

The Issue of Papua, Between Two Interests of Indonesia and the US

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Abstract

In the eastern part of the Republic of Indonesia, Papua has still considered a land of political and socio-economic conflict despite the richness of gold and uniqueness. Since the integration of Papua into Indonesia, the conflict still occurred and led to the separatism issue. Many have perceptions that there is a foreign state actor behind the issue. The role of the Indonesian government to overcome the conflicts in Papua is still questionable. In addition, the US with Freeport seems to be another issue that possibly has a linkage to several problems that occurred in the land. According to that perception, by taking a literature study, the writing will briefly explore Indonesia's role in dealing with the conflict and the US interest in Papua.

Keywords: *Papua, Indonesia, the US*



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INTRODUCTION

Talking about the Papua issue seems to be a never-ending problem. From President Soekarno to the current presidency of Joko Widodo, Papua still raises several issues in the land. When it comes to Papua, many will imagine it as a hard land to live in and full of negative impressions of the natives. Primitive attitude and rude-unfriendly behavior are examples of the stigma that glues to the Papuan, and sometimes it ends up in racial discrimination even from fellow Indonesians. On the other hand, Papua itself is a rich and beautiful landscape with enormous natural resources, from various minerals to the endemic animals living in its forest. Away from its scenery, the people's living condition in the land of Papua is not as beautiful as the natural environment.

Looking at Papua culture, race, and social structure will provide a different experience. According to the geographical and sociological aspects, Papuan characteristics are much more similar to other nations in the Pacific rather than most other Indonesians. The life order of the indigenous Papuan adheres more to the context of tribe and ethnicity, in which the role of the tribal chief is dominant and much influential. This culture is very different from the life order of most people in Indonesia. Thus, when newcomers, either from other provinces or abroad, enter society, social friction often occurs. Commonly, friction arises when the newcomers' welfare and standard of living are better and higher than the natives, and this condition is prolonged as the social gap for years. This gap frequently becomes a reason behind igniting a horizontal conflict such as social crime and acts of violence, as a form of protest against social injustice or just a desire to expel migrants to leave out Papua in order so they can take over Papua for their interest. In 2001, Muridan S. Widjojo discovered that the indigenous Papuans are slowly experiencing a process of marginalization in demographic, economic, political, and cultural aspects (Mambraku, 2015). Additionally, the Papuan often says the main problem is

also the politics of identity and human rights abuses, not only economic development (Pamungkas, 2017, p. 150).

Other research conducted by Anderson (2015) has resulted that Papua's insecurity condition is caused by the uncontrolled migration to Papua, the absence of the rule of law, and the inadequate health and education system. As a result, the stigma labeled Papuan to the socio-economic gap and conditions is the fundamental yet powerful motive that ultimately Papuan extremists use for escalating the issue of separatism against the government. Another issue behind the conflict and separatist actions is the experience of past human rights violations in the Suharto era through its military approach. At that time, human rights violence often occurred and was covered up, but it hurt the hearts and feelings of the Papuan people. The Indonesian military is also notoriously unaccountable for its past and current human rights abuses [...] And it is in West Papua where the Indonesian military most obviously continues to operate under the rules of the Suharto dictatorship (McWilliams, 2018, p. 269). Thus, the issue of human rights abuse still remains now and becomes the main issue for confronting Indonesia's rule towards Papua.

Since the issue obtains international attention very often and gets the support of many Pacific nations, an organization called Papua Freedom Organization (in Indonesian OPM) always takes this chance to provoke Papua people to fight for independence. The objective of OPM activity aims to separate Papua from the state unitary Republic of Indonesia. It is how the conflict stands longer in Papua. Lewis A. Coser (1957, p. 197), an American sociologist, defined conflict as the clash of values and interests, the tension between what is and what some groups feel ought to be. As mentioned earlier, the unfair socio-economic and stigma seem to be the source of the clash that emerges in a conflict. This difference leads some Papuan groups to react with extreme and radical responses. As a result, chaos, terrorism activity, and separatism issue escalate significantly, not only at the domestic level but also in the international forum. It is what currently occurred. The opposite party tries diplomatically to obtain the international perception that Papua's condition is far from welfare under the Indonesian government. At the same time, the armed criminal group takes the domestic level to fight against the government by spreading terror and criminality even to the public and civilians. This diplomacy and independent politics that has been labeled by the Indonesian government as a Papuan separatist movement (Papuan separatism).

