

POLITICAL STABILITY IN ASIA PACIFIC

Irwita Erlangga

College of Interdisciplinary Studies (CIS), Thammasat University, Thailand
ri.erlangga@gmail.com

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dinamika persaingan di kawasan Asia Pasifik. Analisis dalam artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan data sekunder. Data dikumpulkan dari laporan resmi dan sumber terkait lainnya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ada ketidakstabilan dalam politik antar negara, tidak berpengaruh banyak pada konstelasi politik regional. Pergeseran geopolitik dan geo-ekonomi di kawasan ini sedang berlangsung, sehingga wajar jika ada proses adaptasi yang menciptakan sedikit gesekan dengan politik dalam negeri. Ekonomi dan militer berfungsi sebagai basis kekuatan bagi negara adikuasa untuk dapat menyebarkan pengaruhnya di negara dengan kekuatan kecil. Namun, kekuatan negara adikuasa tidak selalu konstan. Gelombang kehadiran kekuatan dapat mempengaruhi konstelasi politik daerah dan menyebabkan perubahan hegemoni.

Kata kunci: *Asia Pasifik, Persaingan, dan Stabilitas Politik.*

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the dynamics of competition in the Asia Pacific region. The analysis in this article used a qualitative approach based on secondary data. The data collected from the official reports and other relevant sources. The findings showed that there is instability in intrastate politics, it does not have much effect on regional political constellations. Geopolitical and geo-economic shifts in the region are ongoing so it is natural that there is a process of adaptation that creates a bit of friction with domestic politics. Economy and military serve as a power base for superpowers to be able to spread its influence in a minor power state. However, the power of the superpower is not always constant. The tide of the presence of force can affect the political constellation of the region and lead to changes in hegemony.

Keywords: Asia Pasific, Competition, and Political Stability

INTRODUCTION

Before World War I, the Atlantic Ocean is considered a disputed world sea for state and economic hegemony. During World War I, America and Japan have become creditor countries thanks to the development of its industry in the Asia-Pacific region. Directly, World War I has resulted in massive capital transfers. The shifting capital that drives the world economy is no longer a trade. At the moment it is known to almost everyone, that in the Pacific Region has created its own economic and political area, with its own problems, where its basic base is America and Japan. The area is growing far beyond the Atlantic Ocean axis. The Pacific region in the world economy generally contains three passive things: as a consumer country, source of raw materials and as a place of investment.

Asia Pacific as a whole can be categorized into two: the area to the north is industrialist and internationally active, while in the South it is agrarian and internationally passive. The Asian region also now stands out. The development of East Asia over the last few decades has changed the outlook and foreign policy of major countries in the Asia-Pacific region that have geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic influence and importance in

the region. In addition to increasingly dominating the global economy, G-20 member Asian countries also have a greater role in saving and reshaping the global economic system, shifting US and Western Europe dominance. Furthermore ASEAN region is seen as one of the central areas of new economic growth in Asia Pacific.

Economic progress and monetary stability of Asia-Pacific countries are not always accompanied by political stability between countries and regions, on the contrary, various issues contribute to the dynamics of the political life of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This variety of issues is a major issue in all countries and regional organizations and is a material of evaluation and input in policy formulation both in addressing domestic politics and foreign relations of each country. It shows that the Asia Pacific region has various conflicts and becomes a "time bomb" when it will explode. Therefore, interesting question arises, why geopolitics shifted; what is shifting; and where the epicenter shifts / points of origin.

METHOD

The analysis in this article used a qualitative approach based on secondary data. The data collected from the official reports and other relevant sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tension on the Korean Peninsula, is it over?

The dispute on the Korean peninsula, inseparable from the geopolitical shift phenomenon from the Atlantic to Asia Pacific in the 21st century. The ongoing tensions are the impact of the changing geopolitical landscape in East Asia due to the rise of China's economy and military. Today China's economic power is so incredible and is directly proportional to its military strength. This is due to an increase in China's military budget that continues to rise and is seen by other countries as a threat unipolar system. Maher (2016) argues China has the potential to drive the United States from Asia-Pacific and become the dominant force in the region. The history of China's border conflict with other unfinished countries is expected to heat up as the military budget increases. Even an increase in China's military budget is also expected to trigger an arms race in the region. China seeks to convince the international community that its military modernization is purely for defensive purposes, but the addition of military might still be seen as an offensive by its neighbors.

