

THE NATIONAL INTEREST CONCEPT IN A GLOBALISED INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Rifki Dermawan

Department of International Relations, Andalas University

rifkidermawan@soc.unand.ac.id

Abstract

Globalisasi telah membuat perubahan di tataran nasional dan juga di sistem internasional. Konsep negara dan kepentingan nasional menghadapi tantangan dari proses globalisasi. Sebagai bagian penting dari kebijakan luar negeri, konsep kepentingan nasional memerlukan penyesuaian di era modern. Kemunculan aktor non-negara juga berkontribusi terhadap transformasi dari komunitas global. Banyaknya negara yang terintegrasi dalam organisasi regional atau organisasi interasional menyebabkan ketegangan antara kepentingan nasional dan kepentingan kolektif dari suatu negara. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini menyarankan bahwa negara perlu mempertimbangkan kembali konsep kepentingan nasionalnya karena ada banyak perubahan terjadi dalam sistem internasional yang mengalami globalisasi. “Konsep lama mengenai kepentingan nasional” yang dikemukakan oleh para realis bisa menjadi tidak relevan lagi di dunia pada hari ini.

Kata kunci: kepentingan nasional; globalisasi; negara; kepentingan kolektif

Abstract

Globalization creates changes at the national level and also in the international system. The concept of state along with its national interest are challenged by globalization process. As a significant part of foreign policy, the national interest concept needs an adjustment in this modern era. The emergence of non-state actors also contributes to the transformation of global community. The large number of states integrate in international or regional organizations cause a tension between national interest and collective interest of a state. Therefore, this article suggests that a state needs to reconsider its concept of national interest since there are many changes occur in the globalized international system. The “old ideas of national interest” proposed by realists could be irrelevant in the today’s world.

Key words: *national interest; globalization; state; collective interest*

A. Introduction

National interest is one of the most important aspects of a state's foreign policy. It can be a guide toward achieving a state's goals (Weldes, 1996: 276; Edmunds, Gaskarth and Porter, 2014: 504). The national interest concept strongly relates with a realism view in international relations, where security becomes the primary goal (Humphreys, 2015: 571). This concept, however, needs to adapt to the modern era of globalization. Changes happening all across the globe can be challenges for national interests. It is also possible that national interests are affected by other issues, such as "supranational interest" (Kiyono, 1969: 3). This circumstance makes state officials consider these circumstances when it comes to other approaches to the implementation of foreign policy.

Humans cannot avoid the effects of globalization, since it reaches many various aspects in the world. In an international system, globalization creates a sphere where competition occurs on the supranational level (Hay, 2013: 295). Collingwood and Logister (2005: 180) claim that international actors gain more power through

globalization. Globalization can change people's perspectives and responses toward a more worldly view (Starie, 1999: 42-43). In regard to Starie's argument, I argue that globalization effects are not only a human problem; a state, similarly, needs to have different behavior, including the national interest concept, in order to adapt in a globalization period. Thus, in this essay, I argue that the concept of national interest is no longer relevant in a globalized international system as it is unclear whether this interest belongs to the 'nation' or any other actors. The emergence of collective interest also makes it hard to recognize which of a state's action is categorized into a national interest sphere.

This essay is divided into three major sections. The first explores the basic concept of national interest in this modern era. The second section discusses the globalization phenomenon in international systems and its effect on state activities such as exercising national interest. It also includes an observation on the effect of the post-Cold War era. The discussion continues with a critical evaluation regarding new

concepts of collective interest and national interest.

B. Concept of national interest in the modern era

National interest is one of the old concepts which exists as the foundation of foreign policy. From George Washington to Hans Morgenthau, national interest has always been the major topic of discussion in state and foreign policy (Edmunds, Gaskarth, and Porter, 2014: 4). National interest indeed has a very significant position in the study of foreign policy (Nuechterlein, 1976: 26; Marleku, 2013: 19; Morgenthau, 1952: 971). Nuechterlein (1976: 247) defines national interest as “the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment”. National interest is not just about theory or abstract concept since it plays an important role in the real process of conducting foreign policy. It can be a basis for policy-makers to implement a particular foreign policy (Morgenthau, 1952: 972; Edmunds, 2014: 530). Furthermore, Nuechterlein (1976: 248) argues that there are four aspects of national interest

which are not mutually-exclusive. They are issue of defense, economic, world order and ideology. Morgenthau (1952: 972) also states that there are three major things protected by state as part of national interest, they are territory, culture, political institution.

Discussing relevancy of national interest in modern foreign policy requires a deep understanding about global condition in this era. Even national interest of the United Kingdom, one of the most developed countries in the world, is being questioned. The UK government receives many criticisms since their action, especially foreign policy in Middle East, Libya and Mali, is not representing national interest in the public eye (Edmunds, Gaskarth, and Porter, 2014: 1-2). Wearing (2014: 118-119) argues that, based on empirical evidences, the UK prefers to follow the interest of global capitalist rather than national interest. Thus, the effect of globalization and capitalism is apparent.

