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Abstract

In the recent decade, Cambodia has adopted the bandwagon strategy toward China. Such conduct leads to the notion claiming that Cambodia is having patron-client relation with Asia superpower. Hence, numerous literatures posit that Cambodia is a passive actor in the global political system. In this article, it is seek to examine the active nature of Cambodia's foreign policy by choosing Preah Vihear temple conflict as the case study. This study adopt small state diplomacy theory in the analysis of conduct and behavior of Cambodia toward its larger neighboring country, Thailand. Under the constrain of external coercion, it is seen that Cambodia has chosen to strengthen its military capacity at the same time enhance security cooperation with China. Cambodia also decided to use multilateralism as the main conflict resolution mechanism by referring the case to ASEAN and ICJ. Additionally, Cambodia noticeably conduct hedging strategy toward Thailand through active engagement and economic pragmatism. Thus, it is seen that rather than depending solely on China, Cambodia has conducted various diplomacies in protecting national interest.

Keywords: Active Engagement, Bandwagon, Cambodia, Economic Pragmatism, Hedging, Patron-Client Relation, Security Constrain, Small State, Small State Diplomacy.

1. Introduction

Since the end of Cold War, the question of what strategies shall small states adopt to maintain its security from external threat has become one of the dominant discussion among scholars in the field. Upon the predominant vulnerable nature, various literatures suggest that small state shall adopt balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging strategy to protect the country from external coercion. Others emphasize on the role of multilateralism and regionalism in maintaining the security of small states. In line with these sentiment, Cambodia, a small state in South-East Asia, has noticeably adopted the bandwagoning strategy toward its main development partner, China. With the adoption of particular diplomacy, various scholar claimed that Cambodia is overly dependence on Beijing's government and defined certain relation as patron-client which indeed suggest the passive nature of Cambodia's position. With the increase in popularity of such belief, literatures in relation with the foreign policy of Cambodia focus mainly on the country's bilateral relation with China rather than concentrate on other aspects.

With the noticeable gap in literature, this research is conducted to examine the behavior of Cambodia's foreign policy by concentrating on the strategy that the country adopt in response to the traditional security threat. Back in 2008 and 2011, Cambodia encountered significant security constrain as Thailand decided to violate territorial integrity of Cambodia by sending troops to occupy the areas surrounding the ancient temple of Preah Vihear. The author argues that the conducts of Cambodia in protecting its national interest in the case of Khmer-Thai conflict, reflects the active nature of the country's foreign policy. It is somehow contradicted to the notion that Cambodia is a passive actor suggested in several literatures which focus on Cambodia-China relation. It is argued that Cambodia has adopted several types of small state diplomacy in protecting its territorial integrity. In response to the security threat, Cambodia decided to enhance its security cooperation with China, at

the same time, the kingdom depended on international and regional institutions as the main mechanism in solving the conflict. It is also suggested that Cambodia conduct hedging strategy toward Thailand through active engagement and economic pragmatism to consolidate the bilateral relation.

2. Literature Review

With the increased interest in the study of small states, there are numerous literatures which attempt to define characteristics and behaviors of small state. There is a great number of argument and disagreement on several aspects. However, it is noticeable that large number of literatures seem to agree that small states are weak and vulnerable even under the protection of current global system. It is posited that small states are highly dependence on international assistance and supports due to the limited economic capacity. Certain condition makes it easy for external actors to interevent into the domestic affairs of those countries. (Mushelenga & Wyk, 2017). In addition to that small states are noticeably weak in term of military capability, thus, those nations are at high risk of facing external coercion. It is undeniable that, the current state system is governed by the international institutions. Whereas, states are bound to obligations and responsibilities under international law, rules, and norms. Thus, the realpolitik or use of hard power is no longer relevant. However, it is also noticeable that there are still cases that bigger power use military power to violate the sovereignty of the small nations. Hence, small states in the current system are still facing the traditional security constrains. (Steinsson & Thorhallsson, 2017). Additionally, bigger powers even without the use of hard power, are still possessing the great influences on the system. Superpowers are normally the one who decide or have enough capability in shaping the system, contrary to the weak powers which have no choice, but to adapt themselves to the surrounding environment. (Keohane, 1969).

