

Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: US Pivot to Asia

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Abstract: In both terms of Barack Obama's Administration, United States of America has focused to intensify its relations with the Asia-Pacific. This foreign policy is considered as an effort to support the United States in obtaining its national interest. However to implement this policy, the United States needed to make adjustments from two levels, international and domestic politics. There are many actors in the dynamic of domestic politics that contributed and constrained the foreign policy to bring an optimum result. Many views which are non-unitary because of the diverse domestic actors were involved in the United States' foreign policy making. In the United States, the foreign policy got influenced by the dynamics of Congress, the public, and the media. United States policy to pivot to the Asia-Pacific region is affected by several biased party interests in the Congress. Barack Obama as the candidate of one of the dominant party in the United States, the Democratic Party, of course, will get a certain response from the Republican Party as the opposition. When those non-unitary domestic actors determined the foreign policy, sometimes cross-interests and negotiation might happen. Not only the Congress, there are many other domestic actors that are trying to put their group interests into the government's consideration. The dynamics of domestic politics can be one of the factors that affected the Asia-Pacific pivot policy of the United States in Obama's Administration.

1 INTRODUCTION

The United States during Barack Obama's administration has taken a significant step of change in its foreign policy, shifting the focus of its foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region. The United States, which during the period of previous governments, was heavily involved in the Middle East region then began to look at the Asia-Pacific region and strengthen economic and security relations in the region. The Asia-Pacific region comprising of emerging countries was later recognized by the United States as a prospective partner who could assist the United States in achieving its national interests. This region does have a smooth and rapid trade flow that it can support the efforts of the United States to cultivate its economic capabilities. In addition, the United States also tries to engage as well as protect the beneficial economic activity by increasing its militarized presence in the region. The United States seeks to join multilateral forums and bilateral negotiations and take steps as facilitator in various ongoing cooperation. Of course, the shift of US axis to start paying more attention in its foreign relations towards Asia-Pacific is influenced by various factors of consideration, one of which is domestic politics.

In this case, the author seeks to focus on analyzing the formation of a shifting foreign policy through the domestic political layer of the United States. In essence, to discuss and analyze foreign policy, domestic political analysis will be sufficiently related to the level of analysis of the international system. Because in the process of foreign policy determination, a country also has what is called a two-level game, ie national or domestic level considerations and international considerations (Putnam 1988: 434). In the game's two-level approach, a win-set policy or policy that is in line with the international situation is required but also accepted by domestic actors. This domestic political actor can be an obstacle to the preparation of foreign policy. Thus, the United States must not only bring its international character into its foreign policy, but also weigh the responses of various domestic political actors. In looking at the changes in foreign policy during this period of the Barack Obama administration, the writer uses three players in domestic politics, the political elite, the society, and the idea or discourse in which the various elements of domestic politics reflect the state of the uniterate state because of differences in focus and interests. In this discussion, the three domestic players seen in presenting the limitations of the formation of

alternative US foreign policy are the two dominant parties in Congress, public or public voices, and the media. The author discusses whether there is significance of domestic political actors attracting each other in influencing the shifting of the United States axis toward Asia-Pacific.

1.1 Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy

Foreign policy of a country can be analyzed through domestic political approach. The central assumption of a country's domestic politics approach is that the state is not a unitary entity (Fearon, 1998: 302). This domestic political-level analysis seeks to see that a country's foreign policy is influenced by diverse domestic actors with different goals and values. Due to the dynamics of the country being met by different components and interacting with each other, thus the state seen as a non singular entity. Each domestic group will encourage the state to take or set foreign policies that are in line with the interests of the group (Putnam 1988: 434). Through the domestic political level as well, it is explained that there are other forces of the country that can provide an explanation of foreign policy output. Domestic political factors will be important in determining foreign policy when several actors within the country can explain different foreign policies. Fearon (1998: 301) explains that this level of analysis of domestic politics provides a limitation for countries to adjust to the international situation, which then leads the country to a less than optimal policy. Because the state is deemed necessary to make policies that meet the two-level game. This limitation arises because the state has several elements such as political institutions, culture, economic structures, and other significant aspects in the formation of choices in foreign policy and may bind other options.

