



THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: THE CASE OF INDONESIA

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Abstract

For decades, the superior position of European and North American theory has been taken for granted in international relations. The study of International Relations (IR) centralizes on North America and Western Europe in which values and basic assumptions of the theories was heavily supported by their point of view. The issue rises when the non-western scholars started to ask whether international relations remains as Western social science or finally open its gate for non western international relations theory. The answers of the questions lead to the more comprehensive and critical thoughts in evolution of international relations theory; since either we need to know why we have to believe an assumption as a single truth or we try to comprehend why we have done what we have done. The fact that we cannot denied is today we have the greater possibility of theoretical development and understanding in international relations; the enhancement in theory, method or perspective not only help to shape the field of theoretical study in IR, but also may have a practical impact on people. As a big country with diverse culture and identity, Indonesian scholars seems strongly influenced by the Western IR theory, meanwhile the reality of Indonesian foreign policy and intermestic issues are very much different. This research will be conducted in qualitative method with interpretive approach. The fundamental purpose of this paper is to determining the development of international relations theory of Indonesia.

Keywords: Indonesia, International Relations Theory, Paradigms.

1. Introduction

For decades, the studies of International Relations in Indonesia centralizes on North America and Western Europe in which values and basic assumptions of the theories was heavily supported by their point of view. The issue rises when the non-western scholars started to ask whether international relations remains as Western social science or finally open its gate for non western international relations theory. The answers of the questions lead to the more comprehensive and critical thoughts in evolution of international relations theory; since either we need to know why we have to believe an assumption as a single truth or we try to comprehend why we have done what we have done. A fact that we cannot deny is that today we have the greater possibility of theoretical development and understanding in international relations; the enhancement in theory, method or perspective not only help to shape the field of theoretical study in IR, but also may have a practical impact on people.

As a barely new major in Indonesia, International Relations (IR) becomes one of popular field for new students in university. It began in 1950, when Universitas Gadjah Mada has opened first class for International Relations; at the beginning of the IR program, the intention to open the study was in response to the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia that requiring diplomats to serve diplomatic service across the globe. Since then, eighty (80) higher educational institutions offer International Relations as one of their major in university (Diambil kembali dari Pangkalan, 2018).

Among numerous subjects in IR program, IR theory is upmost course in every IR program since it is differentiate IR with another major. Regardless of its core position in IR, the study of IR theory seems stagnant comparing to another sub-field in IR. As (Sebastian, 2010)states:

The absence of support for Indonesian institutions and researchers working in the field of international relations and a lack of necessary infrastructure and funds to support IR teaching, coupled with the relatively low educational level of lecturers, means the situation for IR research in Indonesia remains bleak and ominous.

This paper intends to explore the development of International Relations Theory in Indonesia with the focus is on the theoretical evolution since mid-1950 when IR began to be taught in university in Indonesia with major framework is the changing trend of international actors in IR. The shifting perspective in IR theory is the impact of major crucial event in international system i.e. Cold War, monetary crisis, or 9/11; that in the end gives its shades into the evolution of IR Theory in Indonesia. The framework is divided into two parts; the complexion of nation-state influence and the intention to understand human interest.

The frameworks are constructed through literature review of the field of IR theory which is written by Indonesian scholars. The method was limited to the published works of Indonesian scholars that are available either hardcopy or online. The limitation of literature review were made in order to examine the changing theoretical ideas in Indonesian IR scholar. This paper argues that the changing of IR theory in Indonesia is a result of shifting perspectives of IR scholar in Indonesia as an impact of the dynamics of international political system and their reactions towards certain crucial intermestic issues in national level. The argument is elaborated in two consecutive parts; the first section examines the group of theory that developed around nation-state as a major actor in international relations, which focus on the complexion of realism and the nation-state ubiquitous influences in IR theory. The second section of this paper discusses changing focus in IR field as a result of shifting issues in IR scholar internationally and how that matter has general impact towards IR scholar in Indonesia.

The research in evolution of IR theory in Indonesia is considered important because Indonesia has distinctive characteristic and indigenous sources for developing IR theory yet regardless of all the advantages possessed by Indonesia, the development of IR theory with Indonesian feature is difficult to find.

2. The Complexion of Nation-state Influence

At the beginning, IR programming in Indonesia is not a fully independent major with its own right to organize curriculum; more often than not, IR is part of political and social science studies. As a part of social science, IR has a tendency to change rapidly in order to follow the transformation of international issues. The dynamics of IR theory can be easily seen through the major definition of IR which generally accepted by the scholars around the time. During the Cold War, the definition of IR mostly about the relations between political units in this case is nation-state. Around that time, IR is considered as study that is mostly concern in the pursuit of national interest and the nation-state's survival in anarchical international system. In this context, the study of IR at that time seemed to concern nation-state as the uppermost international actor and has inevitable influence in international system.

