

ASEAN-NSP Under the US-China Conflict and Covid-19 Pandemic Challenges

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Introduction

US-China Conflict and Covid-19 pandemic impacted to the future cooperation of ASEAN-NSP. This challenges the current dynamics of initiatives of partnership.

National interests of South Korea, Indonesia and ASEAN State members are relevant to ASEAN-New Southern Policy. South Korean President Moon Jae-in wanted to strengthen “economic and diplomatic ties with ASEAN and India to rebalance its external links away from Northeast Asia and the US... and reduce the dependence on Northeast Asian links” (Pardo 2018). For Indonesia and ASEAN state members the policy will contribute to the rise of regional economic growth of Southeast Asia. They easily welcome South Korea’s NSP initiatives due to the ROK’s foreign policy character by maintaining mutual and equal partnership to reach prosperity for all.

Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said that Indonesia will focus on the Indonesia-South Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IK-CEPA). The diplomacy continues to conduct for larger trade agreement on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) at the ASEAN Summit in November 2020 (The Jakarta Post, 27 October 2020). The RCEP is second important agreement after World Trade Organization.

The diplomacy also involved local government exchanges best practices between Indonesia and South Korea. In July 2020, Indonesia hosted an online seminar participated by local governments from both countries discussing how to manage Covid-19 pandemic and reopening local economy.

To support government initiatives, it is strategic to encourage industrial sectors to engage with universities, research centers and laboratories to join the cooperation. This is urgent to ensure sustainability of the partnership in the long term. Non state actors diplomatic participation will strengthen larger forum from bilateral to regional.

Institutional Theory

The cooperation among South Korea, India and ASEAN on NSP projects can be viewed by institutional theory. The theory countered power relations theory. Institutions should be developed in order to strengthen the mutual partnership.



Institutions should be strengthened for strategic initiatives in regional and international peace and stability, and building cooperation in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic.

Balancing the Powers

In addition, the cooperation will balance potential wars and conflicts between two great powers, China and U.S. They have had trade wars which impacted to global economy. Further threats are South China Sea conflicts. The great powers already attempted to drag ASEAN and Republic of Korea to choose one of the powers. China keeps dominating as the hegemon of regional economy. While US warned China to reduce the powers in South China Sea by regularly having navy trainings with some of Asia Pacific countries. While China and U.S. wanted to develop hegemony of their powers, South Korea through ASEAN-NSP hoped co-existence and mutual prosperity and peace (Kwak 2020).

Indonesia needs South Korea in leading contribution in regional and international peacebuilding, security and stability. Indonesian foreign policy is clearly non alliance country managing a balance of relations between great powers.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Indonesia and South Korea developed health cooperation to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic since early of pandemic. Minister Marsudi said: “since the beginning [of the pandemic], South Korea has been an important partner for Indonesia in providing medical supplies needed to handle Covid-19, including personal protective equipment.” (Sutrisno 2020).

On April 21, 2020, President Joko Widodo had phone talks with President Moon Jae-in. The talks expressed commitment to strengthen international cooperation in handling COVID-19 by both Indonesia and South Korea. It confirmed that “the South Korean Government has prioritized Indonesia as one of the main partners in the COVID-19 handling cooperation, including in medical equipment production sector” (MoFA_RI, 24 April 2020).

Conclusion

ASEAN-NSP is strategic for Indonesia, South Korea, ASEAN and India for mutual prosperity. Co-existence approach of South Korea on NSP will maintain sustainable cooperation involving diplomatic participations of states and non-state actors.

The Covid-19 pandemic is currently common interest of all partners. Government have to protect citizens from the pandemic. The impact on socio-economic and urgency for developing strategic research needs larger participation of universities, research centers and laboratories in building long term cooperation between South Korea, Indonesia and ASEAN.



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