Kaarbo (2015: 207) states that the approach of foreign policy analysis using domestic political level can be seen through several theories of International Relations. Some of these theories will show different actors in domestic politics, as are neoclassical realist groups focused on the political elite. While liberalist groups will focus on institutions and community barriers, as well as constructivist groups will look at ideas and discourses. Basically every factor in domestic politics presents a certain limitation for foreign policy making. This can be clarified by seeing that the political elite, the community, and the idea or discourse bring their own interests and concerns into consideration of a foreign policy. There are five consequences given by domestic political layer

interaction with foreign policy. These include the extent of foreign policy habits, the credibility of commitments to foreign policy, the stability of foreign policy, the ability to mobilize forces, and the strategies of domestic actors in influencing foreign policy (Rogowski 1998, Fearon, 1998: 303).

While Schultz (1998 in de Mesquita & Smith, 2012: 166) argues that the main actor who is influential in the domestic politics of a country is the government and the legitimate opposition groups. Two players in government as a political elite will interact and bring dynamics to decision-making related to a policy. It can be seen that with the politics of the government and opposition groups, the state will get a variety of voice and alternative inputs that describe the non-authoritarian conditions of a country. Such conditions may affect the implementation of existing foreign policy. It said that opposition groups could reject government policies if they are deemed ineffective, too risky, or predicted to fail. Thus, the governing group finds discretion in determining the choices in foreign policy made because of the considerations of the opposition. The existence of these opposition groups also has implications for foreign policy by encouraging state leaders to review the effectiveness of foreign policy that is still being drawn up. The projection of the success or failure of the implementation of the foreign policy in bringing the interests of the state and the interests of society indirectly can influence the public's view of its position as a leader. Thus, the consideration of the opposition group is not only important in the outcome of the country's foreign policy, but also in the coalition of maintaining the position of the state leader (Putnam 1988: 434; Fearon, 1998: 303). Thus, there is a party within the political elite of the legitimate opposition group which then presents the boundaries and obstacles or caution for the leader of the state in determining foreign policy.

Page and Barabba (2000: 347) state that a country's society as one of the elements of domestic politics has little to do with foreign policy making. It is said that the interests of foreign countries are often not preferred or do not get the attention of the community. People have a tendency to influence decisions on government spending that takes care of domestic needs. However, the contribution of people who may be less than optimal in influencing this foreign policy will be aided by the role of the media. Soroka (2003: 28) adds that the media is a bridge for the general public and the policy makers themselves. Media raises awareness of the public to give attention and opinions regarding policies to be taken by the

United States. When people know an important issue through the media, the community can then respond. With the response then the government can present the process of re-evaluation and provide some changes to the policy being discussed.

Society will be more concerned with foreign policy changes if the policy can directly affect the community. The possibility of the impact that will be accepted by the domestic group over the implementation of a new foreign policy will be the problem of the community in determining the policy preferences taken (Fearon, 1998: 304). Some public affairs that will be feared to be directly affected by foreign policy are those that intersect the level of mutual prosperity and state security, for example on how foreign economic policy will have an impact on the sustainability of economic distribution in domestic groups. The United States itself considers that the protection of the welfare of the people in terms of the level of employment is one of the important objectives to be achieved through foreign policy (Page & Barabas 2000: 351). One of the influences of US society on foreign policy can also be seen through its views on security aspects. People tend to reject the policy of sending US troops abroad because their effects can be felt directly. Powell (1993 in de Mesquita & Smith, 2012) argues that domestic considerations often do not meet the wishes of the government and again raise certain limits for leaders. In addition, there has been a lot of criticism of the influence of public opinion as an element that coloring the dynamics of domestic politics. Criticism of public opinion has arisen because some of the general public are often not rational and have an inadequate understanding of issues to influence the consideration of a country's foreign policy (Baum & Potter, 2008: 44). However, society and the media are the elements of domestic political dynamics and can influence the outcome of a country's foreign policy.

