

# Indonesia's Response in the South China Sea Disputes: A comparative analysis of the Soeharto and the post-Soeharto era

Derry Aplianta

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia

## Abstract

*Before it developed into a dispute among China and Southeast Asian nations, the South China Sea has been disputed long before it became what it is today. The post-World War II era brought a fresh start to a new chapter of dispute, as China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam laid their claims one by one. This study contends that under Suharto's iron fist rule, Indonesia's interest to the South China Sea dispute grew from maintaining Indonesia's territorial integrity to maintaining domestic stability. The former took shape after being threatened by China's map which claimed a part of the former's territorial waters, while the later grew in through establishing deeper trade cooperation with China. Despite the half-hearted normalization with China, Indonesia managed to establish a track-two forum for parties involved in the South China Sea dispute, which is later proven to be instrumental. Under President Yudhoyono, Indonesia gradually played its initial role from a passive into an active honest broker, which brought improvements to the process. This research attempts to show that constraint to Indonesia's role in the South China Sea dispute originates from both the ideological and historical factors. Indonesia's long-running ideological constraints set its priorities to its interest to the dispute, while its foreign policy doctrine serves as a pragmatic means to achieve its goals of interests. Indonesia's past relationship with China also played a part in influencing Indonesia's response which later evolved as the relations went through ups and downs. Moreover, the unclear integration process of ASEAN sets the task of the honest broker became a one-country-show for Indonesia.*

Key words: South China Sea, Dispute, Indonesia, China, ASEAN

## Introduction

The South China Sea (SCS) dispute ensued as a result of inter-overlapping territorial claims from Brunei Darussalam,

China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Although the dispute may have developed into a complex phenomenon of what it is today, it actually started as a result of an even more complex

occurring which directly or indirectly involved a lot more states. Simply put, the dispute is a situation which serves as an outcome of an ongoing interaction among the entities in perceiving their territories. Although it may give less weight from the international legal perspective, we may trace the beginning of the dispute through extensive chronological review of any recorded activities in the SCS, dating from as early as the ancient times to give a better understanding of the situation which lead to the one we currently see today. Another way to trace the origins of the dispute is to selectively present the historical records which suggest that there were any indication of dispute among two or more parties to the area. This study investigates reaction of the Indonesian government and what may cause that reaction since the authoritarian Soeharto until the democratic regime of Susilo B. Yudhoyono. This study found that Indonesia's response to SCS dispute during the New Order Era grew from maintaining over territorial integrity to actively accommodate peaceful talks between claimant countries in the reform era which might reflect Indonesia's growing interests of the dispute itself or parties to the dispute. It was steadily developing from a simpler honest broker role into an active bridge builder, and ultimately holds ASEAN's leadership in preserving inter-regional peace and stability.

This article will discuss the issue in two consecutive sections: the New Order era and the Reform era. The following section discusses and analyzes Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute during the Suharto era and how the archipelagic country conveyed its interests into policies to maintain the dispute. Next, it will discuss

Indonesia's foreign policy during the reform and democratic era, and how the transformation alluded Indonesia's foreign policy with the country's ongoing response to the SCS dispute in particular.

### **Indonesia's Response to the South China Sea Dispute during Suharto's Period**

#### *Indonesia and the Normalization of the Diplomatic Relations with China*

Suharto's reign to power marks the era called the "New Order" for Indonesia. The dichotomy was created to serve as a distinction from the era where Sukarno ruled Indonesia for more than two decades, which is dubbed as "Old Order". This means aside from Suharto as the new head of state, the "new" terminology also brought new faces in Indonesian socio-political life, which in turn brought Indonesia to a new style of leadership. The leadership, where Suharto remained in the center, was an alliance of the armed forces, intellectuals, religious groups, and political parties, under the political system known as the Pancasila Democracy. By utilizing such a system that knows no opposition, Suharto had the complete control of Indonesia's domestic and foreign policies.

During Suharto's rule from 1968 until 1998, the foreign policy of Indonesia claimed the neutral posture of free and active principal inherited from the previous reign. In practice, Suharto's foreign policy was stealthily sided with the western bloc as an attempt to distance Indonesia from the communist world and while gaining financial and technical assistance from the Western Bloc. New Order Indonesia's

economy was engineered by the western-centric economists, while the country's defense assets were geared by arms imported from NATO countries. This Post-Sukarno Indonesia also foresaw the founding of ASEAN with Southeast Asian countries and the suspension of diplomatic relations with communist China.

The SCS dispute was initially not of Indonesia's concern since the focus of Suharto was building Indonesia's economy which was torn by inflation in the mid-1960s, however at a certain point Indonesia decided to involve itself to the dispute as a response.

In the beginning, Indonesia did not put much interest in international issues. Like most developing countries in the world, the focus of Indonesia under Suharto was to rebuild the country's economy which was collapsed under Sukarno's administration which suffered massive hyper-inflation (Panglaykim & Thomas, 1967). Since economic recovery was the main focus of the country, Suharto set up his men to formulate and carry out initiatives with the aim to recover Indonesia's economy. As a result, during the beginning of Suharto's tenure Indonesia's foreign policy was aimed at achieving national economic recovery. Suharto's plan to rebuild the economy was carried out with the reinvigoration of the gear of production by inviting investments and capitals to Indonesia. For such cause, Suharto and his men began a tour with a mission to promote and introducing new investment law in Indonesia to countries such as West Germany and Japan. The effort showed progress; in the initial phase Indonesia successfully attracted foreign enterprises to establish production and

extraction facilities to mine the country's abundant natural resources with notable few including Freeport-McMoran and International Nickel Company (Pease, 1996).