Today, the world is different since many changes and transformations happen, especially in international politics. Concept of globalization also needs to be taken in to account as it “opens” state boundaries. The flow of

goods, people, and information is easily transferred from one state to another (Nye, 1999: 25; Population Council, 2017: 593). Edmunds, Gaskarth, and Porter (2014: 1-2) also argue that as the effect of globalization “the world was becoming far more interconnected”. Everything becomes globalized. This condition, however, challenges the concept of national interest in foreign policy. For example, Rice (2000: 27) claims that national interest of the United States has expanded to global level and changed to be “an interest of the international community”. Nye (2002: 236) supports this by arguing that interest of the US today is “beyond national boundary”.

Morgenthau (1952: 972) has predicted this problematic situation as he argues that there will be an act of “usurpation” in national interest which comes from three different sides; sub-national, other national and supranational interest. It is obvious that the pure concept of national interest today is “under attack”. This argument is elaborated more in next sections. The involvement of many actors in national interest and its relevancy in modern era

needs more explanation as well as empirical evidences.

C. Discussion

Globalization in international system

Globalization has a major impact on conditions of international politics. Many current changes affect the pattern of communications within international systems (Humphreys, 2015: 577). The state is no longer regarded as a single actor because others are involved in the sphere, such as civil societies, multinational corporations, and international organizations (Scholte, 2011: 10). This situation forces states toward interaction and greater communication with the others. A state cannot simply focus on building its own defense. With globalization all actors are expected to achieve global goals working towards the concept of a pluralist society (Frankel, 1970: 21). This society consists of states which have common interests and goals to build a better global political life as the main priority.

The concept of national interest is championed by scholars supporting a

realism perspective which focuses on the role of a state. Weldes (1996: 2770) argues that a national interest can be a tool for a state to survive in an international political system. In today's world, a state cannot survive if it only depends on itself. It needs to maintain relations with other states and international organizations. Hudson (2001: 343) argues that the system of global political economy stops treating a state's border as limitation of economic activity. Most states have already integrated into one particular global network, especially the production system, which consists of labor and workplaces on various levels, from local to global ones (O'Brien and William, 2010: 184). In regards to national interest, I argue that it will be hard to identify a certain economic activity of a state, whether it relates to national interest or not. This happens because it already involves many different actors, which also have their own interests. In addition, this economic process is not only a matter of one state's action, but it covers a wider sphere and a higher level.

Nuechterlein (1976: 246) defines national interest as a target that needs to be achieved by a "sovereign entity". In

this era, sovereignty is not regarded as the main value within international politics. There are too many actors which do not have a basis for the concept of sovereignty, but they are able to influence primary agents in the international system. Some organizations, such as civil society, can be involved in the decision-making processes of the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (Hudson, 2001: 334). Their involvement, however, affect the states because policies made by those international institutions will be implemented in every member state. States also need to adapt new policies if changes occur, and they should modify their national interest in order to suit global needs. Collingwood and Logister (2005: 180) emphasize their conclusion that the authority of a state has decreased over the years.

Development plans today are not only the agenda of a state because other institutions, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also contribute to the program. These non-state actors execute their own projects to help states deal with various issues such as security, poverty, education, and environment.

Some get financial assistance from governments or international organizations (Murphy, 2000: 795). This impacts the process to achieve national interests because NGOs also play a role to attain this goal. Unfortunately, there will be a conflict of interest with the state as several NGOs are supported by agents on the international level. Moreover, the existence of “bogus” NGOs worsens the situation because they work based on their organizational interest. It is a common problem in development sectors in South Asian countries and regions in Africa (Clark, 1993: 9). This, however, relates to Morgenthau’s argument regarding an act of “usurpation” in national interest which comes from interest groups within the state (Morgenthau, 1952: 973-974). Pressure from NGOs usurps the national interest leading to a clash of interest between state and NGOs. Therefore, it is indeed not an easy step for a state to implement the concept of national interest where there are too many actors engaged as participants and each of them also possess their own personal interests. This leads the state to struggle if it still wants to focus on its own target and maintain the national interest.