Under such constraints and vulnerabilities, numerous scholars in the field suggest that small states have adopted numerous strategies to protect the national interest. Those strategies are known as small state diplomacy. Thorhallsson (2018), improvised three main concepts of small state diplomacy based on the dominant schools of thought in the field of international relations. First, he suggests that, according to realists, small nations are too weak to protect themselves from external coercion. In the anarchic world, bigger powers get what they want and it is the price that small states have to pay for. Thus, small states in general choose to build good relations with superpowers or bigger powers. By having good relations, small nations could rely on superpowers to protect their national interests. Secondly, he claimed that on the basis of liberalist beliefs, small states relatively enjoy more benefits in the current global system even with the constraints of anarchy. Small states are protected by what-so-called collective power. Thus, small states in the current system tend to adopt multilateralism or involve themselves in regional and international groupings to safeguard themselves. Last but not least, Thorhallsson bases his argument on constructivism. Constructivists tend to believe that states either big or small tend to act in accordance with their ideas and identities. Behavior of states in response to external threats depends on their way of thinking. At the same time, the behavior of states would change, as their ideas and identities evolve. Hence, small states shall depend more on their soft power and art of persuasion rather than the strategies suggested by theoretical ideology. (Thorhallsson, 2018).

Another interesting article in relation with the security strategies of small states is written by Vaicekauskaite. The author claimed that there are several security strategies that small states could adopt including neutralizing, bandwagoning, balancing, and hedging. Bandwagon strategy refers to the act of aligning with the threatening power to protect the country's security. Balancing is the act of forming alliances against the threat of dominant power. While, hedging is somewhat in between balancing and bandwagoning. According to

Leng (2016), hedging is adopted when the state is indecisive or not having enough capability in adopting the straightforward strategies like balancing, bandwagon, and neutral. Interestingly the two author based their argument in relation with hedging strategy on Le's (2013) and Kuik's (2008) studies. These article suggests several type of hedging strategies including indirect balancing, dominance denial, economic pragmatism, binding (active) engagement and limited bandwagoning.

3. Research Methodology

With the above review of literature, it is seen that Cambodia's strategies in response to the security threat imposed by Thailand in the case of Preah Vihear conflict could be classified as small states diplomacy. In the aim of verifying the claim and examining the behavior of Cambodia, this paper will be using qualitative type of research in the analyzing process. This paper will provide discussions on three main aspects. First, it will emphasize on the vulnerability and the limitation of foreign policy choices encounter by Cambodia. Second, it seek to provide explanation on Cambodian-Thai relation and the root-cause of Preah Vihear temple conflict. Lastly, it seek to provide explanation on Cambodia's strategies in solving traditional security constrain. With the discussion on this three aspect, this article is expected to provide more knowledge on the nature of Cambodia's foreign policy and the reason behind the adoption of bandwagoning strategy toward China.

4. Cambodia's Vulnerability and Limited Foreign Policy Choices

Cambodia was one of the most powerful empire in Asia during 13th century, since the collapse of Angkor empire, the kingdom has been under the great influence of the stronger states. In the post Khmer empire era, the territory of Cambodia was threaten from time to time due to the increase in military power of the two neighboring countries, Siam and An Nam. Cambodia's internal affair was largely control by the neighboring states for several

decades until France protectorate began. Cambodia was later fell under French authority for 90 years before it gained back its self-determination right in 1959. As an independent nation, Khmer declared itself as a neutral state to prevent the effect of Cold War. Unluckily, the country was tracked into the proxy war in 1970 when the U.S. backed coup was carried out against the administration of the late king Norodom Sihanouk. During that particular period, Cambodia's territory was used as the battle field between the U.S. and the Northern Vietnam. As Vietnam war come to an end, internal war continued in Cambodia for several years before the communist party of Pol Pot took over the country. Under Pol Pot administration, the deliberate killing was carried out against Khmer people for almost 4 years. Vietnam, later on, stepped in and liberate the country. However, the state of Cambodia was under the Vietnamese control from 1979 to 1989. With the support of the United Nation and the international community, the peace-keeping operation under the name of United Nation Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) began in 1992 under the spirit of 1991 Paris Peace Accord. At the final stage of the negotiation process, parties to conflicts in Cambodia and the international community had agreed upon the creation of the Second Kingdom of Cambodia and the first national election of this regime took place in 1993. Only after the elected government came to power that Cambodia has finally gained back the full control over its remaining territory. Thus, throughout the history, Cambodia had always been under the control of stronger nations.

