



The Impact of South China Sea Dispute on National Interests and Sovereignty of Indonesia

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the impact of the dynamics of the South China Sea dispute on the national interests and sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative research method with data analysis techniques consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The theories used in this study are the theories of sovereignty, national interests, and geopolitics. The results of this study indicate that the dynamics of the dispute in the South China Sea region have shown signs of escalation that encourage the formation of expansionist geopolitics in regional countries. This condition can ultimately disrupt the achievement of the national interests of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and can threaten the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, especially in the Natuna waters. The Government of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is considered necessary to strengthen the maritime military, in this case the Indonesian Navy or TNI AL, to ward off traditional and non-traditional security threats, and optimize diplomacy through a regional approach to encourage the formation of a Code of Conduct (Coc) in the South China Sea region as soon as possible.

Keywords: South China Sea, Geopolitics, National Interest, Sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the dispute over the South China Sea (SCS) began when the PRC Government claimed an area of approximately 3 million square kilo meters. The PRC Government claims that the SCS region has been the territory of the PRC Government since the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BC. This claim was later strengthened by the issuance of an 'eleven-dash line' map by the PRC Government that encircles the SCS waters and the island groups within it.

The PRC's claim to the SCS region as a whole has been rejected by various surrounding countries. Countries that reject the PRC's claim include Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The countries opposing the PRC's claim have strategic interests in the SCS region which were later strengthened by regulations regarding the

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS 1982).

The dispute over the SCS is the hottest dispute in the 21st century (Muhar, 2018). The dispute not only involves 6 claimant states, but also the United States (US) which does not want to lose its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. US maneuverer in the SCS dispute are often carried out under the guise of upholding 'freedom of navigation'. The US government is known to continue to carry out strategic cooperation with the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam, both economic and military cooperation, to minimize the influence of the PRC in the region.

Many studies have been conducted to analyse the possible impacts of the dispute on the stability of the strategic environment of the region, including its potential impact on Indonesian geopolitics, such as research by Ali (2010), Usman & Sukma (1997), Beckman (2013), Darajati et al. (2018), Ralf (2012), Humphrey (2018), Toruan (2020), Muhar (2018), Sunoto et al. (2023), and Beckman & Davenport (2010). However, few of these studies have tried to analyse the impact of the SCS dispute issue on the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. In fact, empirical facts have occurred where the Indonesian Government often conflicts with the PRC Government in the Natuna waters.

Table 1. Research Gap

No	Title	Method	Source	Results
1.	Dynamics in the South China Sea and Their Implications for Indonesia	Qualitative	Ali (2010)	The conflict in the South China Sea is certain to have a significant impact on the stability of the Asia Pacific region. Indonesia must have a national strategy to anticipate the escalation of the conflict.
2.	South China Sea Conflict: Challenges for ASEAN	Qualitative	Usman & Sukma (1997)	China's claim to the South China Sea has sparked resistance from various countries in the region. China's grey zone strategy is likely to trigger an escalation of conflict in the Asia Pacific region.
3.	The South China Sea: the evolving dispute between China and her maritime neighbours	Qualitative	Beckman (2013)	The South China Sea is reputed to be resource-rich. The maritime state in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has raised the tension in the region.
4.	South China Sea Dispute Ruling and Its Legal Implications for Countries Around the Area	Qualitative	Darajati et al. (2018)	International court decisions are one of the sources of international law that must be obeyed and respected by the international community, including the South China Sea dispute. The decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) can weaken China's argument regarding the nine-dash line.
5.	ASEAN, China and The South China Sea: An Opportunity Missed	Qualitative	Ralf (2012)	Efforts to formulate a Code of Conduct related to the South China Sea have faced various challenges. ASEAN countries

				need to work harder to secure regional security.
6.	Asian Waters: The Struggle Over the South China Sea & the Strategy of Chinese Expansion	Qualitative	Humphrey (2018)	China continues to increase its claim efforts over the South China Sea waters based on economic motives. These efforts have not received significant obstacles from countries that are also claimant states over the waters.
7.	Indonesia's Strategic Role in Resolving the South China Sea Conflict in the Perspective of Regional Security Stability	Qualitative	Toruan (2020)	Although Indonesia is not a claimant state in the South China Sea, Indonesia has an important role in creating security stability in the ASEAN region.
8.	Maritime Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea	Qualitative	Muhar (2018)	There are 3 reasons why there is a dispute over the South China Sea, namely the struggle for natural resources, the struggle for strategic shipping areas, and rapid economic growth in Asia.
9.	The Impact of Securitization of the South China Sea Conflict on Indonesia's Maritime Security	Qualitative	Sunoto et al. (2023)	The South China Sea conflict has serious implications for Indonesia's maritime security, including increased defense budgets, trade uncertainty, and political instability.
10.	The South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development	Qualitative	Beckman & Davenport (2010)	Most of China's claims in the South China Sea are vague. However, other claimant states have begun to step up their claims with the passage of UNCLOS.

Source: Researcher (2024)

Referring to the table above, it is known that there is not a single study that tries to elaborate on the possible threat to the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia as an impact of the dynamics of the South China Sea dispute. Most of the studies related to the SCS focus more on the threat of escalation of the South China Sea conflict throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Considering the gaps in the study as mentioned above, this study aims to examine the possible impacts of the dynamics of the SCS dispute on the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Using the theory of national interest, geopolitical theory, and sovereignty theory, this study attempts to show its originality by presenting hypothetical conditions in which the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, especially in the Natuna waters, is threatened due to the escalation of the SCS dispute.

