

Tendency of ASEAN diplomacy on problems of South China Sea

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Abstract

ASEAN cannot ignore the protracted and complex resolution of South China Sea (SCS) dispute. The SCS dispute affect on regional stability and interests of countries in ASEAN region. The presence of army forces of disputing countries will create new threats and tensions for the region. These become ASEAN future challenges in providing a neutral geopolitical platform to meet with major countries, especially amidst of incessant Indo-Pacific issues. This study uses a qualitative method. The data was collected by interviews, official documents, field notes and other media. Through the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific, ASEAN has the potential to play a central role to face geopolitical challenges by developing a more flexible and reliable regional architecture. The strong emphasis on principles of ASEAN centrality and inclusiveness in Outlook on Indo-Pacific will ensure its continued relevance to guide ASEAN in engaging major countries and powers in the region.

Keywords: ASEAN, diplomacy, Indo-Pacific, regionalism, South China Sea, United States.

INTRODUCTION

The oil, gas and fishery potential put SCS as a strategic service route and navigation freedom in the area and also affects the conflict potential in SCS (Roza, 2013). China provocative actions in SCS region were seen to disturb the navigation freedom, and have on several occasions sparked incidents of potential army conflict. The incident did not only occur with disputing countries, but also other countries with an interest in navigation freedom in SCS. By taking actions that interfere with navigation freedom and can threaten the smooth running of international trade, China indirectly encourages more parties to get involved in SCS dispute, including the US and its allies (Roza, 2013). In addition, the importance of SCS waters for a number of these large countries encourages them to continue to monitor China policy to manage the disputed areas. At one hand, the China actions can hinder navigation freedom to trigger conflict with interested countries, and on other hand, the more parties involvement can also create a balance of power and dampen China assertiveness.

SCS disputes were categorized as low-scale disputes. However, along with developments and the yearly dynamics, ineffective dispute management and solution can put these disputes into open disputes and develop into army disputes between countries in the region (Nainggolan, 2013). Judging from the incident area, conflicts often arise and recur in several points of SCS waters that were still in ASEAN region. This conflict can be called a regional dispute. Various factors of international political dynamics also influence the SCS dispute to increase the tensions in the region (Nainggolan, 2013). The potential for a conflict outbreak started with minor incidents has increased in SCS over the past few years. These tensions were related to sovereignty, natural resources usage, navigation freedom in SCS, and competition for region influence. This last point was felt

to be most relevant today, where China and US were competing to spread their influence in SCS. Preventing tension and instability in SCS from turning into open conflicts was a challenge that must be faced by ASEAN countries. A series of dispute resolution efforts have been done, both bilaterally and regionally through the ASEAN cooperation framework. However, the conflict potential was remaining and having potential for an open war.

The developments and dynamics in relation to SCS dispute create conflict potential in this region, especially as the assertiveness has been shown by several conflicting countries, this means that higher tension in SCS can lead to open conflict and have implications for regional peace and stability (Muhammad, 2013). Therefore, peaceful solution to SCS dispute must be done for disputing countries and also regional countries. ASEAN, as an influential regional organization in the region and several member countries involved in SCS dispute needs to take a role in search for such a peaceful solution. Likewise, Indonesia (although not a claimant country, but because part of its territory was adjacent to disputed area) also needs to take that role. Indonesia needs to initiate anticipatory steps in handling the potential for this SCS conflict in ASEAN forum (Muhammad, 2013). The ASEAN role and also Indonesia was aimed to maintain the regional peace and stability to avoid an open conflict. Regarding the ASEAN role, SCS dispute involves a number of ASEAN member countries. It makes the effectiveness of ASEAN solidarity was questionable. ASEAN has to deal with China, which was always excessive in asserting its claims, even though on other hand China has the status of a dialogue partner for ASEAN and an important economic partner. It can be seen that ASEAN role in managing the SCS issue was more strategic as a regional organization that collecting and fights for interests of countries in Southeast Asian region. ASEAN was still trusted to play a role to find peaceful solutions to disputes in SCS region which not only involves a number ASEAN member countries, but also China as one of major countries in the region,