To ensure the process going well as well as to ensure Suharto's regime enjoyed sustainable benefits from it, the new regime sought political stability. In fact, Suharto's leadership was well known for its high regard for stability. His quest for Indonesia's development required incessant political sustenance and social order, which in turn shaped Indonesia as an inward-looking country for at least two-thirds of New Order era. Suharto's foremost concern for the stability to support Indonesia's development transformed Indonesia into a pseudo-democratic country where political aspirations were limited and dissents within the society were suppressed. During his three decades of rule, Suharto successfully created and instilled a stable political culture, while his legacy has shown as a prominent yet inspiring figure for the leaders of neighboring countries, namely Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore (Woolcot, 2008).

New Order brought growth and development to Indonesia, thus earned Suharto's famous nickname of "Indonesia's Father of Development" in the 1980s. With Indonesia economy's flourished, it became inevitable that Indonesia had to expand its growth through International trade and investments to sustain its growing economy, especially when the world saw the Oil Crash in 1980s. During that period, Suharto was trying to increase non-oil exports to be more competitive since the

country saw a decrease of revenue in oil sales (Indonesia Oil – exports, 2013). Apart from making the non-oil exports more attractive, it was also logical to approach inaccessible markets to increase potential revenues. These underlying conditions then led to the re-opening trade relations of Indonesia with China, which consequently paved the way to diplomatic normalization between the two countries.

The normalization of the diplomatic relation between Indonesia and China was seemingly something that China had been eagerly seeking. Indeed, Indonesia maintained the gesture of the proposed side of the offer, hinting that it was the Chinese Government who wished to rekindle the bilateral relations (van der Kroef, 1986). As reluctant as it seem for Indonesia to normalize its bilateral relationship with China, the archipelagic country needs to sustain its economic growth through the re-establishment of diplomatic relations (Sukma, 2013). If the political stability of domestic was the one that ensured and sustained Indonesia's economic development of most of the time during Suharto's rule, the late 1980s saw the need of Indonesia to sustain the stability through a wider economic activity (Sukma, 2013).

Indonesia and China's first post-Sukarno's official meeting was in 1985 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. This meeting of Suharto and the Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja with Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian resulted in an immediate progress of the two countries which came into motion with the normalization of the trade relations in the same year (Indonesia, China, to Normalize, 1989). However, the talks of resuming

diplomatic relations did not happen until 1989 (van der Kroef, 1986), when President Suharto attended the funeral of the late Emperor Hirohito in Tokyo. During the visit Suharto met Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen who was also attending the funeral under his capacity as a statesman. Their rendezvous inevitably led to the further conversation of normalization of diplomatic relations of the two countries year (Indonesia, China, to Normalize, 1989). As mentioned earlier, Indonesia displayed reluctance to push the normalization agenda for the process require a lot of time and preparation, but it was trade, as it was Indonesia's main interest that was pushed forward into realization almost immediately. The resumption of the trade relations between the two countries might serve as Beijing's gambit to appease Suharto who was so adamant in creating an Indonesia free from Chinese influence for almost 20 years (van der Kroef, 1986).

Aside from maintaining the current socio-political status quo, Indonesia's reluctance to carry out the normalization with China was partly caused by ideological reasons. Indonesia sought China's word on not to support any communism causes in Indonesia. Foreign Minister Kusumaatmadja reiterated Indonesia's prerequisite conditions to China, as not to offer any kinds of support to anything that opposes the legal Government of Indonesia. Formally, this was interpreted as an acknowledgement of sovereignty from one country to another, a normative procedure in international relations. On the other side, this could also be interpreted as an official request from Indonesia to China, not to do anything that could harm the current regime. This

confirmed that Indonesia might still bear suspicions to China. Although China's allegation of involvement in the 1965 attempted coup is still debatable, Suharto has made it clear that to resume diplomatic relations with Indonesia; China needs to abide by Indonesia's terms, something which China eventually acceded to despite ideological incoherencies between the Chinese Communist Party's ideology and the terms (van der Kroef, 1986).

Nevertheless, the diplomatic normalization agenda was already set in motion. After the initial encounter in 1985, the process was filled with the exchanging visits of Indonesian high officials to their Chinese counterparts. For the second time, Suharto met Qian Qichen when the Foreign Minister made an official visit to the President in Jakarta. As a response, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Ali Alatas visited China later in 1990. Alatas' visit to Beijing produced a communiqué of the resumption of Indonesia – China's diplomatic relations, which was then followed with Chinese Premier Li Peng's visit to Indonesia then formalized with the signing of Memorandum of Understanding on the Resumption of Diplomatic Relations. Indonesia and China have officially reestablished their diplomatic relations in 1990.

#### *Suharto's Indonesia and Its Initial Response to the South China Sea Dispute*

Despite its non-claimant status, Indonesia has been aware of the SCS dispute as the clash of claims is situated in close proximity to its territorial waters. The earliest Indonesia's expressed concern of SCS dispute ever documented was in 1980,

when diplomatic relations with China was still frozen. At that point Indonesia's Military Commander, M. Yusuf commented that there is a possibility of war in the SCS. Indonesia responded to the SCS dispute in a traditional fashion: by the deployment of military might in the disputed border as it then deployed 35 battalions for military exercise within waters surrounding the Natuna islands. It is worth noted that Indonesia's response to the dispute was arguably because Indonesia was more concerned to its own domestic security, especially border and territorial issues which had the potential for disintegration in particular.