In conducting the impact analysis, the researcher used a qualitative approach. Various information and data obtained came from various books, documents, scientific articles, and journalistic articles. The data and information were then processed into various theories, including sovereignty theory, geopolitical theory, and national interest theory. These theories will then become the researcher's analytical tools in providing interpretations of the data and information obtained.

Literature Review

The theories used in this study are the theories of sovereignty, national interests, and geopolitics to analyse the impact of South China Sea dispute to Indonesia's national interest. The national interest is particularly important for a nation, therefore the authors pick the perspective of national interest assuming with its implication to the sovereignty of Indonesia. Although the theory of sovereignty and national interest are particularly connected, this research also needs the theory of geopolitics because it is very related with international relation situation today, especially in South China Sea.

Theory of Sovereignty

The word 'sovereignty' has other words, namely 'supremus' (Latin) and 'sovranita' (Italian). Each of the two words means 'the highest'. In Bahasa Indonesia, the word 'sovereignty' is actually closer in pronunciation to the word 'dawlah' or 'dulah' (Arabic), which means rotation or turn. In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), sovereignty is defined as the highest power over the government of a country, region, and so on. Thus, etymologically the word 'sovereignty' can be defined as the highest or superiority.

Terminologically, sovereignty can be interpreted as a special attribute of a state which is the embodiment of the power to form and apply laws with coercive power tools (Strong, 1975). However, the concept of sovereignty itself does not describe the institutions that exercise power, nor does it describe the purpose of the implementation of power, so it does not always discuss where the power is located (Sheehan, 2006).

According to Jean Bodin, sovereignty has characteristics including original, supreme, eternal, and indivisible, so that sovereignty is a source of authority that is at the highest level of the legal hierarchy (Riyanto, 2012). The aspects of sovereignty include: (1) internal and external sovereignty; and (2) legal and political sovereignty. Internal sovereignty is the supremacy of a person or group of people in a country over individuals and groups of people in its jurisdiction (Strong, 1975). In this case, internal sovereignty is related to the supremacy of a country to have territorial boundaries. As for external sovereignty, it is related to the sovereignty of other countries. In this case, the sovereignty of a country is related to the sovereignty of other countries in a relationship.

The concept of sovereignty is closely related to territory. Based on the concept of territory, sovereignty is the full power possessed by a country in exercising its jurisdiction exclusively in its territory, where in that territory the country has full authority to implement and enforce its national laws. Specifically for Indonesia's sovereignty over its maritime territory, it is regulated in Article 4 of Law No. 6/1996 which states that state sovereignty in Indonesian waters includes territorial seas, archipelagic waters, and inland waters as well as airspace above territorial seas, archipelagic waters, and inland waters as well as the seabed and land beneath it including the natural resources contained therein.

After the 5th United Nations Convention on The Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) conference in Jamaica in 1982, Indonesia then set the Territorial Sea Limit of 12 miles, the Exclusive Economic Zone Limit of 200 miles, and the Continental Shelf Limit of 200 miles. Thus, Indonesia has experienced an increase, especially in its waters.

Geopolitical Theory

Etymologically, the word 'geopolitics' comes from the word 'geo' (Greek) meaning the earth that becomes a living area, the word 'polis' (Greek) meaning a self-contained community unit, and the word 'teia' (Greek) meaning meaningful affairs of the general interests of citizens of a nation (Pasaribu, 2015). Thus, the word 'geopolitics' can be interpreted as the organization of a state whose regulations are related to problems of the territory or place of residence of a nation.

Geopolitics as a term was originally coined by Frederick Ratzel. The term geopolitics by Ratzel is defined as political geography which studies geographical phenomena from a political aspect. The term geopolitics was later developed by Rudolf Kjellen and Karl Haushofer into geographical politics which studies political phenomena from a geographical aspect (Sulisworo, 2012).

Frederick Ratzel argued that a country resembles an organism or living creature. Like a living creature, a country needs enough living space (German: lebensraum) to be able to thrive. Another main idea of Frederick Ratzel regarding geopolitics is that the power of a country must be able to accommodate its growth. The wider the space and geographical potential occupied by a political group, the greater the possibility of the group to grow. If the country's living space can no longer meet its needs, then that space can be expanded by changing the country's borders either peacefully or through violence or war.

Rudolf Kjellen developed Frederick Ratzel's view. It is emphasized that the state does not resemble an organism, but is an organism itself. The state is a unified system that includes geopolitics, political economy, political demos, social politics, and political kratos. The state as an organism must be able to survive, maintain, and even develop itself by expanding. In this case, Rudolf Kjellen promotes an expansionist view in geopolitics where state borders are something temporary.

Karl Haushofer then developed the views of Kjellen and Ratzel, especially the views related to lebensraum and expansionism in geopolitics. Haushofer argued that if the population of a region increases, then the country must try to expand its territory as a living space. To that end, the country must strive for autarky, namely the ideal of fulfilling its own needs without relying on other countries.

