Research Article

The Domestic Politics and Indonesia’s Tension with Malaysia on The Ambalat Case

Received: 20\textsuperscript{th} March 2022; Revised: 10\textsuperscript{th} May 2022; Accepted: 12\textsuperscript{th} July 2022; Available online: 13\textsuperscript{th} July 2022

Reevany Bustami\textsuperscript{1}, Ali Maksum\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Centre for Policy Research & International Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Penang, Malaysia
\textsuperscript{2}International Relations Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Jl. Brawijaya, Kasihan, Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 55183, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examines inter-state tension between Indonesia and Malaysia on the issue of Ambalat between 2005-2009 using quantitative analysis. The analysis offers these critical and crucial lenses to reduce empirical and conceptual blind spots in international relations discourse. The issue is pivotal since the Ambalat disputes had yielded tensions between the two nations. Furthermore, the military’s involvement and provocations of mass media were arguably excessive. Previous literature merely focuses on the foreign policy tension and neglects the correlated and critical domestic factors. The purpose of this research is expected to possess a different conceptual perspective on the issue of Ambalat, which is often framed from a security perspective. The mainstream rationale captures Ambalat as an internal political maneuver deployed by President Yudhoyono while antagonizing Indonesia’s relations with the neighbor. The analysis offers these critical and crucial lenses to reduce empirical and conceptual blind spots in international relations discourse. The results showed that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) used this issue to advance specific political interests by redirecting the public’s attention from mounting petroleum costs and the president’s declining image. This also occurs against the backdrop of the presidential election of 2009 to maneuver Ambalat. However, the maneuver for the domestic audience affected Indonesia-Malaysia’s relations and the rising tension.

Keywords: Ambalat; domestic politics; Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono; Indonesia; Malaysia


Permalink/DOI: https://doi.org/10.14710/jis.21.2.2022.98-125

Corresponding Author: ali.maksum@fisipol.umy.ac.id (Ali Maksum)
INTRODUCTION

The issue of Ambalat is essential to highlight in the discussion of Indonesia-Malaysia relations, especially in the contemporary era. The Suharto years were a period of friendly relations between the two countries leadership. This has influenced two-way connections, specifically on issues of national borders. The reality has arguably taken a different trajectory in the post-Suharto era. The Ambalat issue exemplifies the rift in this relation of border problems that both nations have not fully resolved. However, the rise of the Ambalat issue is being exploited for the interests of elites, especially in Jakarta. The military’s involvement in 2005 or 2009 at the Indonesian-Malaysian borders is problematic, and the situation becomes more critical when it is further exacerbated by media provocation. For this reason, the Ambalat issue necessitates further deliberation vis-à-vis the factors underlying the tension between the two countries.

This study found three research gaps; first, previous literature argued that Indonesia’s tension with Malaysia was mainly influenced by the transformation of international politics from the Cold to the post-Cold War era (Anwar, 1994; Maksum & Bustami, 2014; Md. Khalid & Yakob, 2012). Second, previous literature also mentioned that the higher nationalism sentiment mainly impacted the rise of the tension between the two nations among Indonesians (Abang & Bala, 2022; Poulgrain, 2014; Setiawati, 2012). Thirds, there was no specific study comprehensively scrutinizing Indonesia-Malaysia relations based on domestic factors, specifically in the Ambalat cases using the rational actor model (Allison, 1969; Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Some factors that potentially influenced the rise of the tension, such as elites, local politicians, the military, and the media fueling the public anger, were identified. Therefore, the issue of Ambalat, which has ignited international tension, should be examined more extensively. The question of being an issue manipulated by elites, specifically in Indonesia, who seek to gain political mileage with the provocation from the media, should also be considered as a novelty in this article. Meanwhile, the subsequent paragraphs will discuss the theoretical framework as the foundation of the analysis of the Ambalat issue.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the approach to international relations, particularly the realism theory, and places the state as the leading actor (Mastanduno, Lake, & Ikenberry, 1989; Yazid, 2000). However, realism theory does not reject internal factors, especially political elites, media, and public opinions, in influencing the process of foreign relations of individual countries (Sterling-Folker, 1997). This is contingent on the international context of the moment concerning the level of situational pressure (Cardenas, 2004; He, 2008; Rose, 1998). The global phenomena in the
post-Cold world witness an increasingly lower pressure and popularity of issues regarding identity, human rights, and democratization (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999; Farouk, 2011; Schlesinger Jr., 1992). In essence, the domestic or internal political element, including media, is becoming difficult to control, as in the case of Indonesia (Maksum, Surwando, & Azizah, 2019; Schneier, 2009).

