

REVIEW OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Indonesia's Strategic Environment: Competition over Cooperation

Alexandra Retno Wulan

Introduction

Dynamics of International Relations in the third quarter of 2013 showcase two traditional patterns between competition and cooperation. This article depicts several events within the scope of international relations during the period of June-September 2013. Such events evidently illustrate Indonesia's strategic environment, in the regional and international level, still corresponds to the patterns of competition which can lead to conflict, and patterns of cooperation that can build peace.

There were at least three events in international affairs on the third quarter of 2013, which bring quite significant impacts on Indonesia. First, in the region of Southeast Asia, the Summit of ASEAN Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Bandar Seri Begawan. The second event was in the region of Middle East, especially the crises in Egypt and Syria, which create significant global impacts. The third event was the meeting between two major power leaders, the United States and China.

Alexandra Retno Wulan is a researcher in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

The Summit of ASEAN Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2013: Collective Effort through Regular Meetings

The regular Summit of ASEAN Ministers of Foreign Affairs was conducted on 23 June to 2 July 2013. The Summit is a series of meetings, which consist of ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, ASEAN Regional Forum, and Summit of East Asian Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

There were at least several crucial issues in the region that emerged as the agenda of this Summit, the issue of haze due to forest fires in Southeast Asia, the continuity of Treaty of South East Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ), and the crisis in the Korean peninsula. Several countries have also tried to bring up the issue of disputes in the South China Sea, which escalated significantly during the year of 2012 to early 2013.

On the issue of haze as a result of forest fires, several countries in Southeast Asia urged Indonesia to immediately ratify and implement the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (ATHP), which have been open to ratification since 2002. The treaty normatively aims to stop transboundary haze pollutions. In essence, the treaty stipulates the effort to monitor, assess, prevent, and prepare the signatories in dealing with haze pollution caused by forest fires and environmental degradation.¹ The treaty also requires the formation of ASEAN coordination center to control transboundary haze and a competent national monitoring authority in each country.

Moreover, the treaty also stipulates cooperation on a technical level regarding country preparation. It also accommodates the importance of scientific research on haze pollution as an instrument of preparation and cooperation. The treaty mandates the allocation of a special fund for the needs of ASEAN in dealing with transboundary haze. In the second meeting (COP II) in 2007, ASEAN countries agreed to pool funds as much as US\$ 500,000 as a modality to implement the creation of an ASEAN centre in dealing with transboundary haze in Southeast Asia.²

¹ "ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution," http://haze.asean.org/?wpfb_dl=32

² The agreement is the result of ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on transboundary haze in Bandar Seri Begawa. See "US\$500,000 Kicks off Asean Fund to Combat Haze," *The Brunei Times*, 3 March 2007.

The ATHP Treaty, which in essence emphasizes on the effort of preventing and monitoring transboundary haze pollution, may generate various political consequences, especially for Indonesia. ATHP also has the potential to reduce Indonesia's economic growth which primarily still relies on industries that require land opening in Sumatera and Borneo. In a long run, Indonesia can experience negative economic impacts from the ratification of ATHP.

Traditionally, forest fires was seen as a form of natural disaster, yet since the late 90s, scientific analysis conducted by several parties have indicated that forest fire disaster has been worsened by land opening activities for palm oil plantations through land burning, so that forest fires became uncontrollable.

At least several companies from Singapore and Malaysia were suspected to be involved in carrying out this forest burning method. The first company is Sime Darby Plantation. The plantation is part of the Sime Darby Conglomeration with workers estimated around 100.000 in more 20 countries with a company turnover reaching RM 56,7 billion or around IDR 176.624.336.020.325,7.³ Other companies are Kuala Lumpur Kepong (KLK), PT. Multi Gambut Industri which is a subsidiary of Lembaga Tabung Haji Malaysia and two Singaporean companies, Wilmar International Ltd and Cargil Inc⁴. KLK becomes a huge company due to palm oil, natural resources industry, and property. Based on an estimation, KLK has a market capitalization reaching approximately RM 22,5 billion or around IDR 70 trillion.⁵