As a war-torn country, even with the adoption of the new state system, Cambodia is still very vulnerable in international community due to the weak military and economic power. Cambodia still depend largely on international assistances and supports in developing the country. Literally speaking, the country remains under the great influence of the bigger states. Nevertheless, geographically Cambodia is located in between the two influential neighboring country, Vietnam and Thailand. Due to the historical conflict and the undefined borderline, security issue remains the significant threat to the country's stability.

In addition to the vulnerable situation, Cambodia also encounter the problem of limited foreign policy choices. It is undeniable that Cambodia has been trying to depend on its relation with China to protect national interest and absorbing economic interest. However, it is noticeable that China is indeed the only superpower that the country could turn to. It shall have been mentioned that the EU and the U.S. has always criticized the government of Cambodia on the negative development of human rights and democratization process. Starting from the 1997 violence coup carried out against Prince Norodom Ranariddh, who was at that time, the co-prime minister of the coalition government; Cambodia's relation with the western world has undergone a great fluctuation. Another significant negative development of Cambodia's relation with the western world occurred when there was the human rights issues report on the force evacuation of the people residing around Boeung Kak area for development purpose. Last but not least, the downgrade tie between Cambodia and the West emerge once again in 2017 when the supreme court of Cambodia has rule to dissolve the country's major opposition party, CNRP, under the accusation of being supported by the U.S. government. (Corgan, 2020).

From an overall view, it seems like Cambodia has chosen China to be the one and only developing partner. However, Strangio (2020) states that China is seen to be the only superpower that acts strictly in accordance with the policy of non-interference. It is seen that the U.S. and EU's intention is to intervene in Cambodia's domestic affairs by forcing Hun Sen government to give up its authoritarian character. Hence, it is not a surprise that the royal government choose to get closer to China. In compliment, Sous Yara, an influential politician in Cambodia, suggests that the EU's decision in the EBA withdrawal was made unjustly. Comparing to other countries in the region that the EU is working closely with, Cambodia performance in human rights and democracy is noticeably better. He concluded that the conducts is made on political reason rather than the aspect of human rights. (Sous, 2020).

Besides, it is also noticeable that Cambodia has also try to diversify it relation by strengthening its relation with Japan. Bilateral relation between Cambodia and Japan continue to increase at the time that the two nations agree upon the adoption of Strategic Partnership agreement. (Chheang, 2018). However, in term of security Japan also has limited capacity.

5. Cambodia-Thailand Relations and the Root-Cause of the Conflict

It is empirically proven that the two kingdoms have a long history of involvement since the formation of Sukhaothai. In spite of the long-lasting relationship, the bilateral relation between Cambodia and Thailand has received some sorts of negative reviews. Charnvit Kasetsiri (2002) dubbed the ties of the Asian nations as “love-hate relationship”. He claimed that the two countries have so many things in common starting from tradition and culture to the way of lives. However, the relation between the two neighboring countries has never been really close due to the behavior of “ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice”. It is seen that the people of the two nations are deeply governed by nationalist perspective which result in the fight over superiority. (Kasetsiri, 2002).

Besides the conflict over the inheritance heritage, the colonial legacy also play a great role in causing conflict between the two nations. It is seen that after the colonization period, the two countries suffered from the undefined border-line which resulted in the conflict over the territory surrounding Preah Vihear temple. Back in 1959, Cambodia filed the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Thailand claiming the control over Preah Vihear temple. In 1962 ICJ’s verdict, the ancient temple was declared under the sovereignty of Cambodia. Thailand accepted the enforcement of the verdict, yet, stating that the area surrounding remained undefined. In 2007, Cambodia attempted to register Preah Vihear temple as the World Heritage site. However, Thai nationalist group express its unappreciation and demanded the temple shall be registered as the mutual world heritage site of both

countries. In 2008, UNESCO accept Cambodia's application and declare Preah Vihear temple as the World Heritage, despite the disagreement of Thailand's counterpart. The event escalated the tension between Thailand and Cambodia and further resulted in the exchange of fire for several times between 2008 and 2011.

Wagener (2011) claimed that the conflict over Preah Vihear temple is the low intensity conflict and suggested that the leaders of the two countries politicized the issue to gain public support. He stated that Hun Sen was using conflict to increase his popularity as the protector of the nation and enhance his son's role in the arm force. At the same time, he stated that Abhisit was also using the case to maintain his position as the prime minister. (Wagener, 2011).