US and China competition in SCS region continues to sharpen. The clash between the two countries in Indo-Pacific region was a reality that must be faced by countries in the area, including ASEAN. US has navigation principle freedom must be applied in SCS. US Indo-Pacific Command regularly deploy air or water patrols to SCS area to ensure navigation freedom was not compromised. On other hand, the arrival of US military ships and aircraft on islands claimed by China as SCS a violation of its sovereignty, so there was no choice but to warn and drive US military ships and aircraft away from the areas. This situation was not clear when the end. China continues to claim SCS as its territorial sea based on nine dash line. The tensions and incidents will continue to be repeated in future. SCS was a significant area of water. Very large number of cargo ships and supplies of gas and oil were passed on a regular basis. The energy supply from Middle East to China and East Asian region must pass through these waters. It makes China and US continue to strive to present military power in these waters. The US comes on principle of navigation freedom in international waters, while China comes through the placement of military infrastructure on artificial islands for territorial security.

ASEAN centrality was considered a way to soften tensions between the major powers, but it also increase the tensions between China and ASEAN claimant states over China maritime claims. However, ASEAN ability to mediate regional tensions, based on Indonesia strong regional leadership become less clear. The ineffectiveness of ASEAN

relations has also been exacerbated by the absence of a coherent strategic policy on China within Indonesian government itself. ASEAN receives harsh criticism for its lack of capacity to formulate the binding solutions to territorial disputes that continue to heat diplomatic relations to point where cooperation has been undermined to protect individual national interests. China size, economic, military and diplomatic strength have succeeded in breaking cooperation among ASEAN countries which has given China greater influence over the loosely bound association of nations. The adoption of a formal stance will be difficult because each country has its own interest to protect and advancing. The ASEAN does not have the capacity to bind the state. This was also complicated by association structure which allows a single country to invalidate an ASEAN proposal. This shows that consensus among ASEAN countries was almost impossible. China relation with Philippines, Vietnam relations and internal ASEAN relations have fallen to bottom when dealing with territorial issues and natural resource economic exploitation in SCS. Low confidence in ASEAN capacity to deal with this issue was further emphasized by the fact that ASEAN countries reach out to military forces outside ASEAN to ensure their security interests remain protected. Indonesia has played an important role to implement a code of conduct to maintain peace in region and was likely to become more involved in coming decades.

The basic logic in this case refers to Amitav Acharya (2011) comprehension that stability of a region will support the interests of countries in the region. The SCS problem that triggers the involvement of large powers become demand for other ASEAN countries not involved in disputes to accommodate peace in the region, so the role of key countries in ASEAN such as Indonesia should maintain ASEAN centrality and unite ASEAN to face challenges from external power (Report from Ministry of Defense of Indonesia Republic, 2013). Regional stability was a broader Indonesian interest than any other interest. For ASEAN, SCS was a strategic area for claimant states and all ASEAN members have interests. ASEAN realizes that there was a global agreement regarding the SCS dispute: the need for peace and stability, including Indonesia with a position as an honest broker. According to researcher analysis, threats to regional stability can be interpreted into two. First, differences in interests of each member country affect perspectives and attitudes towards SCS issues. This was a threat to ASEAN centrality. Second, the external power countries (outside the region), especially large powers, will add to complexity of SCS issue. The large powers that were actively play on SCS issue was the US with a strategy of "rebalance to Asia" as a response to "the peaceful rise of China". The position of Indonesia and other countries in the region with rivalry between the two large power countries will be difficult. The worst scenario was an open war will make countries in the region will become a proxy war instrument for the large powers (Nakir, 2016).

The problem was how ASEAN strategy to find a peaceful solution to SCS conflict. It was not easy to implement it involves territorial conflicts between countries in same region in SCS. It contains elements of sovereignty of each country in the dispute. ASEAN was also required to provide a neutral geopolitical platform to meet with major countries, especially amidst intense competition between the US and China in SCS region. However, it does not mean that ASEAN cannot make peaceful efforts in responding to this SCS conflict, at least it was done to create a conducive climate and to prevent the SCS conflict to become an open conflict and not driven by large countries.

This research has aim to examine the tendency to use diplomacy to solve the problem of South China Sea. The research was started with introduction, followed with literature review. The resesearch method explained how the research was done. It was followed by the explanation of research results. This research was closed with conclusion and suggestion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defense Diplomacy Concept

Conflict resolution with defense diplomacy has now been considered as a strategic step. Defense diplomacy was used to pursue the national interests of a country through peaceful defense capabilities and resources, how a country uses resources peacefully through the defense spectrum to increase the bargaining power in carrying out negotiations with other countries (Simamora, 2013).