In the era of the 50's, countries in the world polarized into two poles. The strong fight happens between the East (lead by Soviet Union) and the West (lead by United States) particularly in the era of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. This fight is an attempt to expand the sphere of interest and sphere of influence by seizing control of the main target areas under the guise of ideology conviction.

Most countries entered in West Bloc and some into the Soviet Bloc. Alliances and fight in it gives a negative physical consequences for several countries in the world such as Germany which was divided into two parts, Vietnam in the past, as well as the Korean Peninsula that have until now is still divided into North Korea and South Korea. In this fight, the third world countries are a very fascinating area of competition for both of the countries in East and Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and countries in other regions which are rich in energy.

Southeast Asia is the location where the United States "Containment" of communism imposed. Pressure of communism in Southeast Asia is great as is the case in Indonesia, Burma, Malaysia, and Philippines. Under President Truman, US emphasized what is called "The Mutual Security Act", announcing to the world and its communist power in particular that the US was prepared to provide military aids to 'free people'. Even so, relations to the countries of the former Soviet Union and the PRC (People Republic of China) are also quite large in Southeast Asia. For example, The Soviet Union became the largest arms supplier in Indonesia and Indonesia established a warm relationship with the PRC in the communist party in the cooperation between the two countries. Vietnam is basically the main focus after the revolution nationalist/communist at Ho Chi Minh City in April of 1952. Vietnam can be a domino effect for the benefit of the United States. If Vietnam can be 100% controlled, then the whole of Southeast Asia would likely fall as well. Around that time, President Soeharto gave his fully support towards the formation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As (Hadiwinata, 2008) asserts:

"This initiative was based on the fear among Indonesian military leaders of a possible threat of communism to the internal stability of the region that might in turn threaten national integrity."

Giving that situation in hand, the tendency of international relations theory in Indonesia as a tools to explain and predict is not a strange thing considering the environment around that time pushed IR scholars to be more practical and able to explain the phenomena that occur in the international system. Nation-state is commonly accepted as the most (if not only) important actor in international relations, meanwhile the goal of every nation-state is the compliance of their national interest. Power seems to be the crucial force in international relations, while all international actors (mostly nation-state) fight to get the biggest domination in anarchical society. In Indonesia, numerous scholarly works have written in order to elucidate how Indonesia supposed to react in that certain era. Until the end of Cold War around 1991, mostly the IR scholars in Indonesia accepted Realism and its complexion as a major theory of IR. Since the traditional theory has a set of assumptions and less abstract than the reflectivist group of theory, students in IR have the tendencies to grasp it easily and use it as their analytical tools.

3. The Intention to Understand Human Interest

After the Cold War, IR faces numerous issues that were not previously considered important. It is not only the changing issues in international level, but also the developing of IR theory which has brought the latest great debate in IR between reationalism versus reflectivism. Many IR scholars such as Alexander Wendt, Cynthia Enloe, Emanuel Adler, J. Ann Tickner has tried to bring gender, norms, values and number of issues which before considering as soft issues in IR into the stage. The influence of Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida or Bourdieu in IR theory can be seen from the development of poststructuralism/postmodernism in IR. Meanwhile the rationalist tries to explain and predict global phenomenas through series of ontologies and assumptions; reflectivist brings a different approach which they argue that the goal of theory should be understanding instead of explaining and every understanding is made by interpretation.

The shifting of the international actor from nation-state into many non state actors i.e. Intergovernmental Organization (IGO), Nongovernmental Organization (NGO), Multinational Corporation (MNC), or simply human being is a result of the dynamics of

international relations. The alteration in international relations also has been found in security studies, international political economy or regionalism for example. After the Cold War, scholars of IR has been realized that the issues in international relations are not just limited in power control between nation state or the tendency of survival in anarchical system, but also including gender equality or shaping identity of international actors. In Indonesia, gender and feminist methodology appears and can be seen in the work of (Soetjipto and Trimayuni, 2013) who argue that gender issue can be seen through different lenses and applicable even in security studies. In security studies, the discussion is not merely about the nation-state or IGO but changing into the actor of assymetric war i.e. terrorist group. The work of Indonesia scholar who intends to understand the characteristic of terrorist, the reason behind someone who decides to join the group and the rationale behind the terrorist group especially in Indonesia can be seen in the writing of (Djelantik, 2010).

4. Conclusion

The evolution in IR theory of Indonesia can be seen through the alteration of international actors in the study of international relations. The developing theory is a result of major changing dynamic of international system i.e. Cold War, after Cold War and 9/11. The IR scholar of Indonesia shows the promising contibution in the future since the issues are expanding and many intellectual works are published in different area of international relations.



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