Minister of Foreign Affaris Marty Natalegawa, under the pressures of neighbouring countries, stated that there should be no blaming game on this transboundary haze pollution problems, yet Minister Natalegawa stressed that Indonesia's main priority and focus should remain in fighting forest fire incidents⁶. Minister Natalegawa also stressed that there have been communications and exchange of information between

³ "3 Perusahaan Malaysia Diduga Pembakar Hutan Sumatera," *Okezone*, 26 June 2013, <http://news.okezone.com/read/2013/06/26/411/827668/3-perusahaan-malaysia-diduga-pembakar-hutan-sumatera>

⁴ "Ini Perusahaan yang Diduga Bakar Hutan Sumatera," *Okezone*, 20 June 2013, <http://international.okezone.com/read/2013/06/20/411/825165/ini-perusahaan-yang-diduga-bakar-hutan-sumatera>

⁵ "3 Perusahaan Malaysia Diduga Pembakar Hutan Sumatera."

⁶ "RI Dodges haze blame game", *The Jakarta Post*, 20 June 2013.

Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as countries that significantly suffer from the problem of forest fires and haze pollution.

Indonesian Environment Minister Balthasar Kambuaya, in a meeting in Kuala Lumpur, stated that Indonesia has restarted the process of ATHP ratification and he is optimistically looking at the possibility that the ATHP can be ratified by the Indonesian parliament next year⁷. This statement was viewed as a positive step by the Indonesian government. However, ATHP can still potentially contribute in generating negative effects for Indonesia, especially in political sphere since ATHP might open the possibility of another country meddling in Indonesian domestic policy in the context of preventing transboundary haze pollution. Yet, losses from haze pollution cannot be neglected either, for Indonesia and neighbouring countries. Singapore claimed that it experienced an increase in air pollution index to 400 and an economic loss approximately \$100 per week during the haze disaster in 2013⁸. Though no official figures exist, Indonesia also experienced losses especially for citizens living within vicinity of the forest fire area and other economic loss caused by fires and haze.

Given the complexity and sensitive nature of the problem, the most ideal approach to deal with the issue of haze pollutions should no longer focus on pressuring Indonesia to ratify ATHP, but also on regional effort of disaster management. At least, if a forest fire disaster occurred, it can be dealt promptly, in a shorter period of time through regional disaster management mechanisms before Indonesia ratifies the ATHP. Hence, the forest fire will not endure and the negative effects and losses can be minimised.

Another discussion in the Summit of ASEAN Ministers of Foreign Affairs is on the South China Sea dispute. Philippines Minister of Foreign Affairs, Albert del Rosario brought up the issue of South China Sea in the regular meeting at Bandar Seri Begawan. Minister del Rosario stressed the concern of the Philippines over the increasing Chinese military activities in the disputed area of South China Sea.

⁷ "Indonesia akan Ratifikasi Perjanjian Asap Regional," BBC, 17 July 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2013/07/130717_indonesia_asap.shtml

⁸ Jonatan A. Lassa, "Governing the Risk of Haze and ASEAN Diplomacy," *The Malaysian Insider*, 30 June 2013, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/governing-the-risk-of-haze-and-asean-diplomacy-jonatan-a-lassa>

During the meeting, all ten ASEAN countries tried to convince China to start the discussion process on the Code of Conduct (COC), which if comes into force can be legally binding. ASEAN countries hoped that the discussion process on the COC can be started in this year, even though Minister Natalegawa were convinced that the discussion process on the COC would not be easy because no country in the region were willing to risk the peace and stability which has been achieved so far⁹. Under such consideration, it is clear that China is still cautious and even hesitant in continuing the discussion on COC with ten ASEAN members. Nevertheless, China proposed the formation of Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to discuss COC further. The proposal can be perceived positively as an engagement by China on this process. However, other might perceive that EPG is just another China's strategy to delay the formal negotiation.

Other issues in the region of Southeast Asia and East Asia are the preparation of Myanmar to be the chairman of ASEAN on 2014 and the issue of North Korea nuclear programme. If the preparation of Myanmar to be the chairman of ASEAN on 2014 has been appreciated by many parties, the development in North Korea—especially regarding the indication of the possible reactivation of North Korean nuclear weapons—has demonstrated a significant decrease of regional stability and security.