Scholar Wallensteen (2002) has defined three main components driving the emerging of conflicts, such as action, incompatibility, and actors (Kaisupy & Maing, 2021, p. 87). The root problems emerging from social and economic differences are slowly but surely spreading to political and economic issues when state actors like the Indonesian government take part and judge that the extremist attitude of individuals in Papua is at risk to the separatism problem. It is the incompatibility that occurred in the case. As a result, military movement and massive police deployment usually set out as the ultimate approach to tackle militant activities. That is the form of action taken by the government. In terms of actors, the existence of non-state actors such as multinational companies, such as Freeport, also contributes to the orchestration of the issue of Papuan separatism. Indeed, it is still arguable that such companies are probably behind the scene taking part in the situation.

Referring to the paper written by A. Elizabeth, there are three main actors involved in the conflict in Papua and at the local, national, and international levels, namely the state/government, society, and business (Elizabeth, 2006, p. 44). Seemingly, those actors still play their roles and interest in the current situation in Papua until now. Defined also in her writing, there are four main categories of issues in Papua, namely politics (history of integration and Papuan political identity), security (cycles of political violence and cases of gross human

rights violations), culture (racial and cultural discrimination – Papuanization vs. Indonesianization), economics (control and exploitation of potential and wealth of Papuan economy by non-Papuans) (p. 57). These issues are getting more complex due to one issue is not standing alone, but closely related to each other.

Thus, to what extent is the role of state actors regarding the issues of separatism and armed criminals in Papua? Dealing with the issue of separatism, the writing will briefly explore the Indonesian government's action and the US's interest in Papua. Why the US? Five years after the US mediated Indonesia and the Netherlands in the arrangement of the New York Agreement in 1962, the US company called Freeport entered Papua and began to explore and mine the natural resources in the highland of Papua. However, since the company runs the mining business in Papua and grows to be the largest reserve of gold and the second-largest reserve of copper in the world, the Grasberg mine, it is perceptively not showing a significant change to the region and Papuan people. Even since then, several conflicts have happened involving Freeport. From the utilization of the Amungme's sacred land to the socio-economics issue are the problems manifested by the existence of Freeport. It generated periodic tension and protests in Papua and increased the role of the Indonesian army and police inclined to repress and intimidate the local people when the issue is linked to Freeport. As a result, there is a judgmental perception that there might be a US intervention behind the conflict that happened in Papua. The writing will also discuss it to describe the US role in Papua.

RESEARCH METHOD

This writing uses a literature study to analyse the issue. By conducting a descriptive-analytical method, this writing would like to figure out Indonesia's and The US' policies regarding the Papua situation. Data and information collected are obtained from relevant journals, books, and sites to strengthen the analysis and argumentation. The analysis will try to compare Indonesia's and the US's course of action and policy derived from the reviewed journal above to the current real situation regarding the Papua issue. Eventually, the result will come up with the viewpoint of Indonesia and the US intention in the Papua region.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

The Indonesian Government's Approaches and Steps

The integration of the Papua to be part of Indonesia in 1969 through the Act of Free Choice became a historical event for Papua and Indonesia as well. Although before that time, it was in 1962, the struggle was not running smoothly since the Indonesian government had to face the Dutch resistance if Papua, or at that time Western Irian, is to integrate into the Republic of Indonesia. During that time, Indonesia played a diplomatic role in some countries, such as the US, to support the integration of Papua into Indonesian territory. As a result, with the support of the US, Indonesia, and the Netherlands agreed to sign New York Agreement as the legal standing and statement that Papua becoming part of Indonesia.

Through time, in responding to the Papua issue, the Indonesian government seems still to prioritize a military approach rather than a non-military approach. It is probably to respond to and confront criminal acts which involve the use of weapons. Returning to the issue, the Indonesian government considers taking military action, a weapon against a weapon, to reduce the risk of civilian casualties. It is such a preventive measure by showing off Indonesia's armed capabilities to convince people. On the other hand, the government continues to take a military approach as a balancing factor against the armed capabilities of the group. This step can be justified as a manifestation of the government's commitment to present and ensure the safety

of all Indonesian people in Papua. It is what the Indonesian government wants to achieve in Papua to bring together safety and prosperity for the people and the country.