Changes in the geopolitical environment make China modernize its

military very rapidly and can not be equaled by neighboring countries. From a realist perspective, the modernization of Chinese armaments has the potential to increase armed conflict in the region. The imbalance in these conditions raises concerns that one day China is changing direction using its military strength from initially for defensive purposes to offensive. Therefore, many reactions emerged from neighboring countries that followed China's move to increase its military power to balance. For instance, Japan also took advantage of the situation to increase its military capacity, especially changing the constitution of self defense to an offensive that has the ability to launch military attacks against other countries. Japan's response to an increase in China's military budget shows the beginning of security in the region's dilemma in this century that will disrupt security stability in East Asia. This increase in Chinese military power also attracted the attention of the United States as the most powerful country in the world after the cold war and tends to plant its hegemony in every region of the world. The United States has always wanted security stability in the East Asia region considering the enormous economic and political importance of the United States in the region.

Another example is what North Korea does with its nuclear weapons development program and missile technology. The North Korean decision does not mean fearing the military power of China because the two have a good relationship. Albert (2018) argued that China's relations with North Korea had been formed since the Korean War. In addition, bilateral relations between China and North Korea have grown not only politically but in the economic field. For instance, China accounts for more than 90 percent of North Korea's total trade volume which most of its food and energy supplies. North Korea understands that there has been a geopolitical shift in eastern Asia so they have to adjust to the changes. Therefore builds its military and nuclear capacity solely in order not to be treated arbitrarily. When looking at geography, North Korea's territory is protected by China and Russia. Its front door faced with South Korea and Japan. Both countries are "satellite" states of US hegemonic power in East Asia. If the two US allies are controlled by North Korea, the smaller the hegemony of the United States. And certainly disrupt the security stability of the Asia Pacific region, especially the interests of the United States and its allies.

Beginning trials of various weapons conducted by North Korea since several decades ago. However, in early 2000 it became increasingly intense because North Korea began to get plutonium. a series of ballistic missile launch tests conducted by North Korea gained worldwide attention, not to mention US President George W. Bush at the time. In addition, North Korea also withdraws from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) that makes the United States and its allies more inflamed. The urgency encouraged the establishment of a diplomatic forum involving North Korea, China, the United States, South Korea, Japan and Russia. Bajoria and Xu (2013) argues the Six-Party Talks launched in 2003 are aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear program through negotiations where each country has a direct interest with the region.

The termination of North Korea's nuclear program as a collective need is weaker in its position compared to the interests and concerns of each party. In effect, progress reached a dead end when Pyongyang quit the negotiations in 2009. Since then, North Korea continues to test Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) repeatedly until at its peak in 2017. Afterwards, North Korea got economic sanction after continued its ICBM testing

and violations of UN Resolutions. CNN (2017) disclose first sanction targets North Korea's main exports and impact to their annual revenue by \$ 1 billion. This first resolution targets North Korea's primary exports, including coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore and seafood. The sanctions also target other revenue streams, such as banks and joint ventures with foreign companies. Then CCN (2017) also reported that new sanction from UN Security council were targets on North Korea's oil imports, textile exports, smuggling and overseas workers.

In the end the economic sanctions from the United Nations got approval from Russia and China which previously both countries always try to keep North Korea. Both countries and South Korea consistently push less tougher sanctions by considering the potential impacts. However, the approval of economic sanctions shows that China and Russia appear to be turning against North Korea. The worst projection if Kim Jong Un feels betrayed by China and Russia to support the United States in the economic embargo against North Korea, intercontinental nuclear warheads will be launched as a justification for the North to defend itself against the threat of state sovereignty. The worst possibility has a mutually supportive backdrop, as the "outdated" diplomacy space is replaced by

its role with the Asymmetric War which can be a "wild ball" and difficult to manage because the interests and non-governmental actors can be directly involved.

