



## ATTITUDES AND STRENGTHS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDONESIA IN RESOLVING THE NATUNA SEA CONFLICT: ANALYSIS OF INDONESIA-CHINA INTERDEPENDENCE RELATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the relationship between Indonesia and China independence in resolving the Natuna Sea conflict. This study uses the library study method obtained from various sources of scientific journals, books, and other news as research support. As for this research, it is known that Interdependence theory sees how peace can be achieved with a relationship of interdependence. The relationship between Indonesia and China is achieved by having a common vision between the two, so that Indonesia and China have collaborated a lot in many sectors. This cooperative relationship did not prevent the two from conflict, as evidenced by China's claim to the Natuna Sea, which is Indonesia's exclusive economic zone. Indonesia's cooperative relationship with Chinese influences Indonesia's foreign policy towards China. This can be seen from its pragmatic policies so that there are no effective results in resolving the Natuna Sea conflict.

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### INTRODUCTION

Cooperation between countries is one of the strategies of a country in achieving its interests. This cooperative relationship is based on the same strategic goals between countries, thus encouraging a deep reciprocal relationship between the two, (Goldstein & Freeman, 1990). The liberal school of thought in international relations, with its theory of interdependence, views that the existence of economic interdependence between countries will create peace. This assumption is based on the consideration of opportunity cost, where when a country is in a condition of interdependence with the benefits and benefits obtained, the country tends to avoid conflict and war. Anas in Goldstein & Freeman, (1990) explains that interdependence is a reciprocal relationship or

a relationship of interdependence between one another in international relations.

The cooperative relationship between Indonesia and China is based on a common vision in achieving national interests between the two, (Pattiradjawane, 2016). China, which focuses on economic development, with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) program has a correlation with Indonesia's vision as the World Maritime Axis (PMD), so that the two synergize with each other by forming cooperation. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which was inaugurated in 2010, was the beginning of an increase in Indonesia-China relations in terms of trade and investment. This can be seen from the data reported from the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM) where Chinese investment is increasing every year, by occupying the second position as a foreign investor in Indonesia in 2021. In

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addition, China is also Indonesia's largest trading partner, with the increase in Indonesia's trade value with China which reached more than 100 billion USD with an increase of 27.5% from the previous period in 2021.

This interdependence relationship does not create an ideal pattern for the Indonesian state, as evidenced by the claims made by China on the Natuna Sea in Indonesia, (Anggraini et al., 2019). It started with China's request that asked Indonesia to stop exploiting natural resources such as oil and natural gas drilling activities in the maritime area of the Natuna Sea. The tip of the South China Sea was renamed the South Natuna Sea and became an exclusive economic zone area belonging to the sovereignty of the State of Indonesia under the UN Convention on the law of the sea. China's claims are based on its history, which is known as the nine-dash line, which covers other ASEAN regions, (Gao & Jia, 2013). According to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 conducted in The Hague, the claim is not actually based on law.

The existence of a relationship of mutual dependence between Indonesia and China creates different attitudes in the two countries. If based on the argument of interdependence theory, then the assumption is that the two countries will not trigger conflict and will not create domination between the two over one another. However, China's claim to the Natuna Sea and Indonesia's attitude in responding to the conflict, as a sovereign country and the owner of rights over the Natuna Sea, is the starting point of the problem, whether this interdependence relationship makes Indonesia's strength as a sovereign country increase or is it more passive in responding to conflict with China, (Hong, 2013).

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

The method used is to use qualitative research methods, using literature study techniques, namely by reading and analyzing various books, journals, and scientific writings related to the research theme, as well as supporting data from internet media and print media, (Allen, 2017). By using literature study techniques, researchers can collect secondary

data, namely by studying literature on the dynamics of Indonesia-China relations in the Natuna Sea Conflict. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique uses the data triangulation method.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Interdependence

According to Goldstein & Freeman, (1990) in his book "Theory of International Relations, Classical Perspectives" that this type of liberalism stems from a belief that interdependence is the original nature of human existence and part of a collective where humans are part of that collective community, (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). In this case humans and governments are basically interdependent and they are affected by phenomena elsewhere that have been experienced by other humans and governments.