The rational policy model developed by Graham T. Alisson is extensively utilized in this study (Allison, 1969; Allison & Zelikow, 1999). This is because the domestic and international external political forces have a significant impact on the policy. Allison’s research was groundbreaking because it questioned the logic of a foreign policy based on economic principles. Realism is also more or less adopted when describing a nation’s foreign policy. The actions of a state are analyzed under the assumption of rationalism, where the state considers all options and acts rationally to maximize profits. Foreign policy is viewed as the result of rational actors’ actions. In addition, Allison introduced three foreign analysis models in general: (i) the rational actor model, (ii) the organizational process model, and (iii) the bureaucratic politics model. According to the rational actor model, the decision was founded on rational or intellectual considerations and the calculation of profit and loss, leading to a mature, accurate, and judicious choice. The state is a mechanical process that moves through phases, processes, and organizational mechanisms as standard operating procedures are used. This is consistent with the process model, which describes the state as a substantial foreign decision-making organization. As members of a large organization, units with significant leadership responsibilities cannot dispute decisions made by central authority. The bureaucratic political model emphasizes that different actors, groups, and interested parties construct a decision-making process through negotiation, compromise, and mutual influence between pertinent stakeholders (Ateş, 2022; Welch, 1992). The decision results from a political process that involves extensive and complex considerations (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

Each state is shown as a logical actor that consistently pursues an interest. The most fundamental is to uphold national interests and sovereignty. This model shows how decision-makers can implement several policies to obtain the best outcomes. To optimize the achievement of their objectives based on rational calculations in the international political sphere, governments are viewed as actors, according to the fundamental premise of the rational actor model approach. Furthermore, the state is shown as an individual actor who is perfectly aware of the situation and seeks to maximize values and goals. Various national behaviors are examined with the supposition that all options are weighed and act logically to maximize profits. The government should
decide between several options during the policy-making process, and each decision has implications. The state will select policies with the most positive effects on achieving the desired outcomes (goals and objectives) (Ateş, 2022; Hudson, 2005). Rosenau also underlined that a nation's response to pressure or encouragement from both home and international politics, or its creation of a foreign policy, is the result of both internal (domestic) pressure or demands and external pressures/demands against the nation (Rosenau, 1974).

In this paper, the author uses rational choice theory in order to examine the interplay between domestic and international relations on Indonesia’s tension with Malaysia during the Ambalat cases. In this context, some factors contributed to the tension such as domestic political issues ranging from oil prices, issues related to national elections, and political rivalries among elites to media companies. At the same time, the role of the national leadership is perceived as a strong determinant of the rise of Ambalat tension with Malaysia, especially President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. It is expected that this paper would contribute to the new perspective on Indonesian foreign policy understanding specifically on Ambalat cases which are highly determined by domestic factors. Nevertheless, this paper believes that the openness of international politics in the post-Cold War indirectly gave the two countries' behavior became more flexible which is slightly different compared to the previous era which was fully constrained by an ideological clash and major power rivalries.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This is qualitative analysis utilise secondary data whether gained from nooks, journals, government documents or online resource. All data gathered were analysed using content analysis to interpret the data related to Indonesian foreign policy on Ambalat and the relations with domestic politics especially during President Yudhoyono administration (2005-2009). In addition, this research also enriched by non-structured interview with stakeholders of Indonesian government. Content analysis is useful to reach conclusion and meaning from the text. Content analysis also allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the event's new meaning and context. In essence, this strategy allows researchers to interpret (analytical or critical) text and turn it into an academically approved narrative (Krippendorff, 2019). Using realism theory of international relations, the authors would analyse two main Ambalat cases that occurred repeatedly during Yudhoyono administration. The first case of Ambalat (Ambalat case I) occurred in 2005 and the second Ambalat case (Ambalat II) erupted in 2009. Direct quotes, graphs, and tables are used to show all of the information gathered. Therefore, the subsequent paragraphs
would highlight the background of Indonesia-Malaysia border disputes, the main discussion consist of the two cases namely Ambalat I and Ambalat II, and conclusion.

**Literature Review**

(a) **Background of Indonesia-Malaysia Border Problems**

Since obtaining independence on 31 August 1957, Malaysia has already been entangled in border problems with Indonesia (Salleh, 2008). However, the two nations have successfully resolved numerous issues either unilaterally or multilaterally (Salleh, 2008, 147). The problems emerged after the Malaysian government publicized the New Map in 1980. The opposition to the New Map did not come merely from Indonesia but also from some other neighboring countries (Butcher, 2013). In the early stage, the problems had been overcome before the publication of the New Map through the negotiation of Continental Shelf Boundaries (CSB) on 27 October 1969 (Salleh, 2008, 148). Since 1969, both countries have agreed to “ignore” the overlapping border issues until 1991 (Liow, 2005). According to Liow, the arrangement is agreed upon to avoid tension between the two sides based on multiple sources (Liow, 2005, 144). This fact was also affirmed by the former Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Hassan Wirajuda, who stated that the interest in regional stability was a priority of both nations (Wirajuda, 2002).

After the Cold War, specifically in 1991, the relations between the two states began to shake concerning the Sipadan-Ligitan Island dispute. The Indonesian authority, for instance, had discovered that Malaysia had built a resort at Sipadan, making it a status quo situation. This represents a breach of the agreement negotiated in 1969. Subsequently, several issues occurred, such as detained Malaysian fishermen using the MV Pulau Banggi ship on 11 July 1991. In this case, Indonesia captured a ship with 13 crew members near Sipadan Island and brought it to the naval base in Kalimantan. Within the same month, a group of security forces was charged for disembarking on Sipadan Island. Consequently, both countries had carried-out meetings and negotiations three times in 1992, 1993, and 1994. Among the outcomes of the negotiations was the establishment of a new committee replacing GBC, the Joint Working Group (JWG), with a specific objective of handling the Sipadan-Ligitan Island (Butcher, 2013; Salleh, 2008).