Contrary to the view of Wagener, Jenne (2017) categorized the conflict as large-scale and long lasting armed violence. She stated that the government of Thailand has been using the conflict to convert the public attention from domestic politics. The author claimed the government of Thailand wanted to escalate the situation. However, due to the close personal relations and the good interaction between Khmer and Thai diplomats and heads of army, the situation was able to maintained. (Jenne, 2017).

Jenne's view is somehow resemble to Ngoun's (2014) and Deth's (2017). The two Cambodian authors posited that the changes in Thailand's domestic affairs poses a great negative effect on Cambodia's security. Var (2017) inserts that Cambodia had never consider Thailand as the threat to national security. He claims that because of the huge gap in military power, Cambodia had never intended to go to war against Thailand. Additionally, he points out that since the establishment of the formal relation back in 1950, two countries had always been in a fluctuate relation. But, there was not a single case that Thailand exercise hard power against Cambodia. However, the case of Preah Vihear conflict back in 2008 reconceptualized the perception of Cambodian

government. Since then, Cambodia has adopted several types of strategies to protect its national interest which indeed reflect the changes in Cambodia's interstate policy.

6. Cambodia Strategies in the Case of Preah Vihear Conflict

With the review of empirical evidences, it is seen that Cambodia has adopted three main policies in dealing with the traditional security threats imposed by Thailand. First, the government was trying to conduct the reform in military and enhance cooperation with China. Second, the government adopt the multilateralism mechanism of conflict resolution. Last, Cambodia adopted active-engagement and economic pragmatism strategies in its bilateral relation with Thailand.

6.1 Military reform and Cooperation with China

Since the conclusion of internal wars and conflicts back in 1990s, Cambodia government decided to decrease the number of military personal and military expense in an unpredictable way. Back in 1993, under the integration programs the number of military personal in Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) was undeniably large and oversized with the number of 203,821. Under the United Nation's administration, 36,000 soldiers in RCAF was demobilized. Since then, the government continue to decrease the size of RCAF and decrease the security expense. The main purpose of certain conduct is to transfer the budget from military expense to develop the prioritized sectors including education, health, and rural development. According to the 2000 Defense White Paper of Cambodia, the government planned to decrease the number of troops from 160,000 to 105,000 and reform the structure of RCAF from 20 divisions to 12 brigades. At the same time, the government is seen to prioritized the training of young soldier and focusing more on the activities abroad. It is noticed that Cambodia has been very active in sending troops and its demining units to join the UN

peacekeeping operations in Sudan, Chad, Central Africa, and Lebanon. It shall have been mentioned that Cambodia ranked number two among ASEAN member states as the country which send the most troops to join UN peace-keeping operations. In the defense white paper, the government also planned to continue to reduce the number of military personal by 25 to 30 percent by 2010. Contrary to the plan, it is seen that the government decided to recruit more army after the border conflict with Thailand. Cambodia also decided to carried out the deep-reform in the defense sectors by developing infrastructures, communications facilities and building new villages for soldier's family along the border-line. In addition to the reform, the government, as well, increase the military budget from USD 100 millions in 2008 to USD 277 millions in 2014. The defense expenditure continues to increase with the report of USD 383 millions and USD 455 millions in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Hence, it somehow suggests that Cambodia is trying to strengthen its military capacity due to the threat imposed by Thailand. (Var, n.d.).

In addition to the reform in RCAF, Cambodia has also tried to enhance the military cooperation with China following the 2008 and 2011 incident. It is reported that Cambodia and China had agreed on the signing of military cooperation pacts in May, 2012. China in the same year provided Cambodia with USD 17 millions in military aid and constructed of training facilities for Cambodian army. Furthermore, China also provided loan to Cambodia in the purchase of military aircrafts, helicopters, and other military equipment. There was also a report on visit of Chinese defense minister to Cambodia in 2012 and 2018. During the visit, Chinese defense minister also agree to provided more scholarship and training course for Cambodia military personal in China. (Sok, 2012). It is undeniable that even with the reform in defense sector and increased tie with China, Cambodia is indeed not a competitor to Thailand. Hence, Cambodia is indeed still under the constrain of traditional security issue.