Furthermore, the tension between North Korea versus the United States has not yet reached its climax. At the beginning of 2018, there was a glimmer of hope for peace on the Korean peninsula. The New York Times (2018) reports that northern Korean leaders invited the US president to meet and negotiate on the nuclear program that has been a problem. The diplomatic offer becomes a bold solution considering the Six Party Talk has always been deadlocked. One month later, BBC News (2018) announces that Kim Jong-un will meet with Moon Jae-in on the demarcation line of the military or demilitarization zone to discuss the willingness of denuclearization of North Korea. This shows that the tension in the Korean peninsula can be said to begin to decrease in intensity. The meeting in the demilitarized zone is also intended to prepare for the meeting between the two heads of state, North Korea and United States. In addition, in May 2018, the North Korean leader also flew to Dalian to meet with President Xi Jinping. Some of the online articles (The New York Times, 2018; The Guardian, 2018; Global Times,

2018) mention that their second meeting shows China's significance to boost North Korea's confidence in the upcoming summit with the United States.

The article shows that China plays a greater role in the process of political resolution of the nuclear issue. Although the main actors in this meeting are leaders of North Korea, South Korea and the United States but it is undeniable that president Xi also contributed. The possible contribution motive is to support China's strategic role after sanctions against North Korea are lifted. Given the output and results of this meeting is closely related to the interests of Chinese political economy in the Asian region.

However, Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump which has been scheduled for June 12, 2018 in Singapore must end with a unilateral cancellation by Trump. CNBC (2018) reported that the cause of the cancellation was the extraordinary anger and open hostility conveyed by the North Korean leader. It relates to North Korea's statement on US Vice President Mike Pence who is considered a "political dummy" and spreading the threat of "nuclear-nuclear showdown". This unpredictable change of attitude from the North Korean leader is indeed one of the biggest obstacles in the negotiation process. Nevertheless the

spotlight should be what causes the change in attitude occurs. Whether after meeting with President Xi Jinping or any other influencing factors. The failure of Trump-Kim summit as international diplomacy suggests that stability on the Korean peninsula is still unfavorable to all.

It is not unexpected that Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump still held meetings in Singapore although the results are still relatively normative. Regardless of whether the results are as expected or not, the meeting shows a positive signal with the decline of the ego of each head of state. The meeting also indicated that the tension on the Korean peninsula was gradually decreasing even though it had not disappeared. The results of the agreement did not explain in detail the denuclearization substance. There is no further clarity regarding the time frame or time limits of denuclearization. Nevertheless, one of the resulting clauses mentioned to halt US and South Korean military training as compensation for freezing North Korea's nuclear and missile tests. This clause indirectly also benefits China. This agreement will impact on the weakening of alliance alliances in East Asia. Consciously or not, the strength of US forces in South Korea is a form of the greatest strength of the allied forces in the

region. The clause makes the space or activity of the allied forces on the Korean peninsula to be very limited. This became an opportunity for the Chinese military to take over the dominance of the region from allies. In addition, the weakening will also undermine the long-term interests of the Allies in the South China Sea. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Asymmetric War in Southeast Asia

Asymmetrical warfare can be described as a conflict between two conflicting parties and has different strengths or strategies. This asymmetric concept has a broader spectrum of targets than conventional warfare because it encompasses all aspects of life. This may take the form of conventional wars but with the involvement of non-state actors or non-military wars targeting the public life aspects of the country. Consciously or not both forms of asymmetrical warfare have taken place in Southeast Asia. After the Cold War changed into proxy war, international diplomacy as the main "space" of conflict resolution turned into a war using third parties instead of fighting each other directly. In a proxy war or Asymmetric War requires an "actor" as a "proxy agent" before a strategic goal is

reached, as is the case of Arab Spring and Marawi in the Philippines.

Proxy agents can be backgrounds of NGOs, multinational corporations, mass media and civil society. Both events show how asymmetrical warfare that occurred in the Arab region occurred between the government and the ISIS group. Propaganda performed by ISIS is massively spread through cyberspace especially social media platform. This strategy is effective enough to gain sympathy from the international Muslim community to support the establishment of the ISIS country in the Arab region. Online recruitment comes from different regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, and Asia. However, the situation did not last long. The position of ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa now began to be besieged from all directions so that the movement of the militants became very limited.

