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Understanding Indonesia–Australia Relations in
Three Models of International Systems

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Abstract: The relationship between Indonesia and Australia is an interesting and important subject of study in the field of international relations. In explaining the dynamics of the two countries' relations, academics and practitioners usually refer to a theoretical approach focusing on each party's assumed interests in both national and regional contexts. This article, however, presents an alternative style of analysis by examining and comparing the impacts of international systems on the conduct of foreign policy. Arguably, there are three models of international systems: the anarchical state-centric model, the relational polycentric model, and the combinative model. The systems influence the setting in which policymakers consider and stage actions. Therefore, they inform how conflict and cooperation between Jakarta and Canberra occur. The discussion proceeds in two parts. The first part explores the three models of international systems. The second part investigates the implications of each system for territorial issues, conflict, and cooperation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Indonesia and Australia is an interesting and important subject of study in the field of international relations, particularly for those who are interested in the development of regional security issues in the Asia-Pacific. In fact, Jakarta and Canberra have devoted considerable efforts – in bilateral and multilateral forums – to establishing stable security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. Hence, the two countries focus their relations on making and maintaining order. Nonetheless, the relationship is not entirely smooth.

Notes of tension have occurred between Indonesians and Australians, mainly on account of the incompatible policy preferences of the two governments. In response, international relations academics and practitioners have argued that the so-called national interests in many forms are the permissive causes of the lack of harmony between Jakarta and Canberra.

This style of analysis connects to the relative ignorance of any systemic factors that can have significant influences on the reciprocal attitudes towards conflict and cooperation.

This article, however, aims to apply a different approach to look at some scenarios of how Indonesia and Australia may decide to conflict and cooperate with each other. In contrast to the major academic propensity to employ the concept of national interest, it is argued here that the model of international system apprehended by policymakers in Jakarta and Canberra offers an explanation of what causes the two sides to contradict and accommodate each other's policies on specific problems.

To elaborate this argument, the following section elucidates the model of international systems as an alternative concept to the national interest concept. In the majority of the literature on international relations, there are three models of international systems: the anarchical state-centric model, the relational polycentric model, and the combinative model.

These systems have their own policy implications, which are explored later in regard to two areas: the first is about territorial issues, and the second is related to conflict and cooperation. The article concludes by suggesting some options for better understanding Indonesia–Australia relations.

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Three Models of International Systems

In the international relations literature, an international system is commonly understood as the framing of facts and phenomena demonstrating the patterns of interactions amongst actors, which are usually sovereign states. Framing means positioning things off from their nearby milieu. This is like the organization of furniture in a room, or a series of actions set out for a movie. A frame in turn connotes the limits of what should be included in, and excluded from, the socially constructed picture of the world.

Specific situations can also be framed together in one order, as they are likely to have a particular kind of impact on actors and processes. In political terms, speaking of an international system as a frame of international activities implies some categories of arenas where interactions take place.

Each presents quite distinct descriptions of situations. The most popular portrait is that of realists, in which they portray an international system as anarchy. Contrary to anarchy is the pluralist picture, which draws on a relational system. Rationalists propose a combination of the anarchic and relational systems, called the *via media* system. These three systems developed from different historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

The anarchic system perspective was derived from the European conceptions and practices of international politics. It was introduced and further upheld by the Treaty of Westphalia, which in 1648 settled the devastating 30-year war in Europe. The Westphalian system evolved to become one of the pillars of the modern international political system.

Under the treaty, fundamental principles governing interstates' interactions were endorsed by the European states. Every state was free to pursue its right to sovereignty and self-determination. Therefore, every state could chase its interests without fear of interference from others.

The Westphalian solution guaranteed equal international status for all sovereign states. As a result, the system was composed of constituent units that knew no centralized power. The highest authority was formally held by the state's government. However, the situation formed in this state-centric model of international system became conflictive, in which threats and tensions were the perpetual reality.