Besides taking the military approach, the government can perform a non-military approach to mitigate the conflict. Papua, by the law in 2001, has been enacted as a special autonomy region. This status provides Papua to have a special budget allocation for the development of the region, and it has been 20 years since the status of Special Autonomy (*Otonomi Khusus*). This policy is definitely to increase the standard living of Papuan, narrow the gap between Papua and other provinces, and provide opportunities for indigenous Papuans to be involved in the progress of Papua as actors and beneficiaries of the development process (Sugandi, 2008, p. 7)

Although the status of a special region is a national policy for Papua, in reality, the implementation at the bottom level does not meet the expectation. As mentioned earlier, the root problems actually exist in the bottom layer of society (p. 9), while the special status is merely applied on the Papuan and non-Papuan elites. Noticeably, the government has undergone several relevant peaceful approaches instead of a military approach. The peaceful dialogue and negotiation aim to obtain and collect Papuan aspirations and desires as part of the unity of the Republic of Indonesia so that the government can deploy suitable action.

The issue of Papua is not only a domestic concern for Indonesia but also an international concern. Based on the integration history of Papua in 1962, there is the involvement of other countries, like the US's role as the mediator. Since then, the issue of Papua has been complex due to the various roles and interests of actors accommodating the issues. There is a presumption that the US is the actor behind several issues which happened in Papua, and it seems to be a question hard to answer. Nonetheless, this writing would not like to answer that presumption but only explore the role of Indonesia and how the US actually towards Papua through the lens of national interest and policy.

The US-Freeport Intention in Papua

As mentioned earlier, the US had a contribution to be the mediator of Indonesia and the Netherland for the integration of Papua into Indonesia. The New York Agreement is a result of Indonesian diplomacy to gain support from the international regarding the effort to integrate Papua into Indonesia. In his writing entitled "Documents confirm the US colluded in Indonesia's 1969 incorporation of Papua", John Roberts (2004) described that the US supports the stabilization process in the Papua through diplomatic action. The result was the Act of Free Choice (*Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*) of Papuan that came up with the integration into Indonesia. According to his findings, the wishes of the Papuan population were of no concern to the US but to Indonesia. The US supported Indonesia to ensure the survival of Suharto as a bulwark in the region for its economic interest which was presented in the form of PT Freeport Indonesia company located in south-central Papua.

Much beneficial cooperation has been implemented such as USAID and several community development programs under the coordination of Freeport. It is a part of the bilateral cooperation to pursue social wellness and environmental sustainability commitment around the mining area and Papua in general. Unfortunately, the bilateral cooperation was wounded by the killing of two Freeport officers which was allegedly carried out by TNI personnel, and the US put military sanctions on Indonesia. Since then, the relationship with Freeport is up and down depending on the political situation in Indonesia. However, either Freeport or the US still puts their position close to the military as regards the Papua condition.

As mentioned earlier, the presence of Freeport in Papua still leaves the issue of human rights related to the Amungme tribe. Scholar Edmund McWilliams (2018) stressed out his views

about it in his writing that for decades Freeport's mining operation has been the focus of human rights abuses meted out by the Indonesian military and police and directed against the Amungme and Kamoro peoples, the traditional landowners in the upland and coastal areas, respectively, of the sprawling mining operation (McWilliams, 2018, p. 265). This issue remarks as the beginning of the following issues and conflicts that occurred in Papua and involved some entities including the military. The conflict of interest that happened in Papua throughout the years is mostly ignited by Freeport and put the local people as the guilty ones.

According to McWilliams (2018), the Freeport mining activity has caused great damage to the environment and polluted water resources. This condition certainly creates a devastating effect on the Papuans' quality of life due to the damaged environment. Moreover, any of the risks caused by Freeport, it seems under the supervisory of the Indonesian government and the US embassy, but they decided to conceal and even limit the public awareness of the devastating impact its operation was having on Papua and its people. The political situation is changing over time, either in the US or in Indonesia, and it affects the Freeport business process and activity. However, during the 1990s, any efforts to reveal what actually happened in Papua were closed. At the same time, as a new team of officers was transferred to the embassy, and it became clear that these officers were inclined to report on West Papua more candidly, the files made available to these officers were stripped of any records that revealed the years of collusion between the embassy, Freeport, and the Indonesian military (p. 266).

Discussion

As mentioned above, Indonesia uses the military approach to deal with current criminal activities in Papua. The government decided to send many troops to Papua to deal with the armed groups' attacks and provide a sense of confidence that the government is taking this problem seriously. It is a sensitive issue threatening sovereignty and security. Although the government obtains many critics, suggestions, and views regarding military activity, it seems that Indonesia keeps utilizing this approach as its national policy in the scope of safety and security. It is to balance the aggressive behaviour from the armed criminal group that could harm civilians and public infrastructures as well as threatens the government. Apparently, this perspective is not different from the perspective in the New Order era (Indrawan, 2016, p. 160).