Even with the various negotiations, both countries still met an impasse. However, in 1996, President Suharto finally agreed to bring the Sipadan-Ligitan Island dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Netherlands. On 2 November 1998, they began to submit the case to ICJ, which was initiated by the joint-signing ceremony on 31 May 1997 in Kuala Lumpur (Salleh, 2008, 157). After a series of court hearings in December 2002, ICJ concluded that Ma-
Malaysia was the rightful owner of Sipadan-Ligitan Island. The Indonesian side accepted the decision of ICJ, even though many regretted it due to the estimated loss of Rp 16 million (H. Wirajuda, 2002). Therefore, this diplomatic maturity can be emulated by countries that seek to resolve territorial conflicts without military engagement (Franck, 2002).

This negotiated outcome of legal ownership of Malaysia over Sipadan-Ligitan Island has led to many other problems of overlapping claims. The ensuing oil concessions have created tension in the Ambalat case. This case has recurred three times during the administration of President Yudhoyono, specifically in the years 2005, 2008, and 2009. However, in 2005 and 2009, Ambalat destabilized Indonesia-Malaysia relations and stirred all kinds of public reactions in Indonesia. In 2008, the case became an issue rather swiftly heated to the levels of 2005 and 2009. Currently, negotiations on overlapping claims in the Ambalat Block are ongoing (Agusman & Nurbintoro, 2018; Supancana, 2015).

(b) **Indonesia’s Foreign Policy toward Malaysia vis-à-vis Ambalat**

In the case of Ambalat, there is a misunderstanding among specific segments of the Indonesian public concerning the actual picture of the block. Many of the coverage on Ambalat is often reported as “Ambalat Island” by news agencies. For instance, in a study entitled “Indonesia will submit an official protest against Malaysia on the issue of Ambalat,” it was stated that Ambalat Island is situated at the border between Northern Kalimantan and a part of Sabah, which is located precisely at Straits of Makassar, Sulawesi seas (Surya, 2015). However, Ambalat is a block on the ocean floor next to Borneo/Kalimantan Island. This is further strengthened by the argument of the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, which stated that:

> “Ambalat is an ocean floor at a depth of 2.5 km within the waters of Sulawesi Ocean which is located at 80 sea mile (120km) from the shore of Eastern Kalimantan, outside 12 sea mile from the island lines of Indonesia.” (Staff of Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Penang, 2014)

Geographically, the position of Ambalat Block is between longitude 118°15’21” - 118°51’15” East and latitude 2°34’7” - 3°47’50” North (Kusumadewi, 2015). The Ambalat Block, situated at curvature Tarakan in Eastern Kalimantan, is suspected of containing a large potential for oil and gas reserves (Druce & Baikoeni, 2016), and the region is an area known as ND6 and ND7. The picture of Ambalat Block can be seen in Figure 1.
Indonesia and Malaysia are members of the United Nations Convention on the law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and both ratified the convention’s laws on 1985 and 14 October 1996, respectively (Arsana, 2014). However, UNCLOS officially took effect on 16 November 1994, even though the agreement was initiated in 1982 in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Before its inception in 1982, the nation’s rights over the sea floor were based on the Geneva Convention of 1958, where the rights of the coastal countries extend as deep as 200 meters into the sea’s surface. Furthermore, such rights depend very much on exploiting the natural resources in the designated sea area. The more advance the technology of a country, the wider the sea floor over which it has the rights (Arsana, 2014).

(c) The Rising Tension on Ambalat 2005-2009

The Ambalat Case #1 (2005)

The Amabalat Case #1 began with capturing 17 Indonesian workers on 21 February 2005 by the Malaysian Royal Navy (TLDM) using the Royal Ship KD Sri Melaka in Karang Unarang
waters of Ambalat. Meanwhile, a few Indonesian fishing boats were allegedly driven away by
the security forces to move out of Malaysian territories (Hadi, 2014; Pabyantara, Wiyatmoko, &
Dharmaputra, 2012). The security forces had encroached into the Indonesian territories around
March 2005. Meanwhile, the Malaysian side accused the security team of trespassing into their
territories. The tension began with the incidence of a dispute between both countries’ warships.

The dispute occurred between the ship KD Renchong (Malaysia), which was close to the
Indonesian ship Tedong Naga. Subsequently, Indonesia sent 4 fighter jets, F-16s, to patrol the
Ambalat territories (Hassan, Omar, & Abdullah, 2017; Schofield & Storey, 2005), which led to a
further show of force by both parties in the area. Among the ships involved are KD Sri Johor,
KD Baung, and KD Kota Baharu, which faced a few Indonesian war ships such as KRI K. S.
Tubun, KRI Wiratno dan KRI Tongkol (Lugito, Febriana, Arifin, & Wibisono, 2005).

In deliberating on the tension in this border zone, a few parties also had internal disagree-
ments. According to Indonesia’s Navy, the tension originated from Malaysia’s war ship’s en-
croachment in February 2005. At 04.06’30” Latitude North-118.03’06” Longitude East and the
distance of two miles, Indonesia’s Navy detected two Malaysia warships, namely, KD Pau-3507
and KD Baung-3509. At almost the same time, Indonesia’s KRI Wiratno-879 was stationary
while servicing the ship Kapal Motor (KM) Dewa Ruci Akbar-I at coordinates of 03.48’06” Lat-
titude North -118.09’30” longitude, where a Malaysia Land base Maritime Aircraft was detected
flying with an airplane model Beach Craft B 200 T Super King. The plane flew close to KRI
Wiratno – 879 to observe and document the ship. Indonesian navy believed that the plane Super
King had trespassed Indonesia’s air space by about six nautical miles (Tempo, 2005).