The situation is good for the stability of security in the region, but indirectly also sparked for wider spread of radicalism especially for the Asian region. One of the areas with the largest Muslim base is Southeast Asia with spreading in southern Thailand, the Malay peninsula, southern Philippines and Indonesia. Afterwards, some sympathizers or ISIS militants then tried to form another ISIS

bases in Marawi Philippines. According to BBC Indonesia (2017) which reported the Maute brothers after being radicalized in the Arab region then back and affiliated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf group as its allies. The ISIS base in Marawi then becomes a new destination for sympathizers for jihad. Although at the end of October 2017 the

Defense Minister of the Philippines declared a military operation in Marawi has been terminated and the area was cleared of ISIS. Yet, Marawi's victory is not the end of ISIS in Southeast Asia. CNN (2017) reveals that there is the possibility of a line of foreign militants who managed to escape from the battlefield and return home. They can bring home an invaluable battle experience to the insurgency in their own country. It becomes a serious threat to some neighboring countries, especially Indonesia. This country has been fighting against terrorism and radicalism for decades, precisely since the Bali bombing in 2002. Recently, facts show that some of its citizens were found to be ISIS fighters or sympathizers in the Middle East and it also related to ISIS network in Marawi.

In geopolitical view, Indonesia has a strategic geographical position in Southeast Asia. The principle of independent and

active foreign policy is the next added value of Indonesia. Although in practice before the Jokowi administration was more inclined to the US alliance. Yet, both are key for Indonesia in regional and global politics. Furthermore, in terms of demography, Indonesia is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world and which two-thirds of the population of this country are in productive age. In addition, data released from the Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association (2017) show that internet users in Indonesia amounted to 45% of 262 million people and 79% of whom are in productive age. Not surprisingly, the middle class in Indonesia is very large and quite literate on information and communication technology. It used to access information and express opinions freely on social media pages. This pattern is almost universal in all social classes in Indonesia. Although this situation seems ideal, it is also quite dangerous for the socio-political stability of the country.

Government policy actually formed a gray area, where the rule of state law is not sufficient to distinguish which is classified as hate speech and criticism of power. Opportunities are then widely used by certain groups –such as radical groups and politicians– to seek public sympathy.

Despite having different commitments and goals, the groups used the same issue, namely religion. Issues related to religion and race are quite sensitive issues in socio-politics in Indonesia.

Referring to Indonesian domestic politics. The time span from 2017 to 2019 can be categorized as a political year in which there will be many elections of regional heads and Indonesian presidents by 2019. The opposition party's political maneuvers have been launched from 2016 at the time of religious defamation by the governor of petahana with a background of Chinese ethnicity and Christianity. The case is then framed in such a way by many interested parties to obtain good imagery. Many opposition parties or Islamic mass organizations are leading the public to prioritize religious issues rather than nationalism or national unity.

The debate occurred not only in the mass media but also extended to social media space and led to the utterance of hatred and discredited certain parties including the Jokowi government. These kinds of people have indeed proven effective in influencing people's views. The mass media that has penetrated into the virtual world is also an extraordinary lighter powerful in spreading the ideals that not necessarily people can filter it. Excessive

exposure to certain religious fundamentalism fueled by threats associated with one's life and death becomes a coercive means that is so effective in winning the "different" candidate. This situation can be dangerous to the stability of the nation and state. If this continues to be tolerated, the opponents of the government will have greater power and eventually be able to shake up the state ideology.