Defense diplomacy was done in peacetime using army force and related infrastructure as a security policy tool and foreign policy. Defense diplomacy was also a process to involves not only state actors (such as army forces, politicians or intelligence services), but also non-governmental organizations, think tanks and civil society. This military diplomacy focuses only on use of military force in diplomacy related to security issues (Saragih, 2018). Defense diplomacy aims to improve relations between countries through formal and informal channels, with both government and non-government and at low risk and cost.

Under Article 33 of UN Charter, disputes over national sea borders can be resolved peacefully, both legally through international judicial bodies and diplomacy. It was an effort to build mutual trust (Confidence Building Measures / CBM). Legal settlements can be made through the International Court of Sea Law in Hamburg, International Court of Justice in Hague, Arbitration Court and Special Arbitration Court. Diplomatic settlement was done by negotiation, investigation, mediation and conciliation. CBM solutions were done through dialogue in various international forums and through collaborative surveys and research in maritime sector (Wiranto, 2016).

The literature on international relations shows that territorial problems were classic causes of emergence of conflicts between countries and were a constant threat to international peace and security. The unclear sea boundaries were latent factor that will disrupt the relations stability between countries. This was caused by unclear boundaries and creates overlapping claims which eventually lead to border disputes (Indrawan, 2015).

Regionalism

Mansfield (1999) stated that regionalism was a link between geographical, economic and policy structures within one country and another. The regionalization was a phenomenon of adoption norms process, decision-making processes, political structures, economics and identity of each participating country to join forces and creating a set of priorities, norms and interests at a new regional level. Regionalization causes changes in structure of a country in various fields and levels of regional entities, from national to individual. The actions at each level of entity can affect other entities. Basically, regionalization aims to establish political and economic relation between the countries, but it does not limit the possibility for the countries to cooperate in other fields (Warleigh-Lack, 2008). A region was a relative “zone” but clearly identifiable because it has similar interests in certain aspects, such as economic, military,

and geographic (Fawcett, 2005). Furthermore, in a region there were intensive interaction patterns between countries, as the ASEAN. It can be seen that a region was a smaller zone than the international system, but larger than state and non-state, and there was a mutually agreed cooperation for a certain period of time.

Security Dilemma

The concept of security dilemma was first introduced by John H. Herz (1950) in his book *Political Realism and Political Idealism*. Herz identified the security dilemma as a structural view for the efforts of a country to increase its power, regardless of motivation, tend to increase the insecurity of other countries. Each country will give the perception of their own actions as defensive actions and presume that actions of other countries were potential threats (Hertz, 1950). A country forms an alliance or updates or improves its weapon system. The anarchic international system makes other countries will do the same thing. This conditions cause higher tension between countries and can lead to conflict even though neither party wants it (Herz, 1950). In other circumstances, security dilemma also forces countries to strengthen their alliances or creating new alliances. Jervis (1984) said that when the option to attack was less profitable, then stability and cooperation between countries will be more realized.

This create a new concept called the alliance dilemma. Glen Snyder theory was a development of security dilemma theory caused by anarchy system in international system itself, where the security dilemma was only explained that competition or dilemma only occurs between countries that have not aligned with hostile alliances. The enemy was countries that can be suspected of being a potential source of threat to a country. Snyder (1984) also revealed that dilemma of justice did not only occur in competing countries, but also countries in same alliance relationship. The country choices to cooperate or defect can be affected by several factors, one of them because was the dependence on alliance partner need each other, and influenced by their perception of their partners dependence.