The Indonesian Airforce rejected the view of the Indonesian navy, who reaffirmed that
Malaysia’s aircraft was detected in Indonesian territory, and still flew again in the Flight Infor-
mation Region (FIR). In the international laws, there are two terms juridical zone and FIR zone.
In the juridical zone, foreign aircraft are prohibited from entering without prior permission, while
the FIR or international zone is more accessible. According to the Airforce, Malaysia’s aircraft
did not encroach on Indonesia’s air space because it was still flying in the FIR zone. Therefore,
the air force advised the navy and the general public to avoid jumping into a state of tension too
quickly and be cautious in assessing and responding to the issue (Tempo 2005). However, the
Indonesian army demonstrated a propensity to support the views of the navy and to voice readi-
ness to face all possibilities, including the deployment of ground forces in Ambalat (Dollah, Has-
san, & Bee, 2007).
Provocative news coverage by national media in Indonesia raised the temperature and public anger when the situation heated up at the border. Therefore, large-scale protests erupted in many locations, including among political elites in Indonesia. These protests became more acute to a point where anti-Malaysia sentiments began to appear. Arguably, the public sentiment peaked in the revival of the “Ganyang Malaysia” war cry, the burning of Malaysia’s flag, and the recruitment of combat volunteers in various major cities of Indonesia (Tempo, 2005; Yaakub, 2013). Table 1 is a sample of organizations involved in this “protest movement” against Ambalat I.

**Table 1. Organizations Involved in The Ambalat I Protest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Barisan Ganyang Malaysia</td>
<td>Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan</td>
<td>Claimed to gather 4,000 volunteers successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Front Bela Indonesia (FBI)</td>
<td>Palu, Sulawesi Tengah</td>
<td>7 registered volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Front Pembela Merah Putih (FPMP)</td>
<td>Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur</td>
<td>Supported by former Militia combatants of Timor-Timur, Eurico Guiteres and ready to send 500,000 volunteers to Ambalat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Gempur Malaysia</td>
<td>Kediri, East Java</td>
<td>30 university students and 150 members of the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Posko “Gasak Malaysia”, Gerakan Masyarakat Anti-Arogansi Surakarta (GEMARS), Komando Bela RI (KBRI), dan Angkatan Muda</td>
<td>Solo, Central Java</td>
<td>Successfully gathered more than 250 youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Forum Aksi Mahasiswa Merah Putih (FAMERPA)</td>
<td>Ambon, Maluku</td>
<td>100 members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Dollah et al. (2007)*

The establishment of various organizations with seemingly anti-Malaysia tendencies needs to be re-examined. These groups emerged due to the provocation, especially by the media and the statements of the political elites in Indonesia. However, their establishments did not get the overwhelming support of the Indonesian people. Certain segments of the society rendered
support, while others opposed them. Undeniably, some of these registered volunteers harbored a personal grudge or resentment towards Malaysia. Some volunteers from Front Bela Indonesia (FBI) in Palu, Central Sulawesi, for instance, admitted that they were ill-treated by the Malaysian Royal Police Force (PDRM) (Darlis, 2005). In Makassar, some volunteers were migrant workers in Malaysia (Irmawati, 2005). The director of the Centre for Peace and Security Research, Universitas Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta, Lambang Tiyono, expressed regrets about establishing these volunteer posts or centres. These actions do not solve problems; but complicate the tension (Amin, 2005).

The Ambalat Case #2 (2009)

After the case of Ambalat I in 2005, the Indonesian authorities continued to improve their control over the territory. At least 130 marine troops members of the Task Force (Satgas) AMBALAT IX had been deployed. Indonesia claimed Malaysia’s ships and combat aircraft trespassed on its territory at least 13 times throughout 2009 (Kusumadewi, 2015). In May 2009, KRI Untung Surapati-872 of the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) detected the presence of KD Baung-3509 in the Ambalat waters. According to the TNI-AL, they tried to communicate through the radio but failed because the TLDM extinguished its communication, violating the international shipping law (Soejarwoko, 2009). KRI Untung Surapati-872 claimed that KD Baung-3509 had entered Indonesian territory about 7.3 miles. Therefore, KRI Untung Surapati-872 tried to block KD Baung-3509 while approaching a lighthouse in Karang Unarang. Inevitably, chasing action took place between KRI Untung Surapati-872 and KD Baung-3509 for about one and a half hours. Finally, KD Baung-3509 was successfully driven out of the Indonesian border (Vivanews, 2009).