Indonesia's involvement in international disputes was not new to Suharto's Indonesia. The country has sent troops known as Garuda Contingents for Peace Keeping Operations in a number of Southeast Asian countries. From more than 68 missions taken by the Garudas, Suharto's administration had their share of at least 40 missions. It is worth noting that until the 1990s most of the contingents for peacekeeping operations were deployed to Middle Eastern countries, while contingents to neighboring countries such as Cambodia and the Philippines were sent after 1991. As conjecture it may be, these deployments of contingents showed Indonesia's grown interest and awareness in maintaining the stability of the Southeast Asian region, or in other words Indonesia began to see the regional instabilities as threat to its national interest. But it is also important to point out that Indonesia's involvement with the Garuda Contingents is nothing as similar as the country's involvement in the SCS dispute where Indonesia plays the role of the honest broker for Southeast Asian

countries and the diplomatically reestablished China.

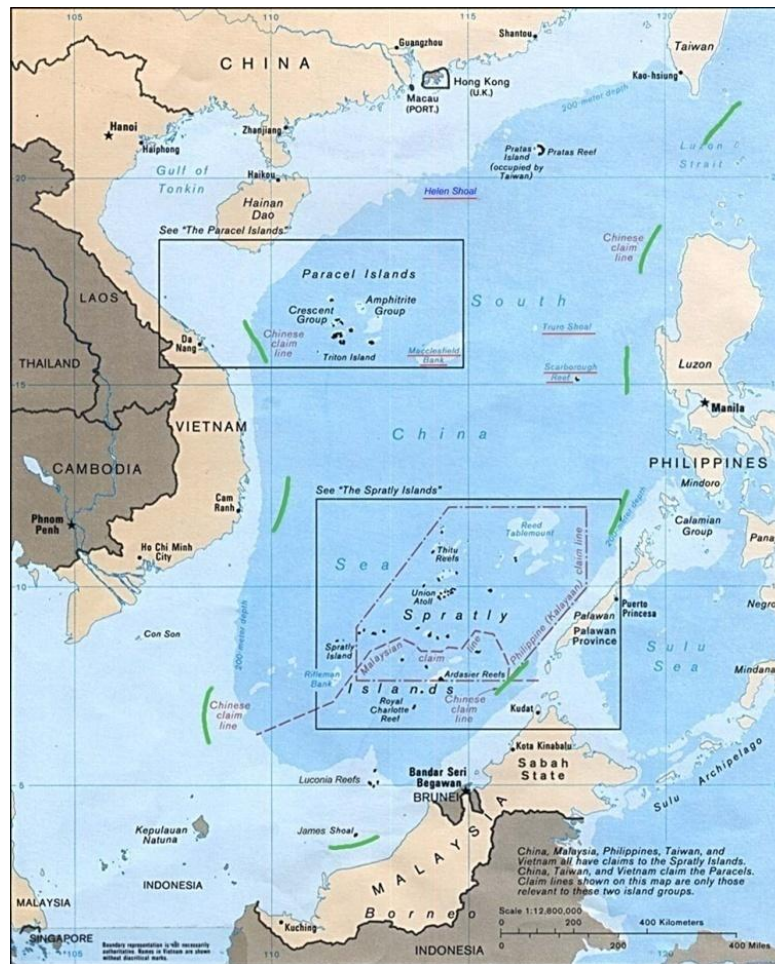
After the successful normalization with Indonesia has taken place, China swiftly mingle itself with the Southeast Asian community under the ASEAN. China became an official dialogue partner for ASEAN after Minister for Foreign Affairs and State Councilor Qian Qichen attended the 24<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in July 1991. This turn of events brought a new air to Southeast Asia as this enabled both China and ASEAN member countries to establish dialogue which was previously hampered by the tensions of Cold War. Unfortunately, China's inclusion to ASEAN's forum did not suppress the dispute from becoming a stumbling block.

Aware of the brewing situation in the SCS, it was in 1991 Foreign Minister Ali Alatas warned that the regional dispute could be developing into a conflict (Johnson, 1997). Amidst Indonesia's neutrality in the dispute, the country expressed concerns regarding the situation in SCS which involved its Southeast Asian neighbors. This indicated that Suharto's administration recognized the SCS dispute as a concern to Indonesia. But what kind of threat did this dispute possess to Indonesia? After all, the claims made by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam were revolving an area distant in proximity to Indonesia. None of the islands claimed were actually owned by Indonesia, so how this dispute did actually equate to Indonesia's interest? Indonesia's interest to the SCS is not a single unitary factor. The archipelagic country's interest can be interpreted into multiple factors. The first one might be

related to the immediate interest of the country, which is its own territorial integrity.

According to Satyawati, Indonesia's national interests in the SCS are security and territorial integrity, economic interest, constitution mandate and ASEAN unity (Satyawati, 2013). During a stage of Suharto's administration, Indonesia shifted the course which seemed irregular to the regime's resolve to focus on national stability. This shift was demonstrated by Indonesia's involvement in international issues such as the SCS dispute. In 1993 China laid out the 9 dashed lines map and integrated it effectively as part of its national law, which covers the entire South China Sea area, including the areas which the Southeast Asian countries claimed as theirs, and as expected, this course of action was then responded negatively from the claimant countries. At that time, Indonesia as a country which held their principles with a rigorous fashion under Suharto's stern leadership, might have felt threatened by China's unilateral actions. It has been only a few years after the diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China was normalized, and seeds of wariness and uneasiness against communism were still deep-planted within Indonesia's indoctrinated society, while ethnic Chinese were precariously treated as the second class buffer citizens by Suharto's regime design. Indonesia in general was apparently threatened, as they were the main target of suspiciousness if there was any indication of disadvantageous scheme from China which will hurt Indonesia (Sukma, 1999). Should any disruptions occur, this will surely bring an impact to Indonesia's stability and ultimately security.

