

Strategic Interest Projection in South China Sea Conflict

Denik Iswardani*

*Universitas Budi Luhur

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Abstract

This article attempts to analyze the theoretical overview of China, United States of America, and Southeast Asia countries strategic interest in South China Sea conflict. This study is carried by projecting their national interest in South China Sea and analyzed them theoretically by using Balance of Influence Theory and Hedging Strategy. The purpose of this study was to analyze the strategy of Southeast Asian countries and extra regional powers (China and US) used to keep each other constructively and cooperatively engaged in the region and to promote rule and norm-based arrangements and principles that help them to achieve their national interest and deny intramural hegemony in South China Sea.

Corresponding Author:

denik.iswardani@budiluhur.ac.id

Artikel ini berupaya untuk menganalisa tinjauan teoritis mengenai kepentingan strategis Cina, AS, dan negara-negara Asia Tenggara dalam konflik Laut Cina Selatan. Studi ini dilakukan dengan memproyeksikan kepentingan nasional negara-negara tersebut di Laut Cina Selatan dan menganalisisnya secara teoritis dengan menggunakan teori Balance of Influence Theory and Hedging Strategy. Tujuan dari studi ini untuk menganalisa strategi negara-negara Asia Tenggara dan negara ekstra regional (Cina dan AS) untuk saling menahan diri secara konstruktif dan terikat dalam kerja sama di kawasan dan mempromosikan aturan dan norma dalam perjanjian dan prinsip-prinsip yang dapat membantu mereka meraih kepentingan nasional mereka dan mengabaikan hegemoni di Laut Cina Selatan.

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Introduction

South China Sea is a marine area which is in the Pacific Ocean area covering more than 200 small islands, rocks and reefs. Most are in the range of Paracel and Spratly islands that are often disputed and political tensions of a few countries in the vicinity. Based on the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which was adopted in 1982, every country has the right to enter the area up to 12 nautical miles as part of its sovereignty and for the 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Obscurity of regarding the rules of UNCLOS stoning area has no limits continent, often lead to unilateral claims over the South China Sea to carry out exploration and exploitation. The countries that are often involved dispute because this claim is Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, and China (Roman, 2005).

South China Sea is second in the world busiest lane and potentially large oil reserves in the amount of 17.7 billion tons, more of Kuwait (13 billion tons), which is the fourth

country with the world's oil resources (Suharna, 2012).

According to estimates of the US Geological Survey (USGS) 60% - 70% of the hydrocarbons in the South China Sea is a natural gas (Nugraha, 2011). It is estimated that the total amount of reserves and undiscovered resources are found in the basin off the coast of South China Sea is 28 billion barrels. Speculation Spratly Islands could be oil bearing province is because the region contains substantial oil resources.

Most of hydrocarbon gas fields explored in the area around Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam. US Geological Survey shows that about 60 to 70 percent of hydrocarbon resources is the area of natural gas. Estimated natural gas reserves of the South China Sea is 2 quadrillion cubic feet. Other reports China's estimated 193 billion barrels' equivalent per day just to the Spratly Islands alone (US Department of Energy, 2013).

These advantages make this region a potentially strategic stability in the Asia Pacific region. Besides, is

one of the world's major oil transport lane, ownership also creates an increase in its own bargaining position (The Military Balance, 2013).

Balance of Influence

Concept Balance of Influence is a form evolution of the concept Balance Power (Morgenthau, 1920) and Balance of threat (Walt, 1987). Universally ignore variable economic interdependence in the global system and focus only on the basis of military power (Ross, 2006).

Similarly, the concept balance of threat who tend to be confrontational balance with emerging threats. Both concepts are no alternatives to do the same work cooperatively with countries that are considered as a challenger or a threat.

The more complex constellation of interests in the current global order, it takes concept with more cooperative in analyzing of behavior a country to achieve its interests. As foreign policy conducted by Mongolia in maintaining good relations between China and Russia, the balance of influence is done through involvement of the United

States and other strategic partners (Reeves, 2012).

Therefore, Evelyn Goh, provides a new alternative to analyze the behavior of these countries, which is none other than the concept balance of Influence realized through hedging strategies.

Goh defines hedging as a package of strategies that aim to avoid (or planned as a coincidence) situation of anarchy where is a clash of interest and ideology between the hegemon and contender in the international order and the countries outside of the second category cannot decide to do alternative balance, bandwagoning or neutral. By contrast, countries outside these two categories choose to be in the middle of the cooperation is beneficial to both or avoid choosing is on one side (counterweight or hegemon).

It's as confirmed Goh (2006) describes the hedging strategy as “a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon straighter forward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or

neutrality. Instead they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side (or one straightforward policy stance) at the obvious expense of another.”