In contrast to geopolitical thinking from Europe, especially Germany, Indonesia has its own views on geopolitics. The term geopolitics for the Indonesian nation was first popularized by Ir. Soekarno in his speech at the BPUPKI session on June 1, 1945. In his speech, Ir. Soekarno said that the territory of Indonesia is a single entity from Sabang to Merauke. In this case, the principle of Indonesian geopolitics is different from the principle of European geopolitics because it does not have the spirit of expansionism of living space.

The theory of Indonesian Geopolitics is more based on a perspective and attitude of the Indonesian nation called 'Wawasan Nusantara'. This perspective and attitude is Indonesian geopolitics regarding itself and its diverse and strategic environment by prioritizing the unity and integrity of the region, and continuing to appreciate and respect diversity in every aspect of national life to achieve national goals.

National Interest Theory

As a concept, national interest is something that is very general, but is a very important need for a country. National interest is also often considered as an element that includes the survival of the nation and state, independence, territorial integrity, freedom, military security, and economic welfare. In recent academic discourse, national interest is often understood as a concept of a country in cooperative relations with other countries. In this case, national interest is the main pillar of foreign policy and international politics that determines the political actions of a country.

According to Jack C. Plano and Roy Olton, national interests are the needs and desires of a sovereign country in relation to other sovereign countries which are the external environment of the sovereign country (Plano & Roy, 1999). In the concept of national interests, a perspective is known as the realist perspective. This perspective assumes that the state is the main actor in international politics. The state is seen as a rational actor, where foreign policy is taken referring to national interests and goals (Paul & Kauppi, 1995). In this case, the realist perspective understands foreign policy as a reflection of national interests and goals.

In its development, the realist perspective of national interests emphasizes the elements of anarchy, power politics, and war as the focus of its analysis (Jackson, Robert dan Georg Sorensen, 2005). The assumption of this perspective is the belief that national security is at the top of the hierarchy of international issues. This is because national security is directly related to the existence of a country. This assumption was emphasized by Kenneth Walt who stated that the main theoretical proposition of international relations interaction is the competition of interests of countries to gain power or security (Walt, 1998).

As for the theory of Indonesian national interests, in general it has been regulated in the 1945 Constitution. In the constitution, Indonesia's national interests include (1) protecting all Indonesian people and all of its territory; (2) advancing general welfare; (3) improving the life of the nation; and (4) participating in implementing world order based on freedom, eternal peace and social justice. Referring to the points in the 1945 Constitution, it is known that Indonesia's national interests do not only apply internally to the Indonesian population, but also apply externally to maintain world security stability..

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research form that can be simply understood as a form of research whose findings are not obtained from statistical procedures, but rather from understanding and interpreting the meaning of events, interactions, or behavior of subjects in certain situations. According to Moleong, qualitative research is research that is intended to understand the phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects, such as actors, perceptions, motivations, actions and others holistically and descriptively in the form of words and language (Moleong, 2013). The qualitative research form was chosen because it was considered more appropriate and in accordance with the topic of discussion.

The data and information processed in this study were taken from various sources, both primary and secondary, consisting of books, scientific articles, and current news. The data is then collected, classified, described, processed, and concluded using data analysis techniques proposed by John W. Creswell, which consist of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Creswell, 1994). Data reduction is carried out to facilitate the analysis process. The results of the analysis are then presented in descriptive form, either in the form of narratives, tables, or graphs. The steps for drawing conclusions will be presented last in the form of an interpretation of the data that has been analyzed descriptively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Before going through the history of South China Sea and analyze the implication on Indonesia's national interest, we have to look at the situation of Geographical Location of the South China Sea. Geographically, the South China Sea (SCS) is a semi-enclosed sea that borders Vietnam on its west side, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam on its east side, Indonesia and Malaysia on its south side, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan on its north side. The area of the SCS is around 550 to 650 nautical miles (width) and 1,200 nautical miles (length) (Beckman, 2013). With an area of 3 million square kilometers, the SCS area is the waters for several island groups, namely (1) the Pratas island group, (2) the Paracel island group, (3) the Spratly island group, and (4) the Macclesfield island group. In addition to these island groups, there is the Scarborough Reef group (Usman & Sukma, 1997). Of all the island groups in the SCS, the Spratly and Paracel island groups are the island groups that are most often the object of dispute. Meanwhile, the Spratly archipelago is the archipelago with the highest intensity of conflict because it is claimed by 6 countries, including the PRC, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines and Malaysia (Ras, 2001).

A Very Brief History of the South China Sea Dispute

The tension in the SCS has a long history involving many countries, such as England, France, Japan, China, Taiwan, and ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines. The beginning of the tension in the SCS dispute began with the PRC's demands for islands in the SCS area referring to historical records, sites, ancient documents, maps, and the occupation of islands in the area by traditional Chinese fishermen. The PRC government claims that the SCS area has been utilized by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty who ruled in the 2nd century BC. In the 12th century, the Yuan Dynasty then included the SCS in its territorial map, then strengthened by the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the 13th century. In 1947, the PRC government, then controlled by the Kuomintang Party, formally claimed the SCS area by creating a demarcation line called the 'eleven dash line', which was later simplified to the 'nine dash line', which covered the entire SCS area (Humphrey, 2018), and then changed back to the 'ten dash line' in 2023. The ten-dash line claim circles 1,500 km south of Hainan Island, and cuts off the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia (Sabah – Sarawak). In addition, the imaginary line also circles other disputed territories, such as Taiwan and Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin in India.