Figure 1. The Nine-dotted line map



Source: Asia Maps, The University of Texas

The other factor to Indonesia's interests is economy. The immediate threat to the region was caused by the nature of the dashed lines map, which included Indonesia's northwestern territory, the seas of Natuna. The Natuna islands area, which is rich with gas and minerals, is one of Indonesia's biggest energy assets which supply the country with abundant gas reserves and revenues from gas exports (Azwar, 2013). The effect of losing such valuable territory would not only caused

Indonesia to suffer a major loss of potential revenues and gas reserve, but also something which generate an immense disadvantage to Indonesia's strategic policy.

The SCS issue is a multifaceted phenomenon to Indonesia, as it does not concern only a single tangible aspect. In a strategic perspective, the logic of the SCS dispute would suggest that should the Southeast Asian countries lost their claimed territories to China, then the risk of territorial loss for Indonesia is amplified.

This logic is based on the domino effect and spillover effect, but rather than ideological or economical the argument is based on historical jurisprudence from the legal perspective. Historical jurisprudence refers to a legal approach which considers the past legal method in resolving an issue as the evidence and legal method are used as the benchmark for resolving a similar case. Should the claimant Southeast Asian countries lose their claimed territories to China through international legal procedures; it would possess a threat to Indonesia's legal authority over the Natunas' waters.

Another reason as to why Indonesia refused to not taking any direct action is Suharto's high regard for stability. As a country which has enjoyed stability for more than three decades, Indonesia was in the midst of developing itself into one of Asia's emerging economic powers, or commonly known as one of the "Tigers of Asia". Indonesia's diplomatic normalization with China was intended to sustain the domestic development of Indonesia which was considered to be on the verge of "*tinggal landas*" or literally defined as transitioning into a developed country (Harian Ekonomi Neraca, 2013). To associate itself among the newly emerging developing countries, Indonesia felt the need to secure the stability of the region through diminishing potential threats which might arise in the coming periods. Indonesia's past hostility with China could be an even greater threat whereas the diplomatic absence was to be kept suspended while the country's immense power continues to grow. Although it is unclear whether the normalization of the diplomatic relation was also factored by the

growing dispute in the SCS, it is safe to assume that Indonesia sought reassurance of stability from its foreign policies by neutralizing the amount of potential threat the Southeast Asian region could bring to the country.

### *Indonesia's Response to SCS Dispute: Track II Diplomacy, Shuttle Diplomacy, and Defensive Posture Response*

As the opinion of two institutions were divided: the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deplu) which leaned to the accommodation and diplomatic approach to engage China; the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) that preferred to terminate and sever diplomatic relations with China, the Government of Indonesia maintained a balance of the soft and hard approach to manage the dispute. Since Indonesia was reluctant to do a direct approach and mediate the dispute G-to-G, Deplu sponsored a series of workshops which facilitated talks and dialogues between stakeholders of the issue.

The workshop mechanism was intended to de-escalate the atmosphere which was tense from the previous stand-offs. Another purpose of the workshop was also to strengthen and consolidate the ASEAN unity among member states, namely the Philippines and Malaysia, as the two countries not only clashed with China on the claimed territories, but also with each other. The other purpose was to bring non-member states to the dispute such as Taiwan to sit together with China and discuss the issue among each other. Indonesia deliberately constructed an informal workshop format so that the



respective delegates can attend and participate with ease. Participants should feel safer to engage in dialogues and exchanging views with each other since everyone attending is within their respective personal capacities. If the realist perspective perceives the security dilemma and perception of threat as something generated from the lack of communication among states, then the workshop would serve as the bridge which would close the gap of information and miscommunication, thus foster further understanding and cooperation.

As it was intended, ASEAN member countries and claimant countries were the ones who participated in this informal forum. These countries served as the main "pillars" of the workshop and addressed as Supporting Regional Authorities (SRAs). The attendees of the workshop were basically divided into four classifications: the first one being the participants, who was appointed by the SRAs to attend under their private capacities. These participants were from various institutions such as the foreign affairs department/ministry, academicians, and representatives of private companies. The second category of the attendee was the observers. Similar to the participants' category, the observers consisted of participants that consisted of academicians and researchers, with the additions of non-diplomatic government officials, military officers, journalists, non-governmental organization (NGO) members. The third attendee category was the resource persons. The individuals belonged in this category were appointed by the committee to provide the workshop with their work and expertise, most of the times to provide points of discussions. While the last

category of attendee was the committee members, mostly consisted of the individuals from the foreign affairs departments/ministries.

With de-escalation as one of the workshop's main concerns, the committee set the condition to be more conducive for discussions. For example, to avoid confrontations among the participants, the committee set the agenda of the workshop to avoid issues which are too sensitive to discuss. Most the time the highlight of the discussions revolves around establishing new methods of cooperation between countries in less-political fields such as environmental protection, navigational safety, and scientific research (Djalal, 2001). In line with the ASEAN way, recommendations and conclusions of the workshops were agreed upon based on consensus and not formally enforced. Should a participant disagree to a point of discussion, it should hold the discussion from having a conclusion which reflects the general idea of the discussion process.

Since the initiation in 1990, the workshop has been held annually. The Indonesian-led workshop was considered to be successful in keeping the dispute from escalating further among claimant countries. In addition that the forum has successfully made informal discussions approach more familiar to the participants, the range of issues has also developed over the time as well. For example, after covering the basic fields of cooperation as theme of discussions for the first three workshops, the topic of discussion became more specific while the a number of aspects generated from the discussions were agreed upon and became implemented for cooperation (Satyawan, 2013).

Excerpts written by Indonesia's senior diplomat Hasjim Djalal entailed points of basic principles of the workshop. While the guidelines put forward principles which reflects flexibility and inclusiveness, the guidelines also mentioned that managing potential conflicts is a long term process (Djalal, 2001), which then hints that it is a continuous, if not gradually improving process. Indeed, aside from the workshop the senior diplomat made efforts which were known today as the shuttle diplomacy. In 1994 Djalal made a series of visit to ASEAN member countries to introduce a proposal which was later known as the "doughnut proposal". Djalal proposed that the middle of South China Sea which consisted of islands should be "negotiable for joint development". Despite the shuttle diplomacy undertaken by Djalal, the proposal was rejected by ASEAN countries.