Hedging mutually intelligible in their respective states to maintain extensive economic relations, mutually benefit each other, addressing uncertainty and security concerns. Hedging also helps prevent geopolitical rivalry of being a self-fulfilling prophecy (Medeiros, 2006). The Medeiros (2006) describes the dimensions cooperative hedging strategy is becoming increasingly given persistent worries about the huge bilateral trade deficit, China's unfair trade practices, the value of currency, espionage technology, and the scope of PLA modernization.

The Southeast Asia region is categorized as a country and state hegemon lead-balancer with classifying China as a hegemon. Aggressiveness growth and expansion in the region to acquire economic and military modernization. In this case, the United States emerged as the lead balancer in order to counter China's

growth and status quo in the region (Goh, 2005).

The author uses hedging strategies to analyze the countries of Southeast Asia to respond to emerging countries hegemon and balancer. There are fears in a multipolar system instability by countries small and medium causes of competing interests between countries hegemon and balancer. Therefore, small countries in Southeast Asia using hedging strategy because it is not possible to use the strategy of balancing and bandwagoning purely with powerful countries (Goh, 2007).

There are three forms of elements in the hedging strategy to be implemented in the region for small and medium countries: indirect balancing, complex engagement, and enmeshing a number of regional powers (Goh, 2005).

“Indirect balancing policies are designed to counter the target state”'s ability to constrain the subject state, either through non-specific deterrence or defense strengthening, or through building diplomatic, economic, and political relationships with third states

or organizations that can be converted into leverage against the target state when relations with it deteriorate” (Goh, 2006). Indirect balancing can be implemented by the countries of Southeast Asia with persuade the United States to participate as observers in the disputed South China Sea to counter the Chinese forces that involved in the security issues.

Complex approach to engagement is a hegemon country (China). Through political, security, and strategies are expected to abide by the rules and norms (preventive diplomacy) prevailing in Southeast Asia. A policy of constructive engagement is understood as a hedge to reduce the aggressiveness of potential Chinese domination but still benefit the countries of Southeast Asia (Goh, 2005).

Elements of the latter is enmeshing a few regional powers, where hedging as public policy will gather (enmeshing) great powers to establish a regional order stability. Southeast Asia hedging against things that are not desirable, such as: Chinese hegemony, the US withdrawal of the

region and the instability of the order in the region. For the countries of Southeast Asia to collect as much as possible partners (South Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India) in the South China Sea dispute as an observer in the settlement.

Research Method

To explain how the projections of countries that have strategic importance to the problems of the south China sea, this study uses a qualitative method which is the exploration of information on the conflict south China sea which is reinforced by the study of related literature.

Result and Discussion

Strategic interests of China Sea dispute

Since the first Chinese state was the most sensitive issue of sovereignty. Experience in foreign encroachment what makes this country are determined to maintain national unity and integrity. Therefore, Chinese leaders are determined to defend the territory against political sovereignty and the Tibet Xianjiang. China has established that the South

China Sea is a “core national interest” expressed by Dai Bingguo, Vice Foreign Minister of China in late July 2009.

The PRC’s first core interest is maintaining its fundamental system and state security, second is state sovereignty and territorial security, and the third is the continued stable development of the economy and society...in specific terms, Tibet Xianjiang, Taiwan and South China Sea island as well (Sukasa, 2010).

China showed the inconvenience that dispute resolution should be the parties concerned without outside intervention. In addition, China needs to be a powerful naval fleet and strategic bases is an essential precondition. China's assertiveness in defending its claim to the South China Sea region associated with the desire to gain status as a maritime power that reliable.

US interested in security at South China Sea as a commercial traffic lane, as defined by Hillary Clinton: “The United States, like every nation, has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to

Asia’s maritime commons and respect for international law in the South Cina Sea”(Sukasa, 2010).

As one of the six lanes, alternative route in the eastern US Persian Gulf. South China Sea to be part of global defense system because it is a cruise line for US fleets in implementing its strategic interests. The end of the Cold War, at a certain extent has brought changes in US foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The US Navy has closed bases in Subic Bay and Clark air base caused by several factors, among others, failure to achieve agreement on the lease between the two countries. The closure of military bases in the Philippines showed that the physical presence of the US in Southeast Asia has been reduced.

Implementation the Balance of Influence (Hedging Strategy)

A survey says that the strategic environment and defense relations in Asia might have got an important shift in the geopolitical dynamics of Asia (Goh, 2008). The shift is influenced by the rise of China in the Asia Pacific region, both in the scope of economic

and military.

China showed a more flexible stance on strategic change in the Asia Pacific region, especially in Southeast Asia. China became active in the development of security regionalism. This attitude makes China more accepted in the region and has a stronger position in competition the other powers in the region.

Therefore, the best way for the United States and other countries in the Asia Pacific region is developing multilateral approaches to prevent the dominance of China in the region. It is implemented at internal consolidation to strengthen its position in new developments in Southeast Asia and East Asia (Prasetyono, 2008).