1.2 Actor in US Domestic Politics

From domestic political elements that have been conveyed by Kaarbo (2015: 207), domestic politics within the United States consists of several elements, namely the two dominant parties in the US Congress as political elites, public voices and institutions as a society, as well as the media as an idea or discourse. The three domestic actors of the United States become actors who may have interests attracting each other and influencing US foreign policy. King (1986: 86) states that the decisions or measures on foreign policy are influenced by the political instruments of the United States through Congress. Congress as a

representative of the United States community contributed to policy making. One such contribution is made by Congress by reviewing the budget and state requirements of other resources when implementing the established policies. In general, the United States Congress is filled by two dominant parties namely Democrats and Republican parties. While public votes by institutions and communities may present other inputs in Congressional considerations through lobbyists or lobbyists.

The two dominant parties in the Congress acted as a legitimate power of the government and opposition forces, both of which are elements of domestic politics as Schultz (1998 in de Mesquita & Smith, 2012: 166) has pointed out. In everyday life, both parties have different characteristics and focus issues that result in two different views on the decision-making process. Partisan attitudes or the inclination of attitudes toward a party often occur in the dynamics of Congress. The partisan attitude of the Democratic and Republican parties is what creates the constraints of non-unitary situation on the state that is in Congress (Spanier & Noguee, 1981: xxi).

Level of analysis on domestic politics does see the state as a non unitary entity, but consists of several actors that cause differences and limitations on policy making in it. Different interests and voters from the Democrats and the Republican party will initially produce different policy plans. But to determine the foreign policy, the Congress does not immediately choose one of the two alternatives proposed from both parties. This is due to the different focus and position of the President as well as the two parties in Congress who have certain insistence. Thus, what Congress should do is to bring together and review the foreign policy that has been proposed by both parties (Spanier & Noguee, 1981: 195). Cooperation between every player in the United States Congress will then convey the pressures of each parties that can be taken into consideration in the preparation of foreign policy. To this end, each of the two parties will deliver a special focus and value, whereby the specificity of the different actors raises restrictions on foreign policy. Although again the limit for the government in taking steps, but this is a natural thing of the dynamics of domestic politics. In order to produce a fixed and definitive output of foreign policy, the government and the United States Congress as non-unitary domestic political actors need to work together (Halperin, et al., 2006: 63). Thus, the bipartisan or cooperative attitude of the Democratic and Republican parties becomes necessary to facilitate the process of foreign policy making.

In the formation of foreign policy itself, the United States Congress has a tendency to meet each other's point of view rather than in shaping domestic policy. US foreign policy will be achieved through Congress when both parties in Congress are bipartisan or cooperative (King 1986: 85). Bipartisan attitude is more common when discussing international issues or determining foreign policy. In decision-making related to foreign policy, Democrats and Republican parties have more tendency to unite because of the pressures that still cross each other between the focus of one party with another (King, 1986: 87). It is said that the differences between the two parties in the Congress are not so rigid when discussing foreign policy so that the cooperative attitude of the Democratic and Republican parties is more easily achieved. When bipartisan attitudes have arisen in Congress, domestic political interests will not be a major constraint or limitation for countries in shaping foreign policy. Parties' cooperation within the Congress will make it easier for countries to adapt policies that address domestic and international situations. So it can be said that non-partisan attitudes or non-partisan attitudes to certain party biases are more supportive to carrying out foreign policy.