In the mean time, Indonesian armed forces responded the dispute in a more conventional way. During the past decade of the '90s, ABRI have held military trainings in the waters of the Natuna Islands. This military training was a reaction to China's unilateral action in 1993 which included the Natuna's waters into their official map (Republika Online, 1996). Dubbed as "loud diplomacy", in September 1996 Indonesia deployed 40 combat aircrafts, 50 warships, and 19,500 armed personnel. While earlier in August, Indonesia and Malaysia had joint military exercise in the Island of Kalimantan. The exercises was conducted in the Natuna waters under the pretext of sea as a suitable place for military exercise in larger number and gives a specific vision of defense exercise in bordering waters. (IMN, 1996).

But the military commander, Wiranto, gave a clear message to China that the exercise is conducted within Indonesia's territorial waters and if China or any other countries considered that such activities might leave a different impression, it was entirely beyond control (IMN, 1996). This suggests that the Indonesian ABRI was fully aware with the "inevitable consequences" generated from the large scale drill; however, they still conducted the activity and exercise authority over what they believe is theirs: Indonesia's authority over the Natuna Islands and its adjacent waters.

### **Indonesia's Response to the South China Sea Dispute during the Post-Suharto's Period**

#### ***BJ. Habibie's Administration (1998-1999)***

With Suharto stepping down from Presidency, the plea for political reform was clear that the transitional government led by President B.J. Habibie named his cabinet as the Indonesian Development Reform Cabinet. Despite the lukewarm and pessimistic responses generated from the general public opinion, Habibie's administration played its part to initialize the transitional period with bringing change to Indonesia's political, social, and legal aspects as the precursor to Indonesia's democratic state. The changes brought by Habibie gradually changed the face of Indonesia from a centralized quasi-authoritarian state into a plethora of openness and freedom, which to an extent brought a massive hope for change that was culminated during the 1999 election.

For certain, the change brought positive impacts to Indonesians; rising transparency, accountability, and efficiency are to name a few from the positive changes brought by the '98 reform movement (Febrian, Setiadi & Suprpto, 1999). But changes also brought other unwanted excess from the other side of the coin; retroactive allegations of misconducts from past Suharto's tenets, Indonesia's fading prestige and the decline of authority to other countries particularly its ASEAN neighbors, increasing socio-political instabilities, domestic dissents and separatist movements were some of the problems Indonesia faced during the reform era. Indonesia sustained a major blow with the separation of Timor-Leste in 1999, which generated distrust among the military higher-ups to the civilian-led government, with the addition that a number the armed forces personnel were charged with the allegations of human rights abuse (O'Rourke, 2002). Another flaw to the administration led by Habibie was the less effort made toward the reconciliation of the ethnic Chinese who fled for safety after the riot broke out. An interview reflected how Habibie's view to the minority group that controlled most of Indonesia's economy as somehow "dispensable" or replaceable by people who stayed in the country (Soebagjo, 2008), which might reflected how the leader's inward looking orientation.

Indonesia has always been taking an inward looking orientation when it comes to foreign policy during Suharto's rule, and Habibie's era was no exception. When the wave of reform struck the country in May 1998, Indonesia faced multi-dimensional crises, with monetary and social crisis to

name a few. Indonesia's transitional government led by Habibie focused even more on domestic issues, most of which required active and direct response as the situation regularly fluctuated. Aside from established and regular day-to-day activities such as the Working Group on the SCS, this initial reform period dramatically reduced Indonesia's active role in international relations (Mulyana, 2011). The country tried to allocate more resource and effort for the national recovery of the country, consequently disabling the government to give more attention to the SCS dispute. After more than three decades living under oppression of Suharto, Indonesia was anticipating for change and most of the energy and resources was allocated and concentrated for the 1999 General Elections which marked the first post-New Order election.

#### *Abdurrahman Wahid's Administration (1999-2001)*

The reform which gave rise to the demands for transparency, accountability, and good practice of politics sparked minor controversies regarding the results of the election which pitted two political party giants namely the established Golkar Party and the biggest challenger Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Despite the legislative victory of the PDI-P, Megawati Sukarnoputri did not manage to secure the Presidential throne (KPU, 1999), after a grueling voting session in the House of Representatives, the Nadhlatul Ulama leader Abdurrahman Wahid was elected as the President, with Megawati as Vice President.

Wahid, who was popularly known with his nickname "Gus Dur", launched policies to recover Indonesia's post-crisis-torn reputation. Wahid traveled the world, one of his missions was to reach the Middle-Eastern world, a world he was already familiar with but yet minimum in financial contribution to Indonesia, to gather funds for the republic's development (Sutiono & Akbar, 2001). Aside from ASEAN, he strived to bring more Indonesian exposure to multilateral forums such as the Developing Countries (D-8) forum, the World Economic Forum, and World Summit for Social Development (Mulyana, 2011). Although the efforts were carried out extensively, Gus Dur's expectations and objectives of a number his foreign policies were never made clear.

Domestically, Wahid made efforts to rehabilitate the victims of past regime "misdemeanors" such as political prisoners and the racially discriminated when the President lifted the communist and Marxist ban from the national law, which then helped smoothed out the rocky path of ideological antagonism legacy of Suharto (Taufik, 2013). Moreover, this move helped rectify the historical misunderstandings between Indonesia and Communist China which turned sour after the suspension of diplomatic relations. Discussions and literatures related to the leftist ideas flourished, historical reviews and reinterpretations became a common theme in the literature and research, while the scholars and media alike are striving to find the missing links in history which can be utilized in invalidating the past in the name of uncovering the truth.