In the context of Myanmar's preparation to be the chairman of ASEAN on 2014, Myanmar stressed that it will focus on three aspects in the substantive manner. The three aspects are (1) building a people-centred ASEAN, (2) human trafficking issues, and (3) discussion on migrant workers¹⁰. The infrastructure development in Myanmar is also increasing further as part of its preparation to be the chairman of ASEAN on 2014. Yet many parties still doubt the capacity, not only the inability of Myanmar to organise various meetings when it takes the role as the chairman of ASEAN on 2014, but also whether Myanmar can ensure strategic and sensitive issues such as the South China Sea dispute remain on the agenda of discussion, considering that Myan-

⁹ "Filipina Kembali Serang China: Indonesia Didesak Segera Ratifikasi Traktat Polusi Lintas Negara", *KOMPAS*, 1 July 2013.

¹⁰ The Jakarta Post, "Myanmar assures its ready to host ASEAN 2014", print edition, June 17, 2013.

mar has been quite close and dependent on China. Hence, the issue of independence of ASEAN chairmanship is also significant.

In the context of North Korea nuclear issue, 27 Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) have agreed to persuade North Korea to start denuclearization process. Yet within the ARF forum which is now the only forum for dialogue on regional security participated by North Korea—especially after the Six Party Talks were suspended in 2009, North Korea again stressed that it would maintain its nuclear weapons program until the United States of America lessened its hostile posture against North Korea that complicate North Korea's situation. Furthermore, North Korea also requires the U.S. to revitalise its relations with North Korea and providing more aid. In this forum, China, which is believed to have been supporting the North Korean government's policy so far, seemed to indicate its support for regional pressure on the denuclearization process of North Korea. The emergence of China as a new power in the region, requires a greater role of China to maintain stability and security in the region for China's interest in the future.

The Crisis in Egypt and Syria: Challenges of Arab Spring

A series of political transitions since 2011 known as the Arab Spring continues to today. The political transition in Egypt trickled down after Hosni Mubarak was ousted by the Egyptian military. However, it still experienced another escalation of crisis in 2013.

Mohammad Mursi, who is supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected to replace Mubarak as the president of Egypt. Nevertheless, politics in Egypt is still polarized and President Mursi's policies that grant special rights and privileges to his Muslim Brotherhood's members create another political friction in Egypt. Mursi was viewed as a president who discriminates and he is not representing the voice of Egyptian people who fought in Tahrir Square and successfully toppled Mubarak¹¹. Such condition lured the Egyptian military, which traditionally dominates the Egyptian political life to act and "correcting" the political dynamics under Mursi. General Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi as the

¹¹ Frida Ghitis, "How to Rescue the Arab Spring," CNN, 30 July 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/30/opinion/ghitis-egypt-arab-spring/index.html>

head of the Egyptian military unilaterally gave an ultimatum to Mursi and then forcefully ousted him on 3 July 2013¹².

Since President Mursi was an ouster and imprisoned by the Egyptian military, his supporters from the Muslim Brotherhood started a demonstration in Tahrir Square. The Egyptian political discord has been escalating, especially between supporters and opponents of President Mursi. The two blocks were attacking each other and several were wounded or even killed¹³.

Even though the Muslim Brotherhood for the 15 months of President Mursi's rule dominated other groups in Egypt—even implemented policies that discriminated against other groups, especially non-Muslim Brotherhood Islamic and Christian Coptic groups, supporters of President Mursi stated that the action by the Egyptian military under General Al-Sisi violated the principle of democracy. The supporter argued that Mursi was the elected president and he was elected by the people through voting mechanism based on democratic principles.¹⁴

The international community seems to experience difficulties in formulating a stance towards the political developments in Egypt. U.S. President, Barack Obama, decided to postpone (without cancelling) several military aid, including joint-military training between the U.S. and Egypt and the delivery postponement of F-16 airplanes from the U.S. to Egypt¹⁵. Even so, the U.S. stance is still judged as not decisive enough towards the violation of democracy conducted by the Egyptian military. One of the reasons that the U.S. act hesitantly towards the Egyptian military is because the U.S. needed Egypt regarding the discretion of air space, especially because the U.S. military airplanes need to fly through Egyptian airspace during their moves to Afghanistan and other territories in the region. Moreover, Egypt is a strategic location for the U.S. warships that pass through the Suez Canal to the Persian Gulf. The deterioration of U.S. relations with Egypt can result