Indonesia is fully aware that the criminal group's aggressive activities are to provoke a counterattack from the Indonesian military so that when there are victims, whether from groups or civilians, the issue of human rights abuse will be raised in international forums. On the other hand, another policy that Indonesia takes to reduce the tension of conflict is by doing a socio-economic approach. It aims not to reiterate experiences when Papua was mostly marginalized. Therefore, the current government under the Indonesia-centrist programs needs to raise Papua's welfare. President Joko Widodo has prioritized to the national programs, Papuan prosperity, national sovereignty, and maintaining climate investment remains stable (Shobaruddin, 2018, p. 7), including the effort to have 51% Freeport divestment. The Indonesian government claims this successful bargain over Freeport will return to the land of Papua for the development of the region and human resources. It is such an enlightenment for Papua to move forward on par with other regions in Indonesia. Indonesian government prefers to use soft diplomacy in renegotiating this giant company's contract [...] not only to increase Indonesian benefit but also to maintain relations between the Indonesian government and foreign investors, especially the US investors who play a significant role in Indonesia (p. 7). It seems to be the government's effort to rebuild the impression towards the 'failure' perception of special autonomy over Papua.

The interest of the US economy through Freeport in the long term has influenced US policy towards Indonesia. Since Indonesia has a bright democratic system, clean governance, and people-oriented under President Joko Widodo, the US has also changed its policy approach to Indonesia. During the presidency of Joko Widodo, in 2018, Indonesia successfully built a commitment with Freeport to divest up to 51 percent of its Indonesian unit.

Corresponding to the US intention that has been briefly aforementioned described, it can be assumed that the US actually has no intention to support the separatism issue in Papua, although they understand the historical situation in Papua from the existence of Freeport in the land. In the era of President George W. Bush, the US consistently never gives any place for separatism activity in its political and foreign policy (Adriana & et al, 2004, p. 46). The US government inclines to support the authority government by adjusting its policy to the current political situation in Indonesia. As the indication, the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama each refused to acknowledge the genocidal dimensions of Jakarta's assault on Papuan human rights. [...] Rather than developing a meaningful policy to address this genocide, the Bush and Obama administrations confined their policy response to tinkering with Jakarta's failed "special autonomy" formulations, which manifestly do not, and have never, addressed the ongoing tragedy afflicting Papuans (McWilliams, 2018, p. 267). From this explanation, it can be assumed that the US intention in Indonesia, especially in Papua, is about economic interests that the US is trying to maintain the sustainability of Freeport at all costs, including the 51% share divestment agreement to Indonesia. That should be the US policy towards Indonesia through the existence of Freeport.

Conclusion

Given the complex situation in dealing with the separatism issue in Papua, as mentioned earlier, Indonesia uses two approaches, the perspective of military and non-military, either at the domestic level or in the international perception. The military approach as the legacy of the New Order era seems to be seen as an attempt to suppress people's human rights and freedom in Papua. In fact, the military approach is needed to address particular issues, for instance, when dealing with the armed criminal group, Indonesia will use armed forces. The government seems to take the military approach to deal with the armed activities of the criminal groups in Papua since their movement could harm civilians in Papua and be destructive. However, Indonesia takes a position not to strike back until the armed criminal group attack first. This strategy is actually to avoid the human rights issue since Indonesia is seen as a dominant party to the Papuan, even to the extremist ones. The Papuan conflict remains a factual issue in Indonesia and even escalates steadily in the international forums, such as the UN, sparked continuously by Melanesian countries like Vanuatu.

Regarding the common perception that there is the US behind the separatism issue, it is seen that the US has no intention to support the Papua separatism issue, but they still raise the issue of human rights in Papua. History shows that the US interest in Papua is about to keep the sustainability of Freeport's trading process. Thus, in conducting foreign policy, especially for Freeport in Papua, the US inclines to be adaptive to the Indonesian political situation. Despite the issues of human rights, the welfare of the Papuan people, and the separatist actions of the extremists, the US confines their policy response even though they know the inability of Indonesia to deal with Papua problems. However, Indonesia uses soft diplomacy toward the US to maintain the relationship between the two countries to address Freeport in Papua, while still upholding Indonesia's national interest for Papuan prosperity and sovereignty. Ultimately, all the issues of Papua are back to Indonesia in defining and shaping the international perspective

on the separatism issue. However, the issue of human rights abuse will be a common issue to blame Indonesia's capacity over Papua.

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