

Food and Power: Global Food Challenges Affecting Interactions among Actors

Asih Purwanti, University of Brawijaya, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

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The International Academic Forum

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The world affairs such as wars and cooperations among states are always been a significance issues. As those events are involving many individuals across borders. Those events are important sphere in the study of international politics. International politics analyse the behaviour of states in international level. This study try to explain the interaction among states. For some scholars argues that the term of international politics has been growing into a term of global politics since the interaction is now involving more non-states actors (Heywood, 2011). However, states are still regarded as the main actors that influencing international politics. One important perspective in the study is realist perspective. Their main argument is that the interaction among states is driven by how states are exercising power to other.

According to realist perspective, state will always pursue for power. Power has been the main reason why states interact among others. Hans J. Morgenthau in his book *Politics Among Nations* (1948) said that "Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the power of man over man from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another" (Morgenthau, 1948, p.9). For Morgenthau, the most important material aspect of power is armed forces, but even more significant is a nation's character, morale and quality of governance. Furthermore, Morgenthau emphasize that "power tends to be equated with material strength, especially of a military nature, I have stressed more than before its immaterial aspects" (Morgenthau, 1948, p.9). Distribution of power or capabilities largely determines international outcomes (Frankel, 1996). According to classical realist (Morgenthau, 1948) mostly discuss on hard power; military and economy. Therefore according to this perspective, interaction among states is struggle for power.

The source of power has been growing from military and economic strength to other aspects such as energy and food. Food has become a global problem. The world is facing challenges and food problem such as food scarcity, famine and hunger. Another problem related to food is that more nations are depending on imported food. For example, Indonesia that depends on imported soybean since 2000s that cause problems. Food become the source of conflicts; internal (civil conflict) and conflicts among states. This paper will try to discuss on how food become the source of power that can affect the interaction among actors in international politics. This situation has created a situation where food is became an importance issue in international politics

Food is now become a global problem. The statistic in 2009 shows that nearly 9 million children younger than five years old will die needlessly, more than half from hunger-related causes. In the developing world, more than 1.4 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1.25 per day (UNICEF, 2009). Among this group of poor people, many have problems obtaining adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. As a result, 1.02 billion people in the developing world are undernourished. They consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth. Undernourishment negatively affects people's health, productivity and overall well-being (FAO, 2009).

Conflicts among states are also causing the hunger in several countries. According to World Food Programme, conflicts affecting farming and food production. Civil wars also forces millions of people to flee their homes, leading to hunger emergencies as

the displaced find themselves without the food and tools to gain food. Syrian civil war throughout 2014 is one example. In war, food sometimes becomes a weapon. Soldiers will starve opponents into submission by seizing or destroying food and livestock and systematically wrecking local markets. Fields are often mined and water wells contaminated, forcing farmers to abandon their land. Ongoing conflict in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo has contributed significantly to the level of hunger in the two countries. By comparison, hunger is on the retreat in more peaceful parts of Africa such as Ghana and Rwanda.

In the past, there was some evidence that some states are using food as part of development aid. It has been argued that states are applying food as their political weapons. States that have access to the food supply, the distribution of food and the price of food are gaining more sources to power. States that possess the power of food became significant players in their relations to other states. The U.S. During the Cold War was using food as foreign policy through food aid mechanism as part of containment policy. The case of U.S. government grain embargo during Iranian Revolution and grain embargo towards Soviet Union in 1970s and 1980s (Paarlberg, 1982).

State is gaining power by having the control on the access to the food supply, the distribution of food and the price of food. In recent years, the price of food products has been very unstable. Roller-coaster food prices make it difficult for the poorest people to access nutritious food consistently. The poor need access to adequate food all year round. Price spikes may temporarily put food out of reach, which can have lasting consequences for small children. When prices rise, consumers often shift to cheaper, less-nutritious foods, heightening the risks of micronutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition (World Food Programme, 2015).

In 2008, the world was having a grain crisis. From 2005 to 2008, the international prices of major food cereals surged upward (Headey and Fan, 2010). Headey and Fan in their reports mention that there are several causes for the crisis. The main reason is the *Dominance of the U.S. grain markets*. The United States heavily dominates global exports of maize (60 percent) and wheat (25 percent), and the world's third largest soybean exporter. Secondly, is the *importance of U.S.-specific factors*. Some events in the U.S. economy or in U.S.-dominated grain markets can be thought of as possible suspects in the recent food crisis. Events such as the depreciation of the U.S. dollar and the build-up of dollar reserves in other countries, and movements in commodity futures markets. Trade shocks in the U.S. will affect other states. Thirdly, is the *Degree of competition and market efficiency in the United States*. The competition among players in grain market in the U.S. also affects the government policy. Fourthly, is *Seasonality and inelastic supply and demand functions*. Because most grains are limited to a single annual harvest, new supply flows to market in response to a postharvest price change must come from either domestic stocks or international sources (Headey and Fan, 2010)

The 2008 grain crisis shows that states that possess the power of food became significant players in their relations to other states. Food exporters states which are mostly developed countries are getting more power in controlling food price. By having power in controlling food price, food access and food supply, the food

exporters countries are argued to have more more to influence the food importers countries

To sum up, global food problem has created a form of food as a source of power. States who has the control of food distribution and price are gaining more power to influence other. It is also argued that states are using food as the political weapons in pursuing their national interest. This resulted for an analysis that an inequality on food power has been affecting conflicts among states whose stronger food power against states whose less food power.

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Contact email: a.purwanti@ub.ac.id