In the case of Ambalat I, the incident continued to cause significant repercussions in Indonesia. The organization of Pembela Kesatuan Tanah Air Indonesia Bersatu (Pekat-Indonesia Bersatu) rallied in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta. In the rally, the chair of Pekat, Iqbal Daud Hutapea, urged “Malaysia to respect the Ambalat waters” and “when these demands are not heeded, we are ready to be at the frontline of war” (Ferdianto, 2009). Pekat also threatened to take Malaysian citizens to Jakarta when, within 7x24 hours, the government ignored the demands to apologize to the Indonesian people (JPNN, 2009). Furthermore, during Ambalat II’s case, family conflicts and abuse arose involving Indonesian citizens in Malaysia. The case involving the artist Manohara Odelia Pinot with the Tengku Temenggong of the Kelantan Kingdom, Tengku Muhammad Fakhry Petra, worsened the situation (Al-Yamani, 2009). Manohara family, who received widespread attention from Indonesian people following the persecutions,
seemed to have taken advantage of the tension of the Ambalat II issue. Therefore, Manohara joined the rally held in front of the Malaysian Embassy with Laskar Merah Putih (Malaysia Kini, 2009). Meanwhile, Forum Betawi Rempug (FBR), which also held a rally at the Malaysian Embassy, claimed to have prepared around 200 volunteers to be sent to Ambalat (Wirajuda, 2014).

In subsequent developments, the tensions between the two countries provoked the Indonesian people in the border areas such as Nunukan, Sebatik Island, and East Kalimantan. Following the Ambalat issue, some people in Sebatik Island admitted that they would start a shooting practice with the TNI-AL (Aryanto, Ari, & Riyanto, 2009). In Sebatik Island, a group claimed to be the National Defenders Army held training similar to real military, such as wearing uniforms, crawling and creeping practice, and a guerrilla warfare strategy (Wahyudi, 2017). The indignation of Indonesian people in the border area of the two countries began when some fishermen were prohibited from fishing in the Ambalat waters by the Malaysian security forces. The incident began when the issue of four crews aboard the KM Aldi Jaya II fishing in the Ambalat waters was arrested and taken to a Malaysian military ship. The four Indonesian fishermen admitted their catch was seized and then beaten by the security forces (Meuko, 2009). In addition to the people of Sebatik Island, the Dayak tribe in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, who are members of the Central Kalimantan Dayak Youth Association, also claimed to have gathered around 400 traditional troops. According to the chair, Yansen Binti, the troops received basic training and could do battle traditionally. They were always in a ready state should the President declare war (Karana, 2009). This shows that the people of Indonesia on the border are quite affected by the Ambalat II issue. In contrast to the Ambalat I issue, the people on the border tend to be less concerned. The hindrance of their economic activities following the prohibition of fishing is a reasonably strong reason for the demise of the people on the border.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(a) The foreign policy of President SBY on the Ambalat case

President Yudhoyono stated that this incident does not reoccur at the highest level to avoid conflict between the two nations and maintain regional stability through negotiations. However, the media played a crucial role in swaying the perception and political policies of the Indonesian government. It is not an overstatement that the media was highly influential in shaping the attitudinal patterns of a large segment of the society in Indonesia in the case of Ambalat. For instance, Kompas was among Indonesia’s media, which played a highly active role in cover-
ing the Ambalat case, reportedly leading to a misunderstanding with the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Rajab (Malaysia Kini, 2005). This resulted in a series of critical meetings after the Ambalat case. The first meeting conducted behind closed doors was in Bali on March 22 – 23, 2005, followed by July 25 – 26, 2005 in Yogyakarta and another on the September 27-28, 2005 in Johor Baru (Schofield & Storey, 2005).

Some cases call for closer attention as it is highly related to the source of tension in the Ambalat block. In addition, 2005 was a challenging phase for President Yudhoyono after the 2004 General Election. The increase in oil prices was among the most demanding issues that had to be resolved by the government. The issue began in October 2004 when oil prices in the international market increased to 50 dollars/barrel and eventually hit 60-70 dollars/barrel. Therefore, the Indonesian government needed to cover a subsidy of 14 billion dollars in 2005 or 1/4 of the country’s budget, and the currency exchange rate of the Rupiah to the dollar was down to IDR10,000 per dollar (Liddle & Mujani, 2006). This situation was increasingly difficult when the country was threatened by the flight of significant foreign investments (capital flights), and the economic emergency following the increase in world oil prices was not immediately resolved. Consequently, on 1 March 2005, the Indonesian government raised the oil price, commonly known by its local abbreviation, BBM, from IDR1,810/Litter to IDR2,400/litter. On October 1, 2005, the government was forced to revise the fuel price to doubled or 87.5% of the original price from IDR2,400/litter to IDR4.500 per litter (Luthfi, Senevirathne, & Kaneko, 2017). Therefore, the Indonesian government raised the oil prices twice in 2005.

