

Diplomatic Tensions in the South China Sea: Implications for Regional Stability

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ABSTRACT

Diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea have become a major concern in global geopolitical dynamics. Conflicts of interest and policy dynamics involving the coastal countries of the South China Sea have made this region always volatile at any time. This research aims to analyze the root causes of these tensions and identify possible implications for regional stability. The research method used in this research is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The results of this research reveal that diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea have a serious impact on regional stability. Disputes related to territorial claims, Exclusive Economic Zones, and economic disputes create economic and security vulnerabilities that can harm all parties involved. Impeded multilateral cooperation also hinders efforts to resolve joint issues. In addition, social and political impacts create internal instability that can trigger riots and divisions within the government. Thoughtful handling of these tensions is necessary, involving open dialogue, intelligent diplomacy, and a strong commitment to maintaining regional stability, creating a strong foundation for sustainable peace and security in the South China Sea.

Keywords: tension, diplomatic, south china sea, regional stability

1. INTRODUCTION

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have become a trigger for increasingly escalating tensions between China and neighboring countries, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. As time went by, tensions increased, especially after US President Barack Obama announced a "focus pivot" to the region, adding complexity to regional geopolitical dynamics (Sudira, 2014). The epicenter of the territorial dispute focuses on a number of islands that make up an area known as "ox tongue," involving almost the entire South China Sea. The region has a wealth of natural resources, fisheries, trade routes and military bases, all of which are at stake in increasing diplomatic tensions (Rosyidin, 2015).

China's sweeping claims to sovereignty over the entire region and its strong opposition to handling disputes through the international arena have hampered efforts to resolve the crisis (Waluyo, 2020). Furthermore, the nationalist attitudes reinforced by these claims have embroiled the countries involved, especially Vietnam and the Philippines, in increasingly complicated tensions. China's showing an unwillingness to negotiate multilaterally has raised concerns about the possibility of escalating conflict in the South China Sea (Chalid et al, 2016).

Experts observe that although the escalation of conflict is far from expected, tensions in the South China Sea are shaping an ongoing crisis in the region. In addition, the implications of this instability involve US strategic interests in the region, indicating the complexity and global impact of this dispute (Maksum, 2017). Therefore, a deep understanding of these dynamics is essential for designing effective diplomatic approaches and building regional cooperation to overcome increasing uncertainty in the South China Sea (Suharman, 2019).

The South China Sea, which covers an area of approximately 1.4 million square miles in the Pacific Ocean, stretches from the Singapore Strait and Malacca Strait to the Taiwan Strait, and involves regional countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam (Ruyat, 2017). With hundreds of islands scattered throughout its territory, the South China Sea includes the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas Islands, Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal, becoming a major focus of regional tensions. Although these islands are largely uninhabited and have never had an indigenous population, the complexity of historical sovereignty issues makes resolving them even more difficult (Noor, 2015). The six major countries in Southeast Asia are making claims to this region, triggering confusing competition and increasing geopolitical uncertainty in the region (Harini, 2011).

Disagreements over ownership of these islands create complex tensions, with each country having different claims rooted in regional history and politics. Debates regarding maritime boundaries, natural resource exploration rights, and the construction of military installations are increasingly escalating, presenting major challenges in finding fair and sustainable solutions (Arifianto, 2018). Ultimately, the uncertainty surrounding sovereignty status in the South China Sea not only affects the region but also has global impacts, especially in the context of increasing geopolitical tensions at the international level (Sartono et al., 2021).

Disputes in the South China Sea do not only cover land, but also involve claims to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by each country, in accordance with the provisions of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). UNCLOS mandates that each country has an EEZ with a width of 200 miles sea from the coastline of its territorial sea, granting exclusive rights to marine resources and full autonomy in exploration and energy production. The EEZ can involve the continental shelf beyond the 200 mile limit, complicating the dynamics of territorial disputes (Ang, 2020).

In this context, EEZs are a key element in disputes, as occurred in the conflict between China and Vietnam in December 2012 regarding oil and fishing activities in the waters around the Paracel Islands. This competition for control of natural resources and economic territory is creating deeper frictions between countries in the region. UNCLOS, although providing a legal framework for dealing with such conflicts, has not always avoided tensions, and fair resolution has become increasingly complicated. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the implications of EEZs in maritime territorial disputes is crucial in efforts to find solutions that can ensure justice and stability in the South China Sea (Toruan & Theodorus, 2020).

This research aims to investigate the root causes of diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea and analyze the possible implications, especially regarding their impact on regional stability. By understanding the dynamics of conflict in this region, this research seeks to contribute to the development of policies that can reduce tensions and maintain regional stability. The benefits of this research involve a deeper understanding of the complexity of disputes in the South China Sea, providing strategic insights to policymakers, and creating the basis for more effective diplomatic efforts in maintaining regional peace and security. Thus, it is hoped that this research can make a positive contribution to the management of diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea, creating a strong foundation for sustainable regional stability.

2. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Diplomacy

Diplomacy is an important instrument in implementing a country's national interests. Diplomacy is the main tool in achieving national interests related to other countries or international organizations. Through this diplomacy a country can build an image about itself. In relations between countries, diplomacy is generally carried out from the earliest level when a country wants to have bilateral relations with another country until the two develop further relations (Djelantik, 2008).

Diplomacy is the practice of carrying out negotiations between countries through official representatives. Official representatives are elected by the country itself without any interference from other parties or other countries. Diplomacy between countries can cover the entire process of foreign relations, both the formation of foreign policy and its implementation. Diplomacy is said to also include operational techniques to achieve national interests beyond jurisdictional boundaries. The increasing dependence between countries has led to an increasing number of international meetings and international conferences being held to date (Prayuda, 2019).

2. Diplomatic Tensions

Diplomatic tensions refer to tense and uncertain conditions of international relations between two or more countries or political entities. Sources of tension can come from various factors, such as differences in political views, ideology, economics, or territorial disputes. This situation often creates an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion between the countries involved, which can escalate the situation into a more serious conflict or crisis (Puspitarini, 2020).

In a diplomatic context, tensions can arise when countries are unable to reach an agreement or when a dispute arises that is difficult to resolve. Factors such as controversial foreign policies, conflicting interests, or international events that trigger negative reactions can also fuel diplomatic tensions. Prudent handling of diplomatic tensions involves effective diplomatic efforts, open dialogue, and cooperation to avoid costly escalation of conflict. Awareness of the importance of maintaining stability and harmonious international relations is crucial in managing diplomatic tensions in order to achieve global peace and security.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research, namely the data collected is in the form of words, images, not numbers. According to Bogdan and Taylor, as quoted by Lexy J. Moleong (2014), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. Meanwhile, descriptive research is a form of research aimed at describing or illustrating existing phenomena, both natural phenomena and human engineering. The aim of descriptive research is to create systematic, factual and accurate information about the facts and characteristics of a particular population or area. This research is used to find out how to analyze Diplomatic Tensions in the South China Sea and the implications for Regional Stability.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In a conflict that occurs, it cannot be denied that each country involved must have its own interests. As in the conflict that occurred in the South China Sea region, all countries involved in it have their own interests which they want to realize so that the country can benefit from the conflict that occurs. In the conflict in the waters of the South China Sea and Indonesia being involved in it, there are also interests that Indonesia and countries in the region want to realize. This is because each country definitely has its own goals in everything it does. Moreover, if in doing this a large amount of funds have been spent.

Diplomatic tensions can have a serious impact on regional stability, creating uncertainty and increasing the risk of conflict. Some impacts that may arise include:

a) Economic Disruption

Economic disruption is one of the main impacts of diplomatic tensions on regional stability. When political uncertainty reigns, trade and investment between countries can experience significant declines. Countries involved in diplomatic conflicts tend to implement protectionist policies, such as high import tariffs or trade restrictions, as a form of retaliation. This not only harms each country's economic growth, but also creates a wave of uncertainty in regional markets. Business actors may become reluctant to make long-term investments or develop cross-border cooperation, resulting in negative impacts on the region's shared economic prosperity. Furthermore, the impact of economic disruption can also trigger internal problems in the countries involved, such as high levels of unemployment or social instability. Economic uncertainty associated with diplomatic tensions creates additional pressure on governments to address domestic economic problems, which in turn can create political and social tensions. Therefore, understanding the economic impact of diplomatic tensions is key in efforts to maintain regional stability and encourage peaceful negotiations to resolve disputes between countries.

b) Security Tensions

Diplomatic tensions can have a significant impact on security tensions in a region. In a regional context, uncertainty and disputes between countries can stimulate arms races, increase military presence on borders, and create strategic tensions. States involved in territorial disputes tend to strengthen their military capabilities in response to potential threats, creating an environment that may be detrimental to regional stability. This competition can increase the risk of military conflict spreading to neighboring countries, creating the potential for broader security threats and harming overall regional stability.

Furthermore, security tensions can create profound psychological and political impacts. The growing sense of insecurity between the countries involved can worsen diplomatic relations and create mutual suspicion.