The security dilemma theory was basically used by International Relations scientists to describe the dynamics of regional security. The security dilemma in International Relations was described as a situation in which actions taken by a country that strengthens its defense and security systems greatly influence the reaction of other countries to take defensive action while at same time creating a stronger strategic partnership with other countries. The security dilemma also has the potential to trigger a high level of competition and illustrates the general dynamics of conflict and state efforts to maintain peace (Thu, 2018). The security dilemma in regional security context also illustrates how an international political dynamic can trigger competition and conflict in a region (Jervis, 2017: 167-174). Furthermore, Jervis stated that concept of a security dilemma was a condition where a country security policies can have the potential to weaken the security policies of other countries (Jervis 1978 in Scrafton, 2016). The concept of security dilemma was used to analyze SCS disputes regarding dynamic competition and conflict. Every country suspected of being an offensive threat can trigger the same reaction for countries around the region (Christensen, 2003: 26). The consequence was that competition and security conflicts have the potential to keep each country to create a mutual agreement,

METHODOLOGY

The researcher uses a case study model. The case study approach enables in-depth exploration within the specific context. The case study methodology allows for a rich, nuanced understanding the case in a real-world setting (Su et al., 2024). This method involves a detailed, in-depth, and detailed examination of study subject (case), and the contextual conditions. Case studies can be produced by following the formal research methods. These tend to appear in formal research settings, such as professional journals and conferences, rather than popular work.

This research was a strategy research in form of a case study to investigate carefully an event, program, activity, process or group of individuals. The cases discussed were limited by time and activity. Researcher collect the complete information and data using various procedures in data collection based on a predetermined time (Creswell, 2009). The researchers must be able to find all the data that causes this problem from various aspects. The data was stated enough if the collected data has high similarity with the previous data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

South China Sea (SCS) was a flash point in Asia-Pacific region, because these waters were one of regions, which have the potential for large oil and natural gas wealth in world. Likewise, half of world large trading fleet passed through this waterway and small islands around it. The Strait of Malacca, which connects the Indian Ocean and SCS was very important in Asia-Pacific region. About 400 ships pass this Strait every day, mainly logistics merchant ships. The sea in Southeast Asia Area was the busiest maritime trade route in the world. This creates an important value in political and security aspects. The importance of sea in Southeast Asian Region was felt by countries inside and outside the region to pass merchant ships and geopolitical strategy importance.

The SCS issue has relevance to use defense diplomacy. This was included in category of defense and security issues, as marked by China assertive actions in its military deployment on its artificial islands in SCS. Some countries, especially US, increase the defense budget and focus on Asia Pacific toward deterrence and security dilemma of countries in region (Nakir, 2016). Interestingly, ASEAN has its own challenges in raising the issue of SCS towards resolution or dispute resolution, namely differences in interests of intra- ASEAN countries involved in the disputes and clashes against the principle of ASEAN non-intervention (Molthof, 2012). This tends to become an obstacle for ASEAN to raise the issue of SCS because it was included in high issue category (sovereignty and defense). However, this does not mean that ASEAN was unable to become a relevant medium for defense diplomacy in reducing potential conflicts, because ASEAN has a platform with aims to reduce the tensions by increasing confidence measures or mutual trust.

ASEAN considers that 1982 UNCLOS should becomes the basis for arrangement of rights and sovereignty in waterways dispute. Vietnam on behalf of 10 block countries agree that 1982 UNCLOS was the basis to determine the sovereignty rights, maritime rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over the maritime zone. ASEAN regrets the attitude of state which was not responsible and violates aspects of international law. ASEAN was faced with three defense issues in Southeast Asia Area, namely the SCS dispute, US strategic policy, and China strategic policy (Ministry of Defense, 2015). The three sea lanes of Indonesian archipelago connect the two most strategic

maritime areas, Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean, and developed countries in southern hemisphere. Indonesia was not a claimant country in SCS, but recent events have shown that maritime disputes were still a serious concern in ASEAN (Azizah, 2019). Concerns to the higher polarization was caused by the competition of US-China with consequences that increase the pressure on other countries to take sides and possibility of marginalization ASEAN in dealing with initiative of Indo-Pacific region, such as the free and open Indo-Pacific initiated by US and Japan to encourage acceptance of an open and inclusive ASEAN vision statement.

The ASEAN role was to build trust and strengthening the link and initiatives to develop interdependence and cooperation. ASEAN was criticized for the low involvement but success in maintaining peace and avoiding conflict even though there were no formal peacekeeping or defense mechanisms. Strengthening multilateral relations and sustainable dialogue will become the most effective and important means to safeguard peace. It will be promoted through ASEAN, the member and the international partners. The economic interests will prevail and reducing the desire of each country to engage in military and further develop cooperation to achieve prosperity. It was clear that China protect the trade routes was primarily motivated by the need to meet its economic growth goals. For example, 80% of the oil import passes through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Straits before reaching SCS. For China, Indo-Pacific route was an important corridor for its energy sustainability. Therefore, it was important to protect them from possible enemy interference. For example, a naval blockade on Malacca Strait, in Southeast Asia, which would cut off supplies oil and other resources. It would pose a challenge to China domestic stability.