The increase in oil prices took a toll on the public with the high inflation rate of 17%, and the hike has reduced subsidies from the government. This implicates the emergence of the spiral effect to the increase of some goods and services, especially in the household, industrial, and transportation sectors (Artami & Hara, 2018). The impact of rising oil prices on some essential goods prices can be described in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Goods</th>
<th>Price Increase (%)</th>
<th>Type of Goods</th>
<th>Price Increase (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seafood</td>
<td>0.995</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>0.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking Oil</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>Railway</td>
<td>2.824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>Land Transportation</td>
<td>4.117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows that the most significant increase occurred in land transportation, water transportation, railway, construction, and groceries. Other goods and services such as rice, sugar, vegetables, and air transportation tend to increase by less than 1%. The largest oil consumption sector is the agriculture sector, including agricultural services 16.38%, fisheries 15.63%, and forestry 10.59%. Meanwhile, oil consumers outside the agriculture sector are transportation at 18.87%, construction at 11.86%, electricity at 11.72%, and the household's lowest, with an oil consumption level of 2.23% (Oktaviani & Sahara, 2005). The increase in oil prices in 2005 also shifted the poverty figures from 31.1 million to 39.3 million Indonesian residents and arguably led to various strikes and protests as well as demands for salary increases (Handoko, 2009; Muthalib, Adam, Rostin, Saenong, & Suriadi, 2018). Throughout 2005, at least 96 cases of strikes and 56,000 job losses occurred (Handoko, 2009, 162-163). After the increase in oil prices in 2005, the number of workers who were fired reached tens of thousands or spiked up to 150% compared to prior prices (Lazuardi, 2006).

Economically, the reasons for increasing oil prices are rational. However, from a political perspective, the process is challenging to be accepted. This is because certain political interests often exploit the process of decision-making (Ikhsan et al., 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that various objections and denials continuously appear in the process. This can be seen or explained in several social-political contexts, including the lack of perceived relevance of the increasing oil prices amid injustice, rampant corruption, high salaries of the elites, and the marginalization of the poor. These impact government integrity’s decline (Benes, Cheon, Urpelainen, & Yang, 2015; Roberts, 2005). The increase in oil prices in 2005 was seen as a “lie” because President Yudhoyono promised not to increase oil prices by 50% before the general election. The government increased the oil price by 107% of its original price (Detik, 2004).

Following the strain of a two-way relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia, on 6 June 2009, President Yudhoyono held a meeting with the Defence and Foreign Affairs Office
committee in parliament to discuss the latest situation on the Ambalat issues and planned the departure of a special force to Malaysia. Therefore, five members of Parliament, namely Yusron Ihza Mahendra, Happy Bone, Andreas Pareira, Shidqy Wahab, and Joko Susilo, met with Prime Minister Najib Razak on 10 June 2009 (Khafifah, 2009). To alleviate the tension, a series of negotiations were held. A conversation preceded the series of talks through a telephone call between President Yudhoyono and PM Najib Razak on 9 June 2009, shortly before the arrival of the five Indonesian MPs in Malaysia. The Malaysian Prime Minister responded positively and agreed on the steps to be taken. In addition, President Yudhoyono also urged Malaysia to continue negotiations to resolve the issues immediately (Rachmawati, 2018).

In the Ambalat II issue, the provocative statements tend to be made by the elites competing in the 2009 presidential election. Therefore, the statements by political elites in Jakarta, including President Yudhoyono, tend to trend toward a political campaign ahead of the 2009 presidential election. In a meeting, it was stated that the president had talked with the TNI commander and the TNI-AL commander, which would not allow a single inch of land to be violated by Malaysia (Rochmi, 2009). At every meeting with the Malaysian leaders, including Najib Razak, the president constantly urged that the negotiation process on the border issue be resolved quickly (Kompas, 2009). In addition, President Yudhoyono also committed to increasing the national defense budget and encouraging the defense industry to reduce reliance on foreign suppliers (RSIS, 2014) since the Ambalat case could be resolved through diplomatic channels rather than war (Hanura, 2018).

(b) The military’s responses to the Ambalat case

As the tension escalated during Ambalat I case, Indonesia’s military proposed to deploy 700 personal or equivalent to a battalion of a naval force from Surabaya. This military force was also equipped with six RM-70 rocket launches, which are said to have a reach of 20km and an explosive capacity of 2 km. In addition, they are also armed with the artillery of Howitzer-105 and Howitzer-122. In November 2005, Indonesia suddenly conducted the largest military exercise involving 40,000 troops and 40 warships of various categories (Dollah et al., 2007). However, a few top-ranking officers of Indonesia’s military denied that these exercises were aimed at carrying out a “Konfrontasi” confrontation against Malaysia (Historically, ‘Konfrontasi’ is a specific term used to describe a period of conflict between Indonesia-Malaysia). TNI-AU argued these patrolling activities had been conducted, and it is not within a context of a provocation. TNI-AL supported such a perspective, saying that the deployment and movements of warships were routine practices (Manan, 2005).
Following the tension, the TNI-AL demonstrated its preparedness, especially during the Ambalat II case. In August 2009, the TNI-AL ruled seven warships deployed to the Ambalat waters, namely KRI Sultan Iskandar Muda, KRI Badik, KRI Kerapu, KRI Kakap, KRI Tulo Rimo, KRI Tedung Selar and KRI Tedung Naga (Wibisono, 2009). According to the Commander of Gugu’s Tempur Timur of TNI-AL, First Admiral RM Harahap, patrolling was expected to prevent Malaysian ships from violating the Ambalat block (Wibisono, 2009). However, the violation issue by Malaysian ships reoccurred in October 2009. In this incident, one of the Indonesian warships, namely KRI Layang-805, which was conducting a patrol around Ambalat territory, detected two Malaysian KD YU-3508 and KD Ganas-3503 encroaching on Ambalat. In response to the issue, the TNI-AL confirmed that the territory violated by the ships of both countries was still in dispute (Setianingtyas, 2009).