The United States Congress was also later accompanied by the presence of certain institutions or interest groups which later entered to lobby. Interest groups in the United States can be present in Congress to lobby in the foreign policy-making process. Interest groups in the United States also come from various backgrounds and identities, such as groups of students, non-governmental organizations, and groups with a particular focus on issues (Caicedo, 2009: 5). The lobbyist will then try to influence the considerations of actors in the government who make policies by giving new considerations. This is quite alarming for US relations in other countries. The lobbyists in the Congress illustrated the United States, which later experienced obstacles because of the many actors who played as group representatives and presented the non-authoritarian situation of their domestic politics. The many interests that fall within the preparation of US foreign policy need to be taken into account so that the existing input does not remove the values and character of the United States internationally. Public opinion becomes one of the other elements in the domestic dynamics of the United States as a liberal democracy (Baum & Potter, 2008: 44). Although the issues of state relations to the international situation or foreign policy are often considered unattractive, the United States will pay attention to international issues in times of crisis. While the media is also a third element in US

domestic politics that can influence decisions related to foreign policy.

1.3 Obama Pivot to Asia

In the Barack Obama Administration, the United States implements foreign policy emphasizing its axis position towards Asia. Asia-Pacific became a shifting focus in US foreign policy on Barack Obama's administration when compared to policies in the previous regime. The United States before the reign of Barack Obama had much to do with the countries of the Middle East because of the backdrop of the tragedy of 9/11. However, in the period of Barack Obama, US foreign policy is just beginning to be implemented and aims to establish strategic relationships with the Asia-Pacific region and enhance the sharpness of cooperation in the field of economy and security (Manyin, et al., 2012: 2). Mills (2015: 1) also mentioned that the implementation of US foreign policy towards the Asian region is implemented by strengthening security cooperation, increasing the intensity of relations with developing countries, joining multilateral institutions of Asia-Pacific region, expanding trade scope, ensuring the existence of the US military in the Asian region, and strengthen the values of democracy and humanity.

To strengthen US-Pacific relations in the Asia-Pacific region on various fronts, first the United States needs to eliminate certain tensions with countries in the region. One of the United States' efforts to embrace the Asia-Pacific is to build sustainable diplomatic relations. This effort was made to several countries, such as Myanmar and Vietnam which had certain previous tensions, to eliminate unnecessary tension and build the foundation for US-Asia-Pacific relations (Dian, 2013: 3). Not only has a good relationship with all elements in Asia, the United States also needs to strengthen that relationship with various forms of cooperation. Barack Obama then exploited the open diplomatic doors of the Asian region through multilateral relations. As the Southeast Asian region is indeed opening up to maintain its regional stability, the United States is then facilitated to discuss various cooperation issues by the presence of multilateral forums such as ASEAN Regional Forum (Manyin, et al., 2012: 17).

The United States also deepens economic ties with the Asia Pacific region. The United States successfully negotiated and implemented one form of intensification of economic relations of the United States, namely through cooperation Trans Pacific Partnership (Manyin, et al., 2012: 6). This is one way

for the United States to enter and engage with economic relations in the Asia-Pacific region as it focuses its trade on the United States. The United States sees that some countries in the Asia-Pacific region are partners of export and import activities that are profitable for the United States economy because the region has such a rapid economic flows. Countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia alone, such as China and Indonesia, are countries that are climbing tiers as an emerging country. This effort to strengthen economic relations is done by helping to facilitate countries in the Asia-Pacific region to smoothen and clarify the trading mechanisms within existing multilateral trading platforms. Of course with the intensive cooperation that is woven through this foreign policy, the United States will be able to increase its export and import activities to support its economic growth.

The economic relations that the United States wants to strengthen by joining Asia-Pacific regional cooperation indirectly have an impact on security relations. The rapid export and import activities demand the United States to protect such trading activities. This is manifested by the United States in the field of security by actively presenting navigation-navigation to maintain trade routes and other economic interests through the Asia-Pacific region. The United States also has an Air-Sea Battle concept that focuses on air and sea strength within the region. Related to the increase of military and security cooperation, the United States in the Obama administration has launched many military and military aid to countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Singapore and Australia (Tsai, 2013: 15). Cooperation in the form of joint military training is also not little implemented. The United States has a strategic interest in the region so that it began to deploy bases and military units at some points that were considered flexible. Increased security by the United States as its foreign policy is not limited to military force alone, but also to intensify regional security from transnational crime threats, such as drug trafficking and terrorism groups. In essence, security cooperation in the form of sending military instruments to other countries is a foreign policy that has been run frequently by the United States since the administration before Barack Obama. However, shifting shafts in the Obama administration period present a new implementation focus in US foreign relations. It can be said so because previously the Asia-Pacific region was not the recipient of intensive military assistance from the United States (Manyin, et al., 2012: 4). This suggests a shift in direction from the United States to give more attention to the new