Figure 1. Nine Dash Line
Source: UNCLOS (2020)

Referring to the figure above, it is known that the PRC's claim to the SCS area overlaps with claims from various other claimant states. The PRC's claim to the SCS covers the entire SCS from Hainan waters to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Malaysia, covering all the island groups within it, namely the Paracel, Spratly, and Scarborough Reef islands. Claims to the SCS area overlapped due to the PRC's agreement with France, which controlled Indochina in 1887. According to the agreement, the SCS, including the Spratly and Paracel island groups, were included in the PRC's territory. However, in 1933, France officially took the island groups for Vietnam (Parandaru, 2024).

Ownership of the Spratlys became increasingly murky in 1939, when Japan occupied the Spratlys and Paracels. The Japanese government combined the island groups into one island group with Taiwan and named *Shinnan Gunto* (Humphrey, 2018). The Japanese government controlled the island groups until its defeat in World War II in 1945, after which the island groups became the property of South Vietnam. For the Vietnamese government, the Paracel and Spratly Island groups are under Vietnamese sovereignty based on a map made by Do Ba

Cong Dao in the 17th century AD. The overlapping claims between the PRC and Vietnamese governments have caused conflict. To strengthen its position in the Spratly, the PRC government built military construction and installations in the region. In return, Vietnam tried to occupy more islands. The conflict eventually led to Vietnam's defeat after armed contact in March 1988 (Humphrey, 2018).

The conflict in the SCS does not only occur between the PRC and Vietnam. Multilateral conflicts in the SCS region occur between the Philippines - Malaysia, the Philippines - Taiwan, the Philippines - PRC, the Philippines - Vietnam, Malaysia - Vietnam, Malaysia - Brunei Darussalam, and Taiwan - PRC (Pradanu, 2024). The conflicts that occurred were conflicts caused by territorial disputes because each of these countries has a historical trace of control where the Spratly Island group was once controlled by Taiwan during World War II, the Philippines in 1971, Malaysia in 1979, and Brunei Darussalam in 1984. Briefly, the claims of each of the claimant states to the SCS region can be summarized as follows (Marsetio, 2019):

1. PRC. Claims almost the entire SCS, including all of the Spratly Islands, seized the Paracel Islands from Vietnam in 1974.
2. Philippines. Occupies 8 islands in the Spratly Islands. Claims are based on EEZ rules, continental regulations, and expedition exploration in 1956.
3. Malaysia. Claims are made only based on continental and EEZ rules, claims 3 islands in the Spratly Islands, and builds a hotel on one of the islands and carries out various other activities.
4. Vietnam. Claims most of the SCS based on EEZ and continental regulations, occupies 20 islands in the Spratly Islands, and claims the Paracel Islands even though they were seized by the PRC in 1974.
5. Taiwan. Claims almost the entire SCS, including all islands in the Spratly Islands based on historical records.
6. Brunei Darussalam. Claims in the SCS dispute are limited only to EEZ rules.

In its development, the conflict in the SCS region also involved countries using the SCS waters which are not claimant states. One example is the incident between the United States Navy (US) survey ship, namely the USNS Impeccable (T-AGOS-23) and 5 PRC ships (1 PRC Navy intelligence ship, 1 fisheries patrol ship, 1 oceanographic patrol ship, and 2 small trawlers) in March 2009, approximately 75 nautical miles south of Hainan Island (Raul, 2009). In April 2001, a similar incident occurred between a US Navy EP-3 Aries reconnaissance aircraft and a PRC F-8 fighter aircraft. The EP-3 aircraft, which was conducting a reconnaissance flight approximately 70 nautical miles south/southeast of Hainan Island, collided with the F-8 fighter aircraft, causing damage to the US aircraft and the crash of the PRC fighter aircraft accompanied by the loss of the fighter aircraft crew (Raul, 2009).

Driving Factors of the South China Sea Dispute

Malaysia's claim to the SCS is directed at 12 features located in the Spratly archipelago, namely Ardasier Reef, Erica Reef, Investigator Shoal, Mariveles Reef, Swallow Reef, Royal Charlotte Reef, Louisa Reef, Dallas Reef, Luconia Reef, Commodore Reef, Amboyna Cay, and Barque Canada Reef. In addition to claims to these features, Malaysia also actualizes its claim to 200 miles of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from its coastline as regulated in the United Nations Convention on The Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS 1982) (Beckam & Davenport, 2010). The Philippines' claim in the SCS dispute case is also based on historical aspects, discoveries, territorial continuity, and geographical aspects as regulated in UNCLOS 1982. The Philippines makes territorial claims to the Spratly archipelago, Scarborough Shoal and Kelayaan Island because they are considered to have important significance to increase the EEZ area. Specifically for Scarborough Shoal, the claim was made on the basis of national

interest motivation for control of natural resources to meet domestic energy needs (Muhar, 2018).

Like Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam also claims the southern region of the Spratly archipelago, including Luconia Shoal and Rifleman Bank and more than 200 miles of maritime zone. Brunei Darussalam's claim is more aimed at sovereign rights interests in its jurisdiction, especially in terms of international service security, as well as management and utilization of oil and gas resources and fisheries (Muhar, 2018).