Ambalat I and II issues were detected as triggers for the rise in the defense budget that has received little attention. Under the spotlight, the Indonesian Military (TNI) is undoubtedly interested in the Ambalat issue. However, the government approved the demands of raising the military budget in 2012. According to the Cabinet Secretariat, to meet the Minimum Essential Forces (MEF), the 2012 and 2013 military budgets were increased to IDR72.54 trillion and IDR77 trillion (Sekretariat Kabinet Indonesia, 2012). The total budget was twice as significant as the combined health and education budget, which was only IDR30.915 trillion (Aritonang, 2012).

Remarkably, during the Ambalat II case, after the Commander of Malaysian Armed Force (ATM), General Abdul Aziz Zainal, visited Jakarta on 12 June 2009, and the two countries resumed the negotiation on 30 June 2009 in Jakarta. During this negotiation, Malaysia and Indonesia were represented by Defence Minister Dato’ Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Juwono Sudarsono, respectively (Wibisono, 2009). The meeting was on 20 July 2009, in which the two countries had negotiated in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, and agreed to resolve the Ambalat issue through negotiations and would not discuss them in the ICJ (Arsana, 2014).

(c) The parliament’s responses to the Ambalat case

During Ambalat I case, many leaders, including in the parliamentary, fuel the fire of existing tension. The member of Commissioner I in Indonesia’s house of parliament or Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) in Jakarta, Djoko Susilo, had pushed for the shooting of Malaysia’s ship, which entered Indonesia’s territory. Djoko also believed that TLDM could not defeat the military power of Indonesia’s navy (TNI AL). This assertion was also supported by the Speaker
of the Parliament, Agung Laksono, who stated that there is a need for military action to protect the sovereignty of the Republic. According to the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Courts, Jimly Asshidiqqie, all parties should practice self-restraint. As countries of “serumpun” (sharing the same identity and heritage), they should prioritize dialogues and meetings to arrive at a collective decision (Yuliawati, 2005).

The various responses from these elites portray the Ambalat as an elite issue by construction or a projected contestation. The Ambalat issue has a budgetary or financial implication, especially in the defense sector, which is said not to receive sufficient attention for some time. From this perspective, the issue can be seen as giving ammunition or even as “benefitting” some of those in the Ministry of Defense, especially in beefing up the budget. The first military leader who questioned the defense budget was General Endriartono Sutarto, who argued for the pressing need for TNI in facing future threats and as a deterrence during conflict (Dollah et al., 2007). Parliamentarians had also supported the General’s call in the DPR (house of representatives). Subsequently, DPR tabled a budget of Rp22 trillion, whereby part of the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) was allocated IDR12 trillion as proposed by TNI-AL, IDR3 trillion for TNI-AD, and another IDR7 trillion for the air force (TNI-AU) (Dollah et al., 2007).

A few national figures in Indonesia also made provocative statements. The former fourth President of Indonesia and advisor to the Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), stated that the arm forces should not be afraid because Malaysia’s military was fundamentally weak with a small country population (Dollah et al., 2007). Similarly, the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) issued a specific call to halt talks, stating that “we need not hold talks about this group of islands because the island belongs to us, and when needed, it should be defended until the last drop of blood.” Echoing this, the head of the Consultative Council of Citizens (Ketua Majelis Permesyuaratan Rakyat, in short MPR), Hidayat Nurwahid, who represented Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), advised that “Indonesia should follow the example of Malaysia in bringing the issue to the international stage and urged that President Yudhoyono act more firmly” (Supriyanto, 2005).

Political rivalry between the government and the opposition was one of the factors that warmed the Ambalat issue. Since the victory of the 2004 general election, President Yudhoyono’s power in parliament was inadequate. This is because the democratic party that supported President Yudhoyono only had a 10.4% majority of the seats in the parliament. Golkar owns the biggest majority of 23%, followed by other parties such as PDI-P at 19.8%, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) owing 10.6%, PKB at 9.5%, Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN) at
9.5%, and PKS at 8.2% (Liddle & Mujani, 2006). However, the political situation changed immediately when the coalition of large and small parties supported President Yudhoyono’s government except for PDI-P. Therefore, the comparison of seats between the pro-government alliance, which calls itself the “National Coalition,” and the opposition alliance known as the “People’s coalition” was 61% to 39% (Schofield & Storey, 2005). Based on the domestic scenario, the issue of Ambalat I benefits some parties in Indonesia. Clive Schofield and Ian Storey stated that the Ambalat issue could at least be a “justification” for internal political pressure after the oil prices rising in March 2005.

