

## **Working Paper**

### **Citizen Protection versus State Sovereignty**

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WITHIN four months, from May to August 2016, Indonesian sailors have repeatedly been targeted as a hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). While there are still seven of those sailors held hostage now, the former were released by the effort of Indonesian government. The trend is, however, using hostage as the instrument of increasing economic resources of their organization and movement.

With regard to the ransom payment, there are two major arguments accounted. First, those who believe that both the company where the sailors work and the government have to pay the ransom despite the huge of money demanded by ASG. Supporters to this idea believe that saving the lives is far more valuable and urgent than the amount of ransom.

While the second argument considers the ransom as a trap which potentially bring Indonesian government and company into “rhythm of captors”. For opponents of the ransom, even if the government is too soft and pay the financial demands were not cheap, this would be a bad precedent in the future. This would be followed by other cases against Indonesian citizens abroad. The other militant groups will replicate the pattern of ASG in capitalizing the hostage. Moreover, Indonesians would be, again, easily targeted by those militant groups since the government performs royal, yet weak indeed. Both decisions seem to be perplexing since it will either make the citizen to become the “ATM machine” for the radical movements or promote the idea that the government is anti-human.

### **State Sovereignty Problem**

There is no doubt that Sulu Sea in the southern Philippines has been the hotspot for the criminals at sea given its significance for the seaborne trade worldwide,

particularly between Indonesia and the Philippines. To this end, the questions of sovereignty and humanitarian actions emerge. Philippines government has so far been relying on its own capacity to overcome ASG and rejecting foreign military assistance due to its prestige and sovereignty. In international relations perspective, the position of Philippines government reflect a Hobbesian model. This perspective always belief that fostering state sovereignty is “sacred” goals.

Traffic in the Sulu Sea and Southeast Asia in general will be more dynamic as a result of the implementation of the ASEAN Community. This area will also be a very fragile region because it will be an easy target for pirates. Thus, it is critical to re-consider the state-centric security principle since it has proven slow in handling the citizen protection such as in the case of hostages by ASG.\*By considering the case of hostage recurring and see the position in this strategic Sulu Sea there should be a paradigm shift in looking at this issue. Given the latest international political landscape characterized by the emergence of state interdependence, the Philippines government’s stance which tends to be anachronistic should be revised. The Philippine government is also too fixated on non-intervention principle that always maintained by ASEAN countries. The ASEAN architecture has experienced a transformation from old regionalism to new regionalism, which includes new challenges from non-traditional arena.

It is therefore critical to shift the paradigm that overcoming the threat posed by ASG is not only the responsibility of the Philippines government, but also Indonesia and Malaysia whose military assistances are also important. The ASEAN principle of non-interference has also exacerbated the situation.

At the regional level, it is time for ASEAN to reconstruct their regional security cooperation and redefine the meaning of “regional security”. Security issues in ASEAN have been particularly focused on the traditional aspect such as open war, ideological contestation, balance of power, and others.

As such, the Minister of Defense’s meeting of three countries; namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines several weeks ago in Bali reflects these traditional issues. The proposal portrays that human security issues are somehow less considered rather than the state security. \*\*\*

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