These circumstances create serious challenges in achieving constructive dialogue and peaceful solutions to territorial disputes. Therefore, maintaining regional stability requires concrete efforts to reduce security tensions, promote transparency in defense policy, and build effective regional security cooperation. By managing security tensions, the region can move towards a safer and more stable environment for all countries involved.

c) Regional Polarization

Diplomatic tensions in the context of the South China Sea could create significant polarization among regional countries. Territorial disputes and conflicting territorial claims can divide countries into competing groups, creating blocks of interests that can complicate efforts to reach agreements or peaceful solutions. This regional polarity creates complex political dynamics and can be detrimental to regional stability, because countries tend to form alliances or cooperate with countries that have similar interests. This not only makes it difficult to reach mutual agreements, but can also exacerbate political tensions and increase the risk of conflict in the region.

Additionally, regional polarization can also create imbalances in political and economic power. Countries that join powerful interest blocs may have greater influence in regional decision-making, while countries that do not join can feel marginalized or unrecognized. These inequalities can fuel feelings of discontent and political instability, exacerbating tensions among regional groups. Therefore, in an effort to maintain regional stability, it is necessary to take steps to reduce polarization, encourage dialogue between interest blocs, and build inclusive cooperation mechanisms to achieve sustainable regional stability and balance.

c) Social and Political Unrest:

The impact of diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea has serious implications at the social and political level in the countries involved. At a social level, uncertainty and tension can create an atmosphere of worry among people. Social inequality may increase along with feelings of insecurity, and issues of nationalism may be amplified, resulting in divisions among societal groups. People who feel affected by diplomatic tensions can channel their dissatisfaction through protests, demonstrations, or even acts of violence, creating an unstable social situation and endangering social cohesion.

On the political side, uncertainty resulting from diplomatic tensions can spill over into government structures. Governments may face internal pressure to take firm or aggressive action, and controversial foreign policies may create divisions among political leaders and political parties. Differences of opinion regarding the handling of diplomatic tensions can also create instability in the domestic political arena, even leading to leadership changes or profound policy changes. In some cases, this political instability can create an opening for extremist groups or political opposition to take a more dominant role, increasing the risk of unrest or more serious internal conflict. Therefore, maintaining social and political stability at the national level is important in efforts to defuse diplomatic tensions and ensure sustainable peace in the South China Sea.

d) Disruption to Multilateral Cooperation

The impact of diplomatic tensions on multilateral cooperation creates obstacles in handling regional and global problems in the South China Sea region. Disputes between countries can hinder efforts to reach consensus or cross-border cooperation in responding to shared issues, such as climate change, maritime security, or handling pandemics. This condition creates difficulties in implementing joint solutions that can benefit all parties and create an effective cooperation framework.

In addition, diplomatic tensions can result in countries in the South China Sea region tending to apply a bilateral rather than a multilateral approach in dealing with conflicts. Failure to participate in multilateral efforts can harm prospects for peaceful and sustainable resolution, as cross-border cooperation is often more effective in resolving complex disputes. The formation of regional interest blocs and isolationist policies can create instability in the international system, reducing the ability to achieve sustainable solutions and harming the stability of the region as a whole. Therefore, maintaining and strengthening multilateral cooperation mechanisms is important in managing diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea and building a foundation for sustainable peace and security.

e) Humanitarian Impact

The impact of diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea includes serious humanitarian consequences. Conflicts and territorial disputes can trigger humanitarian crises with detrimental impacts on civilian populations. Especially in areas directly affected by tensions, such as islands at the center of disputes, civilians may face forced displacement, human rights violations, and significant security uncertainty. Economic development and community welfare can also be hampered, resulting in social and economic instability at the local level.

Additionally, political and military uncertainty associated with diplomatic tensions can create risks to environmental sustainability. The South China Sea region has high marine biodiversity and is an important ecosystem resource. Threats to environmental sustainability, whether through increased military activity or conflict related to the exploitation of natural resources, can harm marine ecosystems and have long-term impacts on fishermen's livelihoods and the economic sustainability of coastal communities. Therefore, in the context of humanitarian and environmental impacts, wise handling of diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea becomes imperative to protect the rights of local communities and preserve the environment in the region.

5. CONCLUSION

Diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea have a multidimensional impact that includes economic, security, political and humanitarian aspects. Disputes related to territorial claims, Exclusive Economic Zones, and economic disputes create uncertainty that can harm regional stability. Disruption to multilateral cooperation also hampers efforts to address common issues, such as climate change and maritime security. In addition, the impact at the social and political level creates internal instability that can trigger riots and divisions within the government. Addressing diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea requires a holistic approach involving open dialogue, thoughtful diplomacy and multilateral cooperation. It is important to understand the full implications of these disputes to create effective and sustainable policy measures. Efforts to maintain regional stability also require strong commitment from all parties involved, both bilaterally and through a multilateral cooperation framework. Only then can the South China Sea region face a more stable, peaceful and sustainable future, avoiding conflict escalation and enhancing cooperation for the common good.

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