A Study of Indonesian Perspectives on the Future of the South China Sea: Navigating the Dynamics of Asymmetric Warfare

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Abstract

This article explores the shifting global dynamics, focusing on the rise of East Asia, particularly China, and its impact on the Asia Pacific region. The South China Sea (SCS) emerges as a critical area with territorial disputes, notably China's assertive claims and the U.S.'s involvement, leading to heightened tensions. Indonesia's strategic position becomes pivotal in navigating these geopolitical shifts. The analysis emphasizes Indonesia's role in promoting a peaceful SCS region through its free and active policy and ASEAN membership. The Kantian Triangle, rooted in Liberalism theory, serves as a conceptual framework, highlighting the importance of democracy, economic interdependence, and international organizations in conflict resolution. Indonesia's engagement in regional organizations, especially ASEAN, is crucial for resolving SCS conflicts. The ASEAN Outlook On The Indo-Pacific (AOIP) reflects a commitment to inclusive cooperation, prioritizing shared interests. The article underscores Indonesia's efforts to balance relations with the U.S. and China through economic cooperation, contributing to regional stability. Indonesia's economic ties with both nations, guided by the principles of the Kantian Triangle, aim to foster cooperation and reduce the potential for conflict in the SCS. In conclusion, Indonesia's strategic positioning and active diplomatic role positions it as a key mediator, contributing to lasting peace in the SCS amidst the competition between major powers.

Keywords: South China Sea, Indonesia, Asia-Pacific, Free-Active, National Interest.

INTRODUCTION

The geo-economic and geo-political gravity of the world is shifting from West to East Asia, this shift is a sign that Asian countries are on the rise. This shift also creates new geopolitics in the Asia Pacific region. The indications of this revival are marked by the rise of China as a superpower and the
shift from the center of the world economy to Asia. Indonesia's strategic position is important not only because it is located between two continents (Asia and Australia) and two oceans (the Indian and Pacific oceans), but also the momentum of realizing Indonesia's vision as the global maritime nexus, controller of energy routes and international trade and resources. As the largest archipelagic country in the world, more than 60% of Indonesia's territory consists of sea areas with abundant natural resource potential. Indonesian territory can be claimed to be open and has the potential to have a very high threat. Indonesian territorial waters as international shipping lanes require security guarantees so Indonesia together with countries in the Asia Pacific region must work together in realizing maritime security.

The Asian region has 10 of the 20 countries with the highest GDP in the world. This illustrates that this region cannot be separated from the many national interests that must be achieved to increase the country's capabilities starting from the economic, social, and security. Countries in the region are actors who play a crucial role in geopolitical and geomaritime dynamics. The dynamics in the Asia Pacific region are increasingly sharp with territorial claims in the South China Sea from several countries such as China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Brunei Darussalam. The territorial claims that occurred were allegedly related to the struggle for natural resources in the SCS region. China is a country that actively makes claims in the SCS with its nine-dash line approach. ASEAN countries responded to this, also felt that their territory was being claimed by China, and responded with different actions. Indonesia as a country that also has an island called Natuna often experiences border problems due to the large number of illegal foreign ships sailing. China's movements in the South China Sea have not only attracted the attention of regional countries but have come from the United States, which views China's aggressive actions as a potential threat to the region. As a superpower, the US feels that it must be involved in the dynamics in the Asian region and implemented it by formulating a foreign policy that makes the Indo-Pacific region a priority. Through its nine-dash line approach, China has carried out a lot of land reclamation in the SCS which is still being disputed, one of which is called Fiery Cross which has become China's naval base in the Asia Pacific which has increased the tension of conflicts in the SCS and the impact is a long competition for hegemony between China and the US. The competition between the two superpower countries China and the United States in the Asian region, especially in the SCS region, is predicted to further increase the tension between the two. This was due to the US's Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) policy, the visit of Nancy Pelosi, Chair of the US Parliament to Taiwan, the establishment of the US defense pact and its alliances such as AUKUS, QUAD, and the Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA), as well as from China carrying out massive development in areas that are still in dispute and implementing the China Gray Zone Tactic. The China Gray Zone Tactic aims to use a coercive approach that falls below the threshold of a conventional military response. Chinese naval combatant ships are not operated but are on standby at Chinese bases to blur the line between military and non-military actions along with their attributes to maintain China's unilateral historical claims.
over South China Sea waters. China has also assigned the Coast Guard and militia fishing vessels as pawns to defend the territory it claims. Chinese fishing vessels are instruments that play an important role in the infiltration of military elements into disputed areas.