In addition, this problem is also used as an entry point to criticize Jokowi's government policy. Jokowi's have courage to invest more and open up opportunities for another investment funding sources considering Indonesia need more investment on infrastructure project. From entrepreneurial perspectives, what Jokowi's did is very rational because entrepreneur cannot rely on one side –stagnant FDI from the Allies which previously got affected by the failure of subprime mortgage in U.S.– financial fund, he should used layered financing in order to securing the development. Therefore, Chinese investment is growing rapidly in his administration and become third-biggest investor in Indonesia after Singapore and Japan. However, the opposition criticized Jokowi's policy was considered to be more in favor of the interests of large investors –especially Chinese– which seemed to

place Indonesian citizens as the second caste. The government is considered to ignore the demographic bonus that is owned and more concerned with large investors. Moreover after the Jakarta Bay reclamation case that had dragged the Jakarta incumbent Governor and big businessman of Chinese descent. Although the incumbent Governor was found not guilty in this corruption case, sentiment towards ethnicity and religion was still felt.

Further criticism was also conveyed regarding economic growth must also be able to participate in employment growth. As it is known Indonesia's economic structure which is supported by manufacturing and agriculture industry which majority is labor-intensive industries. Meanwhile, demographic bonuses have the potential to turn into demographic bombs if Indonesia is unable to prepare jobs for those who are in and will be in the productive age category. Some oppositions argues that Indonesia's economic growth is not linear with employment growth and the poverty rate. They argue with increasing Chinese investment, foreign workers will increase and close opportunities for local workers. Such criticism or sentiment seems to further marginalize the government's position which is more pro-foreign investment and ignore its citizens. Nevertheless, those

criticism can also be perceived as a form of warning to the government that Indonesia is in an asymmetric war between the US and China in the Southeast Asia region.

Economic, political and military relations that cannot be separated from each other. The richer a country is, the stronger its economic investment will be in areas considered strategic from the availability of natural resources. In certain doses, to shock the country against other countries, it is not easily disturbed by competitors, the country concerned always shows a map of its military strength. The presence of waters from the Middle East to Asia Pacific as the largest trade route in the world has been recognized by superpowers in the region. Maher (2016) stated that America's strategic focus shifted from the Atlantic Alliance towards East Asia and the Western Pacific along with China's growing economic and military power.

Geopolitical changes in this region make the US must shift its interests and priorities in the Atlantic region. Poon, Sajarattanachote, and Bagchi-Sen (2006) argue that US geopolitical interests are reflected in the interaction of defense trade which is at the same time a defense base in the East Asia region. Geographical variables such as trade routes and the location of natural resources determine the

geopolitical value of a geographical area. Areas where trade routes and natural resource potential are considered to have geopolitical value. The implication is that waters in the Asia-Pacific are filled with populations of commercial ships from various countries and US Navy war games and allies that milling about in the southwest corner of the Pacific.

Although the Chinese navy has made significant progress, the geostrategic issue of the military still prevents the Chinese military from developing further. The main problem lies in the aquatic configuration around Beijing that is less profitable because it is easily blocked by opponents. Given in the East China Sea region lies between Korea, Japan and Taiwan which are US allies. While Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia are considered potential blockades in the South China Sea.

Each country has a strategic defense policy and defense doctrine that emerged as a result of adjustments to global economic and strategic interests in the South China Sea region. Thus, the South China Sea is seen by the Chinese Government as a strategic maritime route in the Asia Pacific region that needs to be secured. Khurana (2008) states that China uses more influence abroad to protect its geopolitical

and geostrategic interests widely. This means that various diplomatic, economic and military efforts were taken to secure interests in the region. Chang (2012) argues that the Chinese military's modernization efforts for the air force and navy are advantages over Southeast Asian countries. China also gained momentum when the decline in US hegemony was marked by economic stagnation in 2008. With its strength, China was increasingly convinced by showing firm stance in the case of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. During this time, China preferred to carry out bilateral negotiations with prosecuting countries and reject multilateral negotiations. Even China also refused to negotiate in an international arbitration tribunal.