Referring to the claimant states' motivation, there are 3 main factors why the SCS area is a very strategic object of dispute. First, as an area, the waters and island groups in the SCS contain high-value natural resource commodities, namely in the form of petroleum, natural gas, fishery resources, and other underwater wealth. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) of the United States estimates that there are around 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in the SCS area. Most recently, on March 8, 2024, the PRC government-owned energy giant, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) said it had discovered oil and gas reserves in the SCS estimated to contain more than 100 million tons. Second, the SCS region has great geopolitical and geostrategic value for countries that are able to control it considering that the SCS waters are a strategic cross-route. The United States-based international research institute, the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), revealed that the value of global trade through the SCS in 2016 reached US\$3.37 trillion. Third, rapid economic growth has occurred in various parts of the world, giving rise to competition between the PRC and the United States and Europe. Control over natural resources is the key to continuing to accelerate economic growth in each country. This factor has underpinned the United States, which is a non-claimant state, to be willing to be involved in the SCS dispute by maintaining 'freedom of navigation' (Ali, 2010).

Political and security issues in the SCS region cannot be separated from the competition between the US and the PRC, although the US claims not to be a claimant state regarding the SCS region. The existence of the US in the SCS region is explicitly stated in the US Pacific Command (US PACOM) which aims to create safe and prosperous conditions throughout the region, in order to promote peace and political liberalization, thus requiring the presence of US troops (Ralf, 2012). In order to face the development of the PRC's military power as well as the expansion of its influence to the Asia Pacific region, the US then formed the Quadrilateral Security Partnership involving various allied countries, namely India, Japan, and Australia. One example of the realization of the Quadrilateral Security Partnership is through the implementation of the 2009 Malabar Exercise in the Philippine Sea, off the coast of Okinawa, which involved US, Indian, and Japanese warships (Ali, 2010).

The Influence of the Polarization of Power between the United States and the PRC

The dynamics of the conflict between the claimant states of the SCS are basically also influenced by the polarization of the world's major powers, namely the US and the PRC. The issue of freedom of navigation and the promotion of political liberalization in the SCS region is most likely just a cover for the US to defeat the PRC in the competition for influence in, not only the SCS region, but also the Pacific region in general. The US has an interest in bringing in as many allies as possible to support US interests in facing the PRC in the Indo-Pacific, especially the formation of a bloc confrontation through efforts to strengthen the Philippines in the SCS dispute. In addition, the US together with its allies through ASEAN centrality, continues to strive for the security of the Sea Line of Trade (SLOT) and Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) to optimize economic and socio-cultural cooperation with ASEAN countries. The forms of US maneuvers in dealing with the competition for influence in the Pacific region, especially the SCS region, include approaches and cooperation with the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam.

In the Philippines, US maneuvers were carried out through various efforts, including: (1) strengthening arms support and military training for the Philippines to be vocal against the PRC, (2) continuing the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) between the US and the Philippines which was later strengthened by the formation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) which allows the US to help the Philippines in an emergency, and (3) signing the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2023 which gives US troops access to occupy 9 Philippine military bases, namely Antonio Bautista Air Force Base in Palawan, Basa Air Base in Pampanga, Fort Megsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Lumbia Air Base in Mindanao, Benito Ebuen Air Base in Cebu, Camilo Osias Naval Base in Santa Ana, Lal-lo Airfield in Cagayan, Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu and Balabac Island in Palawan.

In Singapore, maneuvers carried out by the US include: (1) signing a Memorandum of Understanding on defense innovation cooperation in May 2024, utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) to address security challenges such as anti-drone capabilities, and (2) strengthening support for Singapore Air Force training in the US and increasing Singapore's access to US technology realized through the acquisition and operation of F-35 aircraft since 2020.

In Vietnam, maneuvers carried out by the US include: (1) providing security assistance of up to US\$104 million in the period 2017 to 2023 under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, and separately providing US\$81.5 million to support the US Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2018, and (2) supporting efforts to increase Vietnam's maritime security capacity and domain awareness, including programs related to the Vietnam Coast Guard, a grant of 2 former US Coast Guard ships, T-6 training aircraft, and MetalShark patrol boats.

On the other hand, the PRC also has an interest in dominating the SCS region which will be used as access to expand its expansion into the South Pacific region to balance the influence of the US and Australia. In addition, the PRC also has an interest in making the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) program a success in order to reduce the hegemony of the US and its allies, and to try to divide US power while still managing territorial disputes in the SCS region. The maneuvers carried out by China include: (1) increasing pressure on the Philippines in the West Philippine Sea to divide the US military focus in the Indo-Pacific, (2) strengthening cooperation with South Pacific countries, especially the Solomon Islands, to strengthen pressure on Australia's influence, (3) supporting the construction of a military hangar in the Coco Islands located about 400 km southwest of Yangon, Myanmar, and (4) supporting the construction of the Ream military base, Cambodia, covering an area of 157 hectares which is used for air defense command with an additional 30 hectares for the Cambodian Navy radar system.

Looking at the development of the dynamics of competition between the US and the PRC in the Pacific region, especially the SCS region, it is not impossible that this will encourage the formation of an axis of power divided on the basis of the balance of power of the two countries. Competition between the US and the PRC will have an influence on regional countries, especially on the attitudes of claimant states and non-claimant states, in order to respond to the dynamics that occur. In the end, it is very possible that competition between the US and the PRC in the SCS region will trigger the formation of an axis of power and an increase in the existence of superpower countries which can raise concerns about the creation of a new conflict arena in Southeast Asia, as well as encourage an arms race as a response to the conflict of interest between the US and the PRC.

