkar now the primary conductor of the orchestra.

Different scenarios

The dynamics between the new administration and the parliament can be understood in terms of different scenarios. In the best-case scenario, Jokowi will be able to preserve and upsize his current coalition, which will definitely ease the new government's burdens. A middle scenario suggests that the ruling coalition will need to constantly engage in intensive lobbies with the balancing party to get its agenda through. In the worst-case scenario, the opposition KMP manages to expand its influence by capturing more political parties, causing Jokowi to lose control of his alliance and the new administration struggling to ensure full support from the parliament.

Scenario 1: *The highroad*

The first scenario pictures a condition in which Jokowi succeeds in upsizing his coalition. Currently, the United Development Party (PPP) is considering to join Jokowi's camp. Leadership change in the

KMP is also likely to lead to alteration in the current political configuration, particularly within the Golkar party – which has never been out of the ruling coalition since its establishment.

Furthermore, it is still possible for Jokowi to attract the Democratic Party (PD) – former president Yudhoyono's political vehicle - which has positioned itself as a balancer. If the PPP's current position favouring Jokowi stays put, the expanded size of the ruling coalition will potentially attract the PD to form the majority in DPR.

Under this configuration, maintaining the unity of the ruling coalition would be crucial for Jokowi to prevent the political parties from crossing to the other side. Ensuring PDIP's full support is also essential, considering that this party holds the largest number of seats in parliament. By sustaining such support PDIP could act as Jokowi's surrogate. Jokowi needs PDIP as a spearhead to guard his policies which will uphold the efficacy of the new government's performance.

Scenario 2: *Hard landing*

The second scenario puts greater emphasis on stances taken by PPP and PD. Suryadharma Ali, who is temporarily dismissed from his position as PPP chairman, has attacked the party's switch of support to PDIP as illegal. If PPP decides to reunite with the opposition KMP, PD's role would be crucial as it will determine each voting result. Thus, PD's bargaining power will increase as both KMP and KIH will compete to draw the party into their camp so as to prevail during the vote.

Public opinion will determine which side PD chooses to support, as the party needs to regain its popularity after the party's downfall prior to the 2014 elections due to corruption scandals of some of its leaders. Therefore, it will be highly essential for Jokowi to win public support to protect government policies in the parliament. The new president needs to maintain good political communication to convince the public to support his policies.

Scenario 3: *A dirty clean sweep*

The ongoing process of electing DPR commission heads may further jeopardise Jokowi's chance to run an efficient government. The newly-endorsed Legislative Institution Law, better known by its acronym MD3, requires the implementation of a package system in which each candidate must have the support of at least five party factions. Golkar Party Chairman Aburizal Bakrie has asserted KMP's ambitious goal for a clean sweep to dominate all commission head positions.

Although the public has criticised KMP's overwhelming dominance in parliament, the coalition seemed to deprioritise popularity — at least temporarily — for the sake of securing strategic positions. In the case of the regional election bill (RUU Pilkada), for instance, the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) revealed that 81 per cent of Indonesians were against the proposal for indirect elections. However, KMP rowed against the tide of public opinion and endorsed the Law.

If the opposition KMP is able to gain the support of the Indonesian public, it will have even more avenues to attack Jokowi's administration. When Jokowi plans to cut the fuel subsidy — a highly sensitive policy which always invites protests — the opposition could easily gain a majority vote to refuse the proposal.

Rejection may even come from within the PDIP itself, as the party had always opposed such policies during the ten years of President Yudhoyono's term, upholding their slogan as *partai wong cilik* (the party of little people). The secret ballot mechanism in DPR will also allow PDIP lawmakers to vote against their own party's stance, complicating the Jokowi government's consolidation process and thereby heightening the political costs.

Tough ride against dependency mentality

The honeymoon between the people and the new president may end much sooner than expected. Breaking through the PDIP's internal structures, parliamentary opposition and the public's dependency mentality like cutting the fuel subsidy could prove daunting, and the new administration may fail to deliver its promises due to slowing economic growth.

While Jokowi is likely to push ahead with his reform plans regardless, the Red-White Coalition may have a field day demonising the Great Indonesia Coalition and accuse them of proposing policies that hurt the people. In a country where meritocracy struggles to fight patronage and collusion, Jokowi and his new cabinet may find a hard time getting support to run an efficient government.

Tiola Javadi is a Research Associate and Adhi Priamarizki Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University,

Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg