

One Belt One Road and Global Maritime Fulcrum: Between Contradictions and Harmony

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Abstract

A story of connectivity, part of the international diplomatic arena with routes, hubs, and corridors has been set as the mantra of the Belt and the Road of China. In 2013, when China's paramount leader, Mr. Xi took a visit in mostly Central Asia and Southeast Asia, he initiatively proposed to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is then being abbreviated as OBOR (One Belt One Road) which represents China's audacious vision to transform political region in Europe, Africa, and Asia for decades to come. The initiative absolutely calls for a greater integration of those regions into a cohesive economic area through building infrastructure, increasing cultural exchanges, and broadening trade. This centerpiece of Mr. Xi's foreign policy has been categorized as the most important feature of the country to show its charm in offering a deeper connection and a bundle of developmental pledges towards all neighboring countries. Indonesia, the south neighboring country of China, is also included in the orbit of convergence with Jokowi's vision and foreign politics strategies 'to be a global maritime fulcrum.' Both are in attempt to reinvigorate what each apprehends as their previous maritime glory. However, there are several limits of cooperation between the two sides, in particular the territorial issue in the South China Sea. Confrontations in fishing and coast guard ships, including a domineering manner of China's foreign conduct are the current impediments to advance cooperation. Yet, it is evident that Indonesia will need Chinese investments in order to realize the Global Maritime Fulcrum. All in all, this research aims to analyze the concept of connectivity between two sides as well as to explore on how Indonesia and China could maintain their partnership to achieve each specific national goals without stepping on each other's toes.

Keywords: maritime, silk road, OBOR, strategic vision, south china sea, trade

Introduction

In September 2013, Mr. Xi visited Kazakhstan to champion the initiative of jointly establishing Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, popularly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR). One month later, Mr. Xi came to Indonesia Parliament House and delivered his speech about the paralleled idea of its Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision.



From the speech, we could infer that Mr. Xi emphasized Indonesia is playing significant role towards the realization of China's ambitious and gigantic foreign objectives. After has been put in the presidential office in 2012, the current General Secretary of the Communist Party of China began to transform a profound shifting in the nature of China's foreign policy. China's paramount leader's "Chinese dream" has been begun in the making a profound shift to the nature of Chinese foreign policy as it was reflected during a speech at a foreign affairs conference on 24 October 2013.¹ Mr. Xi's new version of China's foreign policy strategically known as "Fen Fa You Wei" (奋发有为, "striving for achievement"). It is finally replacing the long famous "Tao Guang Yang Hui" (韬光养晦, "hide capabilities and keep a low profile") which was formulated by Den Xiaoping in the early 1990s.² The new vibe of China's foreign policy drives for the importance of China's neighborhood policy, basically on how to implement good diplomatic relations for the sake of the obtainment of its 'centenary goals', including the realization of One Belt One Road initiative.

China has exactly been turning to outward investment to deal with the country's expansive nature of industrial capacity and excess of foreign exchange reserve garnered through a long period of astonishing economic growth. The current signature China's foreign and economic policy portrays a resemblance with the US Marshall Plan back in cold war era, OBOR initiative is startling. *The Belt* itself stands as a far-reaching network of overland road, interconnected rail routes, natural gas and oil pipelines, and other infrastructure projects running from Xi'an in central China, Central Asia, West & Southeast Asia and finally to Western Europe and Moscow.³

¹ Camilla T. N. Sørensen, "The Significance of Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" for Chinese Foreign Policy: From "Tao Guang Yang Hui" to "Fen Fa You Wei", JCIR: VOL. 3, No. 1 (2015)

² Ibid

³ The State Council The People's Republic of China, "Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative", http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm, accessed on April 11, 2017



The Road encompasses China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route. The land will focus on jointly building a new Eurasian Land Bridge channeling the Indochina Peninsula economic corridors by relying on core cities along the OBOR initiative. Meanwhile at sea, China emphasizes on concurrently building uninterrupted and efficient transport routes connecting major sea ports along countries within OBOR initiative. Chinese top leaders moreover ensure OBOR is not confined by specific geographical factor, a specific historical circumstance or a specific economic situation, it will be open to the rest of the globe.

Like a re-awakening lion, China's visions are exceptional and influential under a leader who tries to show China's charm towards its neighboring states, including Indonesia, a contested or neutral country amidst the growing of rivalry between China-US. Jokowi too attempts to call the world's attention by emphasizing his thundering doctrine, Indonesia as Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF). The previous maritime glory from both of the countries are the basis for them in reviving and rebuilding respective greater and authentic identities. The Maritime Silk Road as embed in OBOR is rooted on the traditional sea routes taken by the Ming dynasty explorer Zheng He in the 15th century. On the other hand, Indonesian GMF is to awaken the traditional motto of *Jalesveva Jayamahe* (at sea we are victorious). There are five pillars within forming the foundations of GMF, consisting of: i) rebuilding Indonesia's maritime culture; ii) better management of Indonesia's maritime resources; iii) development of Indonesia's maritime infrastructure and connectivity; iv) intensifying Indonesia's maritime diplomacy and; v) strengthening Indonesia's maritime defense force. Based on the underlying principles, the GMF illustrates an inclination to domestic development rather than reiterating Indonesian maritime power to its neighboring states. The OBOR initiative compares to the GMF looks more like an engaging China's foreign policy tool and comprehends a globalized nature as it pledges to maintain and foster closer interactions with its neighbors in the hope of setting a Sino-centric international configuration. Suffice to say that the case of Indonesia's GMF, even though the maritime diplomacy is gradually entrenched in



Indonesia's foreign policy, but the main objectives are not actually to strengthen Indonesia's foreign relations.

Theoretical Frameworks

The analytical content on this writing will be based on the exploration of two school of thoughts.

First, in the pluralist school, especially Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye's have made contributions that were remarkable to the cultivation of the international relations theory. They established influential book 'Power and Interdependence' and further introduced the conception of 'complex interdependence'. The theorists recognize varied and complex transnational connections which simultaneously accounts the increasing amount of interdependencies between states and the societies. The states involved still use the military force and power balancing are decreasing but remain important.⁴ Thus, complex interdependence is characterized by three characteristics, involving first is the usage of multilayer channels of action between societies in interstate, trans governmental, and transnational relations, second is the absence of a hierarchy of issues with changing agendas and linkages between issues and third is finally because of the complex relations between states it brings about a decline in the use of coercive power in international relations.

Keohane and Nye illustrate that the decline of coercive power as a policy tool is because the intensity in economic and other forms of interdependence should increase the tendency of cooperation among states. Complex interdependence will help to explore the intense relation between Indonesia and China. Both of the countries are progressing in many sectors, hence simultaneously trying to reduce the power from each perspective. Even though in the reality, a domineering manner from one actor is inevitable. This is where complex interdependence also depicts the nature where one actor could be reliant to the other and the other also needs assistance from

⁴ The IR Theory Knowledge Base, "IR Paradigms, Approaches and Theories", <http://www.irtheyory.com/know.htm>, accessed on May 3, 2017



whom he interacts with. In this context we can perceive both actors, Indonesia and China are actually reliant to each other. Indonesia will need major investment and cooperation from China, simultaneously China will ask Indonesia to become the nexus of its vision One Belt One Road. In the relationship we could see there would be clash and unity from both perspectives, it could be said in another words a nature of competitive cooperation.

Body

After delving in the theoretical framework, this context will bring a closer look to the harmony of maritime agendas of China and Indonesia, which is connectivity. China's MSR seeks to connect the Mainland to Europe via the establishment of deep sea ports in mainly Central, Southeast Asia, and Africa. On the other side, Jokowi has planned to link the numerous islands that form the nation of Indonesia. If we take a closer look to Jakarta and Beijing relations after Mr. Xi came to Indonesia in 2013, seems that Jokowi was well-responding China's signal to bring a warmer ambiance of both relations. Jokowi of course will need many investment from China to build many projected giant infrastructures in Indonesia including 24 seaports and deep seaports that will connect north Sumatera, Jakarta, East Java, South Sulawesi, and Papua.⁵ China exactly can see the great potential of overlaps between Jokowi requests for more Indonesian ports and China's offer to build maritime infrastructures in Indonesia under the framework China's MSR. At the present time, China has been the enormous Indonesia's trading partner and to further co-finance many infrastructure projects, the country decided to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Against the backdrop of APEC in 2014, Mr. Xi and Jokowi through intense deliberations have come into conclusion to agree on enhancing partnership on the areas of maritime development and infrastructure. In the midst of

⁵ Fabian Januarius, "Tol Laut Jokowi-JK, 24 Deep Sea Port Akan Dibangun", <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/09/26/17055701/Tol.Laut.Jokowi-JK.24.Deep.Sea.Port.Akan.Dibangun>, accessed on April 11, 2017



2015, Indonesia finally has been approved on the membership within China-led AIIB and currently negotiating on the possibility of putting AIIB headquarter in Jakarta.⁶

As both of sides have been progressing on the closer interaction, in 2016 there happened a bilateral breach provoked by China linked vessels triggering Indonesia war on illegal fishing which not only impacts on Chinese fishing industry but also staining the future prospect of China's MSR in Indonesia. A Chinese fishing boat, the Kway Fey was arrested by Indonesian patrol boat for fishing illegally in near Natuna Island.⁷ The Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry has several times seized Chinese-linked vessels until sunk a Chinese fishing vessel since 2015.⁸ Indonesia has a clearly strenuous stance on China and its war on the illegal fishing shows no sign of abating due to the high loss of the country's revenue in the fishing industry, which up to US\$ 25 billion per year.⁹ Jakarta then unilaterally revoked a bilateral fishing cooperation agreement signed between two countries in 2013 for China has trespassed one of the key elements of Indonesia GMF vision which is to revitalize the domestic fishing industry and permitted Chinese fishermen an unfair advantage in Indonesian waters.¹⁰ Tension escalated when Beijing in its defense stressed that the area where China's vessel was caught, which is still in Indonesia's EEZ was part of its fishing region. This notorious claim was based on the nine-dash line or 'China's historical traditional fishing zones' which China always tries to prove in every regional and global fora related to the South China Sea issue, a long-standing dispute

⁶ "Indonesia incar markas Bank Investasi Infrastruktur Asia di Jakarta", http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia/2015/03/150323_aiib_cina_indonesia

⁷ "Susi ups game against illegal fishing", <https://www.pressreader.com/indonesia/the-jakarta-post/20160404/281582354774423>

⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Indonesia Sinks 23 Foreign Vessels After China Spat", <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/indonesia-sinks-23-foreign-vessels-after-china-spat/>

⁹ Jeffrey Hutton, 'Indonesia Takes Tough Stance in Fighting Illegal Fishing', The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/world/asia/indonesia-takes-tough-stance-in-fighting-illegal-fishing.html?_r=0, accessed on April 15, 2017

¹⁰ Zhang Hongzhou, "Indonesia's War on Illegal Fishing: Impact on China", RSIS Commentary, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CO15192.pdf>, accessed on April 11, 2017



between China and several ASEAN countries. Jokowi then during his visit to Japan refused to acknowledge the nine-dash line and see Chinese government has undermined Indonesian sovereignty over the Natuna Islands. He further demanded to increase military presence in the Natuna Islands by the deployment of several Indonesia fighter jets and by the conduct of tighter surveillance anti-submarine aircraft to the islands.

Indeed a dilemmatic circumstance has been continuously casting a shadow on the Sino-Indonesia political relations and strategic cooperation. The aggressive and unresponsive movements signaled by Beijing when Indonesia demanded to enter in negotiation process to solve illegal fishing dispute represent that the “Chinese dream” and China’s neighborhood policy are, however, not all about “peaceful development” and “win-win” solution in terms of foreign conduct. Mr. Xi implicitly wants to reassert a tougher and bolder Chinese approach to safeguard Chinese sovereignty and guarantee the country’s core interests, in this context is when China tries to commit in preserving the claim of nine-dash line over Indonesia territory. Based on how previously Beijing declared that all the problems related to South China Sea must be solved within the realm of bilateral management actually depicts, China has its own way to solve the country’s maritime disputes. While OBOR initiative is pledging to promote a peaceful development to all country members, but China simultaneously will never renounce or compromise on China’s legitimate interests. China’s maritime confrontation with Indonesia is not new. Indonesia, the world’s biggest archipelagic state, has historically been flared-up at illegal fishing by its Asian neighbors including China. What China vessels have frequently done to Indonesia is considered as a violation of the sovereignty and simultaneously a robbing of Indonesia’s maritime resources.

Conclusion

Though, OBOR initiative and GMF are complementary to each other, Indonesia-China relations is still being haunted by certain level suspicion triggered



by sovereignty violation as well as a domineering manner directed by China for the sake of the obtainment its centenary goals. To conclude, Sino-Indonesia relations could also be best exemplified by the school of thought of complex interdependence which to some extent draw the limit of cooperation between both countries. In one part of our world there is the prevalent ruler which stresses the realist point, this one actor under anarchic scenario is trying to maximize its strengths and benefits. Meanwhile, in the other part, there is an actor keeping aside their conflicts to cooperate with other for the betterment of its nation and strategic gains. For Indonesia, even though the country intends to tackle IUU fishing which has carried a big loss for the country, but the legitimate interest of foreign investors need to be secured, given the pressure that the GMF vision must be funded by outside investment. For China, a mutual benefit based arrangement should be focused in order to secure Indonesia's trust about its intentions of a long-term genuine cooperation.

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