As mentioned before, in addition to lifting the ideological ban Gus Dur helped

Suharto's political prisoners and Chinese-Indonesians in rehabilitating their names and social integrity to the society. After decades of living under racial discrimination and political oppression by the New Order regime, Chinese-Indonesians enjoy more freedom in socio-political fields while their dominance of the national economy proven to be resilient, despite a number of notable individuals flee the country in reaction to the civil unrest targeting the Chinese-Indonesians and their assets during the May '98 Riot (Soebagjo, 2008). Nevertheless, Wahid's efforts to integrate and rehabilitate the Chinese-Indonesians into the society have proven to be a success, with most of Sino-phobia sentiments gradually faded and for the first time the Government of Indonesia acknowledged the Chinese racial identity as part of the national identity (Taufik, 2013). Over a few years after the reform, the relations of Indonesia – China improved significantly. China's great economic rise by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought the country's influence to Indonesia. Paired up with the reformed Indonesia which showed a friendlier face toward China, the two countries enjoyed a renewed relationship (Kyodo News International, 1999). Under the reform introduced by Wahid, China's influence and culture has become more acceptable and accessible; Mandarin Chinese language gained larger popularity as the Chinese enterprises and investments grows steadily in Indonesia. China itself has become one of Indonesia's biggest trading partners, (International Trade Center, 2015) with Chinese commodities flooded Indonesia's domestic market, Indonesia was also aiming at China to sell its products as the country's growth warranted the rise of

the middle and middle-upper class group which are known for their spending prowess.

For some people, Wahid's figure was considered to be a savior with his domestic and foreign policies (Cooper, 2010), but his leadership was not without criticism. Despite his travels abroad which covered 90 countries, the endeavor were considered to be unnecessary while he was criticized for his negligence to domestic affairs (Mares, 2002). His unconventional demeanor received mixed receptions from the public, political allies, rivals, and adversaries alike. To his critics, his behavior and policies are considered to be from erratic to absurd as they tend to be disorganized, enigmatic, and incomprehensible for general public. His non-compromise and confrontative attitude turned his allies into adversaries who would later brought his downfall by impeachment.

#### ***Megawati Sukarnoputri's Administration (2001-2004)***

After Wahid was impeached by the House of Representatives (MPR) in 2001, Indonesia's foreign policy has taken an even improved route with Megawati Sukarnoputri helming the country's presidency. Started from a modest background in politics, Megawati was very inexperienced when it came to foreign affairs and its policies. Her grassroots-oriented political party was focusing on domestic barebones issues such as regulating basic commodity price, inflation, and infrastructure. According to Sukma, Megawati's lack of vision concerning

foreign affairs was a blessing in disguise for Indonesia since she entrusted the diplomatic affairs to Hassan Wirajuda, a professional diplomat who succeeded Alwi Shihab as Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2001. With Wirajuda commandeering the course of Indonesia's diplomatic vessel, the country embarked for a larger role in international affairs.

The Indonesian foreign minister introduced the term "Intermestic", a confluence between domestic and international aspects (Mulyana, 2011), which means the country wanted to maintain national interests through the seamless connectivity between its domestic issues and foreign policy. In a way, the new guidance to foreign policy could be understood to improve efficiency of the foreign policies' goals in lieu to the essential domestic needs. Dissenters to the government may consider the new foreign policy jargon was created to minimize criticisms from the public which felt there was a disconnectivity between national interests and foreign policy under Wahid (Tribun News, 2013). This could be understood from a perspective of accountability of foreign policy, which might not bring results which were expected from the public. This could also mean that in case the public was less informed about the foreign policies, efforts could be made to help the public to obtain better understanding about the objective of Indonesian foreign policies, or what the country's foreign policies could bring to the lives of ordinary citizens.

In addition to the intermestic approach, Wirajuda also introduced "total diplomacy". Total diplomacy is an approach of diplomacy which incorporated

the various elements of the society to contribute to the success of diplomacy (Mulyana, 2011). In other words, total diplomacy is essentially an integrated concept of multi-track diplomacy, except instead of having the tracks reserved exclusively for the respective groups of individuals and/or institutions; the tracks are interchangeably utilized by the groups to interact with each other and ultimately contributing to the goals of the intermestic foreign policy.

Indonesia's role in international forums such as ASEAN was expanded under Wirajuda's direction. During the Foreign Minister's tenure, Indonesia helped to expand ASEAN to grow into a more close-knit community, thus the concept of ASEAN Community was born after the Bali Concord II concluded (Moorthy & Benny, 2012). Indonesia's foreign policy became inseparable to ASEAN, as the regional organization's agenda was closely in conjunct with Indonesia's foreign policy concerns that Indonesia's leadership within ASEAN was considered to be substantial. The commitments to adopt the ASEAN Community concept has then led to the member states affirmation for democratic values, which arguably led to democratic transformation in Myanmar (Emerson, 2005). It was under Wirajuda that previously in 2002, ASEAN member countries successfully brought China together to agree on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) in South China Sea. According to Wirajuda, the DOC as the guideline to accommodate the peaceful resolution of the dispute is the fruit of the annual track-two informal workshop which has been conducted since 1990 (Dewan Pertimbangan Presiden). The content of the

DOC itself contains points of reaffirmation of both the claimant and non-claimant states to settle the dispute through peaceful means, to not partake in any actions which could escalate the tension in the disputed area, while committing to further cooperation which was discussed during the informal workshops. Therefore, it could be said that during Megawati's administration that Indonesia managed to give a significant improvement in terms of response to the SCS dispute since Suharto's reign ended, as it managed to level-up into the track one multilateral diplomacy in the scale of ASEAN countries plus China.