The presence of the marine militia is also another form of fourth-generation warfare in the concept of hybrid war toward open conflict. The situation in the Asia Pacific, especially in the South China Sea, is increasingly hectic with the presence of the US and its allies and China with its aggressive activities. This illustrates the dynamics of the geopolitical and geomaritime landscape in the life of international relations. Indonesia as a country that is in a region that is bordered by a conflict area, namely the SCS, of course, must have a special strategy in dealing with the competition between the two big countries. With these dynamics, Indonesia through its free and active policy and membership in ASEAN must be able to realize a peaceful and prosperous SCS region. Lasting peace must be fought for by Indonesia with the spirit of cooperating with two competing countries.

METHOD

Based on the background of this strategically and economically important region of the world, stability and security in the south China Sea have to be the utmost concern of all the stakeholder countries. The formation of AUKUS in the year 2021 increased concerns for the countries located in the Indo-Pacific, specifically China, as this trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US could pave the way for the increased presence of the US in this region. The “overlapping claims” on the South China Sea have become one of the main issues in the region since 1973. All claimants have produced maps, charts, and documentation unilaterally and individually. China is known to have the “nine dash lines” map which has never been announced publicly or formally. It has been circulating yet it has never been treated as a formal document, until 2009. China wrote a letter dated 7 May 2009 to the UN Secretary-General to protest the joint submission by Vietnam and Malaysia on the outer limit of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. In that letter, China attached the map as a basis for its protests and claims. This is the first time China formally brought the map at a multilateral level. This is a very interesting development as China stated time and again that it has no wish to internationalize the issue. Indonesia being the largest ASEAN country with the fourth largest population in the world is an important factor in this region. Therefore, Indonesia which has a free and active policy believes that a liberalistic approach can play a very important role in peacefully resolving this conflict and even converting it into cooperation. This will ensure the security and stability of this region which will in turn increase the economic potential of this region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To analyze Indonesia's perspective on the South China Sea region in the future, the conceptual framework of The Kantian Triangle will be used which is a derivative of Liberalism theory. The foundation of Liberalism thought has developed from the era of The European Enlightenment which
emphasized the free and equal socio-economic life of society. In that era, the economic system that was developing was capitalism which was implemented with a free market. In international relations, the theory of Liberalism began to dominate during the events of the First World War in 1910-1919, when international relations experts such as Sir Alfred Zimmern, Woodrow Wilson, and Norman Angell saw the urgency to form a kind of world government based on the principle of legal freedom and equality. The idea was implemented by establishing the League of Nations (LBB) as an intergovernmental organization that aims to prevent war between countries. In line with the theory of Liberalism, a philosopher from Germany named Immanuel Kant wrote a book on international relations in 1795 entitled Perpetual Peace, one of which discussed the concept of The Kantian Triangle. Kant stated that to create lasting peace in international politics, states as the main actors must voluntarily commit themselves to three important components of international politics, namely: democracy, economic interdependence, and international organizations. Kant sought to promote cooperation between states and individuals to create common interests and avoid personal interests. The following is a picture of "Kantitiga Kantian" (The Kantian Triangle).

![Kantitiga Kantian](image)

Figure 1. Kantitiga Kantian

Immanuel Kant believed that through the triangle concept one could achieve lasting peace and avoid war. International organizations are tools to bind world countries through international law which aims to realize justice in international relations. The basic idea of international organizations is that countries can resolve conflicts peacefully based on the common interests that have been developed. Democracy is a system of government where foreign policy formulation is different from an authoritarian system where the opportunities for war are greater. Democracy puts forward conflict resolution in implementing its foreign policy, this is because this system will take into account the huge costs of going to war so negotiation is the chosen way to resolve problems. Democratic country leaders and their people tend to like to avoid conflict because it will benefit both parties. And economic dependence Kant believes that free markets will provide benefits in avoiding and managing
conflicts. Economic activity, namely trade, is also based on the principle of having to promote economic welfare so that if this is not achieved it will affect the disruption of shared prosperity. The triangular image above illustrates how these three elements can create lasting peace, a democracy that is upheld will have an impact on fair law enforcement capable of restraining countries from committing acts of conflict, economic interdependence makes countries prioritize cooperation that reduces the potential for conflict, and international organizations have a role in unifying national interests to become common interests so that countries will continue to prioritize cooperation rather than conflict.

Indonesia through its active role in regional international organizations namely ASEAN is an important instrument that must be improved from the present for the future. This cannot be separated from the unclear situation in the Asian region, especially in the South China Sea region, namely competition between China and the United States. Conflicts related to China's territorial claims in the SCS also have an impact on several ASEAN member countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Brunei Darussalam. This must be of particular concern to Indonesia and ASEAN so that conflict resolution can occur peacefully.

In carrying out its role as a country that mediates the South China Sea conflict, the Indonesian government has several times played an active role in formulating peace resolutions together with ASEAN. Indonesia through ASEAN so far has always acted as a facilitator and mediator for the ongoing process of conflict de-escalation in the SCS. This is important for Indonesia to continue to be involved with regional organizations to maintain regional stability from the competition between the two superpower countries, the US and China.