region of Asia-Pacific. The difference from US policy to pioneer Asia itself can be seen in how the United States seeks to show its presence in the Asian region through military aid deliveries.

2 CONCLUSION

US foreign policy that pivots to Asia can be seen through domestic political dynamics of foreign policy as signify through the congress which will then weigh the budget and potential issues that may arise in the legislative layer. Considerations made at the congress will indirectly affect the policy of the United States to move the bow toward the Asian region (Manyin, et al., 2012: 24). The United States Congress contributed a lot to US foreign policy through the views of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Democrat Barack Obama then faced a response from the opposition party, namely the Republican party linked to this policy (Harold, 2015: 90). The Republican Party and other conservative groups responded that the shift of focus on US policy to the Asia-Pacific region was not supported by the country's supposed spending so the budget became a constraint emphasized by the party. Nevertheless, Democrat Obama is still working on this policy from a variety of inputs that constrain the implementation of Asian axis. For, the Democrats themselves consider that the budget cuts in US security interests will allow for a weakening of the capability for the United States in the future. These cost constraints may prevent the United States from presenting its military presence in Asia-Pacific or other efforts to establish relationships with the region. This policy also brings the fundamental values of the United States and will assist the United States in achieving its national interests. Despite the distinctive features of the issue focus, the two dominant parties in America tend to be bipartisan in US foreign policy leading to the Asian region (Sutter, et al., 2013: 27). In regards to this foreign policy, the two parties which usually deal with each other can then cooperate in Congress.

As discussed by the frictions of the Democrats and the Republican party, the Congressional contribution in US foreign policy toward the Asia-Pacific is seen in its consideration of the budget of the proposed policy. Prior to Asia-Pacific's ongoing foreign policy implementation, criticism over this policy budget has even been alluded to since the election of the president as one of the obstacles. When the Barack Obama administration reign, this Asia-Pacific axis has been successfully implemented with certain

considerations and limits, one of which is its financing. One form of congressional influence on the implementation of foreign policy in the Asian axis period began to appear in the United States, which previously sent many soldiers to Japan and Korea and then planned to move the military base to Guam Island to facilitate the families of the soldiers. However, this policy is then considered to be costly. Congress conducts a review and proposes to postpone the implementation of this policy (Manyin, et al., 2012: 11). The limitations of the budget drawn up also become one of the limits by Congress to US foreign policy. To be able to run a program of bonding between the United States and Asia-Pacific countries in various fields, the United States needs to make certain savings. But Congress has the significance of agreeing to the implementation of a policy or not on its effectiveness in the short or long term. Meanwhile, in an effort to strengthen economic relations between the United States and the Asia-Pacific region, such as through the Trans Pacific Partnership, Congress will determine whether the policy will be implemented or not. The domestic US policy does not really shape US foreign policy shifting from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region, but some elements in US domestic politics contribute to the priorities and determination of the policy.