Regardless of the flaws during her tenure, Megawati was lauded as the progenitor of democracy in Indonesia as her administration facilitated the transformation of the state into the democratic Indonesia the world knows today. Despite assertion of her political interest to ensure her victory in the presidential election, Megawati's administration passed the bill for the presidential general election in 2004, which symbolized the commitment for change and conformity to global norms.

#### *Democracy: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Era (2004 – 2013)*

Perhaps the biggest challenge to Indonesia's foreign policy during Megawati's administration was to maintain Indonesia's resilience to global issues such as terrorism, something which became the main intention since the country suffered the numerous terrorist attacks during Megawati's presidency. Indonesia also gained the spotlight since the country is

home to the largest Muslim population in the world and the hotbed for alleged religious intolerances and terrorist training facilities. To this concern, Wirajuda subsequently played the diplomatic cards correctly by building the image of Indonesians Muslims as moderate among equal (Hughes 2010), while Indonesia's counter-terrorism initiative gained commendation for its effectiveness in curbing terrorism and cooperativeness with their foreign counterparts. For Indonesia, after gaining post-reform momentum Megawati's administration is the start when the country's foreign policy pendulum began to swing.

It was until 2004, the world began to see Indonesia's leadership in a different light when Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected as Indonesia's sixth President. With his pre-election rising popularity, combined with the unexpected coalition with fractions of Golkar and other parties against Megawati's PDI-P (Bulkin, 2013), Yudhoyono became the first directly elected President in Indonesia, cementing Indonesia's prestige of "Democracy" which the country later capitalize on. Under this new banner, Indonesia steadily regains and even goes beyond the vestige of its former glory which was tarnished after the '98 Tragedy and the Post-9/11 terrorist attacks. Yudhoyono's experience serving in Bosnia for Peace Keeping operations and studying abroad signified his familiarity with international issues. His close relation with foreign ministry official which was reflected on his book *Harus Bisa!* written by his Staff for International Affairs and Presidential Spokesperson, Dino Patti Djalal (then former Indonesian Ambassador to the US) indicated that he has been briefed on

international issues. Yudhoyono himself was already familiar with the executive work environment as he was serving under the previous two administrations as Minister for Mines and Energy and Coordinating Minister for Political and Security, in which during his previous tenure should have gave him the insight about what worked well and what did not in the government, and Indeed, Yudhoyono might have entrusted his views on Indonesia's expanded foreign policies based on such evaluation.

In 2004 Yudhoyono picked Wirajuda to resume his post as the Foreign Minister. Wirajuda recommenced his previous work and expand Indonesia's role further which remained grounded on strengthening the most on bilateral relations with stronger cooperation and partnerships, thus moving forward with the expansion and role of Indonesia in regional and international organizations (Mulyana, 2011). Indeed, Indonesia established economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Japan during Abe's Administration in 2007, nurtured a comprehensive partnership with the US in 2009, in which once again Indonesia gained the recognition as the world's model for moderate Islam from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Hughes, 2010). In 2007 Wirajuda managed to have the ASEAN member countries to sign for the ASEAN Charter, the constitution for the regional organization which have been drafted since 2005. The signing of the charter by the member states have effectively transformed the organization into a legally binding entity, a community, while enlist the commitment of the member states to pursue a mechanism for unresolved disputes. This means, through ASEAN mechanism,

Indonesia has moved a step further in creating a "tighter" environment for dispute settlement among ASEAN member countries which would constitute the signatories to abide to such mechanism when the time arise. However, it is not clear how the Charter can be implemented to resolve an inter-regional dispute such as the one in the SCS.

Yudhoyono was re-elected to serve for a second term in 2009. Marty Natalegawa succeeded Wirajuda's post as the foreign minister and further expand Indonesia's role in ASEAN and Southeast Asia with his "Millions Friends Zero Enemies" concept, which is in conjunction to Yudhoyono's new reinterpretation of Indonesia's free and active doctrine. Indonesia according to Yudhoyono, has succeeded in passing the two reefs which pointed out that the country should take an even greater challenge, which is "navigating the turbulent ocean". This new point of view hinted that Indonesia shall take on a larger role in the world, by actively establishing cooperation with other countries which affiliations and alliances in nature were rather constructed with fragmented-power relations which change dynamically as it was personified by a turbulent ocean (Mulyana, 2011). In addition, Natalegawa introduced the "dynamic equilibrium" concept, which suggests that the possibility for a country to rise to power is larger. This concept is a reinterpretation of powers to countries like Indonesia, which has the means and opportunity to play a larger role-if not to obtain more power and influence. Should Natalegawa's concept holds true, this means that the concept of power now has evolved into determined by factors such as

roles, values, and identities, as opposed to conventional components of power.

With this renewed view of foreign politics, Indonesia actively strived to maintain, if not enhance, its role as a bridge builder among worlds, stabilizer, and peace builder. In playing these roles, Yudhoyono's administration utilized the existing elements of Indonesia, namely the Muslim population, the country's role in ASEAN and other international organizations and forums. In addition to Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Indonesia gained even a bigger role with its inclusion as the member of G-20, owing to the US nomination for membership. Sukma argued that Indonesia's expanding role was something happened by default and not by design, or in other words the country's active participation was not planned or not intended from the beginning, but rather a reaction or a response to a condition and opportunity (Sukma, 2013). To reinforce this argument, perhaps we can see that in terms of power Indonesia is rather weaker compared to its neighbors, but due to the development of the international politics, such as Obama's administration and the SCS dispute, Indonesia managed to secure a larger role as it is today.