Common interest and post-Cold War period

Issues of common interest make a state consider not focusing on its national interest. At times, a state needs to priorities the common interest, allowing the global system to work properly. For instance, several states in the European Union (EU) need to leave their own national interest behind because the community demands that states concentrate on the EU’s economic activity (Patten, 2002). Furthermore, the future of a state, especially in the EU, depends on the workability of its common interests. A state also cannot rely on the concept of national interest and exercise its control since it is limited by agreements and rules in the EU. Peiler (2012) argues that the implementation of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), a set of regulations and foreign policy of the EU, constitutes a threat to national interests. Member states have their own interest in CFSP, which makes the decision-making process complicated and ineffective. Even though the member states belong to one official institution, they still compete to have more influence in the

union. This case is pertaining to one of Morgenthau's arguments about 'usurpation action' by supranational organization (Morgenthau, 1952: 975). This organization has power to influence a state's national interest which affects the process of foreign policy making. As the effect, government cannot rely solely on national interest to be the foundation of foreign policy. They have to consider external interest comes from this supranational organization.

The integration of states under the EU mandates that the member states treat the interest of the supranational union as the main priority. However, a state indeed has choices whether it pursues the national interest or takes a part in a regional or global community. For example, the United Kingdom (UK) has taken firm action and decided to play its own role in its relation with the EU. The recent Brexit can be considered an action of defending national interest, as UK Prime Minister Theresa May mentioned this realist terminology twice during her speech on 17 January 2017 (Deighton, 2017). This issue shows that some states have different points of view toward the national interest concept.

Problem of the EU occurs in the United Nations (UN) as well. The United States as one of the UN members needs to refer its interest to the values of the UN. Morgenthau (1952: 976) calls the UN value as "a product of wishful thinking which is postulated as a valid norm for international conduct, without being valid there or anywhere else". This, however, challenges national interest of the US as it needs to justify its interest based on values of the UN.

Besides globalization, international systems were also impacted by the end of the Cold War. The political world became more complicated since tensions between Western and Eastern blocs lessened but new conflicts emerged. Huntington (1997: 28) states that the situation has become complicated and burdened with new problems such as ethnic conflict, tensions between rich and powerful states, and issues of coordination among countries. The state cannot be easily identified as siding with one particular group because the Western and Eastern blocs no longer exist. The pattern of relationship between states also changes to an irregular one (Cabinet Office, 2008). This circumstance creates great

confusion for a state and its officials in terms of constructing the national interest. Weldes (1996: 277) claims that a state's foreign officers need to understand the situation on an international level and have the ability to interpret it as well.

From the perspective of realism, it is not hard for a state to detect threats coming from international systems (Weldes, 1996: 279). In fact, the modern world is getting more complex and complicated, as explained in the previous paragraph. This complexity becomes an obstacle for a state to start building its national interest since understanding the international system has become more difficult. Furthermore, in terms of security issues, global politics today is also full of "complexity" and "uncertainty" (Edmunds, Gaskarth and Porter, 2014: 505; Edmunds, 2014: 528). Rice (2008: 4) adds that even the United States, the global super power, is uncertain about its relationship with the other major powers, Russia and China. The relationship consists of collaboration and sometimes can be a competition. Thus, it is indeed a complicated task for government officials who plan to pursue national

interest. This modern age dictates that a state should not rely too much on national interest. It needs to consider paying more attention to common interests as the future of world politics is filled with unpredictable possibilities, and a state should prepare itself with different approaches and various plans.

National interest versus collective interest of states

Cooperation among states is increasingly necessary. Globalization and the post-Cold War era demand that states work together to reach common global goals. The clash between national and collective interests is heating up. The role of a state as a single actor, as proposed by realism, is no longer significant (Deng, 1998: 310). The global threat has become one of the reasons why states feel the need to cooperate with each other. The threat flows across borders and boundaries, which requires global problem-solving to counter it (Cabinet Office, 2008). This means that the action to counter the global threat is considered as a collective interest because it is not only the interest of one particular state.

The U.S., as an example, has a hard time working on the issue of cooperation. Different values and understandings can be an obstacle to maintain a good relationship with other states. Fortunately, the two great powers, the U.S. and Russia, have common interests which become a starting point toward mutual cooperation. This was indicated when former U.S. president George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an agreement in 2008 (Rice, 2008: 3). The old tension between Western and Eastern blocs has not stopped these two countries from building a strong partnership. The issue of Russian hegemony in Europe during the Cold War is not treated as a priority for the U.S. since it has bigger potential problems to address (Kiyono, 1969: 14). This situation shows that having common interests will help two actors in international politics to focus on the main issue. The problems and conflicts in the past are already part of history and should not be a barrier for states to have good communication. Most of the past issues are related to the national interests of each state, such as U.S. intervention in World War II, which is seen as an action to defend American national

interests (Kiyono, 1969: 13). Today, that old issue should not be a consideration for having mutual relationships in the international system.