It is the basic logic of thinking that depends on dependence that will become the impetus to develop, especially in the economic sector, this form of interdependent liberalism. Prosperity and progress progress as classical liberalists say is the end to be achieved together on the basis of mutual need. Related to this, such as the way activities aimed at gaining profit are usually seen as more cultured and profitable than using violent means in the way of achieving progress. In such case this form is also commonly called commercial liberal with main thesis. Economic interdependence is an incentive aimed at peace and cooperation (commercial/interdependence liberalism thesis), (Copeland, 2003).

Interdependence is part of a functional form of economic cooperation, as well as a driving force in the development of forms of cooperation aimed at specific areas, by increasingly collaborating with other parties such as the European Union. In the international ranking, it is this interdependence situation that ultimately creates an international community filled with a variety of mutually beneficial interests. According to Goldstein & Freeman, (1990) it is described as 'complex interdependence'. Linkages between countries are no longer just relations between state leaders, but include various actors at several levels with various

interests. Beyond that, transnational relations between individuals and between groups are also increasing, (London & Hart, 2004).

External openness is one of the key forms that embodies relationships in a complex world (Schneider, 2014: 173). The state is an institution that is fully responsible for the needs of other multi-actors. This is what has often been shown in European Union society in recent decades.

### National Interest

According to Genandra Aji Perkasa (6-7) that the national interest is the state's attempt to pursue power. In this case power is everything that can develop and maintain control of a country over other countries. This linkage of power or control can be through coercion or cooperation. In this case, national power and interests can be said to be a place and at the same time the goal of a country's actions for survival in international politics (Goldstein & Freeman, 1990). National interests in the relationship between the two countries that carry out various collaborations then give birth to the interests of their respective countries, where the concept of national interests is very important in international relations.

National interest arises because of the needs of a country, this interest can be seen from its internal phenomena, both from the political, economic, military, and socio-cultural situation, (Azar & Moon, 1986). This interest is based on a 'power' that wants to be born so that the state can give direct influence to the country's considerations to gain world recognition. The role of a country in providing material on the basis of national interests that cannot be avoided will become the eyes of the international community as a country that makes relations attached to its foreign policy. In this case, conceptually, national interests are used to explain the foreign policy behavior of a country (Goldstein & Freeman, 1990).

### Power of State Actors in International Relations

According to Azar & Moon, (1986) in his book "state power" that there is a process of international relations, there is the term actor in acting. Actors here can be interpreted as objects that interact in the process of

international relations. Until now, there are four actors in international relations, including state actors, global actors, non-state actors and local actors. State actors are individuals or groups who act as representatives of a sovereign state. Then non-state actors, where these actors are individuals or groups that stand alone, without being related to the state. The three global actors, which consist of individuals or groups that have influence in the global sphere, (Söderbaum et al., 2005). The four local actors, who have influence in the local scope.

Each of these actors has its own role in the process of international relations. The state, which is one of the actors, has an important role in the process of international relations, because the state is an actor that has legitimacy over territorial power. In addition, state actors in the international order such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) have the right to vote and vote where this can influence global politics. Aimed at that, the power possessed by a country can determine the development of the world order in the future.

The state order in the world, in principle, must have national interests attached to it since the country was born. In managing the existence of the state, it requires the ability to manage the resources it has, (Held, 1991). In addition to domestic factors, external factors are needed, namely international conditions, both from the system structure and from individuals. These two things are the basic foundations that must be considered by every country. In getting this, it is necessary for a government to have the power to run the system order in the country. The power possessed must be useful in gaining the trust of the international community as a partner in the world system order.

Referring to the word power, is a definition that is difficult to explain fundamentally because it has a very broad meaning. This definition is acceptable to everyone using the word because the choice of definition reflects their interests and values. Some figures define power as the ability to make or resist change. Others say it is the ability to get what one wants. This general

definition includes power over nature and over other people. What makes sense is that power is the capacity to do various things and socially where circumstances influence other people to get the results we want. Rationally, power is something that is used in advancing the interests of an actor.