¹² "Egypt's Bruised Brotherhood Fails to Show Street Power," *Reuters*, 23 August 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/23/us-egypt-protests-idUSBRE97M0DW20130823>

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "Mohamed Morsi Ousted in Egypt's Second Revolution in Two Years," *The Guardian*, 4 July 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/03/mohamed-morsi-egypt-second-revolution>

¹⁵ "The Factors Behind Obama's Hands-off Approach to Egypt," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-us-egypt-20130823,0,4353000.story>

in negative consequences for the U.S. efforts to increase surveillance in the territories of Libya and Israel which is a need for the U.S. to prevent terrorism and weapon smuggling¹⁶. Because of this strategic value of Egypt to the U.S., the Obama administration can only urge the military to re-install democracy back into the political and civic life in Egypt as soon as possible. The latest developments in Egypt include the release of Mubarak and at the moment, several officials during the Mubarak era are re-installed to the government set up by General Al-Sisi.

Conditions in Syria have not improved either. The regime of Bashar al-Assad has openly oppressed the groups seeking regime change in Syria, which move simultaneously with the regional political transitions during the Arab Spring. President Bashar al-Assad has been the president of Syria, replacing his late father, Hafiz al-Assad. The al-Assad family has been leading Syria for almost 40 years. The government of al-Assad has responded to calls for regime change, triggered by similar phenomena in other countries in the region, with violence. The al-Assad regime allegedly conducts arrests and even assassinations of activists involved in the movement for change¹⁷.

On 21 August 2013, it was indicated that the al-Assad regime used chemical weapons against its civilian populations as an effort to defend power and block the movement for regime change in Syria¹⁸. So far, the international community seemed to tolerate the political crisis leading to civil war in Syria, which has resulted in loss of lives and floods of refugees in neighbouring countries. Even though some countries managed to produce a resolution to intervene through the United Nations, Russia and China explicitly executed their veto rights so that no international agreement to intervene was reached. Yet, the indication of the use of chemical weapons seemed to change this.

The U.S. is one of the countries that issued the option of military intervention in Syria after there was indication that the al-Assad regime used chemical weapons to its own people, especially after the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Key Questions on the Conflict in Syria," *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/28/world/middleeast/the-conflict-in-syria.html?_r=0

¹⁸ "Blasts in the Night, a Smell, and a Flood of Syrian Victims," *The New York Times*, 26 August 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/27/world/middleeast/blasts-in-the-night-a-smell-and-a-flood-of-syrian-victims.html>

attack on 21 August 2013. President Obama, however, did not rush to the decision and has not even request to permission of U.S. Congress for approval, even President Obama seems undecided and cautious in proceeding with the plan of military intervention. Before the process of military intervention is finalised and implemented, other countries also have doubts in supporting the U.S. plan.

Russian president, Vladimir Putin, who has opposed the use of military intervention in Syria, proposed an alternative policy for the international community before the U.S. finalizes its intervention plan. President Putin, who has a long history of alliance with President al-Assad, wrote an article on the U.S. newspaper, *the New York Times*¹⁹, that the U.S. military attack on Syria will result in potential terrorist strikes against the U.S. and therefore, has to be avoided. Furthermore, President Putin also offered the option that the international community can persuade the Syrian government under President al-Assad to report and hand over their chemical weapons to the international community, so it is assured that these weapons are not used in Syria. President Putin's proposal was greeted positively by President al-Assad and has temporarily halted the implementation of option of military intervention towards Syria. Yet, President Putin's challenge in the international level is on ensuring Syria's goodwill and faithful to the proposal. Putin has to ensure that President al-Assad does not move the facility to store and develop chemical weapons to other locations before the facilities can be monitored by the international community²⁰ and the international community can ensure that chemical weapons are not used by neither side in Syria or in other parts of the world.