6.2 Role of Multilateral Mechanism in Preah Vihear Conflict

In 2010, Cambodia's government declared that the bilateral negotiation with counterpart, Thailand, had failed. Prime Minister Hun Sen decided to send the letter to the United Nation Security Councils (UNSC) and requested for the immediate international intervention in Preah Vihear conflict. In response to Cambodian government's request, UNSC urged the two nation to exercise the maximum restraint and prevent the escalation of the dispute. In addition, UNSC had called upon ASEAN to resolve Khmer-Thai conflict based on the existing mechanism as stated in ASEAN Charter. The referral of the case to ASEAN is believed to be the test on its capability in solving the dispute and maintaining regional peace and security. However, Indonesia, as the chairman of ASEAN in that time, failed to come up with the solution to the case. It shall be mentioned that Cambodia has always considered ASEAN as its economic and security shield. Thus, the failure of ASEAN in solving Preah Vihear conflict somehow provided a great implication on Cambodia's security concern. However, Cambodia continue its attempt to use multilateral mechanism in resolving the conflict by referring the case to ICJ, requesting for the interpretation of the 1962 verdict. Following Cambodia request, ICJ announced its ruling in 2013 and declared that the temple and the surrounded area is located in the territory of Cambodia. The ruling is largely appreciated by the government of Cambodia as it satisfy the initial goal. However, it shall be mentioned that the jurisdiction of ICJ is based on the consent of parties to conflict. ICJ has jurisdiction on Preah Vihear case as Cambodia requested for interpretation of the previous verdict. Thus, it means that in the future conflict, Thailand could reject the jurisdiction of ICJ, if the conflicting issue is not related to Preah Vihear case. Thus, it somehow convincing that the multilateral mechanism might not work in the future conflict. (Loch, n.d.).

6.3 Cambodia's Hedging Strategies Toward Thailand

As the compensation to the uncertainty of the future development of Cambodia-Thailand relation, Cambodia government is seen to adopt two types of hedging strategy toward Thailand. As discussed above, it is widely accepted that the changes in Thailand's domestic politics could possibly affect the stability of Cambodia. It is also undeniable that Cambodian-Thai relation was relatively good under the administration of Shinawatra family. At the same time, it is also seen Hun Sen has a close relation with the former prime minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra. And the situation of Preah Vihear temple conflict could be normalized when Yingluck Shinawatra came to power back in August 2011. However, after Prayut Chan-o-cha come to power back in 2014, the government of Cambodia was trying to actively engage with Thailand under the spirit of non-interference. The active engagement between the two countries could be seen through the exchange of leaders' official visit. Cambodia was the second country in ASEAN who welcome the visit of Prayut Chan-o-cha back in 2014. (Vong & Kevin, 2014). In the following year, prime minister of Cambodia also paid an official visit in Bangkok. Hun Sen and Prayut, despites of the past conflict, have developed a close relation with one another. It shall have been mentioned that Prayut was the army chief during the border clashes between the two countries back in 2010. (Jitcharoenkul, 2015). Furthermore, Cambodia has also conduct economic pragmatism toward Thailand. Based on Leng (2016), when small state show its intention in establishing he close economic relation, the bigger power would somehow perceive small state as non-threatening force. Thus, it is important that Phnom Penh's government enhance its economic cooperation with Thailand to safe-guarding the country's security. It has been reported that the government of Cambodia has been trying to enhance the economic cooperation with Thailand since Prayut came to power. During Hun Sen's official visit in Bangkok back in 2015, he was accompanied by a delegation of Cambodian businessmen who seeks for business opportunity with Thai counterpart. In the same year, the government of the two countries

also agreed to reconnect the rail-link between two nation to reduce the transportation cost and improving the trading roots. Thailand and Cambodia also committed to increase the bilateral trade volume to USD 15 billion in 2020. (Khmer Times, 2020). With the practice of active engagement and economic pragmatism, it is noticeable that Cambodia could secure its position with the new government of Thailand regardless of the past-conflict.

7. Conclusion

At the very core, this study examine the character of Cambodia's foreign policy on the basis of the country's vulnerability and security constrains. It is seen that there are numerous literature which focus in the bilateral relation between Cambodia and China which suggest the passive nature of the country's interstate policy. However, with the study on Preah Vihear conflict, it is suggested that Cambodia has been pursuing small state diplomacy in protect and maintain national interest. China plays an important role in Cambodia's niche diplomacy. While, multilateralism is being considered as the country's security shield. Additionally, due to the uncertainty of the two mentioned strategies, Cambodia adopts hedging diplomacy toward Thailand by emphasizing on the principle of non-interference and vitalizing the economic cooperation. Thus, it could be concluded that Cambodia's foreign policy seem to be passive, yet, it is somehow active in nature.

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