Yoshihara and Holmes (2016) argue that freedom of navigation to the extent permitted by international law must be applied by the US Navy as a strategy to respond to the emergence of Chinese Navy forces. Sea control is a key value to put the US in a position capable of suppressing China throughout Southeast Asia. This is the reason for the US to present and strengthen the US military presence and access to the facilities needed to withstand Chinese influence. Especially Singapore is considered to have an ideal location to

control important places such as the Malacca Strait, as well as access to Vietnam and the Philippines. This can help build air superiority above the lane in the South China Sea. Beijing's concern over the US blockade of Chinese waters will have a direct impact on their economy. Thus, offsetting the influence of the military in Asia Pacific, China places more emphasis on non-military warfare in controlling geopolitical strategic areas in the Asia Pacific. Lei (2008) argues that in the face of a geopolitical dilemma, China will cooperate with countries around SLOC, especially in the Malacca Strait where many Chinese oil flows. Therefore, China's economic power is used as the main base of its power to play in this region.

Beijing uses the Belt and Road Initiative as a geo-economic development strategy through land and maritime routes. This initiative as a US military counter strategy is more profitable than having to compete directly with US warships and allies. With the budget capacity and fleet owned, basically China is able to compete in the ocean. However, Sun Tzu taught that the ultimate art of war is to fight enemies without fighting. This means that the doctrine asserts to avoid 'direct friction' with the enemy. In addition, Saunders (as cited in Shambaugh and Yahuda, 2014)

says that a stable environment in Asia is preferred by China because it allows to encourage economic growth to support China's increasing influence. Given China's influence in the regional economy was quite large, then encouraged as an opportunity to 'conquer' US hegemony. Chan and Li (2015) state that Chinese decision makers recognize that in the Asia-Pacific region there is a gap in military power and strategic influence between China and the US, which will make it difficult for China to pursue its national security interests. Therefore, China's strategic interest in controlling the South China Sea region was then manifested in the Maritime Silk Route as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Blanchard and Flint (2017) argue that the Maritime Highway Initiative is part of the Belt and Road Initiative that is leaning towards a political economy project in an area between the geopolitical spectrum of poles. In addition, Brewster (2017) also exposes the Maritime Silk Route to show competition between naval forces to control maritime space through economic significance for the entire region and expand Chinese political influence.

Even though China has adhered to the principle of non-intervention in its foreign policy, it seems that this is still not clearly seen when linked to this initiative.

For some cases, for example the Philippines and Indonesia, it is clear that China has not carried out any intervention on the two countries as beneficiaries. But through the framework of the Belt and Road Initiatives, these countries seem to show a tendency to be more "obedient" and show a more friendly attitude. As for intrastate conflicts and interstate conflicts that occur in these countries as if they have no influence on the country's political views. Du (2016) said commercial interests would go hand in hand with unexpected geopolitical impacts through the Belt and Road Initiatives. At first glance, this initiative is like transactional politics where there is a process that gives and receives something in the form of material and non-material in accordance with the agreed agreement.

The transactional negotiation process that takes place in this initiative is limited to commercial interests rather than politics. Changes in the attitude of recipient countries that tend to soften are not the result of negotiations but to maintain the status quo. This means that it strengthens the notion that this initiative contributes to the growth of China's power. Therefore, it can be said that this initiative is a soft power which wrapped in commercial interests to be able to influence the beneficiary countries.

CONCLUSION

The illustration above shows how the dynamics of competition of two superpowers in the Asia Pacific region. Although some previous explanations show that there is instability in intrastate politics, it does not have much effect on regional political constellations. Geopolitical and geo-economic shifts in the region are ongoing so it is natural that there is a process of adaptation that creates a bit of friction with domestic politics. Owens (2015) state geopolitics is dynamic because it reflects the strength of international politics which is an implication of the relationship between geography and technology and economic development.

The geography and political logic of the superpowers leads to a way to build predominance in the region. Short (1993) argues that arguing by extending the sphere of influence will preserve and enhance the geopolitical position of the superpower. It can be reflected that each country can utilize or be utilized by its geopolitics. Recognizing geopolitical opportunities or being victims of their geopolitical situation depends on how the state views geography as a strategic factor in global phenomena. The minor power state has a difficult tendency to maintain an independent position, because it is often trapped in the

ebb and flow of manipulation of superpower forces. Economy and military serve as a power base for superpowers to be able to spread its influence in a minor power state. However, as has been said before that the power of the superpower is not always constant. The tide of the presence of force can affect the political constellation of the region and lead to changes in hegemony.

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