This regional security issue was so complex. The resolution becomes responsibility of all countries in Southeast Asia Area. ASEAN Diplomacy Tendency in SCS issues were collected from interviews with Ministries of the leading sector or Ministry of Foreign Affairs, experts and observers of ASEAN issues.

ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific

Geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic competition has created political instability and security which was not conducive to Southeast Asia. All ASEAN Member made a MoU at 2019 ASEAN Summit in Thailand by adopting the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific. The document should be able guide ASEAN member countries in conducting relations and cooperation inside and outside Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, ASEAN Outlook seeks to create a relations pattern between ASEAN and neighboring countries that contribute to creation of peace, freedom and prosperity (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

The current situation in SCS was followed by an intensification of Indo-Pacific strategy. It put the Southeast Asian region as a theater for China-US geopolitical competition and added to complexity of the problems. Therefore, on 23 June 2019, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific as a foreign policy guideline for its member, including Indonesia as the initiator. The adoption of ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific raises Indonesia name in global political arena, considering Indonesian initiative to submitted to A SEAN since 2018 to build an umbrella for Indo-Pacific cooperation with the concept of ASEAN centrality, as conveyed by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi in a speech on January 9, 2019 entitled "Indonesia: Partner for Peace, security, and prosperity".

Indonesia become ASEAN leader in drafting a general view of Indo-Pacific concept. The widening of Indonesia geostrategic canvas from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific was in line with President Joko Widodo want to make Indonesia to become a World Maritime Axis. The US and China competition and the emergence of various Indo-Pacific invites the initiatives from other countries. Indonesia believes that ASEAN must try to maintain its centrality. The draft of Indonesian perspective for ASEAN view on Indo-Pacific to keep the peace, prosperous and inclusive region, was proposed by ASEAN. The concept was finally adopted at ASEAN Summit in June 2019 after 18 months of intensive lobby by Indonesia. Indonesia has a significant role in ASEAN to conceptualize the outlook on Indo-Pacific for three reasons. First, this concept strengthens Indonesia status as the unofficial leader of ASEAN and a global middle power. Second, this concept underlies ASEAN centrality and gives control to association to manage regional security and economic challenges. Third, this concept could provide a strong strategy for Indo-Pacific cooperation to counterbalance large power politics through a view that independent from China, US and other stakeholders influence such as Australia, India and Japan. In addition, along with President Joko Widodo mission to expand the Indonesia geostrategic scope from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, Indonesia was faced with various challenges such as US-China rivalry and emergence of various Indo-Pacific initiatives from other countries. Therefore, Indonesia was determined to use its significant status in Southeast Asia to encourage ASEAN to maintain centrality.

ASEAN view promotes the principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, respect for international law and ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific region. It proposes a building block approach, seeking common ground between existing regional initiatives in which ASEAN lead mechanisms will act as a fulcrum for norm-setting and concrete cooperation. Instead of creating a new regional architecture, East Asia Summit was proposed as a platform for advancing Indo-Pacific discourse and cooperation. Indonesia in ASEAN view on Indo-Pacific marks its renewed foreign policy activism as a middle power and underscores the importance to put ASEAN as a the foundation of its foreign policy, emphasizing the centrality of ASEAN as the main vehicle to manage the relations with major countries in Indo-Pacific region.

Since 1946, Indonesia has had a foreign policy principle known as the Free Active Policy. In context of defense, this principle was implemented in form of resistance to defense alliances (Ministry of Defense, 2015). The Indonesian Constitution mandates regional and global stability as one of core national interests. Therefore, Indonesia defense strategy was directed to eliminate the turmoil in Southeast Asia Area by prioritizing the cooperation with any country regardless of politics condition. The formulation of Indonesia foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region has been developed. It was started from Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (IPTFC), Maritime Axis to connects the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, and Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept (IPCC). Indonesia in 2013 began to adopt the Indo-Pacific concept. It was in line with popularity of international geopolitical scene. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs translates this concept as a cross between two ocean areas with Indonesia being placed in a central position (Scott, 2019).