During the Ambalat II case, President Yudhoyono’s political power in parliament was stronger than after the 2004 General Election, as discussed earlier. However, to succeed in the second term, President Yudhoyono will have to fight even harder than before as it was very different from the general elections for parliament members. The depiction of power in parliament after the 2009 General Election can be seen in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
<th>Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demokrat Party</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>13.4/+91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golkar Party</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>-7.1/-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDI-P</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>-4.5/-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKS</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>+0.6/+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-0.4/-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-2.8/-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKB</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-5.7/-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerindra</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>+4.5/+30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanura</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.8/+15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mietzner (2009)

Table 3 shows that the Democratic Party, with a total of 148 seats, was stronger When other parties formed a coalition called the “Joint Secretariat.” Almost all the parties joined the “Joint Secretariat,” except for the PDI-P and Gerindra, who preferred to vote against it. The Hanura party did not join the “Joint Secretariat” or oppose President Yudhoyono’s government. Therefore, the Hanura party argued that it could agree to or oppose any policies issued by the
government. The Hanura party had the right to support the government when the policies favored the people. However, when the policies were at the expense of the people, the party was obliged to take a position outside the government (Mietzner, 2013). The “joint secretariat” in favor of President Yudhoyono held about 422 seats, 123 opposition, while the Hanura party held 15 seats. Table 3 also shows the Democratic, the PKS, the Gerindra, and the Hanura parties. Others were disappointed with the results, especially the Golkar Party, which experienced a decline in votes with 7.1% compared to the 2004 General Elections with 21.6%. During the Ambalat II case, Indonesian parliamentary members from multiple political parties were also involved in the negotiations, mainly from Yudhoyono’s backed political personnel. For instance, five MPs claimed to have met with some of the Malaysian elites, including the TLDM Commander, General Abdul Aziz Jaafar, who repeatedly apologized for the incidents in Ambalat and promised such events would not reoccur.

The tension between Indonesia and Malaysia during the Ambalat cases had negative impacts. First, the intensification of pro-war sentiment, protests, and the emergence of “Ganyang Malaysia” voluntarism are very sensitive to their relationship. Second, amidst the sentiments of anti-Malaysian nationalism, about 60.5% of Indonesian respondents consider Malaysia a major threat to Indonesia (Benny, 2012). Third, the media provocation also worsened people-to-people relations, leading to the rise of negative sentiments between the two countries (Ali Fauzi, 2009). During the 2007-2008 period, a study showed that the cyber world had experienced a “cyber-war,” which was quite alarming (Soebhan, 2008). The post-Ambalat I cyber war was an unprecedented event and was also for the first time in the history of Indonesian-Malaysian relations (Madu, 2008), and the trending topics were “I hate Indon” and “Malingsia.” The keyword “Malingsia” (using quotation marks) generated 64,700 pages, while “Indon” (using quotation marks) generated 121,000 pages (Soebhan, 2008). Furthermore, two “groups” of e-Ganyang and e-Godam represented Indonesia and Malaysia in the cyber war. At least 24 websites in Malaysia were targeted by e-Ganyang, which include Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), the Public Works Department, Sultan of Perak, Perak State Information Department, and several other websites. Meanwhile, e-Godam targeted at least 32 websites, and only General Election Commissions (KPU) Surabaya and Tulungagung City Government’s websites (Madu, 2008) were hacked. Therefore, the domestic role is prominent and cannot be ruled out in the Ambalat case.

Domestic politics plays a vital role in international relations to intervene in overseas issues for political reasons. This was in contrast to the widespread realist view, where behaviour was determined entirely by the influence of international structures (Yazid, 2000). A new realist
version known as neoclassical realism, according to Sterling-Folker (1997), was argued as a significant factor in shaping state behavior (Rose, 1998). Internal elements (elites) used the Ambalat case (I and II) to acquire political support in the face of unpopular public policy. Furthermore, the low pressure of international politics following the end of the Cold War led to the rise of domestic actors in Ambalat issues.

The application of Graham Allison’s rational actor model further strengthens this analysis, and the national political actors are thought to employ the rational model. The legislative and executive branches are interested in using the Ambalat case for political gain. Even parts of the security apparatus are attempting to capitalize on the issue to strengthen the position of their defense budget. However, the involvement of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono seems to be more dominating at all levels, from decision-making to the political exploitation of the issues. In Ambalat I and II, the actors are all aware of their political stand in the controversy surrounding the case. Indonesia has to pay a high price for the Ambalat issue, which is more advantageous for local actors by escalating political tensions with Malaysia as a nearby country.

CONCLUSION

In this discussion, Indonesia’s foreign policy towards Malaysia in the Ambalat case is stringent and patriotic. Furthermore, the foreign policy toward Malaysia changes dramatically, especially after Suharto’s era. In the case of Ambalat I and II, the role of domestic factors is seen to be more dominant. The Ambalat issue had instead been used by Jakarta’s elites, especially President Yudhoyono, to divert public attention from government policies. For example, it coincided with the Indonesian government’s decision to increase oil prices and weak President Yudhoyono’s power in parliament. The Ambalat II issue matched with the 2009 General Election. In the Ambalat I and II issues, the media became an essential factor in provoking, shaping the opinion, and raising the sentiments of nationalism against the Ambalat case. Therefore, Ambalat is an interplay between domestic and international affairs since the domestic role theoretically depends on the low and openness of international politics. In this context, domestic politics or actors predominated the Ambalat. The cases benefited everyone from president Yudhoyono, political party elites, the Indonesian army, and media companies. However, amid numerous sensitive issues involving the two nations, including Indonesian migrant workers and cultural disputes, the Ambalat incidents have negatively impacted Indonesia-Malaysia relations. Even though this study only covers the Ambalat cases from an Indonesian domestic political perspec-
there is still an opportunity to complete the case study. Future analyses can add insights from various Malaysian, Media, social media, and parliamentary perspectives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to sincere our gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of Indonesia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia and Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia for their full support of this research. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for the constructive comments to improve this article.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