No states could trust their neighbors, and they had to be constantly prepared for war. Conflicts in the Westphalian anarchical system were mitigated through establishing intergovernmental arrangements, similar to the function of institutions from the anarchical society perspective. The system was reinforced by three important frameworks for conflict resolution.

Economic disputes caused by incompatibilities regarding material national interests were dealt with through market mechanisms. This method inspired the liberals to create global economic governance institutions and procedures. Military conflicts were managed through the balance of power policy; thereby, alliances played an important role in maintaining the condition of peace.

The more complex extension of self-help was institutionalized in the form of a security community amongst states located in the same region. Political problems that could engender strained relations were pacified through diplomacy, which was essentially an advancement of the older practice of European kingdoms. Diplomatic representatives were placed in other states' capital cities to serve as the official channels for government-to-government communications. On many occasions, European governments convened to discuss upheavals to the ties amongst them.

Despite the doubts raised, particularly by militarists, about the efficacy of diplomacy as a preventive strategy against war, diplomats in Europe had in fact succeeded in preventing uneasiness from escalating into armed clashes. For this reason, the Westphalian system proved to be effective, at least until the First World War.

When the anarchic system was operating in Europe, in other parts of the world, such as China, India, and Malaysia, a different frame of international activities was practiced. Let's call it the Asian model of international system. Unlike the European states, which did not allow for the presence of a central power to become the *leviathan*, in the Asian system, there was a central power that took significant control over the subsystems.

It was normally the kingdom that had the biggest military and economic capabilities in absolute terms. Indeed, the system was formed based on a hierarchy of power: something that in modern international political theory is akin to the neorealist presumption of Waltz's systemic argument.

The central power had the responsibility of retaining order for all components in the system. It did not claim for the whole sovereignty, thus overriding smaller units' belongings. Every state

could still conduct much of its affairs independently, according to what was regarded as pivotal national objectives.

Participation in the hierarchical system did not reflect full political submission of the unit to the core power. In many cases where this systemic organization was practiced, they (the central and constituent elements) interacted in a relational and polycentric mode of governance, suggesting a neorealist foundation of international politics. Such centripetal power relations were traditionally kept on the ground of cultural bonds, including marriages.

When conducting international relations, the Asian kings were reluctant to wage war against their political relatives. Rather, they regularly gathered in the capital city of the core kingdom for celebrating ritualistic and tributary moments. On such occasions, the kings would pledge their commitment to sustaining and strengthening their good neighborliness as their primary policy.

This illustrates the primacy of the collective will to live together in well-preserved order. War might have been a solution to an act like insurgence, but this was quite rare if the system functioned as agreed. Interestingly, the Asian system provided more-established order than that of Westphalian Europe.

The combinative model of international system was built by Middle East and North African communities. Originally, the system was an inherent exercise of power characterizing the communal organizations in the Arab world.

Instead of territories, cultural and religious values were the main reference for community members to install a political regime based upon various social identities. It should be noted here that though it lacked institutionalization like that in the contemporary nation-state, this did not prevent the system from working. Nevertheless, it was not shaped in the form of an Islamic caliphate.

Governance was held in a strict power-sharing composition. The leader governed semiautonomous regions, albeit most of the regional territories were not wholly under his control. An elite product of law was imposed on the regional entities to ensure order. The same as the Asian framing of international politics, the Middle Eastern and North

African one focused on developing order. This centrifugal arrangement was based on defined common interests, which subsequently made it possible to distinguish between the internal and external environments of the state – realism clearly provided a distinction between domestic and international affairs.

In many Middle Eastern and African societies, military strength was the most important instrument for external policy. The central leader, possibly a sultan, possessed the unquestionable right to carry out international relations for all members of the polity.

He would select foreign powers to ally with, which were kept away from the external businesses of the state. In fact, the system was seldom plagued by war that had severe impacts, such as dead and lost territory. This was to some extent caused by the many formations of alliances, which moved between the states in a more or less flexible manner. Meanwhile, each regional leader was permitted to develop internal security infrastructures separate from the authority of the national leadership.

The regional armed forces, including police and army forces, were responsible for the region's internal affairs only. Strict alliance restraint was employed to prevent regional forces from establishing greater military power that was anticipated as a threat to the central leader. This rule also prohibited regional leaders from tightening links with each other through emotional affiliations of marriage. This framing illuminates the high degree of control and order present in the anarchical system.

A question arises as to how this typology of international system can be used to analyze bilateral states' relations. The framed international politics may be comprehended differently by each state's decision-makers. The picture incorporates and tells us about positions and roles that are optional in a particular situation. Anarchy directs one to think of war and diplomacy.

The hierarchical and relational system leads to order between states, which is upheld through the institution of multilateral governance. In the combinative model, however, anarchy and order are bridged by a supranational organization equipped with a structure that will selectively perform on behalf of the subsystems. Given that there is no international system that is able to run entirely based on its pure principles of conduct, overlapping occurs between certain roles and policies.

The solution sometimes causes disadvantages to others: even after World War II, sophisticated international institutions have been implemented and expanded. This is certainly not to say that the international system has failed to socialize its norms and ensure the enmeshment and compliance of its members, but the foreign policy of a state is circumscribed by 'unpredictability derived from misperception and misconduct'.

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2.2 Territorial Issues, Conflict, and Cooperation in Indonesia–Australia Relations

Applying the three models of international systems as an analytical tool to understand the relations between Indonesia and Australia, which are sovereign states, requires them to be contextualized in a certain concept of space. This relates to the way in which each system gives meaning to the geographical aspect of a state. Space encompasses a number of properties. In the Westphalian system, space is associated with tangible territories. In this context, physical borders between states preoccupy crucial legal and political places.

This is because they delineate the size and shape of a state on Earth. A state's determination of territory is accompanied by rights regarding jurisdiction, the utilization of extractable resources, and control over migration. The rights bring together the material and symbolic values within a territory. Through this Westphalian mapping, the territorial claims between Jakarta and Canberra are mutually exclusive and can be seen as entirely exhaustive regarding the space of territories available.

The issue of Timor Leste after the 1999 referendum, backed by the United Nations, especially Australia, made the meaning of territorial interest real, with significant implications for both sides. The conception of space in Jakarta–Canberra interactions corresponds with the comprehension of the binary notion of sovereignty. Each party in bilateral relations has, and will have, sovereign rights executed on a certain piece of land, or not at all.

Thus, on the one hand, when sovereignty matters, it heads-up inviolability of the state; on the other hand, relationships with neighbors – in this case the relationship between Indonesia and Australia – become a subject of constant political negotiation.

Focusing on the Asian system, the conception of space does not imply territoriality; rather, it is naturally relational and can be transferred to a more suitable context. Territorial rights with regard to the validity of jurisdictional disposition do not come into the limit of the state's policy. The dual view of sovereignty is also not applicable as it is in Westphalian Europe.

States in the Asian system may determine the possession of a territory through their defined common interests. As a result, a territory can be possessed by one or more states under the rules the parties have agreed on. In this regard, neither Indonesia nor Australia shows eagerness towards the implementation of unilateral interference over particular land.

They just watch what is happening in front of them, like enjoying a performance on a stage, without worrying too much about what is going on behind them.

As actors on this stage, where both comedy and tragedy play out, Indonesia and Australia could regard sovereignty in a relational context. This is only possible (not to suggest disrespect for the role of borders) if sovereignty is considered dynamic and sharable for the functional good.

This relational backdrop of interstate ties implicates the significant obliviousness of the realist egocentrism in international relations. For example, in maintaining their bilateral links, Jakarta and Canberra should not care much about themselves as individual units: more important is the relationship between them as units of a system. It may be possible to implement global governance principles in some of the multilateral organizations in which Jakarta and Canberra have been involved.