First performed in hedging strategies the countries of Southeast Asia are indirect balancing (soft balancing), which each involve other major powers (between the United States and China) by way of persuasion to act as a counterweight in the balance of power in the area so it does not appear the state hegemon absolute, Southeast Asian countries

in fact did hedging strategy in the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) to avoid the three threats that exist in the region of Southeast Asia: Chinese hegemony or domination; withdrawal of cooperation the United States and regional order is unstable.

ARF is an official intergovernmental dialogue forum with the main goal to build mutual trust between member states (Confidence Building Measure/ CBM), preventive diplomacy, and the conflict resolution. The discussion covered by ARF very broad, is not limited to security issues in Southeast Asia but also in Asia Pacific.

ARF is not a forum to solve regional security issues in the Asia Pacific region, but rather a forum for dialogue to discuss and reconcile the different points of view, to build a sense of mutual trust and shared interests on regional security issues in the Asia Pacific region, regarding the settlement of disputes South China Sea (Andrea, 1996).

In the forum of ARF, the countries of Southeast Asia could restrict the activity of the forces

outside the region and take collective action to prevent the domination of power in Southeast Asia. Such actions can be said with a hedging strategy realized by enmeshing.

ASEAN countries' efforts in maintaining the US military existence in the region is needed to balance the aggressiveness of China. In the implementation, Malaysia and Singapore continue to conduct military exercises with the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand in cooperation Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA).

Likewise, Thailand continues to hold annual military exercises with the United States, known as the "Cobra Gold." Since 1995, the US navy has participated in a series of annual bilateral cooperation exercises in Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) (Collins, 2003).

Similarly, the state lead-balancer (United States) and of the hegemon (China), they do a hedging strategy to counter the strength of each

other. The US presence in the ARF are very intense because of the strategic interests of the military and its economy in the Asia Pacific region and Southeast Asia. At the ARF meeting to-18 in 2011 in Bali, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the United States is a party interested in the sea South China Sea, a route that transports nearly half of global trade and is vital for transport military United States (Bower and Santoso, 2013).

The arrival of President Barack Obama on the 18th ARF in Bali also proved that the US will not allow China to stand alone in a dominant position in Asia, especially in overlapping claims in the South China Sea. In the ARF, China implemented many policies that invites sympathy from the countries of Southeast Asia.

To comply with one of the principles of transparency in military ARF (Confidence building measure/CBM) in dialogue forum 3rd in 1996 in Jakarta, China began to publish a White Paper on defense in 1998. The white paper contains a full report on the assessment of China to the global

security situation, the doctrines of defense, national defense policy, defense spending, modernization and deployment of armed force, development measures in the military and so on.

Until now, the latest Defense White Paper was released in March 2011 (ASEAN Regional Forum Series Document, 2013). This was done to build confidence among ARF members against China for the sake of eliminating image aggressiveness and sensitivity of China. China thus avoid the situation of security dilemma that occurs when developing its military forces, especially in the policy of the Blue Water Navy. Thus, it can be said that China undertake complex hedging strategies in the form of engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia.

In the fifth ARF Inter Sessional Support Group (ISG) stated that the ARF opens great possibilities to dialogue and informal bilateral workshop (ASEAN Regional Forum Series Document, 1997). This facilitates China because the mechanism of settlement bilaterally with countries facing other claimants

individually, the possibility of China to win the greater. This is reflected in the Chinese rage when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that “freedom of navigation in the South China Sea” in the interests of the United States (Clinton, 2011).

Conclusions

In the disputed South China Sea, hedging strategies used by the countries in the region as a way to unify (engaging) China and the United States in order to create a good relationship between them so that the regional countries can avoid a situation of anarchy that usually occurs between countries balancer and hegemon. State balancer (United States) and hegemon (China) also undertake hedging strategies to cooperatively engage one another so that they are still in a global order of peace, because it is not possible to do the balance of power in the extreme in this region.

Hedging strategies realized with the involvement of the countries that the dispute in the South China Sea to the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), a forum is a point convenient

for the checkered diplomatic major countries in the Asia Pacific region with a record of regional power in the ARF can maintain the balance are stable (stable balance) between the great powers in it.

Based on the results of these discussions, the authors concluded that the hedging strategy taken by the United States, China, and countries in Southeast Asia is a rational strategy to be implemented due to the intensity of the tensions in the South China Sea region.

Recommendation

Although the author has reviewed the literature in projecting the conflict settlement in southern China Sea involving several countries like USA, China and ASEAN, the author realized that the only diplomacy and hedging strategies to solve the problem. In accordance with the level of conflict then there will be another suitable shape, such as disclosure of stimulus response theory, combined with the application of international law. Likewise, the research methods used in future studies will more accurately with

quantitative methods so that the results can support exploratory International policy.

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