PRC's Grey Area Strategy

In launching its various efforts as a claimant state against the SCS region, the PRC Government implemented a strategy known as a grey strategy. According to Antulio Echevarria, a grey area strategy is a strategy carried out by a country with the use of military force but not intended to create a war situation (Antulio, 2015). According to Michael Green,

a grey area strategy is a strategy that avoids the direct use of large military force, by targeting objects in the security sector but within certain limits so as not to result in open war (Green et al., 2017). The grey area strategy is implemented by the PRC Government in the form of coercive actions against claimant states and non-claimant states in the SCS region and its surroundings. The coercive actions carried out by the PRC Government in the SCS region are carried out in many forms. In the early stages of expansion into the SCS region, the PRC Government built artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago to support its military activities. These efforts have a positive impact on the interests of the PRC to encourage claimant states to withdraw in an orderly manner. Several PRC military bases in the Spratly Islands region have been revealed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies / CSIS (a US-based global strategic research institution) through various satellite imagery photos. To strengthen the military bases that were built, the PRC government also established missile shelters.

In addition to building military bases, the PRC's claim to the SCS region is also manifested in the form of an economic approach. The US Naval War College stated that the PRC has formed a city with an area of around 800 thousand square miles called Shansa (Simela, 2021). The construction of the city can be interpreted as a strategic effort by the PRC government to declare the existence of an 'exclusion zone' in the SCS region, including an air defense identification zone, with a tendency to change international waters into PRC domestic waters. In addition, the construction of the city of Shansa can also be understood as an effort to emphasize the effective occupation of the PRC government over the region for centuries. This shows that the PRC government is trying to take an effective approach to achieve its national interests by creating new claims.

The grey area strategy implemented by the PRC Government in the SCS region is also carried out in the form of sailings of various PRC aircraft carriers and holding PRC Navy military exercises in the SCS waters. In April 2021, the PRC aircraft carrier Liaoning sailed in the SCS waters after completing naval military exercises around the Taiwan region (Agustin, 2021). The presence of the aircraft carrier was intended to emphasize the PRC Government's claim to the SCS region, as well as a response to the US's stance in holding military exercises by bringing the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the amphibious assault ship USS Makind Island. In this case, the PRC Government is aware that the US Government is trying to carry out a containment strategy against the PRC's dominance in the SCS region which has so far not been matched by other claimant states. Some of the grey area strategy coercive actions carried out by the PRC Government include: (1) concentration of power on unagreed borders, (2) military exercises and operations in disputed areas, (3) threats to use force, (4) provocative actions against military assets of other countries operating in disputed areas, (5) paramilitary activities, and (6) deployment of state-owned enterprises through the National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) which offered an international tender to manage oil and gas blocks in Vietnam's EEZ in June 2012 (Zhu, 2012).

Indonesia's Conflict with China in Natuna Waters

As one of the countries in Southeast Asia that geographically borders claimant states to the SCS region (including Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei Darussalam), Indonesia is basically not involved and positions itself as a neutral country in the conflict. However, in its dynamics, there has been friction between the Indonesian Government and the PRC Government. The conflict between the Indonesian Government and the PRC is centered on claims to the Natuna Sea.

In March 2016, there was a conflict between the Indonesian Government and the PRC caused by the illegal entry of fishing vessels from the PRC into Natuna waters. Responding to this, the Indonesian Government through investigators at the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia (KKP RI) decided to arrest the vessels. In the arrest

process, there was a dynamic where the PRC Coast Guard ship hit KM Kway Fey 10078 (one of the PRC's illegal fishing vessels). This action was allegedly carried out by the PRC Government so that the KM Kway Fey 10078 ship would not be brought to Indonesia for further investigation.

In May 2016, conflict occurred again when the Republic of Indonesia Warship (KRI) Oswald Siahaan captured the Gui Bei Yu ship (a fishing vessel from the PRC) in Natuna waters. The capture of the Gui Bei Yu ship was responded to harshly by the PRC Government, which emphasized that the ship did not violate Indonesian law because it was in China's traditional fishing area.

In June 2016, conflict also occurred when the KRI Imam Bonjol captured a PRC fishing vessel with hull number 19038. During the capture, the PRC Coast Guard ship gave chase and asked for the fishing vessel to be released.

In December 2019, conflict between the Indonesian Government and the PRC occurred again in Natuna waters. Fishing vessels from the PRC re-entered Indonesia's EEZ to carry out illegal fishing. In response to this, the Indonesian Government planned to take action in the form of arrests and expulsions. However, the enforcement process was disrupted by the PRC Coast Guard which provided assistance and escort to the illegal fishing vessels from the PRC.

In response to repeated violations committed by fishermen and PRC Coast Guard vessels in Natuna waters, the Indonesian Government has made various efforts. First, President Joko Widodo symbolically upheld the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia in the Natuna Sea by holding a limited meeting on the KRI Imam Bonjol sailing in Natuna waters on June 23, 2016. Second, the Government through the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment of the Republic of Indonesia (at that time the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia) in July 2017 released a new map of the Republic of Indonesia. Referring to the map, there was a change in the nomenclature of the Natuna waters, which are in fact included in the SCS area, to the North Natuna Sea. The naming of the North Natuna Sea sparked protests from the PRC Government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China sent a diplomatic note to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Beijing on August 25, 2017. The diplomatic note contained 3 points of the PRC Government's stance, one of which was a rejection of the naming of the North Natuna Sea. However, the naming of the North Natuna Sea by the Indonesian Government received recognition from the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), an institution under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), with document number S-23 IHO. It was stated that the naming of the North Natuna Sea applies to Indonesia's jurisdictional area, and not to the entire SCS area (Parandaru, 2024).