The United States has always been an interesting example of having a collective interest in the global political system. The issues of terrorism and security are treated as high priorities for the U.S. The current government under President Donald Trump has taken firm action as it has temporarily banned immigrants from seven Muslim countries. Trump argues that this action is needed to stop terrorism, even though the facts do not support this view, because since 1975 there have been no extreme violent actions perpetrated by immigrants (Mathias, 2017). These bans, however, are executive actions that have not stood up in U.S. courts. In regard to collective interest, the Bush administration tried different tactics to counter terrorism, as it preferred to build coordination with other states. It tried to maintain partnerships with countries in Middle East, as the governments in this region also have some of the same interests as the United States (Rice, 2008: 14-15). This indicates that cooperation among states has become an

essential tool to survive in a globalised international system. Even the United States, at times regarded as a leader of the world, still need other countries to maintain its security through a collective interest (Cabinet Office, 2008).

Collaboration between states on an international level is an interesting phenomenon. It is helpful for some states to cooperate with others since the global threat is apparent. On the other hand, this relationship tends to undermine the concept of national interest, which was popular before the globalization era. The issue of identity becomes the primary focus in the discussion of national and collective interests. The identification of a state's identity is needed to exercise national interest in an international system (Edmunds, Gaskarth and Porter, 2014: 505). Recognizing a state's identity will help the other states understand the situation in the global sphere. The construction of national interest, however, depends on identity. The United States always tries to build its identity among other nations. In the early independence of the state, the U.S. tried to differentiate itself from Great Britain in terms of a political system.

After World War II, the U.S. changed its identity and attempted to build a new one. It intended to be seen as a global leader opposing hegemony from the Soviet Union (Huntington, 1997: 36). Furthermore, the role of the U.S. as "a leader" was strongly attached to itself, even though tensions between Western and Eastern blocs had already diminished.

In the globalization era, some states struggle to have their own identity. The high level of integration on a regional and global level has a tendency to make states lose their identity. However, several countries successfully maintain their identity, such as the United States, which it is still able to act as "the world's police" (Lynch, 2014). The other less powerful countries face huge obstacles to show to the world their own identity. Integration into groups or communities which have common interests is beneficial for them, yet, at the same time, their identity can be taken away. Thus, it gives them positive and negative effects as well. The Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) is one example of a regional organization that shares a collective interest among its members. The ASEAN Charter, the

ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint are mediums to achieve one's identity as an ASEAN member (Tolentino, 2014). Having one identity under ASEAN is a good way to build stronger relations with other member states. Yet, this affects the national identity of each state since they focus on maintaining their identity as an ASEAN member. This will have an impact on the progress of constructing a national interest because collective interests in ASEAN become the main priority of the states. Moreover, in an international system, the state will be known as part of ASEAN rather than as a sovereign state.

Collective interests can help states have stronger alliances. However, this condition also has consequences for members of the group. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), for example, is known as one of the most powerful world alliances. The members feel confident in terms of security issues to be part of this group, as Article 5 says that "an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies" (NATO, n.d.). Nevertheless, member states still need to follow rules

and regulations. NATO members have a responsibility to allot a considerable part of their budgets to the security sector (Coffey and Kochis, 2016). This obligation contradicts the national interests of several states. Some members decided to reduce their budgets for defense due to the post-Cold War effect and the 2008 financial crisis (The Economist, 2017). These states stay in confusion status because they intend to protect the country by joining NATO, but it is also urgent to exercise their national interests, such as placing a high priority on their financial conditions. This dilemma will lead the member to focus either on collective or national interest.

Issue of collective interests and national interests is indeed complicated. Some states, however, can still reach the goal through collective interests which acts as a medium to exercise their national interests. Meanwhile, the other states cannot do the same thing as I provided the example about obligation as a NATO or EU member. To conclude, I argue that it is very difficult to determine if a state's action is considered in terms of national interest

or just a consequence of being a member of community or alliance.

D. Conclusion

In today's world, globalization has many effects on international systems. The emergence of non-state actors and their transnational activities as well as an act of "usurpation" in national interest are examples of how globalization can impact a state. The application of national interest is heavily affected. The national interest concept, as proposed by scholars, supports realism, which also focuses on the role of a state as the center of international systems. Today, many changes are occurring in the world, not only because of globalization, but also as an effect of the post-Cold War era where security issues are difficult to analyze.

States need to prepare themselves to face the global threat caused by the effects of globalization. Competition between states in general has been reduced. Most states start building cooperation with others in order to counter this threat. Even the old rivals, the United States and Russia, have agreed to build a better relationship since they share common interests. The

national interest was used to achieve goals in the past but now has become unpopular in this modern day. Collective interests shared by states have become a new trend in the global political system. Regional and global organizations help governments achieve their target goals through collaboration.

The issue of collective and national interest becomes a challenge for a state. The integration of countries through an official institution can be both a benefit and a deficit for the member. The possibility to raise a concern with national interest is low since the main target is collective interest, which needs to be achieved together. A state action does not mean it belongs to its national interest since it is possible the action is part of the state's responsibility as a member of the group or coming from influence of external actors. Therefore, the concept of national interest is blurry and can be irrelevant in the globalized international system.

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