The element of public opinion as part of domestic politics is seen through how the United States society responds to the discourse of foreign policy in this Barack Obama administration. Basile & Isernia (2015: 109) shows the results of a United States public assessment survey when it recognizes a shift in international relations shaft that will focus on Asia. The results of the survey indicate that throughout 2008 to 2011, 51% of the US community tended to prefer an overseas-oriented policy of intensifying relationships toward Asia compared to Europe. The importance of the Asian region in supporting the United States reaches its interests more perceived by the general public so that public opinion demonstrates the support of foreign policy in this Obama period. The Asia-Pacific is considered a lucrative new partner focus and which needs to be embraced more closely in bilateral and multilateral relations. Thus, the implications of public opinion on the implementation of US policy are seen in the support provided. While the role of the media as part of domestic politics can be seen through broadcasting in the campaign and the election debate Barack Obama as a Democratic candidate. Through broadcasting Obama's election debates with Republican party candidates, the media can encourage public awareness of the policy focus

and encourage opinions from the American public on the issue of US relations with other countries.

With the analysis of the domestic political level described above, the authors conclude that domestic politics has only a minor influence on shifting the focus of US foreign policy toward the Asian axis. Although domestic politics plays a role in determining the implementation of US policy to Asia, domestic politics is not the main element of policy making and has shifted the policy to pivot from the Middle East region to Asia-Pacific. Analysis with a domestic political approach sees a state as an uniterate entity and this situation can result in suboptimal foreign policy. This is because many players in domestic politics then have their own interests, focus, values, and considerations so as to create limits on alternative policy options.

The US domestic political actors themselves are divided into congresses with two dominant parties as political elites, public voices as societies, and the media as ideas or discourses. In the United States itself, the Congress then consists of government and opposition groups that gain legitimacy played by the Democratic and Republican parties. The non-authoritarian nature of the state in the domestic-level outlook is reflected through the difference in focus and character by the Democrats and the Republican party in drafting a policy. The Democratic Party nominating Barack Obama as a candidate certainly supports Asia's full axis policy as an effort to support the achievement of the national interest of the United States. But the Republican party as opposition then responds to this policy and presents restrictions by reminding government budget allocation constraints. This can be an obstacle to the United States in practicing its policy, because in its own determination there are two different wishes from both parties in Congress.

Both parties then need to collaborate and be bipartisan to achieve the implementation of a fixed policy.. The Democrats succeeded in defending their foreign policy by considering the considerations posed by the Republican party. In foreign policy making, both parties must bring together the focus on the relations of the United States with other countries. Both parties in the Congress were cooperative in order to support the achievement of policies that support the acquisition of US national interests. Through the Congress side as a domestic political aspect, the role of domestic politics in influencing foreign policy is limited to the process of approving Asian axis policies to implement or not. The existing debate between the two parties does not lie in what areas need to get intensified relationships by the

United States, but on the effectiveness of policies, particularly those tangled with large expenditures and resource availability.

Society as an element of public opinion in the domestic politics of the United States only plays a minor role to give a positive or negative response, which also does not affect the direction of the axis of foreign relations that will be done by the United States. The positive response of American society emerged as support for policy implementation. This response is known through a survey that shows most societies believe that Asia-Pacific is becoming a more important area to be embraced as a United States partner than Europe. While negative responses from the public also appear to criticize the same thing as the political elite opposition groups, namely the discussion related to the effectiveness of the United States policy with the reality of the budget and existing resources. The two responses given by the general public regarding the new direction of the United States to forge closer relations with the Asia-Pacific region are also influenced by the media as facilitators of providing information, such as on broadcasting electoral debates that shape public perceptions. However, the role of the media and the public of the United States as a public voice is then insignificant because the two domestic actors are not the founders and compilers of the draft foreign policy to shift the course. Thus, briefly there is no significant indicator in showing the domestic political elements of the United States as the major composers or causes of US foreign policy to pivot in Asia-Pacific. Various domestic actors in this level tend to contribute only to approving or critiquing the policy design so that it can be more effective. Despite the diversity of voices and inputs and making non-authoritarian situations in foreign policy setting, US political elites in Congress cooperate with each other to consider policy through the consideration of various groups. Society can only show response or support. The US domestic politics of minor significance as a weighing actor, setting limits on policy alternatives, and approving the implementation of foreign policy to pivot to Asia-Pacific because it considers this policy to help the United States to achieve its national interests in various fields.

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