Indonesia maritime geopolitical problem was crucial for the location between two oceans. Indonesia geostrategic approach for decades was still limited to unifying islands and relations between ASEAN countries. Indonesia the 21st century expands the reach of

its maritime vision to Indian and Pacific (Indo-Pacific) oceans. Indonesia has begun to face the challenge to formulate its policies on Indo-Pacific trend. Indonesia sees the Indo-Pacific as a prospective area because it has a lot of potential that can be exploited and managed. Therefore, Indonesia needs to maintain regional security stability and ensure that two maritime areas do not become an arena for territorial battles and seizure of natural resources. Indonesia struggle to implement its national interests in Indo-Pacific must face the US, China, Australia, India and Japan which also have regional policies. Indonesia diplomacy towards China was characterized by two trends: competition in geopolitics and cooperation in geo-economic. Japan and US translated the value of regional strategy into Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in last two years, several countries had offered various approaches to Indo-Pacific, including Indonesia.

ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific has the potential to play a central role in geopolitical challenges by developing a more flexible and reliable regional architecture. The strong emphasis on ASEAN principles on centrality and inclusiveness in ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific will ensure its continued relevance to engage major countries and powers in the region. The adoption of Outlook on Indo-Pacific should combines the Indo-Pacific Infrastructure and Connectivity Forum for development needs for the members. Indonesia role as the leader will encourage other ASEAN member countries, especially maritime countries of Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, to use this forum as strategic competition between Beijing and Washington-led FOIP bloc. Instead of placing heavy reliance on China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and US-led FOIP, ASEAN member countries can use the forum as another platform to get financial support from international organizations and from these extra regional forces. This can force external players to participate in this event to get useful to work in this ASEAN-centered Forum to realize their agenda in Southeast Asia,

ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific was used to rebuild its geopolitical narrative and put regional strategy in protecting the common interests. Amid the strengthening of rivalry between the US and China, this outlook does not put ASEAN position to side with any of major powers in their competition in Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. ASEAN sees these two regions as an integrated and connected region. The four important elements in FOIP regarding how ASEAN approach to Indo-Pacific region are: integration of Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions; the priority of dialogue and cooperation over rivalry; promoting the development and welfare for all; and importance of maritime affairs for regional architecture. The large power rivalry in Indo-Pacific region may affect regional stability and spread to competition in various sectors, not only the economy. ASEAN wants to manage this condition by reducing and avoiding mutual distrust that can lead to misunderstandings and a zero-sum game.

The Indo-Pacific represents a new strategic scenario that will shape Asia politics, economy and security in future. It needs geopolitical instrument to link developing countries as India and other African countries on one hand and Japan and Australia on other. In addition, US attempt to get a foothold on Asian continent to make persistent connection with the previous strategic policies. For example, "pivot to Asia", proposed by Obama administration in 2011, has not achieved the desired outcome, particularly the detention of China and increasing US power in region. The Indo-Pacific strategy was another attempt to examine China expansion, especially BRI that increasingly pervasive

in geopolitical logic in Asia continent. Therefore, Indo-Pacific strategy looks at security dimension and economic and infrastructure.

Indonesia sees the Indo-Pacific as a prospective region because it has a lot of potentials for exploitation and cooperation. Indonesia considers a need to maintain the stability and security of the area and ensuring that the two maritime regions do not become a battleground for territories and natural resource and reject the claims of maritime supremacy (Marsudi, 2019). Indonesia's struggle to implement national interests in the Indo-Pacific must face the United States, China, Australia, India, and Japan with their policies on the region. Indonesia's diplomacy towards China was characterized by two trends: competition in geopolitics and cooperation in geoeconomics. Japan and the United States translated the region's strategic value in past two years, several countries have offered various approaches to the Indo-Pacific, including Indonesia.

ASEAN-China Relations

China makes claims over almost all parts of SCS creates dispute. The cause of this dispute was each country justifies the SCS area as part of their country sovereignty. The identification factor of never ending sovereignty creates conflict of the countries. The US confrontation with all the strength has also increase security stability conflict in SCS. US and China were reluctant to negotiate properly to manage conflict in SCS region. They have the potential to resolve through violence and ending up in war.