The presence of ASEAN amid conflict disputes in the SCS is also the best effort that can be made by regional countries to maintain their shared commitment to prioritizing common interests rather than personal interests. This was proven by ASEAN by launching an ASEAN-Indo-Pacific regional cooperation called the ASEAN Outlook On The Indo-Pacific (AOIP) which aims to increase mutual trust through dialogue whose result is expected to form strategic trust. The value emphasized is the importance of inclusive cooperation rather than rivalry. ASEAN is trying to spread this cooperation to world countries, one that has been done with Canada. Representatives of ASEAN countries in Ottawa conducted a seminar that was attended by government officials, academics, think-tanks, and diplomatic institutions.

Indonesia with a democratic government system has a long historical political process, the development of democracy which is now the result of reform. As a country that applies democratic principles, Indonesia has also played its role well in terms of international relations so far, one of which is by implementing a foreign policy that is conflict prevention, resolution, and management, especially in the SCS region.

Responding to the ongoing competition between China and the United States in the SCS region is crucial for Indonesia to act. As a country that adheres to the principle of free and active foreign
policy, Indonesia benefits because in the conflict resolution process it is not burdened to open up opportunities for cooperation with any country. For example, Indonesia opened defense cooperation with Australia which collaborated in creating a stable region and upholding the rule of law, particularly through maritime security cooperation such as the Joint Declaration and Plan of Action on Maritime Cooperation and the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Apart from that, to prevent open conflicts in the SCS as a democratic country and uphold the establishment of a peaceful resolution, Indonesia through the ASEAN Political-Security Community also issued a blueprint, namely multilateral cooperation in dealing with the developing LCS conflicts.

Indonesia's efforts to create peace and open cooperation in the South China Sea region which is now full of competition between two superpower countries are actually in line with the principles of its foreign policy, namely free and active. Since becoming an independent country, Indonesia has had a vision for the future that it will not side with the Western or Eastern blocs. This is evidenced by the existence of cooperative relations in the economic field with the United States and China. Indonesia has more than five strategic partner countries for economic cooperation and the US and China are included in it.

Economic cooperation between Indonesia and the United States varies from investment, trade, and export-import, Indonesia is also considered an important partner in the Indo-Pacific region by the US. Increasing Indonesia's domestic economy is a consideration for superpower countries such as the US to carry out economic cooperation. Based on 2021 data, bilateral trade between Indonesia and the US will reach $37 billion, while trade in services will reach $2.4 billion in 2020 and the main US exports to Indonesia include soybeans, airplanes, mineral fuels, machinery, and cotton. Based on data for 2020 US investment stocks in Indonesia reached $18.7 billion and until now the US-Indonesian economic cooperation relationship is heading towards economic reform with an emphasis on reducing trade barriers such as protectionist laws and infrastructure development. Dealing with the South China Sea region as a trade route for the US and Indonesia also strengthens cooperation in developing a sustainable green and blue economy.

Indonesia is also actively engaged in economic cooperation with China, as a country that is experiencing increasing economic growth in the Asian region. China is indeed Indonesia as an important strategic partner. This is evidenced by the increase in trade between China and Indonesia in 2021 growing 54.03% or $110 billion. The economic trade between the two countries is very good and growing rapidly even though in the last two years the world has been faced with the Covid-19 health crisis. Exports of Indonesian goods to China also grew 69.22% or $53.78 and imports of Indonesian goods from China also grew 41.86% or $56.22% so both parties benefited.

**CONCLUSION**

Indonesia and the South China Sea region can never be separated, the ongoing conflict there must be of particular concern to the government because it involves the potential for open military
conflict between the two superpowers, namely the United States and China. Through the concept of The Kantian Triangle, Indonesia in the future can create an LCS region that is peaceful and far from war through three important components in international politics, namely international organizations, democracy, and economic dependence. International organizations in this case are the role of Indonesia and ASEAN to indirectly bind countries that conflict with China regarding territorial claims to be subject to agreements or agreements based on a strong desire to avoid war. This will certainly have an impact on maintaining regional stability. because if the ASEAN countries are not governed by the agreement it will increase the tension of the existing conflict, namely between the United States and China. Furthermore, Indonesia's democratic government system is the concept of achieving lasting peace, because in this system all important decisions must be discussed transparently in public including those related to the declaration of war. Indonesia can become a country with an example of good governance in the region in creating peace for ASEAN countries to jointly put forward resolutions to conflicts. Economic dependence based on Indonesia's free and active political principles is an important instrument that must be maintained by Indonesia because one of the causes of conflict in the SCS is related to economic problems, namely related to world strategic trade routes. All countries in the world know that the South China Sea region is a vital aspect that is widely used in achieving the national interests of each country. Therefore, the existence of Indonesia's economic cooperation relationship with both the US and China will form economic dependence so that Indonesia will remain a strategic partner of each country and the pattern that emerges is the interest to create cooperation rather than conflict.

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