Impact on National Interests and Sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia

Referring to the data that has been reviewed previously, it can be said that the dynamics of the SCS territorial dispute tend to show escalation. Symptoms of conflict escalation in the SCS region can be seen not only from the increasingly massive and varied efforts to strengthen claims from all claimant states, especially the PRC, but also non-claimant state superpowers such as the US. The increasing intervention and existence of the US in the dynamics of the SCS territorial dispute through the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam will most likely encourage an increase in the level of trust of the 3 ASEAN countries to be more vocal in rejecting the PRC's claims, thus forcing the PRC to redouble its various coercive efforts in asserting claims to the SCS region. What is feared from the escalation of the conflict in the SCS region is the occurrence of a territorial conflict that can threaten the stability of the region's strategic environment, thereby threatening Indonesia's national interests and sovereignty, especially in the Natuna waters.

The dynamics of the SCS territorial dispute basically show that the theory of geopolitical

expansionism initiated by Frederick Ratzel is still a relevant theory. Claimant states consisting of 6 countries, driven by their national interests to control the strategic value of the SCS region, continue to strive to strengthen their claims over the disputed object. The presence of EEZ regulations through UNCLOS 1982 has actually worsened the jurisdictional status of the SCS region, especially the Spratly and Paracel island groups, because the EEZ regulations are actually used as an instrument for claimant states to strengthen their respective claims over control of the disputed object. Thus, the dynamics of the SCS territorial waters dispute can be understood as an effort by each claimant state to expand lebensraum.

The symptoms of geopolitical expansionism in the SCS territorial dispute need attention. This is because in the discourse of geopolitical expansionist theory, the concept of state boundaries is often postulated as something imaginary and temporary. It is not impossible that the SCS territorial waters dispute, supported by the polarization of US-PRC power, will lead to regional conflict that can change the boundaries of surrounding countries that were previously considered standard, stable, and comfortable. The direct impacts that can arise from the occurrence of regional conflicts include: (1) disruption of trade routes that can trigger inflation of various commodities, (2) disruption of transportation and communication routes for residents, and (3) increasing the burden of the defense budget to anticipate the spill over effect of regional conflicts.

The potential for regional conflicts due to the SCS territorial dispute needs to be mitigated and anticipated by the Indonesian Government because it can have an impact on disrupting national interests. In the 1945 Constitution, it is stated that Indonesia's national interests are: (1) protecting all Indonesian people and all of our homeland, (2) advancing public welfare, (3) educating the nation's life, and (4) participating in implementing world order based on independence, eternal peace and social justice. From the 4 major points of Indonesia's national interests, Indonesia's national interests in the SCS dispute phenomenon can be elaborated as follows:

1. Security and Sovereignty.

Article 25 of the 1945 Constitution states that the Republic of Indonesia is an archipelagic country with Nusantara characteristics with territories whose boundaries and rights are determined by law. This clause reaffirms that Indonesia has a vast sea area divided into several islands. Indonesia's national interest is to maintain and preserve security and sovereignty in the areas that are its maritime territory. Referring to the regulations in UNCLOS 1982, the total area of Indonesia's seas is 5.9 million square kilometers, while the EEZ is a sea area located outside territorial waters and 200 miles from the baseline. Indonesia's EEZ covers most of Indonesia's sea area, including the Natuna Sea, Sulawesi Sea, and Java Sea. In its EEZ, Indonesia has sovereign rights to explore and exploit natural resources, as well as exercise jurisdiction for other purposes such as the regulation, conservation, and management of living marine resources including fisheries. The sovereign right is hypothetically threatened and pressured if a regional conflict due to the SCS dispute occurs in the future because part of the SCS waters is Indonesia's EEZ. De facto, disturbances to the sovereign rights of the Republic of Indonesia in the Natuna waters are often carried out by the PRC Government through illegal sailing of fishing vessels escorted by PRC Coast Guard ships.

2. Natural Resources.

The SCS waters are the most strategic area in the world (Puguh Sunoto et al., 2023). The area has abundant natural resource potential, including oil and gas resources, fisheries, and mineral resources. Oil and gas reserves in the area are estimated to reach around 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, making it one of the largest reserves in the world. In addition, the SCS region also has great fisheries potential because it is home to various types of fish and other marine biota. The potential for mineral resources

in the SCS region is very large. The SCS waters are estimated to have tin, copper, and nickel mineral resources. As an archipelagic country, the stability of the strategic environment in the SCS region plays an important role for Indonesia to ensure fair and sustainable access to various natural resources.

3. Maritime Security and Trade Traffic

The maritime features of the SCS region are a very vital trade route for Indonesia. Various Indonesian export and import commodities pass through this trade route. The strategic maritime features of the SCS are due to the fact that the region connects Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the US. Trade traffic in the SCS waters is very dense, with more than 200 thousand ships passing through the region each year. In this case, Indonesia's national interest is to ensure that these maritime features remain safe so that they can continue to support international trade.