BPPK Head of Foreign Ministry also explained that China strategy and action to maintain its coral islands in SCS was aimed to maintain the direct access to high seas, considering that China was a land lock country, China uses it only for trade routes via SCS. China only wants this SCS route as its main trade route to become a major industrial country. China must leave SCS open but remain under its control. The key to SCS was Indonesia as the largest coastal country in ASEAN. Therefore, China tries best in Natuna, but China cannot possibly dominate Indonesia, because it will be a risk to China trade relations, considering that Indonesia also has an important role in trade routes in Straits of Malacca.

China protection to the trade routes was primarily motivated by the economic growth goals. For example, 80% of oil imports passes through the Indian Ocean and Straits of Malacca before reaching the SCS. Therefore, Indo-Pacific route was an important corridor for the energy sustainability. It was important to be able to defend them from possible enemies. For example, a maritime blockade in Malacca Strait and Southeast Asia can cut off the supply of necessary oil and other resources. It would pose a challenge to China domestic stability. While China increases the uses of militarization in SCS, higher importance of SCS as a shipping gateway in East Asia and relationship between the Pacific and Indian Ocean put countries to see the Pacific Ocean.

This geopolitical commitment underscores the China historical geographic vulnerability: vast land and sea borders to protect itself from enemies. The main driver of China port expansion concerns was desire to minimize its maritime vulnerability by also shortening its supply routes to find ways to reduce the "tyranny of distance". China was trying to establish its presence (both military and other) at ports along the Indian Ocean to protect its maritime corridors. This was called dual use strategy, namely: the use of ports for both civilian and military purposes (Berkofsky and Mirakola, 2019).

China feels as the target and victim of an alleged Japan-India-Australia-US detention strategy. China policy makers should expect a reaction to very assertive and aggressive regional policies in general and policies related to territorial claims in East and South China Seas., Unfortunately, China policymakers and scholars (usually and indeed systematically under pressure from policymakers and Communist Party officials) continue to pretend that they do not understand why China policies regarding territorial claims in East and South China Seas were considered aggressive in Japan others. The inability to understand the construction military facilities on disputed islands of SCS was considered aggressive. It was extraordinary given the fact that Permanent Arbitration Tribunal has ruled in 2016, that China built such facilities and violating the international law (Berkofsky and Mirakola, 2019).

The security tension in SCS escalates. ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific was passed at ASEAN Summit in June 2019. It aims to promote a dialogue and cooperation in most areas of low politics, reflecting the perspective of Indonesia Kantian middle power on Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Competition between the US and China has potential to destabilize the region. It becomes a major concern for Indonesia and ASEAN as a whole. Indonesia economic growth relates with countries in Indo-Pacific. It further strengthen the desire to maintain regional peaceful and stable.

Indonesia sees the BRI China and US Indo-Pacific strategies as a way to take ASEAN advantages in regulating high-developing economies and a large demographic quantity in Southeast Asia Area. The above strategy covers the world strategic waters where Indonesia also has sovereignty over some of these waters. To accommodate these interests, Indonesia actively carries out maritime diplomacy based on independent and proactive principles, development orientation, and a rules-based approach (Kemenko Kemaritiman, 2019).

ASEAN-US relations

ASEAN was born as a pro-US but unfortunately US policies were inconsistent with ASEAN and disturbing their relations (Mahbubani and Sng, 2017). However ASEAN has proved successful to create a relatively stable geopolitical environment through regional arrangements centered on ASEAN processes. Unlike the US, ASEAN relationship with China was quite consistent, after going through several "phases". ASEAN was established in 1967. China responded with objections because it felt more pro-US. But after the Cold War ended, China began to move closer to ASEAN and built diplomatic relations. Feeling benefited from partnering with ASEAN, China has begun to continue existing cooperation with ASEAN countries, and even China has also provided assistance to ASEAN countries that have been quite severely affected during economic inflation (Mahbubani and Sng, 2017). However, ASEAN regrets the moment of China awakening and becoming an expansionist country as shown in SCS waters. ASEAN hopes that China rise should become a large power for peace (Mahbubani and Sng, 2017). ASEAN has challenges in future to provide a neutral geopolitical platform for major countries amidst Indo-Pacific issue.