The Yudhoyono's administration saw an even more pro-active Indonesia in the efforts of resolving the disputes in Southeast Asia, particularly during Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2011. During its leadership in ASEAN, Indonesia successfully mediated the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia which generated tensions among member states. To this cause, Indonesia sent observers to monitor the ceasefire, brought the



conflicting parties, and encouraged negotiations which ultimately diffused the dispute.

In the same year, Indonesia was actively endorsing ASEAN member countries and China in implementing the DOC during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) with China. Natalegawa as ASEAN Chairman urged the members to step-up the dispute resolution process by reaching a consensus on the guidelines for the implementations of the DOC (Thayer, 2012). The meeting went successful with the consensus from the ASEAN countries and China was reached (Khalik & Nurhayati, 2011), furthermore the talks resumed in Beijing in January 2012 where the senior officials from respective countries have agreed upon setting up four expert committees based on the DOC (Thayer, 2012). Before the talks began in Beijing, there were discussions on setting up the Code of Conduct (COC) as the continuation of the DOC, and a number of officials have already worked on the COC (Thayer, 2012). Regardless, while China expressed its preference to stay clear from discussing the COC and maintained the original priority of the meeting which was to discuss the Guidelines of the DOC, the Philippines resumed producing and circulating the COC draft agenda among members. When ASEAN convened later that year for the annual Ministerial Meeting, the Chairmanship was already shifted to Cambodia, which pushed the agenda of having China in the ASEAN discussions; something which was deemed irregular considering China is not a member state to the Southeast Asian organization. The COC and China's interference would later

become the precursor to one of the biggest rift spikes within ASEAN members.

It was later in July 2012 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the AMM was held in Phnom Penh, when the Chair led by Cambodian Foreign Minister, Hor Nom Hong concluded that a joint communiqué could not be produced due to a lack of consensus from the members. Namhong concluded that the inclusion of the South China Sea paragraph in the communiqué will have the potential to escalate the tension since there were intentions from the member countries to be more specific with the naming of the disputed areas in question, whereas others expressed discontent with the direction the Chairman was leading.

This turn of event drew a tense atmosphere among the member countries, particularly the Philippines and Cambodia which blame each other for the failure to reach a joint communiqué. Natalegawa, with the intention of preserving the unity of ASEAN, went for a shuttle diplomacy over a two-day period to Manila, Hanoi, Bangkok, Phnom Penh and Singapore. The tour started from the Philippines to discuss the six-points proposal with the country's Foreign Minister Del Rosario. Once agreed, Natalegawa went to Vietnam, another ASEAN claimant country which has shown a desire to have a South China Sea paragraph in the joint communiqué which reflects the event occurred. From Hanoi, Natalegawa went to see his counterpart, Namhong, in Phnom Penh to discuss the six-point proposal which have been green lit by the previous two. Namhong agreed to Natalegawa's proposal, and the Indonesian Foreign Minister entrusted it with his Cambodian counterpart when he left for his final destination of his tour to Singapore.

Later in July, Namhong on behalf of the Chair released the six point proposal as the ASEAN's Six Principles of the South China Sea. The Six Principles is basically a substitution for the missing joint communiqué to address the SCS dispute, which exists to reaffirm the member states of the ASEAN and China to the existing principles of DOC with its implementations and guidelines, to the early conclusion of the Regional Code of Conduct (COC), respect to the international law with UNCLOS in particular, the commitment to self-restraint and non-use of force, and seeking a peaceful resolution to the dispute. The Six Principles which was originally proposed by Indonesia successfully prevented the absence of consensus about the dispute resolution, which has the potential widening the rift among ASEAN member states.

### **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to discuss how the post-Suharto regime's approach to the SCS varies considerably from the Suharto era. The latter was characterized with an undisputed ruler to Indonesia's political aspects during the New Order Regime, including the country's foreign policy. Despite Suharto's "ends justifies the means" principle to govern Indonesia for three long decades, the President's power was not without constraints, as absolute as it may seem, Suharto's control over everything in Indonesia was surpassed by forces beyond the geographical limit: economy.

Indonesia's response to SCS dispute during the New Order Era grew from

maintaining over territorial integrity to actively accommodate peaceful talks between claimant countries might reflect Indonesia's growing interests of the dispute itself or parties to the dispute. Indonesia's relation with China is an example how the country's dynamic of interests influenced its policies, notwithstanding the fact that there were contesting interests between Indonesia's influential decision-making institutions, it was Suharto who gave the final says to everything.

The post-Suharto era brought a different approach for Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute. The red line which connects the four administrations would be identified as conditions that would determine Indonesia's response. The first condition would be the domestic situation in Indonesia; as we can see the democratic Indonesia has more room for its foreign policy to maneuver due to a more stable domestic situation, while the earliest post-Suharto domestic situation was marred with instabilities and crises, which require further attention and resources from the authorities; the second condition is the authority figure, in this case it would be the president as the highest executive power holder, and the foreign minister as the spearhead, or second-in-command of the foreign policy, after the president; the third condition would be the given role, as in to what extent does Indonesia had the capacity to execute its foreign policy from its given role in an international environment, such as ASEAN.

One thing worth noting about Indonesia's growing response to the SCS, it was steadily developing from a simpler honest broker role into an active bridge builder, and ultimately holds ASEAN's

leadership in preserving inter-regional peace and stability. At a glimpse we might see that Indonesia made its best achievements when it was chairing ASEAN, but the events after 2012 AMM shows us that Indonesia can make a proper response to the SCS dispute regardless it holds the ASEAN chairmanship or not.

#### About the Author

Derry Aplianta holds a Master of Arts from the Graduate School of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University; He is currently a diplomat at Asia Pacific Section, Center for Policy Analysis and Development for Asia-Pacific and African Regions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia.

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