There are several strategies in using power, namely first, A uses threats or rewards to change B's behavior towards B's initial preferences and strategies. B knows this to feel the effect of A's strength. Second, in controlling A's actions, namely by limiting B's choice of strategy. B may know but also cannot know this and is wary of the threat of A's strength. Third, A drives to give birth and shape B's beliefs, perceptions, and preferences which become the basis. B may not know this but it is also possible for B to realize the effects of A's powers.

In the present era, where the interrelationships are multipolar, power is something that is being contested by countries in the world. The linkages in international relations that lead to maps of political power in national interests, the world order pivots to a multipolar period in which every country has equal opportunities depending on how to utilize the capabilities it has. Thus this leads to the strength of each country as time goes by more equal. The strength of power at this time is the key that distinguishes each country to fight against each other in meeting national needs. Since the end of World War II, there have been 3 periods of the world power map namely, first the Bipolar World in 1945-1989, the rivalry that occurred between the Soviet Union (Communist Ideology) and America (Capitalist Ideology). Second, 1991-2000 A new period in which only one super country remained after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Third, the 2000-present change of order in which a new power emerged that could rival America's power.

In order to gain power in its existence, the state must be able to correlate several important aspects which include hard power and soft power capabilities. In his explanation, hard power is the ability of a country to use sanctions or rewards (carrot and stick) by involving military and economic power in order to make other parties do what is needed.

Hard power is related to coercion, is aggressive and has a direct effect. Meanwhile, soft power is the ability of a country to invite or attract other countries to adopt its goals and interests. The combined form of these two powers can be said to be smart power and is something that is owned by countries in the world to be able to exist in facing future security challenges.

### Cooperation between Indonesia and China

The cooperative relationship between Indonesia and China is influenced by both external and internal factors. The first external factor is China's strengthening in the economic field, which has made China a global economic power. China's entry into the modernity of the market economy brought about major changes in its national economic structure. Before the implementation of the open economy program, China's export trade only reached 0.7 of the total calculated data or 12 percent of GDP, (Lestari et al., 2022).

This then underwent a change, where China became one of the countries with the most open economies in the world, as seen by the decrease in average import tariffs from 23.7 percent to 5.7 percent. The next external factor is the formation of the vision of the One Belt One Road Initiative, as China's continued effort to develop its economy. The internal factor is Indonesia's need for infrastructure development. the Jokowi government focuses on infrastructure development, so the funds needed to realize this are very large, reaching 4,700 trillion Rupiah. Indonesia cannot fully meet this funding, therefore foreign investment is needed to meet the shortage of funds.

The One Belt One Road Initiative program is an opportunity for Indonesia to become a destination country for Chinese investment. Indonesia is a strategic destination for China in the success of the One Belt One Road Initiative program, because Indonesia will become a supporting bridge in Southeast Asia. Indonesia has the potential to benefit from China's One Belt and One Road Initiative which is currently intensively building good relations with its neighbors in Southeast Asia amid the country's infrastructure boost in the maritime sector. China is also said to be interested in investing

in the development of international ports and industrial areas in Indonesia under the New Maritime Silk Road policy which is included in the Belt and Road Initiative strategy.

Most of the Belt and Road Initiative programs in Indonesia are usually through funding or long-term loans with low interest rates from Chinese banks and there is also a role for Chinese companies in several projects. External and internal factors make the relationship between Indonesia and China even closer, so that this closeness influences the Indonesian government's foreign policy, especially with China.

### **The Natuna Sea conflict between Indonesia and China**

The Natuna Sea is a new dynamic in relations between Indonesia and China, considering that the Natuna Sea is directly adjacent to the South China Sea, which currently has overlapping waters. Indonesia basically has no claims over the South China Sea (Non Claimant State), but the Natuna waters which are north of Indonesia's Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) are claimed by China on the grounds that the Natuna Sea is included in the nine-dash line zone. This was the beginning of problems between Indonesia and China. China's claim was then followed by several actions in the Natuna Sea, ([Darmayadi & Purnamasari, 2022](#)).