Their application, however, needs careful assessment on what areas of reciprocal response the two would be comfortable enough to collaborate. Relations, it is argued here, cannot be negotiated. They are not claims of something political or non-political. This resembles the orthodoxy of the Asian model of international politics.

A problem stands as to which party will take what role in forums. If they are part of an anarchical system like Westphalia, Indonesia and Australia have ascended roles in political terms, yet they must concentrate on themselves as sovereign units.

By contrast, under a relational or soft hierarchical system, their respective roles are important. Indonesia's leading position in the ASEAN organization for many years indicates the perceived importance of the principle of interaction. Canberra considers Indonesia's role in Southeast Asia as vital to the two countries' objective of making the region a secure environment.

The issue perhaps is resolvable when both sides want to alter the nature of the relationship into the combinative model of international system. In this system, the mix of anarchic and relational systems enables the formal recognition of territory and hierarchy in regard to each state's role in international politics. States' borders are clearly mapped in the frame.

Therefore, in the contemporary world, the state can preserve its territorial rights. In dealing with the necessity to create and maintain order, the

combinative model does not prescribe the notion of formal equality; in practice, it generates a distinct position for each state to occupy in the process of maintaining peace.

Drawing upon the principles of a mixed system, Jakarta and Canberra understand each other's role and position. When interactions are uncertain, the parties can turn to the asserted functions for their own reference. This ensures that order is maintained amidst anarchy.

Each system has a different understanding of the meaning of space, and its importance to the relationship between Jakarta and Canberra provides different forums for conflict and cooperation. Within the Asian relational and combinative systems, there is a center responsible for organizing and constituting all units.

Hence, in the contemporary context, it is not only symbolic but also strategic that the system is properly governed by rules and institutions. Units in the system move according to the direction and principles imposed by the center. Maintaining regularity and order is the highly endorsed objective of intraregional interactions. In terms of national power, Indonesia–Australia relations are asymmetrical as developing and developed countries, respectively. This asymmetry implicates the existence of a hierarchical frame. One could dominate the relationship, unless the center of the system is working.

The center is fixed, and its power manifests to keep all units moving towards it. This suggests the need for a regional security arrangement like the ASEAN Regional Forum to take a proactive role.

On the contrary, if the relationship is based on the perception that it is directed by the Westphalian anarchic system, there is no need to create a central institutional power. Neither Indonesia nor Australia will move towards the center.

They will just undertake foreign policy for domestic motives. International order is the focus of action when its course resembles an asserted agreement. Harmony and disharmony are placed in the second line of both Jakarta's and Canberra's international outlooks, as they consider anarchy as unalterable.

3 CONCLUSION

The preceding argument informs the way in which different approaches produce different maps of Indonesia–Australia relations. A study on foreign policy in bilateral contexts of diplomatic affairs is an exploration of the pragmatics of discourses. Before the context can be interpreted and analyzed in terms of how it operates, it must be seen, and, in practice, many academic activities lack the insertion of a frame.

Framing is evidently very important to the case studied. Framing is a way of confining a picture that represents an aspect of social life – in this case, the international relations of states. When it presents again, the representations and meanings of attributes (like policy) will be made manifest and subject to creative simulations.

Creatively framing the international system that constitutes the relationship between Jakarta and Canberra presents a new way to think about the relationship. Academics and practitioners normally consider the power that controls the relations in its traditional form. Power is the ability of actor A to influence, and subsequently control, how actor B thinks and acts, which actor B otherwise would not have done.

This definition can be applied within the anarchic perspective. However, from the other two perspectives of international systems, power is not exercised but is performed. It is not a matter of what actor A can make actor B do but what actor A and actor B can do together for the system to sustain itself. Finally, it is clear that when relations are demarcated in connection with power that buttresses self-fulfilling interests, the result is tension and conflict between neighboring countries. Rather, if the ties that bind two nations are projected in terms of the practice of collective power underpinning common interests, a more harmonious portrait of relations will appear.

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