China was the main target of Indo-Pacific concept. The US and its allies have taken various measures to weaken China sources of income and ensure that China has a greater economic dependence on US, especially considering that BRI concept of China has begun to be shunned by developing countries (Kompas, 2021). US relations with China were also an important factor in world order, including in this SCS conflict. Joe

Biden was wary of increasing China presence in SCS. This conflict received serious attention from Biden. In fact, for first time in history, US has formed a special unit to review military policy towards China at US Department of Defense (Kompas, 2021). This shows that military aspect of dealing with China was considered crucial by Biden. Biden had also sent a warning to China regarding his expansionist actions in Southeast Asia. In addition, Biden also expressed support for Philippines. It was signal of US rejection on China unilateral territorial claims in SCS.

The ASEAN effort can be understood as part to realize CBM and preventive diplomacy to avoid SCS disputes into open conflicts between disputing countries and interested parties in the region. Building mutual comprehension becomes a possibility to discuss efforts to resolve SCS disputes peacefully through dialogue and cooperation, through a multi-track approach. Therefore, ASEAN needs to manage the potential conflict in SCS.

US strategies were triggered by China new law related to coast guardian authority in SCS. It causes new problems, especially overlapping claims in the region. This new China law gives coast guardian more authority to destroy other state buildings that stand on rocks and islands and confiscate, evict, and shoot foreign ships that enter illegally in waters claimed by China (Kompas, 2021). This China law also authorizes the coast guardian to take all necessary measures, including the use of weapons, when national sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdictional rights were violated illegally by foreign organizations or individuals at sea. The China Coast Guardian was the most powerful in the region and active in SCS. China also claims the islands. It makes the coast guardian forces frequently come into contact with troops from ASEAN countries, namely Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Philippines. Control of sea area was China main strategy to replace the US as the dominant power in the region. A spokesman for China Ministry of Foreign Affairs also said that Coast Guardian Law was consistent with international conventions and practices in many countries.

The pandemic conditions in 2020 were also due to China strategy to take advantage of power vacuum by US at SCS. China has conducted a number of military exercises with advanced defense equipment and formed two new divisions around the region in April to July 2020. It was to balance China maneuvers to Quad group (US, Japan, India and Australia), known as the "Asian NATO", conducted a counter military exercise in Bengal Bay area in November. ASEAN should make maneuver to fight for interests of its members in this situation. ASEAN will always be flexible in political manifestation to choose partners who can help to deal with pandemic in ASEAN region.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

World power competition China and US in SCS will have an impact on ASEAN. ASEAN can still remain neutral and not side with anyone. The ASEAN has impartial attitude, both to China and US. ASEAN basically avoids regional conflict. It will have an impact on economy and war will certainly cost a lot of money. It was better to stem open conflicts to keep the economies improvement of ASEAN countries.

Indo-Pacific concept was offered by Indonesia through ASEAN based on Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. In addition, Indonesia was 2/3 of ASEAN region. ASEAN countries tend to be reluctant to Indonesia. This can be seen when the US asked Indonesia to join Indo-Pacific pact. Indonesia sees the two parties as quite profitable, so Indonesia

made a concept called the ASEAN outlook on Indonesia which made cooperation projects with Indo-Pacific and BRI China, and US and China agreed with this insight. Indonesia make projects in ASEAN. This concept was approved by all ASEAN countries because they do not have to give up a cooperative partner that was quite profitable. These projects have function to stem the war. The big countries have invested in ASEAN projects and they will not damage it by starting a war.

ASEAN has received a lot of criticism regarding its capability to manage SCS conflicts, but it was still considered as qualified forum for Southeast Asian countries to work together. The benchmarks used were cohesion, economic, political and social clusters. It can be concluded that the data calculation from 2008 to 2018 shows a tendency that overall score of all ASEAN countries increases, sometimes quite significantly. This means that economic, political and social aspects and good governance in ASEAN continues to be stronger from time to time. Ten years period shows a lot of progress in ASEAN. Hard criticism cannot avoid evidence that an improvement and stronger good governance was a valuable asset to increase ASEAN autonomy. This means that ASEAN can be more independent and have national resilience as the foundation for regional resilience.

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