There have been several incidents where Chinese ships entered the Natuna Sea, one of which occurred on May 5, 2010 when Chinese fishing boats entered Indonesia's EEZ to steal fish. The second incident occurred on June 22, 2010, when Chinese ships illegally entered the Natuna Sea again. The third incident occurred on 26 March 2013 when Chinese fishermen who were carrying out illegal fishing were caught by the Indonesian military. There were several fully armed Chinese coast guard officers intervening by asking the Indonesian side to release the Chinese ships. The next incident occurred on November 22 2015 where illegal Chinese fishing vessels were seen entering Natuna waters. Then the incident continued to repeat itself in subsequent years.

China's increasingly massive attitude in the Natuna Sea conflict is a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna Sea.

Therefore, there is a need for firm action from the Indonesian government towards China, so that there are no more Chinese actions in the Natuna Sea that threaten sovereignty. The Indonesian government has provided many responses to the Natuna conflict. One of them was President Jokowi who held a meeting at KRI Imam Bonjol-383 in 2016, which was a symbol of rejection or resistance to Chinese actions which were considered to threaten sovereignty in the Natuna Sea. Then the next action is to make diplomatic efforts.

The Indonesian government has issued several protest notes to China, three times in 2016, 2019 and 2020 to be precise. In its protest notes, Indonesia firmly rejects China's claims over the Natuna Sea, which it considers to have no legal basis. The next effort is the release of a new map of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, in which there is a change in the name of the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea. Finally, Indonesia implemented a sustainable objection strategy, to be precise on May 26, 2020, by sending a protest note to the United Nations over China's claims over the Natuna Sea. By sending a note verbale to the UN Secretary General, it is emphasized that Indonesia is not a party to the dispute in the South China Sea and Indonesia also rejects China's nine dash line claims which have no legal basis.

Various efforts have been made by the Government of Indonesia to defend its sovereign rights in the Natuna Sea, but this has not had any influence or changed China's attitude in the Natuna Sea Conflict. This can be seen when the protest note was filed, the Chinese side denied it and gave a statement that they have historical rights and have sovereignty over the Natuna Sea. Then there were still actions from China in the Natuna Sea, Chinese ships still frequently entered the Natuna Sea area. One of them occurred on September 8, 2022, where a Chinese sea guard ship not only crossed the Natuna Sea, but carried out acts of intimidation against Indonesian fishermen who were at sea ([CNBC Indonesia, 2021](#)). China's attitude which does not show any change, shows that the efforts that have been made by the Indonesian government in dealing with the Natuna conflict have not had an effective impact.

The influence of this cooperative relationship, especially in the field of investment, has occurred before in countries in Southeast Asia. China's approach by using investment instruments is effective enough to influence its rivals, (Christensen, 2015). One of them is the change in the attitude of the Philippines after an agreement was made on 30 cooperation projects worth Rp. 494 trillion. Initially, the attitude of the Philippines strongly disagreed with and opposed China's claims in the South China Sea. The Philippines' efforts at that time brought the South China Sea claim issue to the Arbitration Court in The Hague which then won the Philippines' claim. The Philippines' attitude then softened after the signing of a joint project carried out during the era of President Rodrigo Duterte. In this case the pattern that occurs in Indonesia is indeed different. Indonesia is not yielding to China over the Natuna Sea conflict. However, Indonesia's foreign policies tend to be pragmatic.

## CONCLUSION

Relations between Indonesia and China continue to progress, as seen by the increasing cooperation between the two in many sectors. China has approached countries in ASEAN, one of which is Indonesia, to support the success of its economic development. The One Belt One Road Initiative program, which has a correlation with President Jokowi's vision which focuses on the maritime sector, is the basis for cooperation between Indonesia and China. This cooperative relationship was accompanied by a conflict between the two countries in the Natuna Sea.

China claims the Natuna Sea as the nine dash line, which is officially the Natuna Sea is Indonesia's Economic Exclusive Zone. There have been many efforts made by the Indonesian government as a response to China's stance on the Natuna Sea. However, until now China is still carrying out activities that have the potential to disrupt Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna Sea. Indonesia's cooperative relationship with China influences Indonesia's foreign policies towards China. It can be seen from the policies of the Government of Indonesia which tend to

be pragmatic in addressing sovereignty conflicts.

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### Author declaration

### Author contributions and responsibilities

The authors made major contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### Availability of data and materials

All data is available from the author.

### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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