4. Regional Stability

In line with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia has an interest in participating in implementing world order based on independence, eternal peace, and social justice. For this reason, Indonesia has an interest in maintaining political stability and security in the Southeast Asia region. Indonesia's active involvement in the SCS dispute is important because it can have a major impact on regional stability. An aggressive foreign policy can increase tensions and the risk of conflict in the region, while a peaceful and cooperative foreign policy can help increase regional stability.

The dynamics of the SCS territorial dispute which tends to escalate, not only has the potential to strongly disrupt and hinder the achievement of Indonesia's national interests, but can also be a potential security threat to the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, both traditional and non-traditional threats. Traditional security threats are threats originating from state or military actors that can endanger the sovereignty of other countries. This type of threat can take the form of a major power competition between the US and China which can escalate into open war in Indonesian waters. Non-traditional security threats are threats that target human security, such as the threat of terrorism issues, piracy, illegal fishing, and transnational criminal threats. The threat of terrorism in Indonesian waters is generally an act of kidnapping or hostage-taking by terrorist groups. The threat of piracy is a prominent security issue, where Indonesia is recorded as one of the countries with the highest number of piracy cases in the world in 2016 to 2021 (Sumadinata, 2022).

The implication of the exposure of vulnerabilities as explained above, namely that the Indonesian Government is considered necessary to increase vigilance against the escalation of the South China Sea dispute into a regional conflict that also threatens the interests and sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. In the economic sector, regional conflicts will have a direct impact on Indonesia, where there is disruption to shipping transportation which is the export-import route for Indonesian commodities. In addition, regional conflicts are also very vulnerable to triggering forced occupation by the disputing parties in Indonesia's territorial area. In the end, it is not impossible that the territorial boundaries that have been standardized, enjoyed, and fought for so far, especially in the Natuna waters, can be dissolved and areas that were previously Indonesian territory become the territory of other countries.

Although the threat to the national interests and sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, as elaborated in this study, seems logical theoretically, the degree of reality of the threat is still very hypothetical. This is because the current pre-conditions have not shown any dynamics that directly and openly threaten the stability of Indonesia's territorial sovereignty. The disturbance and confrontation carried out by the PRC Government in the Natuna waters are still merely an implementation of a grey zone strategy that is not intended

to trigger a war for territorial control.

Indonesia Engagement Strategy

Recently, the Indonesian Government has continued to actively encourage the transformation of maritime power through various efforts, especially encouraging the realization of the Global Maritime Axis concept. The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, has emphasized the importance of maritime issues. The 'sea power' strategy is implemented with an emphasis on 4 areas of diplomacy, namely: (1) Indonesia's ocean identity, (2) improving its international image, (3) expanding its presence in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions, and (4) strengthening public diplomacy. These efforts are made to build maritime power that is integrated with national development (Herbaru & Soedantono, 2018).

The realization of the Global Maritime Axis concept requires the development of a reliable and respected naval military fleet at the regional level. This development needs to be supported by the use of cutting-edge technology, such as unmanned defense equipment (drones), etc. However, the development of Indonesian defense policy tends to be more focused inward. Most of the defense strategies of the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) focus on internal and non-traditional threats. This is less efficient because these problems are sufficiently handled by the Maritime Security Agency (BAKAMLA). This focus is partly due to the vision of the Global Maritime Axis itself which wants to utilize maritime potential for the interests of the economy and national development alone. Seeing the dynamics of the SCS territorial dispute which has the potential to threaten national interests in the fields of security and sovereignty, the Indonesian Government needs to increase the strength of its defense fleet. Rejuvenation of defense equipment is needed to support the operationality of the KRI. In addition, it is also necessary to increase the competence of TNI AL soldiers so that they can be more optimal in carrying out their duties.

In addition to strengthening the military, optimizing the diplomatic approach with ASEAN countries is very necessary to anticipate the possibility of regional conflict. Since the beginning, ASEAN has focused on the principles of peace and stability in the region. In 1992, ASEAN issued the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea which emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution, cooperation in maritime navigation and communication, protection of the marine environment, coordination of search and rescue, prevention of maritime crime, and countermeasures against drug trafficking. In 2002, ASEAN and the PRC even agreed on the Declaration of Code of Conduct in the SCS which was signed by 10 Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Toruan, 2020). However, these efforts have not completely resolved the conflict. Tensions between claimant states continue to occur and even tend to show signs of escalation. As a country that always positions itself as a mediator for ASEAN claimant states regarding the SCS region, Indonesia needs to continue to encourage the establishment of a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the SCS region through a regional approach.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of the dispute related to the SCS region tend to show signs of escalation. This is driven by the national interests of the 6 claimant states and increasing US intervention. This condition has encouraged geopolitical expansionism in the region, so it is feared that it will trigger regional conflicts that can not only disrupt Indonesia's national interests but also threaten Indonesia's sovereignty, especially in the Natuna waters. In anticipation of this, the Indonesian Government is considered necessary to strengthen the naval military fleet (TNI - AL) to carry out its function in repelling various security threats, both traditional and non-traditional threats, as well as strengthening diplomacy through a regional approach to encourage the formation of a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the SCS region as soon as possible. However, the results obtained from the analysis in this study are still hypothetical so that they only produce open theoretical possibilities. Further research, especially research using a

quantitative approach that has predictive power, is needed to test the truth of the theoretical possibilities as found in this study.

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