The Meeting of President Barack Obama and President Xi Jin Ping: The Meeting of Two Global Giants

One of the events viewed crucial in international affairs is the first informal summer meeting between the U.S. President, Barack Obama,

¹⁹ Vladimir V. Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," *The New York Times*, 11 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?hp&r=1&>

²⁰ "Kerry Insists that Syria Quickly Give Data on Arms," *The New York Times*, 12 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/13/world/middleeast/united-states-and-russia-far-apart-as-kerry-arrives-in-geneva-for-syria-talks.html?pagewanted=2&r=0&ref=syria>

with the President of China, Xi Jin Ping. The meeting is viewed crucially, especially since both U.S. and China are the two major powers in international relations. Moreover, the meeting is crucial since it was President Xi's first meeting since elected as the President of People's Republic of China replacing President Hu Jin Tao in the beginning of March 2013 and President Obama also has just been re-elected as the U.S. president in the end of 2012.

As the first diplomatic manoeuvre between two leaders of the most powerful global powers at the moment, the U.S. and China projected a positive hope on how huge the scope for cooperation between the two in the future, compared to competition. Yet, the informal meeting did not produce any binding agreement. Several main agenda discussed in this informal meeting were covered the issues of stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region with the nuclear threat from North Korea, cyber-espionage, and the issue of climate change²¹.

The meeting, which lasted for two days in June 2013, did not result in any official agreement. Yet, both leaders claimed that consensus and common understanding were built between the two on several issues. First, in the context of climate change, the meeting discussed the fact that both countries are the largest contributors to global warming through greenhouse effects. Thus, through this talk, both countries built a common perspective that both must reduce hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) gas pollution from refrigerators and air conditioners²². In the previous period, China's position on the issue of carbon reduction was dominated by rejection since it can negatively affect Chinese economic growth. While the U.S. position was waiting on China, which means that U.S. will only reduce its carbon emission if China is willing to do the same.

Second, in the context of stability and security that is potentially disrupted if North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, both countries have also succeeded in building a consensus. China has indicated on

²¹ "U.S. and China Move Closer to North Korea, but Not on Cyberspionage," *The New York Times*, 8 June 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/world/asia/obama-and-xi-try-building-a-new-model-for-china-us-ties.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

²² "US-China Summit Ends with Accord on All but Cyber-Espionage," *The Guardian*, 10 June 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/us-china-summit-barack-obama-xi-jinping>

its rejection to nuclear proliferation. Based on this consensus, both countries stated the willingness and commitment of both to return to the regional mechanism that can bring back stability and security in the region.²³

Another agenda discussed in the meeting but failed to reach a consensus was the issue of cyber-espionage. Both leaders understood that technological development could lead to intelligence activities in cyber space. Even though the U.S. has indicated its disapproval on the violations allegedly conducted by China, at the same time the U.S. has also launched a project by NASA that could potentially violate China's state security. In this talk, President Obama explained that the U.S. disapproval on the case of cyber-espionage against China was in the development of violations including intellectual property rights and the potential disruptions on the U.S. economy. On the other hand, President Xi regretted the asymmetrical media reporting in the U.S. on the cyber-espionage cases allegedly conducted by the U.S. towards China.

We can conclude from the informal meeting that both leaders have strived to open a channel of communication and build trust between one another. Even though this forum can be used to project that both leaders remain confident and try to maximize their own national interest, the indication on a more constructive—as opposed to confrontational—relationship between the U.S. and China in the future is clear.

Conclusion

Traditionally, patterns that are derivative of international relations in bilateral, regional, or global levels are competition or cooperation. Based on the explanation from events taking place on the third quarter of 2013, pattern of competition still dominates the international relations sphere. However, several attempts to increase cooperation still take place, even though they seem like mere regularities with no significant outcome like the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

In general, patterns of competition tend to perpetuate a world that is less stable in security and patterns of cooperation tend to perpetuate a world that is more peaceful. Based on such consideration, it is advis-

²³ Ibid.

able from Indonesia to prepare for the possibility of a world that is less stable in security while at the same time try as hard as it can to build a more peaceful world.

** Translated from the Indonesian language by Rocky Intan.*